Transitions

March-April 2015

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Quality Corner

This month we will review an error caused by incorrect shelter expense amounts and also an invalid denial.

Incorrect entering of household shelter expenses

A household comprised of two elderly members was recertified on April 14, 2012 and given a two year certification period. The couple received $1146 in Social Security benefits. They had no mortgage expenses but paid annual property taxes and homeowners insurance.

Quality Control (QC) determined that the worker failed to include the homeowners insurance as part of the client's shelter expense. A verification of the expense was found in the case record. In addition, the property tax amount was entered incorrectly.   As a result of the omissions the household received an underissuance of $55.00 in SNAP benefits.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Clients who own their own home are entitled to the total incurred cost of mortgage, homeowners insurance, property taxes and condo fee (if applicable) as shelter expenses. While some of these households no longer have mortgage payments, the homeowner is responsible for property taxes and in most circumstances homeowners insurance. In this instance, verification of both the property taxes and the homeowners insurance were given to the case manager. The case manager failed to include the homeowner's insurance policy and incorrectly recorded the property tax amount when entering the shelter costs.

Once the information is entered on the Shelter Expenses page, the case manager must ensure that the amount for each expense item is accounted for and that the correct frequency of payment is checked (monthly, annually etc.) on BEACON. Each expense item must be entered under the appropriate selection so that all shelter expense items that the client is responsible to pay will be easily identified on BEACON. This itemization is also helpful for case review and for making changes when a payment amount for an expense item changes. For more information on shelter expenses, see Online Guide/SNAP/Expense and Deductions/Household Expenses/Shelter Expenses.

Invalid Denial Failure to Allow 10 days for Return of Verifications

The household was sent an Interim Report (IR) on February 14, 2014 with a return date of March 1, 2014 and a closing date of 3/30/2014 if the report was not returned. The IR was received by the Department on March 25, 2014 and reviewed by the case manager who initiated the case on BEACON. The case manager explained in the case narrative that although the client reported that there were no changes, there was an outstanding wage match. Consequently, the case manager issued verification checklist (VC-1) requesting pay information. On March 25 (the same day the VC-1 was issued), the case manager entered a closing for failure to provide verifications. The Quality Control (QC) reviewer determined that the closing was invalid because the client was not allowed 10 days to return the requested verification.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Whenever a VC-1 is issued, the client has 10 days to provide the requested verifications.   For more information on verification timeframes, see Online Guide/SNAP/SNAP Verification/SNAP Verification Timeframes.

From the DTA Mailbox

Welcome to the new "From the DTA Mailbox" column. This column replaces "From the Hotline." If you have any questions on this column or other policy and procedural material, please have your Hotline manager or supervisor contact the **DTA Mailbox.**

Q. 1. Can certain SNAP clients have their recertification interviews waived?

A. 1. Yes. Clients receiving Bay State CAP, certain interim reporters and certain elderly/disabled households may have their interviews waived.

Q. 2. Under what conditions must the elderly/disabled household have a recertification interview?

A. 2. Most elderly/disabled households must not be required to have a recertification interview. However, an interview must be conducted if any of the situations below arise:

information supplied on the elderly/disabled recertification form is questionable or contradictory;

the client reports that a member of the household is now employed. (In this situation, the household must be placed on Annual Reporting (AR) and must be interviewed.);

the client reports that a household member is now self-employed. (The household must be given a 12-month certification as a change reporting household and must be interviewed.); or

the client requests an interview, in which case, the case manager must arrange an interview.

For more information on interview waivers for elderly/disabled households, see Operations Memo 2011-29, Operations Memo 2012-55 and the Job Aid entitled "SNAP-Interview Waived Checklist" under Job Aides/Desk Guides on the training link of DTA Online.

Q. 3. Can a SNAP client who is approved for benefits in Massachusetts use his SNAP benefits outside of Massachusetts?

A. 3. Yes. Per Operations Memo 2013-34, as long as Massachusetts residency is verified, case managers must <u>not</u> close a case due to out-of-state EBT usage. The Fraud Investigation and Data Match Unit continues to monitor and follow up on any continuous out-of-state EBT usage.

Q. 4. Is Massachusetts residency a verification requirement for SNAP clients?

From the DTA Mailbox *(Continued from Page 3)*

A. 4.   Yes. According to 106 CMR 362.100, there is a Massachusetts residency requirement that must be verified. When available, the same documents used to verify rent, mortgage payments, utilities or identity must also be used to verify Massachusetts residency. If any of these documents do not verify residency, or there is discrepant information, other documents or collateral contacts that reasonably establish the applicant's residency may be used. No requirement for a specific type of verification can be imposed. See 106 CMR 362.120 for more details.

