



## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Quality Corner	3
From the Hotline	4
From the Forms File	5
Self-Declaration for Rental Allowance	5
Young Parents Program (YPP) Suspension of Referrals	5
Disaster SNAP for Certain Communities in Hampden and Worcester	6
Disaster SNAP Supplements for Twelve Communities	6
ESP Clean-up	6
SSI Special Benefits: Disaster	7
Automatic D-SNAP Supplements for Brimfield, Monson and Wilbraham	7
Reinstatement of the Elderly/Disabled No Interview Waiver	7
Employment Services Program (ESP) Suspension of All Referrals	8
SNAP Annual Reporting Process	8

(Continued on page 2)

## From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues:

I cannot thank you enough for all of your efforts to assist individuals and families during the month of June.

As you know, on June 1, several tornadoes and severe thunderstorms devastated Central and Western Massachusetts and left thousands of residents and businesses without power, surrounded by destroyed property, and homeless. Immediately after the storms, we took the lead in establishing three Storm Assistance Centers in Monson/Palmer, Southbridge, and at Springfield Liberty. These centers, open seven days a week, provided a variety of services such as food assistance, housing, unemployment assistance, and mental health services. More than 5,000 households were assisted at these centers through June 16<sup>th</sup>.

On June 15<sup>th</sup>, President Obama declared a federal emergency in Hampden and Worcester Counties. As a result of this declaration, we could administer Disaster SNAP (D-SNAP), a one-time benefit for people who do not already receive SNAP. To administer D-SNAP as quickly as possible, we transformed the three Storm Assistance Centers into Disaster SNAP sites, and added a second D-SNAP location at Springfield State. Working from tents pitched in the parking lots of the storm centers, we assisted more than 16,000 households in just seven days.

At all of the sites I witnessed unparalleled teamwork and incredibly compassionate customer service.. Despite working nights and weekends for several weeks, it was clear that you were energized and fully committed to assisting individuals and families affected by the storms. Specifically, I would like to thank all of the TAO Directors and Assistant Directors; the Supervisors, Case Managers, Clerks and Human Service Assistants who worked on the front lines; the Regional Directors; Assistant Commissioners; and Deputy Commissioners.

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**From the Commissioner** *(Continued from page 1)*

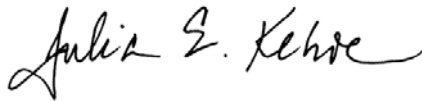
*(Continued from page 1)*

Automating Two Additional Categorical Eligibility Groups	8
ESP BEACON Changes	9
TAFDC and SNAP-Income Tax Refunds as Noncountable Assets	9
Diversity Quote	9
FYI: Clarification for Funeral and Final Disposition Payments for SSI and TAFDC Clients	10
FYI: Increase in Federal Mileage Rate	10
FYI: Systematic Alien Verifications for Entitlements (SAVE) Enhancements	10

I would also like to thank all of the staff in the TAOs and Central Office Units who offered critical support throughout the D-SNAP effort, notably the Holyoke, Greenfield, Lowell, North Shore, Plymouth, Taunton and Worcester TAOs as well as Administration and Finance; Field Operations; Legal Division; Management Information Systems (MIS); Policy, Programs and External Relations (PPER); and Program Integrity. The entire DTA staff across the Commonwealth worked together to ensure efficient and expedient intake and processing of D-SNAP.

I have always been impressed and humbled by your dedication, and I know you work every day with limited resources to serve more than 810,000 people across the state – one out of every eight Massachusetts residents. Your response to the storms has been truly remarkable. You demonstrated incredible energy, grace, and compassion in the aftermath of the tornadoes and truly went above and beyond the call of duty to assist thousands of people in dire need.

With much appreciation and gratitude,



Julia E. Kehoe  
Commissioner

## Quality Corner

This month, we will review two cases with errors. In the first case, an error was caused by an incorrect wage calculation. In the second case, a negative error was caused by a failure to send the client a Notice of Missed Interview (NOMI).

### **Incorrect Wage Information**

The first case included a family of five: husband, wife and three children. The case was certified as Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) with a certification period from December 2010 through June 2011. Both adults in the household worked for Dunkin Donuts and presented their income information at the time of certification.

