

T Transitions



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

On November 19 we officially unveiled the new Food Stamp Program application at a press conference held at the Greater Boston Food Bank. The reaction of the press and the public to our new application has been overwhelmingly positive. On the surface, the reaction is to a new form, but I believe the real reaction is to our continuing efforts to change how we provide this most needed benefit. And while I am pleased with the public reaction, I am most proud of the positive comments I have heard from DTA staff. Together we are figuring out how to do things in a way that serves those who need food stamp benefits and also allows us to do our work more efficiently.

Food stamp benefits are different than the benefits provided through other programs we administer. First, food stamp benefits are, most importantly, a nutrition benefit. No one would argue that good nutrition is not important for everyone, particularly children. Second, the benefit is 100% federally funded and those who use food stamp benefits bring needed money into the Massachusetts economy. Third, the rules of the program recognize that it is a benefit for a much broader segment of the population, including working families struggling to make ends meet.

The Food Stamp Program application is just one part of our efforts to increase participation in this important program. As you know, we have made a number of changes in the past year to make the rules and the administration less complex. We no longer count the value of a car in determining eligibility; we have expanded categorical eligibility resulting in waived asset rules and less stringent

From the Hotline

This edition of ***From the Hotline*** highlights the relocation benefit process. The relocation benefit is an important tool to help families obtain permanent housing. It is important that all TAFDC families in temporary shelter be aware of this benefit and take advantage of it, as appropriate. The questions below highlight some instances when a family is not eligible for a relocation benefit. For more information on relocation benefits, refer to 106 CMR 705.350 and the ***EA User's Guide***, page VI-5.

Q. TAFDC benefits for a family were closed in August of this year. Recently, the former grantee returned to our office requesting a relocation benefit. Is the family eligible?

A. No. To be eligible for relocation benefits, you must be an active TAFDC assistance unit or an EAEDC family assistance unit that has been living in a shelter or teen structured living program for 60 days or more.

Q. A TAFDC assistance unit had its Emergency Assistance shelter benefits terminated last month when a relative agreed to house the assistance unit and they moved in with the relative. Now, the TAFDC family would prefer to move elsewhere and is requesting a relocation benefit. Does this TAFDC AU meet the requirements for a relocation benefit?

A. No. A relocation benefit may only be authorized when the TAFDC assistance unit has expenses related to securing permanent housing. These expenses could include items and services such as advance rent, security deposit, rent arrearages, utility arrearages or deposit, storage or moving expenses. Because the family has moved in with the relative, the assistance unit is ineligible for the benefit.

Q. An AU was transferred into our office last week after the family moved into an apartment in our area. Before moving, the prior office authorized \$500 in relocation benefits. Now that the family has moved into its apartment, they are requesting an additional \$250 in relocation benefits. The maximum allowable relocation benefit is \$750. Should I authorize the additional \$250 amount?

A. No. An additional relocation benefit could be issued only if the worker in the prior office neglected to properly complete the SSPS procedures on an already approved relocation benefit. Since the assistance unit is already physically present in their new apartment, additional relocation benefits cannot be authorized.

TAFDC APs Receiving SSI

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo
2002-27

A recent match with BENDEX/SDX files indicated that 289 currently active TAFDC APs are receiving SSI. The same match also indicated that a number of EAEDC APs are receiving SSI. These EAEDC APs will be processed (closed) by Central Office.
No additional AU Manager action is required for the EAEDC APs.

While some of the TAFDC APs may be appropriately receiving the SSI benefits for a dependent not included in the TAFDC AU, a review of these TAFDC APs is required by AU Managers to determine which APs can remain active and which need to be closed. This Field Operations Memo gives TAO staff instructions for processing these AUs.

BEACON Views

All

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 038

This update transmits the following changes to Chapter II, Section A:

Daily Priority Actions

- deletes the Conversion Benefit Discrepancy View,
- adds two new Views: Most Recently Updated Households and Verifications Due, and
- makes a change to Pending Applications - reflecting the new name: Pending Applications/Reinstatements.

Assessed Person Potential Changes

- clarifies the Check Post Birth Exemption, Clients in Active AUs with Expiring IPV End Dates and Youngest Child Turns 6, and
- expands procedures for dispositioning the Check 120 Day Placement, Disability End Date, TAFDC Teen Parent Turns 20 and Youngest Child Turns 2.



