



Transitions

March 2012

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Dear Colleagues,

As I've travelled across the state to meet with you in our Transitional Assistance Offices (TAOs) and at Central Office, many of you have asked for a way to submit suggestions and recommendations to me and to Senior Staff.

I am pleased to announce that we've created a special email address to capture your ideas. Effective immediately, please feel free to send your thoughts and concerns to dta.suggestions@massmail.state.ma.us. Several of my staff members will check the account regularly. I will consider all of your recommendations, and will respond to as many of your messages as I can.

I hope that your suggestions will also include ideas for solutions or improvements. I have always felt that the best way to address an issue is to be part of the solution, and I hope you will feel that way, too. Together, we can provide the best possible service to our colleagues and our more than 843,000 clients across the Commonwealth.

While I welcome all of your thoughts, please remember that issues regarding specific employees or clients should be raised with your manager or supervisor.

If you would prefer to submit your suggestions anonymously, please feel free to fax them to me at 617-348-8575 or mail them to:

DTA Suggestions

Department of Transitional Assistance – Commissioner's Office
600 Washington Street, 5th Floor
Boston, MA 02111

I look forward to receiving your suggestions.

Sincerely,

Daniel J. Curley
Commissioner

Quality Corner

This month we will review two errors. The first error was caused by household composition and unreported earnings while the second error was caused by an invalid denial.

Household Composition

This first case included the client and four children. The client reported paying rent of \$900 per month and being responsible for heating/cooling expenses. She reported income of \$1465 in RSDI benefits for three of her children.

The QC reviewer determined that the client had not reported that her eldest son, who had no income of his own, had left the home. Another finding was that one of her sons who was listed as living in the home was mistakenly left out of the SNAP household composition. He had RSDI income of \$183. Based on a household of five and the increased unearned income amount of \$1648, the case had an overissuance of \$76 for the review month.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Case managers must remember to review household composition before processing a case. Based on mandatory inclusion rules, some family members who live together are automatically included in the SNAP household regardless of their purchase and prepare arrangement.

Counting the Required Days for a Verifications Due or the Denial of a Case

An application was received on October 27. The client missed the first scheduled interview and was sent a Notice of Missed Interview (NOMI). She was interviewed on November 7. On the day of the interview, a verification checklist was issued to the client, giving her until November 16 to provide verifications. On December 16, a denial letter was mailed to the client. This denial was invalid because the verification checklist only had a 9-day time limit and also the case manager did not wait until the 30th day before denying the case.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

To determine the 10-day time limit allowed for providing verifications, day one is the day *after* the verification checklist is issued. Likewise, to determine the 30-day time limit for denying a SNAP application, day one is the day after the client submits the application. If the due date falls on a weekend or holiday, the due date recorded on the verification checklist must be the next business day. For more information on verification time frames, see *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter III-D.

Compliance Corner

Every year DTA is subject to audits of our financial management and of our program operations. These audits are conducted by oversight agencies, such as the Social Security Administration, the agency that runs the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. When audits deal with program operations, they generally involve reviews of cases receiving benefits from the program being audited. Since local offices and case managers administer these cases, you are directly involved in the findings from these audits.

This new column, *Compliance Corner*, will present findings from recent audits and will discuss both the positive findings and the areas where more attention is needed. In future columns, we will present some of the results of fraud and overpayment referrals you submitted to the Program Integrity division.

SSA Reimbursement

As a condition of eligibility, DTA requires that certain EAEDC recipients apply for SSI benefits. While the client's application for SSI is pending, the Department provides EAEDC cash assistance. This period of assistance is referred to as "interim assistance," and if the EAEDC recipient is approved for SSI, DTA is reimbursed for that period when EAEDC and SSI overlap. The client is also paid retroactively for the difference between the SSI benefit amount and the EAEDC payments received. When the client applies for EAEDC, he or she signs the Authorization for Reimbursement of Interim Assistance (AP-SSI-IAR). The purpose of this form is to have the client acknowledge DTA's right to be reimbursed for some or all of the period of interim assistance.

This process, called Interim Assistance Reimbursement (IAR), is reviewed every three years by the Social Security Administration (SSA). Earlier this year, representatives from SSA conducted a review of this program in Massachusetts. SSA reviewed 252 cases that were processed in October 2010 to determine if our procedures were followed correctly for those cases, that there was appropriate documentation in the case file, that the reimbursements were calculated correctly, and that the cases were timely processed. **SSA found that all 252 cases were calculated correctly and were processed timely.** They did, however, find five cases that did not contain valid authorizations. For two of those cases, the client had not dated the AP-SSI-I form. (The AP-SSI-I form was used because the review period was prior to implementation of the AP-SSI-IAR form). For the remaining three, the AP-SSI-I form was more than one year old. Because the client's assignment of interim assistance was not done properly, DTA was required to issue the reimbursed funds to the client. Even though five cases were not properly documented, SSA noted that DTA does an excellent job administering the IAR process.

What Can a Case Manager Do?

To ensure that DTA is properly and completely reimbursed, always make sure the AP-SSI-IAR form is signed and dated by both the client and yourself, and that you both sign and date a new AP-SSI-IAR form every 12 months. Please note, however, that the AP-SSI-IAR form and Operations Memo 2010-53 provide some exceptions to the 12-month requirement. You should review the individual case circumstances to determine if an exception applies.

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. I had received my client's Interim Report (IR) before the closing date, the case was initiated, but there were still missing income verifications. Before the 30th day, I received the client's missing income verifications. Can I reopen this SNAP case back to the date of closing?

A. 1. Yes. If otherwise eligible, reopen this case back to the date of closing. For more information, refer to Operations Memo 2011-31 and Operations Memo 2011-43.