The QC reviewer determined that, in some instances, the case manager extracted the net income from the wage stubs instead of the gross income and entered this information in BEACON. The net income was entered in error for three out of four paystubs for the wife and one out of four paystubs for the husband. In addition, the wife informed the QC reviewer that her eldest daughter had not been living with her since September 2010. This review was being conducted for March 2011. The combined issues caused an overpayment error of \$250 for the review month.

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

Case managers must be very careful when extracting information from proofs clients submit. This is especially critical when recording income from paystubs. Careful attention to details such as gross income, the deductions on the paystubs and other information such as tips or child support paid is important as this information impacts eligibility. Refer to Quality Corner of February 2008 entitled *Keys to Preventing Errors*.

### **No Notice of Missed Interview**

The second case is an invalid denial or a negative error. This error involved a web application that was received on February 14, 2011. On February 28, a FS Telephone Interview letter was sent to the client with a scheduled phone interview. A verification checklist was also sent to the client on February 28.

Although an appointment letter for a telephone interview was sent, QC determined that no telephone interview occurred, and that there was no other contact with the client. This determination was based on the lack of information in the case record or in BEACON indicating that an interview occurred. In addition, there was no record of a Notice of Missed Interview (NOMI) in Document History of BEACON. On March 16, 2011, the case was denied for failure to complete the application process.

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

This was an inappropriate denial. Case managers have been instructed to use the BEACON Narrative to support case activity, especially when there is nothing else in the case record or in BEACON to support adverse case actions such as a denial.

If a client misses a scheduled application interview (telephone or face-to-face), a BEACON-generated NOMI must be sent. Case managers must indicate on the BEACON Narrative tab whether or not the client was interviewed by phone. There has been an increase in the number of negative errors based on lack of evidence that an interview was scheduled and/or conducted, and whether or not a NOMI was sent. In many instances, a narrative entry addressing the client interview could prevent a negative error. For more information on negative errors, see *Negative Errors and How to Avoid Them* on Policy Online/Job Aids.

## 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.** When must the *Assignment of Support Rights, Cooperation with Child Support, or Good Cause Claim* T-A34/36 (Rev. 10/2009) form get completed?
- A.** Complete this form:
- when, during the application process, the applicant indicates that the dependent child's parent is absent; and/or
  - when a new child whose parent is absent is added to the TAFDC case.
- Q.** Must the T-A34/36 form get completed at each reevaluation?
- A.** No. It is unnecessary to complete this form at each TAFDC reevaluation. Remember, however, that during the client's reevaluation, any change reported that impacts information previously entered on the T-A34/36 may require an updated version of the form. For more information on the *Assignment of Support Rights, Cooperation with Child Support, or Good Cause Claim* (T-A34/36), refer to *A User's Guide, Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter XIII, Section G, page 11 and 106 CMR 203.700 et seq.
- Q.** I was preparing to recertify my SNAP client this morning and could not find his birth certificate. I needed this form to verify his age for SNAP and the EAEDC Program. Should I ask the client to furnish another copy?
- A.** No. It is important to remember that if a client has already provided a permanent verification, it cannot be required again, unless new developments make the existing verification questionable. If a physical case record is not readily available at the time of application, reevaluation or recertification, but a permanent eligibility factor is listed on BEACON as having already been verified, it does not need to be reverified. The client is not required to provide this information again. For more information on verification requirements for the SNAP, TAFDC and EAEDC programs refer to Operations Memo 2010-55.
- Q.** My SNAP applicant is currently working and has two children in daycare. She has not furnished a statement or bill from her child care provider. Since she has already signed her application which contains the expense amount for each of her children and will be providing this again at subsequent recertifications, can the signature on her application and subsequent recertification forms serve as adequate verification of her dependent care expense amount?
- A.** Yes, the signature on her application and subsequent recertification forms serve as adequate verification of her dependent care expense amount. Dependent care expense amounts are optional verifications for SNAP. If your applicant or client reports dependent care expenses but is unable to get a statement from the provider, then a signed self-declaration is adequate verification for this deduction, unless the amount paid is questionable. If the information is questionable, the case manager may request further verification of dependent care expenses. See 106 CMR 364.400, 106 CMR 364.450 and Operations Memo 2010-55.