Diversity Quote

We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color.

Maya Angelou

Online Guide Transmittals

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Child Tax Credit (CTC), Massachusetts Earned Income Credit (EIC) and Child Care Assistance Informational Mailing

OLGT 2015-9
SNAP, TAFDC

Each year, in January, the Department issues an Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Child Tax Credit (CTC), Massachusetts Earned Income Credit (EIC), and child care assistance informational mailing.
This year, the mailing began January 12, 2015.

The mailing is being sent to all active TAFDC clients, certain former TAFDC clients whose cases closed on or after January 1, 2014, and all active SNAP cases, excluding SNAP cases receiving TAFDC.

The following new book and pages have been added to the Scheduled Mailings/Projects Online Guide topic:

Topic: Scheduled Mailings/Projects
Book: EITC/CTC/EIC and Child Care Mailing
Page: EITC/CTC/EIC and Child Care Mailing EITC/CTC/EIC Brochure Child Care Fact Sheet
Page: Free Tax Assistance Sites EITC/EIC Update for the TAFDC Orientation PowerPoint

SNAP Appointments and Interviews

OLGT 2015-17
SNAP

Effective March 2, 2015, with BEACON Build 47.3, new BEACON functionality was implemented to ensure that SNAP application appointments are scheduled in a timely manner and that applicants who miss scheduled telephone interviews receive a NOMI in the event that these actions were missed.

To reinforce and update Business Process Redesign (BPR) procedural changes related to SNAP appointments and interviews, the following Online Guide pages have been revised:

Topic: Business Process Redesign
Book: Procedures
Chapter: Processing Procedures
Page: Scheduling In-Person SNAP Appointments

Topic: Business Process Redesign
Book: Procedures
Chapter: Processing Procedures
Page: Scheduling SNAP Telephone Appointments

Online Guide Transmittals *(Continued from page 5)*

Topic: Business Process Redesign
Book: Procedures
Chapter: Processing Procedures
Page: Completing Scheduled SNAP Telephone Appointments

Topic: Business Process Redesign
Book: Procedures
Chapter: Processing Procedures
Page: Conducting Cold Calls for SNAP Application and Recertification

TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP – DTA Mailbox

OLGT 2015-19

All

Effective Friday, March 13, 2015, the Department discontinued the Policy Hotline. The Policy Hotline phone number has been disabled. All questions related to Department policy and procedures are conveyed only through email to a new mailbox address. Field staff may use this address to forward questions and report policy and procedural concerns, which will be immediately triaged and prioritized for response and any required follow-up.

With implementation, any Systems Support Desk tickets that have policy and/or procedural implications will be forwarded to the Policy Division for resolution and response.

To promote the consistent implementation of Department policies and procedures, all field staff will be able to email their questions or concerns after consulting with their supervisor or manager. Staff should:

- submit questions related to regulations and procedures that arise during the course of completing assigned casework; and
- report any need for follow-up or correction of prior actions or inactions taken on a case.

If staff is having difficulty determining whether the question is a Systems Support Desk issue or a mailbox concern, consult the Online Guide as well as their supervisor or manager. If the answer to the policy or procedure question cannot be determined, and BEACON is functioning in a manner consistent with Department instructions, then an email to the new mailbox address is appropriate.

Online Guide Transmittals

MAP Release 5.0 Enhancements

OLGT 2015-20
All

My Account Page (MAP) Release 5.0, implemented March 15, 2015, included the following updates and enhancements to DTA's MAP website page:

- In the Consumer Search section, the client is no longer asked to enter a zip code to view benefit information.
- In the Benefits section and the Extended Permission to Share Information section, the DTA Recipient Services phone number has been changed to the statewide DTA Assistance Line phone number.
- In the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) section, text has been added to provide clients with information
  about DTA eNotification and how to opt-in or opt-out to receive email alerts when notices are
  posted to their MAP accounts. This new text includes a link for the client to use to learn more about eNotification and how to sign up.
- In the My Office Information section for SNAP, specific TAO, case manager and supervisor information

has been replaced by the DTA Assistance Line phone number and a link to a Transitional Assistance Office page.

In the DTA Benefits Page, a new section has been added to list client documents mailed or faxed by the client and received by the Electronic Document Management Center (EDMC). The section will include information about document type, date received by the EDMC and processing status.

The following books/pages have been added.

