October 2020 Advisory Board
Statewide Updates

Domestic Violence Awareness Month
October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month and this month DTA would like to highlight and recognize the incredible work of the Domestic Violence Specialists in our Domestic Violence Unit. This unit is dedicated to helping people live violence-free and address safety concerns and barriers to program participation. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the risk of domestic violence that too many people face. Please note that our Domestic Violence Unit continues to be able available to assist clients over the phone. Learn more about the Unit and how to contact a specialist here.

DHCD Housing Resources
DHCD has created a new website and flyers to help spread awareness of state assistance available to help low-income households with rent or mortgage payments. Please visit their new website in English and Spanish and see the attached flyers. Please share this information with your networks.

Globe Santa
DTA is once again partnering with the Boston Globe Foundation and their annual Globe Santa donation drive to provide books and toys to children in low-income households in eastern Massachusetts. Qualified families receiving assistance from DTA will receive notices from the agency about their eligibility and information needed to complete their family letters. As offices are currently closed, eligible households will also be receiving a reminder on DTA Connect and through text message this year. For more information about the program, visit www.globesanta.org or call 617-929-1525.

Caseload and New SNAP Workers
DTA continues to see high demand for services across our programs and call volume on the assistance line has been extremely high. Due to the SNAP interim reports and recertifications that were postponed earlier in the year as a result of the pandemic, DTA is now processing double the number of these documents than we typically would be each month.

To help manage the incoming work DTA staff have been regularly working overtime and the Department is also continuing to pursue administrative and policy opportunities to help ease administrative burdens for staff and clients. Recently, the Department also promoted 47 clerks and human services assistants (HSA) to become SNAP case managers.

Continuing Resolution DTA Related Provisions
At the end of September, the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 was signed into law, which funds the federal government through December 11, 2020. In addition to extending federal funding, the legislation includes almost $8 billion for nutrition assistance programs and allows states to take advantage of administrative flexibilities that were employed at the start of the pandemic.

The law includes the following provisions:
- Extends P-EBT through September 30, 2021, with simpler rules and state options to expand eligibility
Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

- Opens “Summer” EBT (somewhat similar to P-EBT) to all states, previously run only as pilot (not in MA)
- Extends waivers on some SNAP administrative flexibilities (extending certification periods, waiving interviews, etc.)
- Extends the authorization for TANF funds, which provides funding for TAFDC

Currently, DTA is working to reinstate the interview waiver for SNAP applications and recertifications, which will further strengthen the agency’s ability to manage the high number of recertifications coming in. The agency is awaiting further guidance from USDA for some of the other provisions included in the bill, most specifically around P-EBT. The Department is unable to move forward with issuing P-EBT for October and beyond until specific guidance is received from USDA.

September P-EBT

DTA received approval from USDA in the middle of September to issue additional P-EBT benefits to eligible families in the month of September. In collaboration with DESE, DTA distributed September P-EBT benefits to more than 440,000 students, bringing about $46 million into the state’s economy. The MAP-EBT.org website has been updated and includes outreach materials (flyers, school template emails/texts/robo calls) in more than 10 languages. Under rules from the USDA, eligibility for September P-EBT was based on each district’s learning model, therefore not every child who received P-EBT in the spring received September P-EBT. Each child’s school district determined September P-EBT eligibility.

To assist families who received P-EBT cards in the spring but have since lost them, DTA launched an online tool to help families request a replacement P-EBT card, which can be found at DTAConnect.com/pebt. The tool is available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese and Vietnamese.

SNAP Cost of Living Adjustment

Each year in October, as required by the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, the USDA implements a Cost-of-Living Adjustment, which adjusts the maximum SNAP benefit allotments to reflect the average cost of foods in the marketplace and updates the program’s income eligibility standards and deductions.

This year, due to increased food prices, USDA has increased the maximum SNAP benefits by 5%, making the SNAP maximum monthly benefit allotments the highest they have been in the history of the program. As the Baker-Polito Administration announced, the majority of SNAP participants in Massachusetts will see an increase in their SNAP benefits with no participants seeing a decrease. About 10% of clients will see an increase of more than $30 per month.

Emergency Allotment Supplemental Benefits

The federal state of emergency was extended by the Federal Health and Human Services agency to January 21, 2021. This enables DTA to continue to issue the emergency allotment supplements that were authorized by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. This provision brings every SNAP household up to the maximum benefit amount for their household size. The emergency allotment supplement amounts will be increased in accordance with the Cost-of-Living Adjustment. DTA has been approved to issue the emergency allotment supplements for October and families will receive the supplement on November 3, 2020.