## From the Forms File

### New Brochure

The Children's Behavioral Health Initiative (CBHI) has provided the Department with its brochure entitled: *Worried about the way your child is acting or feeling? MassHealth has New Services for mental, emotional, or substance abuse issues that may help!* The brochure explains the benefits and services provided by the Children's Behavioral Health Initiative. MassHealth asks that the brochure be made available to our clients. Please display the brochure and make it available in TAO waiting areas. Additional copies can be ordered through DTA's Document Production unit at Schrafft's.

### Obsolete Brochure

02-568-1206-05

DVU Brochure

*Everyone Deserves To Be Safe – DTA Domestic Violence Unit*

This brochure is now obsolete. Please discard old versions of this brochure.

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## Operations Memos

### Self-Declaration for Rental Allowance

TAFDC

Operations Memo 2011-21

This Operations Memo advises TAO staff that clients may self-declare whether they are living in private or public housing. Clients must answer whether they are living in private or public/subsidized housing as a question on BEACON. Once the application or reevaluation form is signed by the applicant or client, no other proof of housing type is needed.

### Young Parents Program (YPP) Suspension of Referrals

TAFDC

Operations Memo 2011-22

Operations Memo 2011-28

Operations Memo 2011-22 advised staff that, no referrals to the Young Parents Program (YPP) can be made in certain TAOs.

Operations Memo 2011-28 advised TAO staff that no referrals to the Young Parents Program (YPP) can be made at any TAO.

(Continued on page 6)

## Operations Memos *(Continued from page 5)*

### **Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Certain Communities in Hampden and Worcester**

#### SNAP

##### Operations Memo 2011-23

Following a Presidential Declaration of Disaster, the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) received approval from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to operate a Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP) for certain communities in Hampden and Worcester counties. D-SNAP is designed to provide food benefits to people who might not ordinarily qualify for SNAP. The Operations Memo transmits D-SNAP rules and implementation procedures.

### **Disaster SNAP Supplements for Twelve Communities**

#### SNAP

##### Operations Memo 2011-24

DTA received approval from USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to issue D-SNAP supplements to ongoing SNAP households who reside or work in the 12 communities previously approved as part of the state's D-SNAP.

This Operations Memo issues procedures for processing D-SNAP supplements for ongoing SNAP households residing in one of the twelve communities approved for D-SNAP. Households that received the maximum SNAP benefit amount for June for their household size are ineligible for a D-SNAP supplement.

### **ESP Clean-up**

#### TAFDC

##### Operations Memo 2011-25

This Operations Memo advised TAO staff that, in preparation for a mailing to ESP clients about possible funding reductions in ESP, clients enrolled in an ESP activity that ended must be terminated from the activity on BEACON. This will prevent them from being sent an incorrect notice and may decrease phone calls regarding clients' ESP status. The Operations Memo also advised case managers to work on ESP-funded activities first.

*(Continued on page 7)*

## Operations Memos *(Continued from page 6)*

### SSI Special Benefits: Disaster

TAFDC

Operations Memo 2011-26

Operations Memo 2011-23 detailed procedures for issuing disaster SNAP benefits as a result of the June 1, 2011 storm that included several tornadoes. Operations Memo 2011-26 reminds TAO staff about disaster benefits available for certain SSI clients. It also gives procedures for administering the benefits. These benefits are considered noncountable income for SNAP.

### Automatic D-SNAP Supplements for Brimfield, Monson and Wilbraham

SNAP

Operations Memo 2011-27

This memo advises staff that based on approval from USDA, the Department would automatically issue D-SNAP supplements to ongoing SNAP households who reside in the Brimfield, Monson, or Wilbraham. Ongoing SNAP households in these three communities will not have to complete the Affidavit of Loss of Income or Disaster-Related Expenses form referenced in Operations Memo 2011-24.

Automatic D-SNAP supplements **were not** issued to households who work in Brimfield, Monson or Wilbraham because DTA does not have a record of persons who work in these communities. A person who works in one of these three communities may apply for D-SNAP benefits for the month of June at the TAO that services the community in which they reside. This application must be made by the close of business on Friday, June 24, 2011.

### Reinstatement of the Elderly/Disabled No Interview Waiver

SNAP

Operations Memo 2011-29

This memo advises staff of BEACON enhancements implemented to ensure the appropriate use of the recertification waiver and the application waiver for eligible households.

Although the waiver of the face-to-face interview at application was never suspended, the BEACON changes implemented and described in this memo also ensure the appropriate use of the application waiver.

