



Transitions

July 2012

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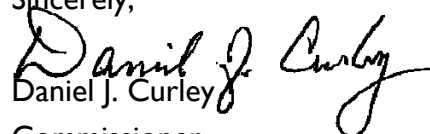
Dear Colleagues,

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.

Sincerely,


 Daniel J. Curley
 Commissioner

Quality Corner

This month, we will review an error that was caused by incorrect medical expenses. We will also review an invalid denial.

Medical Deduction

This was a household of one receiving SNAP benefits of \$200 per month. The client received RSDI benefits of \$762 per month, paid shelter expenses of \$192 per month and was credited with a medical deduction of \$120.

The Quality Control reviewer determined that the case manager had used a prescription drug coverage summary sheet from an insurance carrier to verify the medical expenses but had incorrectly interpreted the information on the sheet. The client was allowed \$120 in medical expenses, but the amount she actually paid was considerably less. In fact, the client reported that at no time did she pay more than \$35 per month in medical expenses. The correct medical expense per month was only \$13 per month. This caused a significant overpayment error for the review month.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

When determining a medical expense amount, be careful to identify the actual amount paid by the client or the actual cost incurred by the client. In this instance, the case manager should have used the amount listed in the Amount You Paid column but used instead an amount that included the Medicare payment. When the verification provided by the client does not identify the cost incurred by the client, you may request the client's written permission, using the Voluntary Authorization to Release Information form and call for clarification. For more information on medical expenses, see 106 CMR 364.400 (C).

Invalid Denial

The client applied for SNAP benefits on February 27, 2012. The case manager noted in the BEACON Narrative that several attempts had been made by phone but there was no success in reaching the client. On March 29, 2012, the application was denied for failure to submit required verifications.

The Quality Control reviewer determined that the client had never been interviewed. There was also no record of a verification checklist in BEACON or in the case record. Failure to conduct an application interview or to send a verification checklist (where necessary) before denying the application constitutes a negative error.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

SNAP applicants must be interviewed. The interview is commonly followed by a BEACON-generated verification checklist informing the client of the items needed to complete the case for processing. If the client cannot be reached by telephone, you must send an appointment letter by mail to the client. For more information on SNAP application processing, see Field Operations Memo 2006-30.

Training Corner

How Are Your Listening Skills?

In a conversation, have you ever ask yourself? “Did I miss something, or did he forget to get where he was going with this?”

Listening is much more than simply hearing. It is a communication skill that merits practice and refinements as much as any other. The effective listener is an active listener; he or she participates in the conversations. While Selective Listening is the process of listening for “facts,” **Active Listening** is the process of listening for “feelings.”

The following are suggestions to watch for when using Active Listening:

Pay attention:

1. Listen for the person’s key ideas and underlying feelings, in addition to facts and words.
2. Communicate your acceptance and attention through empathetic responses such as “yes,” “I see” and “ok.”
3. Ask the person to clarify words or statements if you aren’t sure you understand the message.

Be patient:

1. Let the person know that he or she has the time needed to discuss the problem at hand.
2. Avoid interrupting the person, especially by trying to complete his or her sentences.
3. Don’t express impatience if the person’s thoughts and words come slowly.

Keep an open mind:

1. Suspend your judgment and decisions until the person has finished.
2. Do not interrupt to correct an error in the person’s use of words, or if you disagree with one of his or her statements.
3. Ask for feedback to confirm your interpretations of the person’s message.
4. As you listen, try to understand things from the person’s point of view. Try to discover his or her desired outcome.

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 TAFDC client is the grantee in a three-person household that includes her child and the child's father. She is claiming an exemption as a grantee essential to the care of the father of their child who is a disabled person, but she is not related to this disabled man. Can she still qualify for the exemption?
- A. 1.** Yes. The other parent of a grantee's child or any unrelated child may be the disabled person under this exemption. For more information on TAFDC exemptions from the Time-Limited Benefits and Reduced Need and Payment standards, see 106 CMR 203.100.
- Q. 2.** My TAFDC client is claiming an exemption because she is essential to the care of her daughter's father. As a disabled parent, the father in this household has already verified his incapacity, as specified in 106 CMR 203.530. Does this TAFDC mother still need to have the TAFDC-4, *Verification of Caring for the Disabled* form completed?
- A. 2.** Yes. Even though the disabled person who requires care is also a TAFDC client who has already verified his or her incapacity through DES, the TAFDC-4, *Verification of Caring for the Disabled* form is still required to provide:
- written specifications on the severity of the disability;
 - the reason that the grantee is essential to the care of the disabled person; and
 - confirmation that the grantee is unable to work and instead must remain home to care for the disabled person.
- This form is available on Policy Online under Online Forms.
- Q. 3.** My TAFDC client is claiming an exemption because she is essential to the care of an unrelated, disabled child. This child's disability was verified with the TAFDC-4, *Verification of Caring for the Disabled* form. Must the child's disability also be verified through DES?
- A. 3.** No. If the grantee proves the household member's disability with the TAFDC-4 then a DES review is not required.
- Q. 4.** My client's physician completed the TAFDC-4, *Verification of Caring for the Disabled* form. The form shows that the grantee's child is disabled. Also, the physician checked the "Yes" box indicating that the child has a disability-related need which requires care by the caregiver and prevents the caregiver from seeking, obtaining or maintaining a full-time job. However, the physician left the "Explain" section blank. Until now, the client gave no indication that her child had any special needs. Can I still approve her exemption?

