



# Transitions

August 2012

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Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to announce a number of steps being taken to improve safety and security at DTA offices.

First, we are prohibiting all weapons in DTA facilities except those carried by office security guards and law enforcement personnel. Our policy states that no one is allowed to enter a DTA office with a weapon, including clients, visitors, and employees. Prohibiting all weapons will help to ensure a safe environment where everyone who enters DTA can peacefully conduct his or her business.

It is important to note that verbal violence, spoken threats, and inappropriate comments also will not be tolerated. If you experience any of this behavior, please alert your manager or office security guard immediately.

The second phase of our plan is to provide every DTA employee with an identification badge. Once you receive your badge, you will be expected to wear it at all times while you are at work (Central Office employees already have ID badges, and are required to wear them). Representatives from Central Office will be visiting each TAO during the next several months to take ID badge photos. Your manager will let you know when your photo will be scheduled.

Third, I ask for your assistance in complying with TAO security rules, particularly to make sure visitors are escorted by an employee in any DTA work areas. Staff members are also reminded not to share security codes with anyone who is not employed by DTA.

These measures are in place to make DTA a safe place for everyone, and I appreciate your cooperation. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to speak with a manager.

Sincerely,

Daniel J. Curley  
Commissioner

## Quality Corner

This month we will review two errors. The first is related to lump sum income while the second is related to verification of earned income.

### Lump Sum Payments

This case was a SNAP household of one. The client applied for SNAP benefits on March 7, 2012. During the interview, he reported that he had received a lump-sum payment of \$17,075 from his 401(K) account. The case manager divided the total lump sum amount by 12 months, then subtracted a 10% penalty imposed on the client by the 401(K) for early withdrawal and arrived at a monthly figure of \$1280. This income made the household ineligible because the countable income exceeded the gross income limit of \$1,180. Quality Control reviewed this case and determined that the lump sum income was noncountable.

### What's a Case Manager to Do?

Case managers must be careful to ask questions if unsure about how to process payments, such as a withdrawal from a 401(K) account. In SNAP, nonrecurring lump sum income is treated as an asset in the month of receipt rather than as income. Since the case was categorically eligible, a lump sum treated as a countable asset would have had no effect on the case. For more information on lump sum payments, see 106 CMR 363.130 (D).

### Misplaced Earnings Verification

This case included the client, her spouse and their three-year-old son. The spouse was disabled and received \$778 per month in Supplemental Security Income (SSI) income. The household also had earnings of \$787 per month. The family was homeless and had no shelter expenses and had an Annual Reporting certification type.

Quality Control reviewed the case record and could not find any documentation to verify the earnings being counted in the case. A wage inquiry received from the employer indicated that the client had earned \$305 per month at the time of certification. Using \$305 instead of \$787 caused a \$116 under issuance error for the review month.

### What's a Case Manager to Do?

Annual Reporting certification safeguards a case against errors during the certification period if the case was established accurately at certification. Since this case was not processed accurately at certification, QC used the corrected figures to determine the error amount. With a large volume of verifications being submitted by mail, it is important that all verifications be filed in the case record and entered as they are received. For more information on Annual Reporting, see 106 CMR 366.110 (C).



## Training Corner

### Organization and Time Management

The following is a list of best practices that will help you achieve efficiency and stay organized:

1. Record an Out of Office voicemail message when you are out of the office for any reason and include an expected return date. Include an alternative number for the caller such as your supervisor's number or the TAO main phone line. To access your voicemail box from an outside phone:
  - a. Dial your 10-digit office phone number.
  - b. When you hear the greeting, press \*.
  - c. Enter your 7-digit mailbox number (i.e. office phone number without area code).
  - d. Enter your password, and press #.
2. Don't keep more than a few case folders on your desk at one time. The clutter will slow you down and fewer piles will help to convey the image of a well-organized professional.
3. Know the location of all forms and keep copies of frequently used forms at your desk. Prefill folders with all of the forms needed to conduct an interview for a new application. Many forms can be found in Policy Online - [Online Forms](#)  
(Note: If this link does not work, you can locate forms either by accessing the DTA Intranet site on the EOHHS home page or by clicking the "Policy" button in BEACON and proceeding to "Online Forms.")
4. Check phone messages throughout the day and return calls frequently. This will make it unnecessary for clients to leave multiple messages or visit the TAO in person. One method to keep up with voicemail messages is to block out a reasonable interval during the day to return calls.
5. Voicemail boxes can fill up, leaving the client with no opportunity to leave a message. Be sure to delete voicemails that have been answered or notated. Also, provide as much information in your greeting as possible, i.e. Fax number, address, the process for dropping off verifications.
6. Arrange file cabinets. Conventional setup may include but is not limited to:
  - a. a drawer for **Pending Applications** (alphabetical);
  - b. a drawer for **Recertifications and Interim Reports with Verifications Due** (alphabetical or by verification due date);
  - c. a drawer for **Cases Closed/Denied** that may be reinstated within 30 days (alphabetical, and be sure to print the last date that the case may be reinstated on the case folder);
  - d. a drawer for **Appointments Scheduled** (31 slots or days, alpha within each day); and
  - e. a drawer for **Case Maintenance** (file by verification due date).
7. Minimize clutter and paper accumulation by printing only those documents absolutely necessary (i.e. signature page) for file retention.