*(Continued on page 8)*

## Operations Memos *(Continued from page 7)*

### Employment Services Program (ESP) Suspension of All Referrals

TAFDC

Operations Memo 2011-30

This Operations Memo advised TAO staff that no referrals to Employment Services Program (ESP) funded activities can be made at any TAO. Referrals can still be made to non-ESP funded activities and to community service sites to help clients meet their work program requirement.

### SNAP Annual Reporting Process

SNAP

Operations Memo 2011-31

This Operations Memo introduces the SNAP Annual Reporting process and issues procedures for processing an annual report. The annual report includes two six-month periods separated by an interim report.

The annual report process will be implemented in two phases as follows:

- Phase One: conversion of all of active Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) cases and cases with a pending release for Universal Semiannual Reporting to Annual Reporting in July; and
- Phase Two: mailing of the first Interim Reports to Annual Reporting households in October.

**Note:** Details about the Interim Report process will be issued in a separate memo.

### Automating Two Additional Categorical Eligibility Groups

SNAP

Operations Memo 2011-33A

This memo informs staff of BEACON programming which automates the two categorically eligible groups introduced in 2008. This memo:

- defines the two categorical eligibility groups being automated;
- outlines BEACON updates to automate the two categorical eligibility groups;
- discusses the categorical eligibility determination of PA and NPA SNAP households;
- reviews the operation of the Federal Certify Indicator in categorical eligibility determination; and
- explains What If Calculator procedures for SNAP-Only Adult Services Adult Households.

This memo obsoletes Operations Memo 2011-33.

*(Continued on page 9)*



## Operations Memos *(Continued from page 8)*

### ESP BEACON Changes

TAFDC

Operations Memo 2011-34

BEACON is being modified to reflect changes to ESP. This Operations Memo advises TAO staff about these changes.

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### State Letter

#### TAFDC and SNAP – Income Tax Refunds as Noncountable Assets

TAFDC and SNAP

State Letter 1360

The Tax Relief, Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization, and Job Creation Act of 2010 was signed into law on December 17, 2010. This law makes changes to how the TAFDC and SNAP programs treat federal income tax refunds.

This State Letter transmits the following changes: federal income tax refunds received are considered noncountable assets for twelve months from the date of receipt. Thereafter, any portion of the federal income tax refund remaining is considered a countable asset.

This material was effective December 17, 2010.

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### Diversity Quote

**“The wave of the future is not the conquest of the world by a single dogmatic creed but the liberation of the diverse energies of free nations and free men.”**

**John F. Kennedy**

## FYIs

### **Clarification for Funeral and Final Disposition Payments for SSI and TAFDC Clients**

TAO staff are reminded that if the deceased is not identified by a relative or funeral director as a current or former SSI, TAFDC or EAEDC client, before establishing the deceased as an EAEDC client on BEACON, case managers must determine if the client is in receipt of (or was in receipt of) TAFDC, EAEDC or SSI. SSI clients do not need to be entered onto BEACON. The Special Services Payment System (SSPS) was modified to validate the entry of SSPS benefits for SSI clients against SSI information available as part of the SDX update process.

Please see Operations Memo 2010-54 for current procedures regarding Funeral and Final Disposition Payments.

### **Increase in Federal Mileage Rate**

Effective July 1 2011, TAO staff must use the federal mileage rate of 55.5 cents per mile when calculating allowable transportation costs to be used as a medical or a dependent care deduction for SNAP. The new federal mileage rate represents an increase from the rate issued in an FYI in *Transitions* of February 2011.

### **Systematic Alien Verifications for Entitlements (SAVE) Enhancements**

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services has reported two upgrades to Systematic Alien Verifications for Entitlements (SAVE) effective July 13, 2011:

- First, in addition to the immigration status information provided previously by SAVE, DTA will now receive employment authorization information. For example, a response of “Non Immigrant” will now read “Non Immigrant – Temporary Employment Authorized” when appropriate.
- Second, due to these enhancements, DTA may experience fewer cases requiring the “Request Additional Verification” process.

The Training Job Aid for the Systematic Alien Verifications for Entitlements (SAVE) has been updated to reflect these changes as well as additional screen layout changes.

See [http://dtaonline/training/tr\\_online/jobaides/save.pdf](http://dtaonline/training/tr_online/jobaides/save.pdf) for instructions on using SAVE.

## TAO Meeting Notes