

Quality Corner

This month we will discuss three errors involving inaccurate payments to AUs receiving food stamp benefits and two errors involving incorrect denials of applications. In each instance, the error could have been prevented.

Teen-Age Child Returns Home

In February, the grantee's 16-year-old son returned home. She did not inform her AU Manager until March 28th. The AU Manager did not add the son until the May issuance. Since the AU was reviewed for April, an underpayment occurred.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

If the AU Manager had acted immediately, the cut-off date might have allowed a change before the April 8th issuance. If she or he could not, a supplement should have been issued in April. In that instance, there would have been no Quality Control underpayment error.

Reading the Pay Stub

In a two-parent family, the husband's pay stub from Home Depot had two columns – one with the earnings (regular hours, overtime, etc.) and one with deductions. A closer review of the earnings column, however, revealed that deductions for medical and dental insurance were reported there, since they were pre-tax deductions. In determining the gross earned income, the AU Manager used the figure at the bottom of the column which was not the real gross income because the medical and dental insurance were already subtracted from this figure. Using the incorrect gross income resulted in an error.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

When reading a pay stub, be sure to see if any deductions were taken out before using the amount listed as the "gross" amount. Whenever deductions are taken out, be sure to add them in to realize the real gross income.

New Income

The recipient started a new job where she is paid every two weeks. She received a check on February 14th for her first week of work. The AU Manager entered the earnings on BEACON as though it repre-

sented two weeks of work. This was an underestimate of her income that resulted in a food stamp overpayment.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

When reading a pay stub, give careful attention to the week ending dates to determine the period the pay stub represents. Whenever it is difficult to determine the pay period (common in the case of the first pay stub) the AU Manager must contact the recipient for additional verification. If there is sufficient time to process the AU within program guidelines, the AU Manager may also choose to wait for the next pay stub. Once the pay period is identified (i.e. weekly, biweekly, monthly), the AU Manager may use income averaging as outlined in 106 CMR 364.340 to determine the monthly income of the AU.

Incorrect Denials

In the last month, Quality Control has noticed an increase in the number of incorrect denials, specifically denials for failure to appear for a scheduled interview. Generally, an incorrect denial does not mean that the person should have been approved. Instead, it generally means the proper procedure was not followed.

According to 106 CMR 361.700, the AU Manager must wait until

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the 30th day to deny an application for failure to appear for a scheduled interview. However, a case may be denied before the 30th day in cases where the interview was conducted and all verifications requested on the same day, and the AU fails to submit all requested verification by the 10th day. The AU still has the opportunity to submit the required verifications by the 30th day, at which time the AU Manager must accept the verifications and determine eligibility based on the original date of application.

Also, remember that when the 30th day falls on a weekend, do not send the denial until the first work day after the weekend.

EAEDC Living Arrangement H

EAEDC Field Operations Memo 2003-22

A recent review of EAEDC AUs has found the following error: EAEDC recipients receiving a Living Arrangement H budget do not have a correct Mandatory/Responsible role with an associated (Spousal) EAEDC AU.

This Field Operations Memo gives TAOs procedures for correcting these budgets.

FYI

Fuel Assistance 2003

Mailing Regarding the Fuel Assistance Program

The fuel assistance mailing will take place in September. TAFDC, EAEDC and FS recipients will receive a brochure about the Fuel Assistance Program. This brochure provides an overview of the program and explains how to apply for fuel assistance. It also includes a list of agencies statewide where applications can be filed.

TAFDC and EAEDC recipients will also received a system-generated notice with verification of their grant amount. Food stamp benefit recipients will receive the brochure about the Fuel Assistance Program but will not receive verification of their benefit amount. The brochure tells food stamp benefit recipients that if (1) they receive food stamps, (2) they receive fuel assistance and (3) their heat is included in their rent, then they may be entitled to more food stamp benefits.

For the fuel assistance season (November through April), AU Managers are reminded to ask recipients at every contact if they receive fuel assistance. If they receive fuel assistance and food stamp benefits, make sure they are given the heating Standard Utility Allowance ***even if they are not paying heat.***