Continued from Page 1

income rules for many recipients; we have worked to limit face-to-face interviews and to allow recipients to apply and recertify by mail; and food stamp benefits for noncitizens are gradually being restored. In December we will implement what's called the Transitional Benefits Alternative (TBA), providing continued food stamp benefits for five months to families leaving TAFDC. We will also move from our current quarterly reporting process to a semiannual one. These changes make the program simpler for those interested in the benefit and simpler for you who are charged with administering it.

At this time of year it seems especially appropriate that we are focused on a continued recognition that people need our services. As we enter 2003, I am confident that we will continue to devise new and innovative ways of providing food stamp benefits and other benefits to the families of the Commonwealth. I want to thank each of you for your hard work and support since I became your Commissioner last spring and to wish you and your families the happiest of holiday seasons.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Wagner". The signature is fluid and cursive.

John Wagner
Commissioner



COMMUNICATION is the KEY

FYI

MassHealth Benefit Changes

A number of MassHealth benefit changes will take place on January 1, 2003. As of January 1, the following services will not be covered for adults who are 21 or older:

- Chiropractor services;
- Eyeglasses, eyeglass parts, eyeglass dispensing, contact lenses, and other visual aids, except for visual magnifying aids (which do not include eyeglasses or contact lenses) used by those who are both diabetic and legally blind;
- Prosthetics and orthotics, except when provided in hospitals (Note: orthotic shoes for individuals with severe diabetic foot disease continue to be covered in all settings); and
- Dentures and related services, with some exceptions in accordance with Division of Medical Assistance regulations.

The MassHealth pharmacy copayment for most individuals who are 19 or older will increase from .50 cents to \$2.00 for each prescription filled or refilled as of January 1, 2003.

MassHealth members have received notification of these changes. Individuals with any questions about these changes should call the MassHealth Customer Service Line at 1-800-841-2900 (TTY: 1-800-325-5231).

“When we really, deeply understand each other, we open the door to creative solution and third alternatives. Our differences are no longer stumbling blocks to communication and progress. Instead, they become the stepping-stones to synergy.”

Stephen R. Covey (From: *Daily Reflections for Highly Effective People*)

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

Changes to Policy Online

This month you will see the following changes to Policy Online.

FMCS Codes Window

The following FMCS data element options have been added to the FMCS Codes window:

- Categorical Type - EAEDC - Eligibility Reasons,
- Categorical Type - TAFDC - Deprivation Reasons,
- Error Profile - EAEDC,
- Error Profile - TAFDC,
- Food Stamp Recoupment Claim Status Codes,
- Medical Amount Codes - TAFDC and EAEDC,
- Option Codes,
- Utilities Codes - Food Stamps.

When an option is selected, the corresponding definitions will be displayed. Additional FMCS data element options will continue to be added in the following months.

AU Processing - First Quarter-Case Closing and Reduction Schedule

The 2003 First Quarter Schedule (January-March) can be accessed by selecting the First Quarter from the AU Processing window.

Simplified Food Stamp Application

FS
Field Operations Memo
2002-26

In mid-November, to increase participation in the Food Stamp Program, the Department introduced the simplified Food Stamp Program application. Attached to the form are instructions for completing it and how to receive benefits. The form will also instruct the applicant that if eligible for expedited food stamp benefits, he or she should *not* fill out the form, but should go to the TAO for immediate assistance.

The final page of the form provides the AU Manager with a means of tracking the application activities.

This Field Operations Memo:

- tells TAO staff about the simplified food stamp application and where applicants may get copies; and
- gives TAO staff procedures for processing the application.

BEACON Todays Issued in December 2002

BT 99 BEACON Release 2.1.0
(12/16/02)

Food Stamp Transitional Benefits Alternative (TBA)

TAFDC, FS
State Letter 1242
A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 036

State Letter 1242 and Update 036 introduce the food stamp Transitional Benefits Alternative (TBA). TBA provides food stamp benefits to certain former TAFDC AUs who have transitioned to work or closed for other reasons. When certain TAFDC AUs close, the Department will recalculate food stamp benefits without the TAFDC grant. The TBA benefit will be provided for five months. The benefit level cannot decrease during the TBA period.

Food Stamp Work Requirements and the 36-Month Clock

FS
State Letter 1243
A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 037

State Letter 1243 and Update 037 implement the following changes to the FS/ET Program:

- A mandatory Skills Training and Related Job Search Activities component has been established for nonexempt FS/ET adults between the ages of 18 and 60 who receive EA, and reside in a shelter, hotel or motel.
- All other nonexempt FS/ET required individuals between the ages of 16 and 60 must participate in Self-Directed Job Search.
- Food Stamp Work Program participants can no longer volunteer for vendor assisted FS/ET services;

In addition, Update 037 transmits changes to the Food Stamp 36-Month Clock. MIS will automatically reset the 36-month period effective January 2003. The new Food Stamp 36-Month Clock will start on January 1, 2003 and end on December 31, 2005.