Topic: EAEDC
Book: Services
Chapter: MAP
Page: My Account Page (MAP)

Topic: EAEDC
Book: Services
Chapter: MAP
Page: My Account Page (MAP) Overview

Online Guide Transmittals *(Continued from page 7)*

Topic:	TAFDC
Book:	Services
Chapter:	MAP
Page:	My Account Page (MAP)

Topic:	TAFDC
Book:	Services
Chapter:	MAP
Page:	My Account Page (MAP) Overview

Topic:	SNAP
Book:	Services
Chapter:	MAP
Page:	My Account Page (MAP)

Topic:	SNAP
Book:	Services
Chapter:	MAP
Page:	My Account Page (MAP) Overview

Languages Available for SNAP Applications, Department Forms and Brochures

OLGT 2015-21

SNAP

The Virtual Gateway SNAP online application is now available in English, Spanish and Portuguese. Updates to the Online Guide include information about the languages in which paper SNAP applications, Department forms and brochures are currently available.

The following Online Guide pages have been revised:

Topic:	SNAP
Book:	Application Processing
Chapter:	SNAP Application Processing
Page:	SNAP Application Processing - Introduction

Topic:	SNAP
Book:	Application Processing
Chapter:	SNAP Application Processing
Page:	Gateway Web Application – Overview

Online Guide Transmittals

Cross Program: Haitian Family Reunification Program

OLGT 2015-22
EAEDC, TAFDC

The United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) recently implemented the Haitian Family Reunification Parole (HFRP) Program to expedite family reunification for certain eligible Haitian family members of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents. Family members will be paroled into the U.S. as Cuban/Haitian entrants and await their immigrant visas in the U.S., rather than in Haiti. At that point, they will be eligible to apply for lawful permanent resident (LPR) status.

The eligibility requirements for parole under the HFRP include:

- The relative sponsor (petitioner) must be a U.S. citizen or LPR who has filed a Form 1-130, Petition for Alien Relative which was approved on or before December 18, 2014;
- The relative for whom the petition was filed (beneficiary) must be a Haitian national currently residing in Haiti;
- An immigrant visa is not yet available for the beneficiary; and
- Petitioner must have received an invitation to apply from the Department of State National Visa Center.

USCIS will use its discretion to grant parole on a case-by-case basis.

Since noncitizens approved for the HFRP Program will enter the United States as Cuban/Haitian entrants, they are eligible for EAEDC and for TAFDC and SNAP without a five-year bar if all other financial and nonfinancial criteria are met.

The following Online Guide pages have been revised:

Topic: TAFDC
Book: Program Nonfinancial Requirements
Chapter: Noncitizen
Page: Eligible Qualified Noncitizens

Topic: EAEDC
Book: General Nonfinancial Requirements
Chapter: Noncitizen
Page: Eligible Qualified Noncitizens

Topic: SNAP
Book: Eligibility Requirements
Chapter: Noncitizen
Page: Eligible Qualified Noncitizens

FYIs

Over verification

Over verification occurs when clients are unnecessarily required to provide a permanent verification a second time, or when clients are asked to provide proof of one eligibility factor, when other verifications may have already proven the eligibility factor. Over verification also occurs in SNAP cases when optional verifications (such as medical expenses) are being treated as required verification. This makes it more difficult for clients to obtain benefits and results in duplicative effort for both clients and the Department.

If a client has already provided a permanent verification, DTA staff must not require the client to provide this verification again, unless questionable. To be considered questionable, the information on the application/reevaluation/recertification must be inconsistent with statements made by the client, with other information on the application/reevaluation/recertification or previous applications, or other information known or reported to the Department. Also remember that verification that can be proven through interagency matches should be used whenever possible.

Correct Work Requirements Reasons

Accurately coding the Work Requirements program pages is vital to ensure that clients subject to the:
- TAFDC work program;
- Employment Service Program;
- SNAP work program or SNAP E&T

are adhering to those requirements. It is also important to make sure these clients are appropriately sanctioned if they are not meeting the requirements. It is also important to ensure that clients who are exempt must not be coded as work required. If so, they could be incorrectly subjected to a reduced need and payment standard and/or incorrectly sanctioned.

Incorrectly coding the Work Requirements-FS page may result in an inability to issue an ESP referral for a client who is in receipt of TAFDC. For two-parent cases where at least one parent is being reopened due to a work program sanction, it is important to ensure that the proper FS Work Requirement reason is selected. This will enable availability for all appropriate TAFDC work requirement components.

As part of the TAFDC work program assessment, case managers, who are on the ESP Component Eligibility page, who notice the only component listed is employment, must go to the Work Requirements – FS page. For the TAFDC work required individual, change the Work Program Required Reason and the FSET Required Reason to "Meets TAFDC/EAEDC requirement." Return to the ESP Component Eligibility page for the selected client. Click the Re-Assess button. All applicable TAFDC work requirement components will be available for selection and enrollment.

TAO Meeting Notes