## From the Hotline

If you have any questions on this column or other policy and procedural material, please have your Hotline designee call the **Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478**.

- Q. 1.** My SNAP client has a large one-time medical expense for a day-surgery performed last year. I averaged his \$2,400 expense over his 24-month certification period because he wants to pay the hospital \$100 each month. Can these average SNAP medical expense deductions continue beyond a 12-month period?
- A. 1.** Yes. Households with an elderly or disabled member certified for 24 months that have one-time only medical expenses may choose to average the expense over the remaining months in the certification period or choose a different option, as indicated below.
- (1) If the expense is incurred during the first 12 months of a 24-month certification period, clients may:
- deduct the expense for one month;
  - average the expense over the remainder of the first 12 months; or
  - average the expense over the remaining months in the certification period.
- (2) If the expense is incurred during the second 12 months, clients may:
- deduct the expense for one month; or
  - average the expense over the remaining months in the certification period.
- See the *SNAP Medical Deductions Job Aid* in Policy Online for more information on deductions. See 106 CMR 361.210 for information on elderly or disabled client qualifications.
- Q. 2.** Are there times when averaging medical expenses over a 24-month certification period would not be the most advantageous approach for a client?
- A. 2.** Yes. An elderly or disabled client may choose to average nonrecurring medical expenses over the certification period or have the nonrecurring medical expenses applied as a deduction for a single month. For the client to make an informed decision, the effect of each option should be explained to the client by the case manager. Because there is a maximum SNAP benefit allotment based on household size, several factors related to the impact of the medical expense deduction on the SNAP benefit amount must be considered when reviewing the options. These factors include:
- the amount of SNAP benefit the client currently receives;
  - the medical deduction type, i.e. standard versus actual; and
  - the length of time over which the client would receive this deduction.

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**From the Hotline** *(Continued from page 4)*

**Q. 3.** Can you give me an example of when averaging a nonrecurring medical expense over 24 months would not be to the advantage of the elderly or disabled client?

**A. 3.** Yes. First, review the medical expense deduction policy in 106 CMR 364.500(E) and 106 CMR 364.500(F). A summary of these rules is below.

When medical expenses for elderly or disabled SNAP household members exceed per month:

- \$35, but are no more than \$125, deduct \$90; or
- \$125, deduct the medical expense, after subtracting \$35.

**Example**

If a client with a nonrecurring medical expense of \$720 requests to have this amount averaged over a 24-month certification period, the average will only net a \$30 per month expense. Since the regulations only permit a medical deduction for expenses in excess of \$35 per month, BEACON would not make a medical expense deduction in this case. If, however, the \$720 nonrecurring medical expense were averaged over a 12-month period, BEACON would recognize the \$60 per month as exceeding \$35 and give this client a \$90 monthly deduction. This would increase the client's SNAP benefits for an entire year. (This example assumes the case is not already receiving the maximum monthly SNAP benefit allotment.)

**Q. 4.** With ten months remaining in his certification period, my client reported a \$1,800 one-time medical expense. How many months of deductions are allowable and most beneficial for this client?

**A. 4.** In this example, the client has only 10 months remaining in his 12-month certification period. To maximize this client's SNAP benefit amount, a \$180 monthly deduction amount should be entered into the system, for 10 months. Following medical expense deduction rules, BEACON will apply a \$145 medical deduction amount when calculating this client's SNAP benefits, over the next 10 months.

**Q. 5.** My SNAP client had a one-time medical expense of \$1,200 from an in-office medical procedure performed last year. At his recent recertification, he reported that even though we had been deducting \$100 for the past year to cover his entire expense, it turns out that he has made zero payments on this obligation and therefore still owes the hospital the entire \$1,200 amount. Can I continue making this medical expense deduction?

**A. 5.** No. Whenever a nonrecurring medical expense deduction is allowed, it must be discontinued once the full payment amount has been deducted. Before zeroing out the expense, however, remember to assess the client's current situation and determine whether or not the client has incurred any subsequent one-time medical expenses or whether or not the client has more regular medical expenses that could still meet or exceed the \$35 threshold.

