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Dear Colleagues,

This month has been a fast-paced one as we begin to implement a few high-priority initiatives, including putting photo ID's on EBT cards, expunging high balances, the blocking of ATMs and Point of Sale devices and beginning our first State Law Enforcement Bureau investigations. As we turn to November, we will continue to move at a fast-pace and we will rely on everyone to help make sure the implementation of our initiatives is successful. I want to give you a quick update on our October.

On Saturday, Oct. 12, 2013, a routine test at the Xerox Data Center in Dallas caused a power outage at the facility and resulted in complete loss of services in 17 states, including Massachusetts. The power outage occurred at approximately 11 a.m. and lasted until roughly 9:30 p.m. Massachusetts clients were unable to perform transactions of any kind with their EBT card.

While this was an issue with the Xerox system, Department leadership was in constant contact with the Xerox team throughout the entire day, including hourly phone calls and emails. Our staff worked hard to inform clients of the outage, including using its social media accounts, working with media to get accurate and consistently updated information to the public, calling resource lines like 211 to ensure they were aware of the issue, updating the DTA call message, and working to inform retailers about an emergency voucher system available to those customers trying to purchase food.

I want to thank those who were on-call that Saturday for their hard work, passion and dedication to help fix a situation that paralyzed the state's most vulnerable families. We continue to work with Xerox to remedy this issue in future and ensure a back-up plan is in place so our clients can access their benefits when they need them.

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Commissioner's Corner *(Continued from Page 1)*

Through October and November, two significant changes will impact the SNAP benefits for many of our clients. Effective Oct. 1, 2013, most SNAP households will have a benefit increase due to the annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) and effective Nov. 1, 2013; all SNAP households will have a benefit reduction due to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 rollback. This may prove to be confusing changes for our clients, so as a Department, we will be doing outreach to all clients, stakeholders, and community partners to educate people about these changes.

As always, thank you for your continued hard work. I am looking forward to an equally successful November here at DTA.

Sincerely,



Stacey Monahan
Commissioner

If you have any comments or feedback, please feel free to contact me at Stacey.Monahan@state.ma.us.

Quality Corner

This month we will review an error that occurred in a Non Public Assistance (NPA) SNAP case.

No Follow-up on Information Reported at Recertification

This was an NPA SNAP household of one adult. A recertification form was sent to the client on October 25, 2011 and returned on November 9, 2011. On the recertification form, the client had reported a new address and telephone number. Later in the form, in *Section 8: Housing and Utilities*, the client indicated that he had no change in housing and utility costs. The case manager processed the recertification without verifying the new address or inquiring about any changes in housing and utility expenses as a result of the move. The case was recertified using Supplemental Security Income (SSI) of \$740, the prior rental expense on file of \$125 per month and the heating/cooling Standard Utility Allowance (SUA). The case was recertified for two years; from December 10, 2011 through December 9, 2013.

The Quality Control (QC) reviewer determined that the client had moved in June of 2011 and had not reported that his rent had increased to \$495 per month. This unreported change in shelter expense caused an underissuance in the amount of \$53 for the review month which was April 2013.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Although the client failed to report a change in shelter expenses, the error could have been prevented if the case manager had reviewed the recertification form and noted the change in residence. The case manager should have requested verification of the new address and should have inquired into whether or not the client's shelter expenses had changed. For more information on verification of residency, see 106 CMR 361.610(H).

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**.

The questions and answers below relate to Operations Memo 2013-48, TAFDC and EAEDC – BEACON Changes: Screening for Chronic Mismanagement of Funds. For more information, also refer to 106 CMR 706.600 through 106 CMR 706.690.

- Q. 1.** A family receiving TAFDC is renting an apartment and the household is behind in their rent. As I was reviewing the BEACON pages concerning possible cash mismanagement of funds, the parents stated that they never signed a lease with their landlord. Should mandatory vendor payments be established in this case?
- A. 1.** No. Without a signed lease, there is an increased risk of eviction and homelessness. Also, the likelihood of a landlord agreeing to an inspection is diminished, without a signed lease.
- Q. 2.** Since the mandatory vendor exception for the absence of a signed lease must be verified, how do I document this type of situation?
- A. 2.** While primary documents are often the preferred method of verification, they are not always obtainable. Remember that alternative forms of verification, such as a third party statement and/or the client's statement are also acceptable. For more information, refer to 106 CMR 702.311 and 106 CMR 702.340.
- Reminder:** Case managers must identify these alternative forms of documentation and assist clients in obtaining required verifications. For more information, refer to 106 CMR 702.310.
- Q. 3.** In addition to the example in **Q** and **A 2.** above, are there other examples of when the verification of an exception to mandatory vendor payments may be documented by a third party statement or the client's own statement?
- A. 3.** Yes. There are other situations such as clients who are "doubling up" with a host family, where requiring an inspection or mandating vendor payments is not practical and could increase the risk of eviction and homelessness. In situations where there are no other available forms of verification, a client's statement is acceptable. Additionally, remember that the client's statement that domestic violence is an issue is acceptable until a Domestic Violence/TAO Specialist can follow up to determine and confirm any potential risk.