(Continued on page 5)



From the Hotline (Continued from page 4)

- A. 4.** Before you may approve this exemption, the TAFDC-4 must be fully completed. This physician checked the “Yes” box indicating that the child has a disability-related need requiring care that prevents your client from seeking, obtaining or maintaining a full-time job, but then did not explain why the child needs your client, in particular, for this care. There may be good reasons that your client is administering this care, and the regulations at 106 CMR 203.100 (B) require that you determine the reason(s) and maintain this information as part of the case record.
- Q. 5.** I received a phone call today from a physician about the completion of the TAFDC-4, *Verification of Caring for the Disabled* form. She did not understand what to write in the “Explain” section of the form. What are some examples I could provide to the physician so that she gains a better understanding of the information we’re requesting?
- A. 5.** Once the disabled individual’s incapacity is verified, reasons a client may be necessary to provide care to the disabled person include, but are not limited to:
- the regularly scheduled caretaker is on leave for an extended illness or no longer available;
 - the disabled individual responds adversely to other caretakers; or
 - the disabled individual requires round-the-clock care as well as continuity of care provided by a single, consistent caregiver.
- Q. 6.** Besides doctors, are the signatures of other health care professionals accepted on the TAFDC-4, *Verification of Caring for the Disabled* form?
- A. 6.** Yes. The TAFDC-4 form may be signed by any competent medical authority, as defined in 106 CMR 701.600(H).



Compliance Corner

As you may know, one of the units in the Program Integrity Division is Quality Control (QC). This unit conducts mandatory reviews of cases that receive SNAP benefits, as well as those SNAP cases that are denied, closed, or suspended. Each month they review approximately 90 cases selected at random from around the state. They review BEACON and case records, interview clients in their home or in the office, and obtain any verifications required by federal policy. Using state and federal eligibility rules, QC makes a determination about the amount the household was eligible for in the month being reviewed. This amount is compared to the benefit amount that was issued to the household in the review month. Based on the QC review, cases can be determined to be correctly paid, ineligible, eligible but overpaid, or eligible but underpaid. To determine the error rate, QC adds all the benefits that were issued to ineligible households, overpaid households and underpaid households. This number is then divided by the total amount of SNAP benefits issued to all cases reviewed, and this calculation produces the error rate.

Since SNAP is a federal program, federal reviewers look at the findings QC reports and conduct their own investigation on many of the cases. If they determine the household is eligible for a different amount, the federal reviewers will change the error amounts reported by DTA. After all their adjustments have been applied they produce a final error rate. For the period from October 2009 to September 2010, our error rate was 5.9%, while the country as a whole had an error rate of 3.8%. Many of DTA's errors were related to overdue recertifications in NPA SNAP.

In the following year (October 2010 to September 2011), our error rate was 4.5%, an improvement of 1.4%. This improvement was the fourth best in the country and reflects all the efforts made to recertify the overdue cases. Our negative error rate is below the national average, and everyone should be proud of this achievement.

Keep up the good work!

For the months from October 2011 through March 2012, the error rate is estimated at 4.3%. The agency-caused portion, including errors made through system issues, case manager action and others, is only 0.6%. Congratulations!

Diversity Quote

“We may have different religions, different languages, different colored skin, but we all belong to one human race.”

Kofi Annan

Operations Memo

TAFDC and EAEDC – Accepting Copies of Medicals and Disability Supplements for DES

TAFDC and EAEDC

Operations Memo 2012-32

This Operations Memo advises TAO staff that TAFDC and EAEDC clients who claim a medical disability must complete medical and/or disability supplement forms as a condition of eligibility. Under prior guidance, those forms had to be originals signed by the client and/or competent medical authority.

