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From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues:

I am thrilled to announce that Massachusetts was selected by USDA to administer the Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP) in Hampden County. With the help and hard work of dozens of staff members from our Holyoke, Springfield, and Central offices, and grant writers from Public Consulting Group (PCG), we submitted a proposal in May which USDA describes as “a comprehensive pilot proposal that included very thorough and strong design, implementation, staffing, and management plans.” We will receive \$6.3 million to administer the pilot.

HIP will test whether incentives for SNAP households to buy fresh produce will increase the purchase of healthy foods. Beginning in the fall of 2011, for every dollar spent on allowable produce, HIP participants (7,500 randomly selected households) will receive 30 cents in additional SNAP benefits. Massachusetts was the only state chosen to administer this groundbreaking study.

We chose Hampden County due to its geographic and demographic diversity: it includes urban, suburban and rural areas, and about 50,000 households enrolled in SNAP. In addition, there are a wide variety of food retailers, community organizations, and strong partnerships that provide innovative solutions for reducing hunger and improving nutrition.

I commend all of you for your teamwork and your commitment to this project in the face of escalating caseloads. As you know, SNAP participation has increased by more than 65% since the beginning of the Patrick Administration, due in large part to our efforts to improve access to this critical nutrition support. HIP continues our tradition of assisting low-income individuals and families as comprehensively as possible. We look forward to working with USDA, Abt Associates, Inc., and the excellent organizations in Hampden County to ensure the success of HIP.

(Continued on page 2)

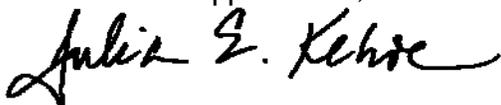
From the Commissioner *(Continued from page 1)*

To read the article about HIP in the Boston Globe, click here: http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2010/08/19/food_stamp_discount_for_buying_produce/

To read the press release issued by the Governor's Office, click here: http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=gov3pressrelease&L=1&L0=Home&sid=Agov3&b=pressrelease&f=100819_USDA_Grant&csid=Agov3

I am consistently impressed by your dedication to the low-income individuals and families of our state. Thank you for everything you do, and for helping to make HIP possible. It is an honor to work with you.

With much appreciation,



Julia E. Kehoe
Commissioner

Quality Corner

This month we will review two errors. The first error was caused when the frequency of a homeowner's insurance payment was incorrectly recorded. The second error was caused when an ineligible college student was erroneously included in a SNAP household.

Frequency of Homeowners' Insurance Payment

In the first case, an elderly couple had a total household income of \$1659 in RSDI per month. The case was certified for 24 months from February 2009 through February 2011. At certification, the client provided verification of expenses such as property taxes and homeowners' insurance. However, when the homeowners' insurance amount was entered into BEACON, the frequency was incorrectly selected as monthly instead of yearly. This caused an overpayment error of \$125 for the review month.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Although most household expenses are paid on a monthly basis, there are some expenses that are paid with a different frequency. Case managers must be careful to extract the correct information from the verification before entering the expenses into BEACON. If the homeowners' insurance bill is issued on an annual basis, the case manager may enter it on BEACON as a yearly amount, or the case manager may choose to calculate and enter the homeowners' insurance as a monthly amount.

Ineligible College Student Included in SNAP Benefit

The second case included a 57-year-old adult with two children, ages 17 and 19. The case was recertified for 12 months. At the time of recertification, the client indicated that her 19-year-old daughter was living at home and attending the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth. During the QC interview, the client confirmed that her daughter had been a full-time student at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth since September 2009. This caused an overissuance error for the review month.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Whenever it becomes known that a household member is a college student, the case manager must give the client an Educational Income and Expense (EDUC-I) form and/or a Community College Enrollment Verification (CCE-I) form based on information provided in the interview. The client must have the appropriate form(s) completed by the Financial Aid Office at the college or university. Some students may not know that they are enrolled in the Perkins IV Program, which meets eligibility for SNAP so, after interviewing the client, determine if the client needs one or both forms to prove student eligibility. It would not be necessary to prove student eligibility if the student meets one or more of the student eligibility requirements at 106 CMR 362.410.

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.** Can the cost of a cell phone be considered a utility allowance deduction in SNAP?
- A.** Yes. The cost of a cell phone can be considered the basic service for one telephone.
- Q.** Are the costs of prepaid calling cards an allowable utility allowance deduction in SNAP?
- A.** No. One-time deposits cannot be included. A deduction is only allowed in the month when an expense is billed or otherwise becomes due. There is no bill or due date for a prepaid calling card. See 106 CMR 364.400(G) for more information on the telephone standard utility allowance expense deduction.
- Q.** I have a SNAP application from a woman who works for our local school department and she has an annual contract. She has not been working during the summer months and receives her income during the 10-month school period. How do I consider this income?
- A.** When considering the income of school employees, remember that each employee may receive the earnings differently. Some are paid over 10 months and others are paid over a 12-month period. In both situations, school employees and others who work under a renewable contract are considered to be receiving their pay over the entire year, even though they may receive their salary only during the school year. Even if an applicant is given an hourly wage rate, as a contracted school employee, he or she must have the earned income averaged over the 12-month period. See 106 CMR 365.430 for more information.
- Q.** If a TAFDC client becomes a school employee on an annual contract, how would I consider the client's income?
- A.** If a TAFDC client is receiving earnings based on an annual contractual salary, then the amount of the salary is divided by 12. Verify that the client is receiving the earnings on an annual contracted salary by obtaining a copy of the signed contract or a signed letter stating the annual salary to be received. See 106 CMR 204.290 for more information.
- Q.** My SNAP client is receiving earned income from an ARRA-funded source. How is his income treated in SNAP?
- A.** For SNAP purposes, ARRA-funded earnings continue to be excluded as income. In addition, WIA-funded earnings (unless from on-the-job training) and the earnings of students under age 18 are also excluded. See 106 CMR 363.230 for more information.