## Compliance Corner

Each year, DTA is required by the federal government to conduct Management Evaluation (ME) reviews of how TAOs provide SNAP benefits. Among other things, the reviewers assess how well TAOs apply DTA policies and procedures, including ensuring access to the SNAP program. In Massachusetts, for the ME review process, LOQC staff interview TAO staff and clients, observe business operations, and review clients' BEACON case records and physical case records. These reviews evaluate approved and denied applications and closed cases to determine that actions taken on the reviewed cases were correct. The federal Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), which is responsible for the SNAP program, considers this process "one of the State's most important management tools in evaluating the administration of the SNAP at the local level." The interviews and reviews are generally conducted in May of each year with a random sample of each type of case action. TAOs that have deficiencies are required to develop corrective action plans.

This year, FNS conducted an oversight review of the ME process in Massachusetts. They interviewed the ME coordinator, an LOQC supervisor, and a reviewer. In addition, they "shadowed" the LOQC reviewer in the Brockton TAO as she conducted interviews, reviewed cases, and assessed the waiting area. The outcome of the FNS review was that the ME process in Massachusetts was fully in compliance with federal regulations and "is to be commended for establishing an effective and comprehensive process for conducting MEs." Several Massachusetts ME practices were cited as noteworthy, such as having review tools online to ensure uniformity in the review process, having instruments that are intuitive to ensure that all review elements are included, and having a "best practices" document to assist reviewers in conducting reviews.

### How does this affect local offices?

These findings validate what we find most of the time – that TAO staff do a good job administering the SNAP program. LOQC occasionally finds circumstances in TAOs that merit corrective action and identifies these problems to the TAO managers. As with all identified problems, steps should be taken to develop solutions that improve casework performance and ensure that DTA remains in compliance with FNS policies and procedures.

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### Diversity Quote

**"Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment."**

**Buddha**

## Operations Memos

### **TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP – Voter Registration BEACON Changes: New Edits**

TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP  
Operations Memo 2012-29A

The purpose of this Operations Memo is to advise TAO staff about warning edits added to the voter registration page reminding DTA staff about proper completion of the page.

### **TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP – Updated Voter Registration Procedures**

TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP  
Operations Memo 2012-36

The National Voter Registration Act requires the Department to provide voter registration services to all applicants and clients (hereafter referred to as clients). There are very specific requirements for clients of all programs during the application, reevaluation and recertification process as well as when clients report a change of address. Clients may register to vote either at the TAO or by using a mail-in form.

The purpose of this Operations Memo is to remind TAO staff about voter registration procedures so clients may register to vote if they choose. Please refer to Operations Memo 2012-29A for an explanation of BEACON changes relating to voter registration.

### **TAFDC and EAEDC: Ten-Day Pending Period Reminder**

TAFDC and EAEDC  
Operations Memo 2012-38

Operations Memo 2011-55A informed TAO staff about changes to the reevaluation process. One of these changes included a cash case closing on the same day as the associated SNAP case closing if a reevaluation appointment was not kept.

The purpose of this Operations Memo is to remind TAO staff that, before closing a TAFDC or EAEDC case with an associated SNAP case for failure to keep a redetermination appointment, it is important to ensure that there are 10 days remaining before the BEACON release date of the SNAP closing.

## Operations Memos

### TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP: Updated Case Transfer Procedures

All

Operations Memo 2012-39

When a client reports a move to an address covered by another TAO, the case should be transferred, even if the new residence is not a permanent one. With a few exceptions, a client's case should be serviced as soon as possible by the TAO where he or she lives. The client must provide proof of the new address. The purpose of this Operations Memo is to update case transfer procedures.

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## From the Forms File

### Revised Form

The *Checklist for Transfer Cases* form has been revised. Refer to Operations Memo 2012-39 for more information. Please discard old versions of this form and use the revised version.

15-042-0812-05

CTC (Rev. 8/2012)

*Checklist for Transfer Cases*



## FYI

### National Voter Registration Act Reminder

The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) requires the Department to provide voter registration services to all applicants and clients (hereafter referred to as clients). Clients may register to vote either at the TAO or by using a mail-in form. Voter registration services provided to our clients include:

- informing clients of the ability to register to vote at a TAO or by use of a mail-in form, if the client prefers;
- asking clients if they would like to register to vote at application, reevaluation, recertification and when they report address changes to a case manager;
- assisting clients with voter registration;
- distributing the Secretary of the Commonwealth's Voter Registration Option Form entitled, *Declination Form* at all in-office applications, reevaluations, recertifications and when a client reports a change in his or her address during an interview;
- providing a Massachusetts Official Voter Registration Form to the client who wants to register or, if the client prefers, providing a Mail-In Voter Registration Form that a client may mail or hand-deliver to his or her city or town hall;
- giving the client a Mail-in Voter Registration Form if the client does not want to register, but does not fill out the Secretary of the Commonwealth's *Declination Form*;
- transmitting completed Massachusetts Official Voter Registration forms to the appropriate local election office within five days of the client's completion of the form;
- making voter registration forms available at TAO reception desks; and
- providing assistance in completing such forms.

**Please refer to Operations Memo 2012-36 for more detailed instructions.**

## TAO Meeting Notes