Effective immediately, faxed, scanned and photo copies of these forms can be accepted by case managers as acceptable forms of verification.

TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP – Voter Registration Mailing

TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP

Operations Memo 2012-33

As a result of a settlement in *Delgado v. Galvin*, the Department will conduct a mailing to ensure that any applicant or grantee who is a citizen and aged 18 or older for any case that was active, closed or denied or had an address change between June 1, 2011 and June 1, 2012 is given the opportunity to register to vote through the Department.

The purpose of this Operations Memo is to provide TAO staff with information about this one-time voter registration mailing.

TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP – Voter Registration Reporting Requirements

TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP

Operations Memo 2012-34

The Department is required to offer applicants and clients (hereafter called clients) the ability to register to vote. To comply with that mandate, DTA must track clients who register to vote to ensure that all forms are processed according to established procedures. Operations Memo 2012-33 informed TAO staff about this mailing. The purpose of this Operations Memo is to provide TAO staff with required Voter Registration reporting procedures.



Operations Memos

TAFDC, EAEDC and SSP – Funeral and Final Disposition Payment Changes

TAFDC, EAEDC and SSP
Operations Memo 2012-35

The FY '13 State budget authorized changes to the Department's administration of funeral and final disposition payments. Effective July 1, 2012, the maximum allowable expense for a funeral and final disposition has been capped at \$3500. Effective July 1, 2012 all requests for funeral and final disposition payments must be processed using this new guideline. This Operations Memo advises staff how to process funeral and final disposition expenses under this change.

From the Forms File

Revised Forms

The *Certification of Immunization Status* (TAFDC-2) has been revised and also can now be accessed in BEACON for clients. Please discard old versions and use the revised version of this form.

Certification of Immunization Status
02-191-0612-05
TAFDC-2 (Rev. 6/2012)

The *Application for Payment of Funeral and Final Disposition Expenses* (F&FD-1) must be used to collect the necessary information to determine eligibility for payment of funeral and final disposition expenses for deceased individuals who were not TAFDC or EAEDC clients or in a pending status for TAFDC or EAEDC at the time of death, i.e. SSI (including State Supplement Program payments) clients and non-clients.

The form has been revised to reflect the cap on funeral and final disposition expenses at \$3500. This change has been authorized by the FY '13 state budget. This form is available in the Online Forms section of Policy Online. Please refer to Operations Memo 2012-35 for more information.

Application for Payment of Funeral and Final Disposition
04-085-0712-05
04-086-0712-05(S)
F&FD-1 (Rev. 7/2012)

New Poster

Voter Registration Requirement
Voter Posting Requirement (S) (7/2012)

The Spanish version of the Voter Posting Requirement is now available. An initial supply of the poster has been sent to each TAO and is available for ordering from the Document Production Unit at Schraffts. Please display this poster in the TAO waiting room area.



FYI

Interview Methods, Telephonic and Face-to-Face

Case managers are reminded that reevaluation interviews for TAFDC and EAEDC may be conducted by telephone. Application interviews, however, must be conducted face to face.

Exceptions to this TAFDC/EAEDC reevaluation rule include when the client:

- requests a face-to-face interview,
- requests and signs the *Heightened Level of Security Confirmation/Declination* (HLS-1) form (as shown on BEACON by the HLS indicator),
- does not have telephone service,
- experiences an exemption status change,
- has used 22 months of time-limited benefits, or
- has provided information during the telephonic interview that is questionable.

For more information on telephonic interviews in the TAFDC and EAEDC Programs, refer to Operations Memo 2010-21. For more information on the confidentiality of case record information and the HLS indicator, refer to Operations Memo 2010-50.

Case managers are also reminded that for SNAP applications and recertifications telephonic interviews are the preferred method of interview.

Exceptions to this rule include when the client:

- requests a face-to-face interview,
- requests and signs the *Heightened Level of Security Confirmation/Declination* (HLS-1) form (as shown on BEACON by the HLS indicator); or
- does not have telephone service.

For those applying for SNAP in person, offer the telephone interview option and screen for expedited service at the time of first contact. If the applicant specifically requests a face-to-face interview, plan to conduct the entire interview in one meeting, as long as time and work schedules permit. For more information, refer to Field Operations Memo 2006-30. For more information on the confidentiality of case record information and the HLS indicator, refer to Operations Memo 2010-50.

NOTE: At recertification, elderly or disabled SNAP households without earnings may have their interview waived. For more information, refer to Operations Memo 2011-29.

FYI

National Voter Registration Act Reminder

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TAO Meeting Notes