Q. 2. A client did not return his IR form and accordingly his SNAP case closed. Twenty days after the SNAP closing, the client returned a completed IR. Twenty-two days after the closing, the client supplied all of his required verifications. How and when is this SNAP case reopened?

A. 2. Using the information from the now completed IR form, open this case back to the date you received the IR. In this case, the SNAP benefits would be prorated to account for the client's 20-day delay. For more details, see 106 CMR 366.340.

Q. 3. What happens if my SNAP client ends up returning his completed IR more than 30 days after his case closes for failing to complete an IR?

A. 3. If more than 30 days have passed since this IR closing, conduct a new application interview with your client. The completed IR can serve as the application form and the SNAP household becomes eligible for benefits as of the date the IR was received.

Q. 4. What verifications are required with a completed IR?

A. 4. Required verifications include:

- an SSN, if adding a new household member; and
- any change in residence.

Additionally, the verifications below are *only* required if the change will cause a benefit increase:

- any earned income decreases of \$100 or more;
- any unearned income decreases of \$50 or more; and
- any new income.

Refer to Field Operations Memo 2010-55 for more details on verification requirements.

Continued on Page 5



From the Hotline (Continued from page 4)

- Q. 5.** If a client reports that her dependent care, shelter or utility expenses have increased, is the self-declaration on the IR considered sufficient verification?
- A. 5.** Yes. Dependent care, shelter and utility expense verifications can be self-declared on the IR.
Note: For information on how to verify medical expenses, refer to the *Medical Deductions Job Aid*, in Policy Online.
- Q. 6.** I was reviewing my client's IR and noticed that he forwarded wage stubs along with his completed form. The wage information showed a \$20 weekly pay raise. Am I required to enter this new wage information into BEACON?
- A. 6.** Yes. Although your client was not required to report wage increases or decreases of less than \$100, he nevertheless sent this updated wage information to you, and it will impact his SNAP benefit amount. Therefore, the information must be entered into the system.

Diversity Quote

"We are of course a nation of differences. Those differences don't make us weak. They're the source of our strength."

Jimmy Carter



Training Corner

Training Tips, Tricks and Reminders

Welcome to the first installment of *Training Tips, Tricks and Reminders*. The Training Unit will be providing tips in this new column on a wide variety of subjects in the coming months. This month the topic is how to perform basic maintenance and clean-up for your **Outlook** account.

All offices are using **eLog** to register clients as they arrive in our waiting rooms, and workers and supervisors are notified that a client is waiting by an email message. However, your Outlook email account has limited storage space. Therefore, it is important that, on a regular basis, you do two things:

1. **First, delete emails that were sent from eLog notifying you that a client is waiting for you. All these emails have the subject line *SECURE: Someone is waiting for you*.** That moves them to your Deleted Items folder.
2. Second, “empty” your Deleted Items folder. To do this, right click on the Deleted Items folder. Then left-click on Empty Folder. Finally, click Yes to confirm.

This will free up more room in your Outlook account and ensure that there is no interruption in your ability to send or receive emails.

You can choose to delete the unwanted emails one by one using the Delete key, or select multiple emails to delete all at once. To select multiple emails in a sequence, click on the first email in the sequence, hold down the Shift key and select the last email in the sequence. Then press the Delete key. To select multiple emails that are not in a sequence, click the first email you want to delete. Hold down the CTL key and continue selecting the individual emails you want to delete. Then press the Delete key. Finally, empty your Deleted Items folder (as described earlier).

Remember, most of the emails you send and receive on a daily basis are considered public records and must be retained for a certain period of time. Click this link to access the Administrative memo entitled *Email Retention Policy and Procedures* for detailed information and answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). **Page 2 of the Policy and Procedures section lists 14 types of emails that you can delete.**

For detailed, step-by-step directions on how to delete emails, click this link to view the **Outlook Maintenance Basics** job aid.

Next month, we'll cover how to archive the emails you must keep.

Operations Memos

SSI – State Administration of State Portion of SSI

TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP

Operations Memo 2012-13

Massachusetts currently offers a program of state-funded supplemental payments known as the State Supplement Program (SSP) to aged, disabled and blind residents who are eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). While SSP is authorized through the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) and the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB), the federal Social Security Administration (SSA) currently determines program eligibility and issues the state supplemental payments to clients on behalf of DTA and MCB. These payments are currently included as part of a client's monthly SSI benefits, and many clients do not realize that they are receiving SSP in addition to SSI.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) has always administered the program of state-funded supplemental payments known as the State Supplement Program (SSP).

Effective April 1, 2012, the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), in partnership with University of Massachusetts Medical School (UMMS), will assume the administration of the state portion of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments.

This Operations Memo:

- explains how this change will impact applicants and clients;
- explains University of Massachusetts Medical School's (UMMS) role in administering the program;
- provides contact information for DTA staff; and
- provides DTA staff with answers to clients' frequently asked questions.



FYI

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNA) Benefit Decreasing

Effective for April 2012 cyclical benefits, SNA households will begin receiving the reduced SNA benefit of \$6 monthly. BEACON will automatically issue SNA benefits for each month the household is actively receiving SNAP-only benefits and meets SNA program requirements. Please refer to Operations Memo 2012-12 for SNA program eligibility and to respond to client inquiries about this change.

From the Forms File

Revised Brochures

Your Right to Know

02-211-0312-05(English)

02-212-0312-05(Spanish)

18-129-0312-05 (Portuguese)

YRTK (Rev. 3/2012)

The *Your Right to Know* (YRTK) brochure has been revised to remove the phrase “if needed” from the ‘register to vote’ dot point under the **Your Rights** section. Please discard the previous version (Rev. 1/2012) and use the newly revised (Rev. 3/2012) version. The revised brochure will soon be available in other languages.

TAO Meeting Notes