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Field Operations Memo 2008-54
October 23, 2008

To: Transitional Assistance Office Staff
From:  John Augeri, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations
Re: Fall 2008 Food Stamp Heat and Eat (H-EAT) Program Update

Background

To date, approximately 84,000 FS households have received increased food stamp benefits as a result of the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program.

On the evening of October 18, 2008, approximately 25,000 FS households were selected for 2008 H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program benefits. Of these households:

- Approximately 11,000 are households who received the November 2007 H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program benefit. These households are eligible for a 2008 \$1.00 H-EAT benefit. They will not see an increase in FS benefits because the Heating/ Cooling Standard Utility Allowance (SUA) is already on file.
- Approximately 14,000 are newly eligible H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program households. For these households, November 2008 FS benefits will be recalculated using the Heating/Cooling SUA as anticipated recipients of the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program.

DHCD will enroll all households in the 2008 H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program and make \$1.00 H-EAT fuel assistance benefits available.

This memo will review H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program criteria, explain the responsibilities of DTA and DHCD, discuss notices to H-EAT clients, provide instructions for restoring lost FS benefits to H-EAT households and describe the DHCD client brochure.

There will be minimal case manager impact since the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program enrollment and FS recalculation processes are fully automated.

Role of DTA

MIS will:

- create a data file of FS households, which meet the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program criteria. H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program households must:
 - be active on FS;
 - have a gross income of 200% of the federal poverty level or less;
 - have the Non-Heating SUA, the Telephone SUA or no SUA on file; and
 - receive less than maximum benefits for the household size.

Note: Homeless households and Bay State CAP households are not eligible for H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program benefits.

- transmit the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program file to DHCD;
- recalculate November FS benefits of newly identified H-EAT eligible households using the Heating/Cooling SUA.

Note: This change will impact all eligible active FS households, including those FS households with a pending recertification or a case maintenance action. Case managers and/or supervisors must allow the H-EAT change as part of the recertification or case maintenance activity. If a pending authorization contains an SUA other than Heating/Cooling for a H-EAT recipient, a new Heating/Cooling SUA record must be created, wrapped up and authorized by the case manager.

- create a utility expense verification type: *H-EAT Program Certified by DHCD Match* in BEACON;
- make an entry on the BEACON Narratives tab, *H-EAT Program benefits recalculated*; and
- establish an internal H-EAT eligibility tracking period in BEACON since the Heating/Cooling SUA is allowed for one year for each household.

Important: At reapplication or reinstatement, case managers must check for a 4/24/2008 or 10/18/2008 BEACON Narratives tab entry indicating the household was H-EAT eligible. The case manager must continue the Heating/Cooling SUA for the balance of the appropriate one-year period ending either in April 2009 or in October 2009.

**Role of
DHCD**

DHCD will make available a \$1.00 H-EAT fuel assistance benefit for each H-EAT eligible household and send a file back to DTA confirming H-EAT enrollment.

**Notices to
H-EAT Eligible
Households**

The DHCD Heat and Eat Fuel Assistance Program brochure (*See Attachment A*) and FS change notice will be sent to each newly eligible H-EAT household that has a FS benefit increase.

Only the DHCD Heat and Eat Fuel Assistance Program brochure will be sent to any ongoing H-EAT household. These households were eligible for 2007 H-EAT fuel assistance benefits and are eligible for a 2008 H-EAT benefit.

**Restoration
of SUA for
April 2008
H-EAT Fuel
Assistance
Households**

Approximately 7,000 April 2008 H-EAT eligible households were on file with an SUA other than Heating/Cooling despite continued H-EAT eligibility. The Heating/Cooling SUA was reentered and FS benefits will be recalculated using the restored SUA for these households. A report listing these households will be transmitted with this memo.

Case managers must review each household on the report for lost benefits. Supplemental FS benefits must be calculated and issued for any month(s) in which benefits were lost as a result of the removal of the Heating/Cooling SUA. Case managers are reminded to make an entry in the BEACON Narratives tab regarding the reason for the supplement and include the month(s) of lost benefits.

**DHCD Client
Brochure**

The DHCD Heat and Eat Fuel Assistance Program brochure is attached. This brochure informs H-EAT households about the program. It also tells households how to access Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) fuel assistance payments through local fuel assistance provider agencies and gives information about utility discounts. The impact on FS benefits is also discussed.

Questions

If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline.

Heat and Eat Fuel Assistance Program

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is pleased to tell you about the Heat and Eat (H-EAT) Fuel Assistance Program. This is a fuel assistance benefit provided to low-income households identified by the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA). DHCD has automatically enrolled your household in the H-EAT Program.

Enrollment in the H-EAT Program has the following **important benefits** for your household:

- Special rules allow fuel assistance recipients to have their food stamp income calculated using higher shelter costs. This allows for a higher food stamp benefit than you would otherwise receive. **Please call DTA at: 1-866-950-FOOD (3663) if you have questions about your food stamp benefits.**
- The H-EAT Program provides a \$1.00 fuel assistance benefit. This \$1.00 fuel assistance benefit will be available to you when you visit your local Fuel Assistance agency. By getting this benefit and Food Stamps, you are also eligible for a Utility Discount from your local utility company. **To locate a Fuel Assistance agency in your area, please contact the DHCD Heat Line at: 1-800-632-8175.**
- When you contact your local Fuel Assistance agency, you can *also* receive help in applying for *regular* Fuel Assistance - most generally referred to as LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program). *LIHEAP helps eligible households pay a portion of winter heating bills. Eligibility for LIHEAP must be determined at your local Fuel Assistance agency. If you are a **first-time applicant** you must contact the agency after November 1, 2008 to schedule an appointment.

* Payments for actual usage or fuel delivery are made directly to the heating vendor from November 1st to April 30th except when the cost of heating is included in the rent.

* A subsidized housing tenant whose heat is included in rent and pays less than 30% of their income towards rent is not eligible for more than \$1.00 in fuel assistance.

A DHCD and DTA partnership