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From the Hotline *(Continued from Page 4)*

- Q. 4.** My client owes more than three months of utility payments, but when I spoke with her about the particular circumstances leading up to the arrearage, she mentioned that the past due bills accrued during her period of TAFDC closure and unemployment. Since she is currently receiving TAFDC and working part time, does she still have reasonable cause for having a utility arrearage?
- A. 4.** Yes. The client does not need to have a current reasonable cause for case managers to use the “temporary setback/emergency” option. As long as there was a temporary setback in the client’s past that contributed to the arrearage, this reasonable cause option applies.



Operations Memos

SNAP: General Household Misfortune Procedures

SNAP

Operations Memo 2013-30

SNAP policy allows for the replacement of food lost during a household misfortune, such as a fire, flood, loss of electricity or other disaster. Replacement is limited to the value of the food lost, not to exceed the total monthly benefit amount. This Operations Memo:

- identifies the eligibility requirements for replacement SNAP benefits under household misfortune, outlines procedures for generating a replacement benefit or denying the request for a replacement benefit; and
- transmits the revised *Statement of Loss/Request for Replacement Food Due to a Household Disaster or Misfortune (SNAP-9B)* - Attachment A and a new form, the *Denial of Request for Replacement Benefits under Household Misfortune (SNAP-DHMB)* - Attachment B.

EBT Card Usage – ATM and POS Blocking at Prohibited Establishments

TAFDC and EAEDC

Operations Memo 2013-43

State law prohibits the use of cash assistance (TAFDC and EAEDC) in certain establishments and for the purchase of specific goods and services. This law applies to both Point-of-Sale (POS) transactions as well as ATM withdrawals in certain establishments. DTA acts to enforce this law by blocking the use of EBT cash benefits at POS devices and ATMs in identified establishments.

The purpose of this Operations Memo is to advise TAO staff about:

- the blocking of POS devices and ATMs at prohibited establishments and at locations that have been determined to sell a majority of prohibited goods and services; and
- notices and communication with retailers and law enforcement personnel advising them of this law and penalties for violating this law.

Operations Memos

External Agency Match: National Change of Address (NCOA)

All

Operations Memo 2013-50

This Operations Memo announces the Department's use of the United States Postal Service (USPS) National Change of Address (NCOA) database to update clients address in BEACON.

When a client completes a change of address form at the post office, the post office records the new address in the NCOA database. The Department now runs a monthly data match with the NCOA database for all currently eligible, pending, or grantee ineligible households in BEACON for all programs.

The automated mail process outlined in Operations Memo 2013-13A: *Returned Mail Process –Automation of Central Office Returns* is used in processing cases that have an address change on the NCOA match. The purpose of this Operations Memo is to:

- advise Department staff about the use of the NCOA database; and
- explain the process of how mailing addresses will be updated in BEACON.

TAFDC and EAEDC – Non-Principal Real Estate

TAFDC and EAEDC

Operations Memo 2013-52

Clients must report and verify the ownership, fair market and equity value of all real estate owned by any member of their assistance unit. Real estate that is not the principal place of residence is a countable asset and the Agreement to Reimburse (RER-1) form **must** be completed for this real estate.

This Operations Memo describes the procedures for the completion of the *Agreement to Repay* (RER-1) form for certain TAFDC and EAEDC clients.

The Operations Memo also:

- gives guidance for the completion of the revised *Agreement to Repay* (RER-1) form;
- reminds DTA staff about when clients must complete this form; and
- updates procedures for the processing of real estate other than the client's principal place of residence.

The *Agreement to Repay* (RER-1) form has been revised.



Operations Memos

Fall 2013 SNAP Heat and Eat (H-EAT) Program Update

SNAP

Operations Memo 2013-53

DTA, in collaboration with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), provides H-EAT benefits to eligible SNAP households each year. This Operations Memo reviews H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program criteria and the responsibilities of DTA and DHCD. Households newly eligible for H-EAT benefits will receive a significant increase in their SNAP benefit amount based on receipt of the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program.

