

Transitions



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

A number of exciting projects are underway in the Department's Housing and Homeless Services Unit. Improving the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) approval rate is just one example. While all of us seek to promote long-term independence for our clients, at times the best option for those suffering from mental or physical illnesses is SSI and/or SSDI.

Although our Department requires that certain clients apply for SSI/SSDI, the Housing and Homeless Services Unit has recently been working towards making these benefits more accessible. When a medical condition is either chronic or requires intensive treatment, SSI/SSDI can provide essential benefits. Aside from providing higher monthly payments and health care coverage, SSI/SSDI can move homeless individuals closer to their goal of finding stable housing.

Since the advantages available through SSI/SSDI go beyond the cash incentives, our Commonwealth has taken the lead in increasing SSI/SSDI application approvals. As a member of the federal Homeless Policy Academy, Massachusetts has been chosen along with fourteen other states to participate in a federally sponsored technical assistance initiative called SOAR (SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery). The goal of this new initiative is to improve access for applicants and increase the rate of successful SSI/SSDI applications in our state. Although not targeted exclusively to the homeless, a complementary initiative soon to be implemented by the Cash and Full Engagement Unit will help clients who have been denied Social Security benefits by assisting them

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through the reapplication/appeal process. This project is scheduled to start up during the second week of December in five local offices.

A national study estimates that only 11 percent of those who are homeless are actually receiving SSI/SSDI, as opposed to the more than 40 percent of this population who are eligible. Massachusetts is hoping to significantly increase this rate.

Our Central Office Housing staff kicked off the SOAR initiative at a planning session this past July. Along with a number of other organizations, DTA developed an action plan to gain greater access to SSI/SSDI for the homeless population in Massachusetts. In addition to this two-day planning session, our partners at Policy Research Associates conducted a four-day intensive, statewide Train the Trainer class in late September to provide ongoing training and technical assistance to organizations in Massachusetts that assist homeless applicants with their SSI/SSDI applications. Next month, targeted training and technical assistance will take place for organizations in the Worcester area. As this work continues, we'll be reporting on its future progress.

In an effort to increase permanent housing outcomes for homeless *families*, the Housing and Homeless Services Unit is drafting revisions to the EA Family Self-Sufficiency Plan. The newly revised form will include a focus on re-housing our homeless families as quickly as possible by identifying barriers to self-sufficiency and then creating a goal-oriented, outcome-based process for overcoming these barriers. This step-by-step approach will also rely on strengthening our clients' connections with existing mainstream services such as child care, transportation and employment services.

With the holiday season approaching, I want to close this letter by turning my thoughts gratefully to all of you who have made our past year's progress possible. Your dedication to the clients we serve is the foundation of that progress. I want to wish you all a peaceful and joyous holiday and a happy New Year.

Sincerely,



John Wagner, Commissioner

From the Hotline

- Q.** Instructions in Field Operations Memo 2006-41 say that an Assessed Person (AP) with a Caring for the Disabled exemption must verify this exemption every six months. The *Returning an Up-to-Date Verification of Caring for the Disabled* notice and a TAFDC-4 will be mailed to the AP 45 days before the end of the six-month-period. If the AP fails to return the TAFDC-4 within 21 days, BEACON will send out a warning notice and another TAFDC-4. If the AP fails to respond to the warning notice within 10 days, the AU Manager must schedule an appointment with the AP for an interview to explain the work program requirement, and/or determine whether another exemption applies. What if the AP fails to appear at the appointment?
- A.** In this situation, the entire AU should be closed for failing to keep an appointment for a review. The AU cannot continue as an exempt AU without verifying an exemption.
- Q.** A father with over five years of Legal Permanent