From the Forms File

New Form

25-170-1102-05

FSA-1 (11/2002)

Food Stamp Benefits Application

The Department has simplified the paper Food Stamp Program Application. Attached to the form are instructions on how to complete it and how to receive benefits. This form will be available at numerous locations throughout the community (e.g., grocery stores, doctor's offices); online at www.gettingfoodstamps.org and by request through the Department's Application Information Unit (1-800-249-2007). Refer to Field Operations Memo 2002-26 for more information. The Spanish version will soon be available.

Revised Form

13-200-1202-05

HM-NT (Rev. 12/2002)

Notice to Recipients of Emergency Assistance (EA) Staying in a Hotel/Motel

This revised notice includes two new hotel/motel rules and new language telling recipients to: arrive at the hotel/motel at a reasonable hour; stay at the hotel/motel every night authorized by the AU Manager; and tell the hotel/motel if they leave for failure to do so will result in the disposal of their belongings. The Spanish version will soon be available.

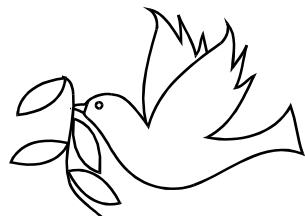
13-093-1202-05

13-094-1202-05 (S)

TESR-3 (Rev. 12/2002)

Acknowledgement of Recipient Responsibilities While in Temporary Emergency Shelter

This form has been revised to comply with a recent EA court order.



Revised Brochure

02-820-1102-05

02-822-1102-05 (S)

CC-1-Mail (Rev. 11/2002)

Getting and Keeping Child Care

CCR&R agencies' addresses have been updated. Also, revised food stamp categorical eligibility language has been added to this brochure.

Obsolete Form

25-160-0801-05

FSBA-1 (8/2001)

Food Stamp Benefits Application

The FSA-1(11/2002) replaces this form.

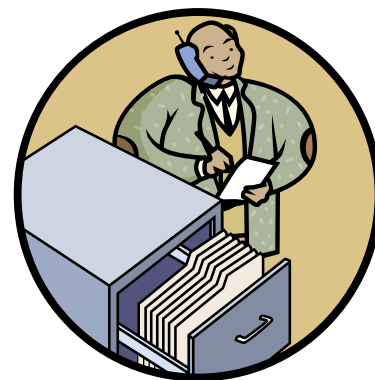
Obsolete Brochure

18-046-0791-05

AB-1

AIDS Brochure

Information can now be accessed via the Department of Public Health (DPH) web site: www.state.ma.us/dph/cdc/aids/hivfac.htm.



2003 Social Security/SSI COLA for TAFDC, EAEDC and Food Stamps

TAFDC, EAEDC, FS
Field Operations Memo
2002-28

The Social Security and SSI Cost-Of-Living Adjustments (COLA) have been scheduled. Effective January 2003, Social Security benefits and SSI payments will increase by 1.4 percent. The basic Medicare Part B premium will increase from \$54.00 to \$58.70 per month.

This Field Operations Memo identifies:

- general BEACON activities for processing the 2003 Social Security/SSI COLA; and
- AU Manager and Supervisor activities required to prepare for the 2003 Social Security/SSI COLA.

FYI

TRANSITIONS for
December and January

This issue of *Transitions* is a combined issue for December 2002 and January 2003. Regular monthly publication of *Transitions* will resume in February 2003.

Farm Bill: Semiannual Reporting

FS
State Letter 1241
Field Operations Memo 2002-25
Field Operations Memo 2002-25A
A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 036

In a continuing effort to simplify Food Stamp Program rules and increase participation, the Department is requiring certain NPA FS AUs with earned or unearned income (or a history of income within the past six months) to be on Universal Semiannual Reporting.

This means NPA FS AUs will be required to report changes every six months. The exception to this is that if the household's income during the certification period exceeds the Food Stamp Maximum Gross Monthly Income Standard, the household must report this change no later than the month following the change of income. This process replaces Universal Quarterly Reporting.

Field Operations Memo 2002-25 told TAO staff about the mass mailing which informed clients about the new reporting requirement and the automatic extension of certification periods for current FS AUs.

Field Operations Memo 2002-25A provided additional clarifications regarding the interim Universal Semiannual Reporting process.

State Letter 1241 issued policy related to this change.

Update 036 instructs TAO staff how to process the Semiannual Reporting AUs.