This Operations Memo also discusses the restoration of H-EAT benefits for households who lose H-EAT benefits prematurely, and the removal of the heating/cooling SUA for households that are no longer eligible for H-EAT benefits.

SNAP: Benefit Decrease due to End of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009

SNAP

Operations Memo 2013-54

In April 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), commonly known as the Stimulus package, helped improve food security for many people affected by the recession. The extra benefits provided by ARRA end on October 31, 2013. All SNAP benefits will be recalculated using the new eligibility standards. The impact of the ARRA recalculation is a decrease in SNAP benefits in November.

This Operations Memo discusses:

- the recalculation and reduction of SNAP benefits effective on the household's November issuance date;
- the notice SNAP households will receive; and
- the phone bank established to answer client calls.

Operations Memos

TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP: Photo EBT Card Replacement

All

Operations Memo 2013-55

Chapter 65 of the Acts of 2013 requires that certain EBT cardholders be issued EBT cards with photographic images. This Operations Memo informs staff about:

- the new Photo EBT card requirements and exceptions to the requirement; and,
- client notifications regarding the implementation of this Photo EBT card requirement.

A poster and flyer communicating the photo EBT requirement must be displayed in each TAO. Each TAO will receive a shipment of posters and flyers. The poster and flyer will also be available on the Department's website for download by community partners.

FYIs

Entering RSDI, SSI and SSP Information on the Other Income Page of BEACON

Quality Control identified an error related to the inclusion of unearned income information on BEACON. This FYI is a reminder about how to process this information.

When entering or updating a household member's information regarding Social Security Administration (SSA) Retirement, Survivors and Disability Insurance (RSDI), Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or State Supplemental Payment (SSP), case managers must always look for and use the information provided on the History Tab of the Other Income Page in BEACON or, in the case of SSP, the SSI Tracking Page. Central Office MIS runs a monthly RSDI batch and a daily SSI and SSP batch on all active, pending, closed and ineligible household members to validate the information displayed in BEACON.

It is important to ensure that the RSDI, SSI and SSP information is correct, particularly the RSDI claim number. Otherwise, the RSDI, SSI or SSP income may be doubled when the respective batches are run. If the case manager cannot find the information on the History Tab of the Other Income Page or on the SSI Tracking Page, it can be found on the SSA award letter or on either the SSA Beneficiary Exchange (BENDEX) and/or State Data Exchange (SDX) screens accessed through the Financial Management Control System (FMCS).

Settlements and Awards

Settlements and Awards has been added to BEACON as an unearned income type for TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP. Most settlements and awards are received as a lump sum. When this happens the settlement or award should be treated as a lump sum payment for all three programs.

In the Income Q & A Navigator clients will be asked if they have received settlements or awards. *Settlements and Awards* will also appear as an income type in the Other Income Status page Source tab. Click on the popup next to the Type field to select *Settlements and Awards* from the list of income types.



From the Forms File

Revised Form

Agreement to Repay

02-022-1013-05

02-024-1013-05 (S)

RER-1 (Rev. 10/2013)

The *Agreement to Repay* (RER-1) has been revised. This form must be completed when a client owns property other than their principal place of residence. Refer to Operations Memo 2013-52 for more information. The forms(s) are available on the Online Forms section of Policy Online. Please discard the old version of this form.

Statement of Loss/Request for Replacement Food Due to a Household Disaster or Misfortune

09-010-1013-05

09-044-1013-05 (S)

SNAP-9B (Rev. 10/2013)

The Witness Signature line and date were removed from the SNAP-9B. Refer to Operations Memo 2013-30 for more information. The form is available on the Online Forms section of Policy Online. Please discard old versions of this form.

New Form

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Denial of Request for Replacement Benefits under Household Misfortune

SNAP-DHMB (10/2013)

The SNAP-DHMB was created for use when denying SNAP households that have requested replacement benefits because of household misfortune. Refer to Operations Memo 2013-30 for more information. The form is available on the Online Forms section of Policy Online in English and Spanish.

Diversity Quote

It were not best that we should all think alike; it is difference of opinion that makes horse races.

Mark Twain

Training Corner

SNAP Job Search Declarations from Your Desktop

Did you know you can generate your SNAP-JS forms right from your desktop? Just follow these steps!

Step 1



From any BEACON page, **click** on *Policy*.

Result: The *Policy Online* homepage opens.

Step 2



From the *Policy Online* homepage, **scroll down** and **click** on *Online Forms*.

Result: The page titled *Online Forms* opens.

Step 3



From the *Online Forms* page, **scroll down** and **click** on *SNAP*.

Result: The page titled *Online Forms: SNAP* opens.

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TAO Meeting Notes