Field Operations Memos

Verifying Noncitizen Status

TAFDC and EAEDC

Field Operations Memo 2010-36

The FY '11 state budget requires that the Department use the federal Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) system to verify the immigration status of any noncitizen whose documentation includes an alien registration number to determine whether the individual meets noncitizen requirements for benefit eligibility purposes. The Department continues its practice of verifying citizenship status prior to issuing benefits. This memo reminds TAO staff how to verify noncitizen status.

TAFDC Clothing Allowance

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2010-38

The Department has issued a nonrecurring clothing allowance for September 2010 of \$150 per eligible TAFDC client under the age of 19. All TAFDC clients under age 19 who were active on September 1st, 2010 or became TAFDC-eligible during the month of September 2010 are eligible for a clothing allowance. Clients active on September 1st received \$150, while those clients who became active after September 1st will receive an amount less than \$150.

TAFDC and SNAP: 2010 Federal Poverty Guidelines

TAFDC and SNAP

Field Operations Memo 2010-39

This memo informs TAFDC staff that, on August 3, 2010, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) published the 2010 poverty guidelines in the Federal Register. Based on the way HHS calculated the 2010 poverty guidelines, the 2010 guideline amounts are the same as the 2009 amounts.

The *Income from the Parent(s) of a Teen Parent Under Age 18* eligibility table for TAFDC and the *Gross Monthly Categorical Eligibility Income Standards* for SNAP posted at www.mass.gov/dta remain unchanged until HHS publishes the 2011 poverty guidelines, which is expected to occur in late January 2011.

The current BEACON eligibility standards that are used in the calculation of income eligibility for TAFDC teen parents under the age of 18 living with a parent and the gross monthly income test for categorically eligible SNAP households will not change.

Field Operations Memos

Implementation of the SNAP Expedited Waiver

SNAP

Field Operations Memo 2010-40

The Department obtained a waiver from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to streamline the processing of SNAP applications for claimants who have lost unemployment compensation (UC) benefits. This initiative, the SNAP Expedited Waiver, allows the Department to postpone the application interview and delay most required verifications for one additional month beyond the required time frames for eligible households.

BEACON 3.0 Implementation

All

Field Operations Memo 2010-41

BEACON 3.0 was redeployed on August 30, 2010. All BEACON 2.0 data was converted to BEACON 3.0 over the weekend of August 27, 2010. Statewide training for all BEACON 3.0 users was conducted in April, May and June. To enhance training, BEACON 3.0 Production was made available between for several weeks between the hours of 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. daily, for all staff to complete practice scenarios.

On Wednesday, August 18, 2010, a statewide stress test was conducted for BEACON 3.0. All users were asked to close out of BEACON 2.0 and log into BEACON 3.0. Field staff were instructed to complete application, recertification and case maintenance activities. Central Office staff were instructed to complete activities associated with their job functions.

The purpose of this memo was to ensure that all staff were fully informed of any pertinent information they required prior to conversion, and to re-introduce the *Conversion Tracking Form* (Attachment A) and the *DTA has a new computer system flier* (Attachment B). The flier was updated with the appropriate date changes.

ARRA \$25 Weekly Unemployment Compensation Update

SNAP

Field Operations Memo 2010-43

This memo informed staff that the ARRA \$25 weekly UC payment is no longer being paid to some claimants. The memo also advised staff of:

- the recalculation of impacted TAFDC and SNAP cases;
- updated procedures for entering UC income; and
- the processing of retroactive benefits for certain active and closed households.

FYI

BEACON 3.0 Update

BEACON 3.0 was successfully re-launched on August 30, 2010. We would not have been able to achieve these results without the dedication of all DTA staff, particularly those working in field offices. Thank you for all of your patience, cooperation and hard work.

- At this time, Central Office continues to conduct teleconference calls with field staff to review outstanding issues and questions.
- Please continue to have your Help Desk liaison, TAO manager or IT site manager report BEACON 3.0 issues to the Systems Help Desk, including response time issues. In emergency situations, if you encounter a crash while processing a case and need assistance expediting the issuance of benefits, please have a manager contact the Regional Director or Jim Gorman. Please remember to put **Secure:** in the subject line of these e-mails.
- All previous editions of *BEACON 3.0 News You Can Use* have been consolidated into a single document so that all updates are available in one place. All future *News You Can Use* updates will be added to this consolidated document. You may also navigate to the *News You Can Use* link by:
 - Visiting DTA Online,
 - Clicking the “BEACON” button in the left-hand column
 - Clicking on “BEACON 3.0 News”
 - Clicking on the BEACON 3.0 News file.

Diversity Quote

“Great achievements are not born from a single vision but from the combination of many distinctive viewpoints. Diversity challenges assumptions, opens minds, and unlocks our potential to solve any problems we may face.”

Anonymous

TAO Meeting Notes