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Field Operations Memo 2005-24A
December 20, 2005

To: Transitional Assistance Office Staff
From:  Cescia Derderian, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations
Re: HAP Referrals and Toolbox

Background

HAP Providers work collaboratively with the DTA in homelessness prevention by providing critical housing-assistance services to eligible Massachusetts families. HAP Providers assist the following families:

- Families at-risk of losing their current housing who need assistance to retain housing; and
- Families currently placed in shelters who need housing-search services to secure private, public or subsidized housing.

Purpose of Memo

The purpose of this memo is:

- to identify the housing assistance services that are provided by HAP;
 - to inform AU Managers or Homeless Coordinators that effective immediately, ***Toolbox* is no longer available for prevention services but will be used to transition families from shelter into permanent housing**; and
 - to advise AU Managers or Homeless Coordinators that *Toolbox* is available once in a 24-month period.
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Completing the HAP Referral

When an AU is at-risk of losing its current housing and housing-assistance services are needed to help the AU retain housing, the AU Manager or Homeless Coordinator must:

- Complete the *EA HAP Application* form (EA-3) with the AU; the AU must pass a preliminary test of eligibility for EA.

Note: An EA-3 is not required for an AU who is in an EA-contracted shelter because the HAP Provider automatically meets with every AU in shelter.

- If the AU passes the preliminary test of EA eligibility, complete the *Referral to Housing Assistance Program Services* (RHAPS) and fax the referral to the appropriate HAP Provider. Refer to Chapter XI, *Listing of Housing Assistance Program Providers* in the EA User's Guide.

HAP Services

The HAP referral covers all of the housing assistance services listed below. The appropriate service depends on the total housing situation and is determined by the HAP Provider after the assessment is completed.

Housing assistance services include:

- Statewide search to locate permanent housing;
- Screening to determine eligibility for subsidized and public housing and assisting the AU with the appropriate applications;
- Assisting the AU in resolving CORI, credit and legal problems;
- Advocating on behalf of the AU including, mediation between the AU and the landlord or utility company, counseling services, and advocacy for the AU in housing court appearances;
- Budgeting, housekeeping and other tenancy-related skills;
- Community linkages with programs that provide services/benefits to help stabilize the tenancy;
- Informational services;
- Transportation when necessary to access housing/tenancy-related services;
- *Toolbox* (see page 3 of this memo for a list of *Toolbox* uses); and
- Twelve months of stabilization services after the AU receives *Toolbox*.

Upon receipt of the referral, the HAP Provider completes a case management assessment to determine the severity of the situation and what remedies are needed to stabilize the AU in their current housing or to ensure the AU is able to secure or maintain long-term, permanent housing.

**HAP
Services
(continued)**

After the assessment of the housing situation is completed by the HAP Provider, HAP may recommend any of the following:

- The current housing situation cannot be maintained and the options are for the AU to move in with friends or relatives or be placed in temporary shelter until suitable permanent housing is found;
- Mediation with the landlord or management agency, or utility company; and/or
- Other resources, such as relocation benefits for certain TAFDC or EAEDC AUs (see 106 CMR 705.350), *RAFT* benefits (see Field Operations Memo 2005-47), and/or fuel assistance, may resolve the AU's housing-assistance needs.

***Toolbox* - the
Appropriate
Plan**

The HAP Provider determines if additional financial assistance provided through *Toolbox* is the most appropriate plan for the AU.

Toolbox is used for:

- First month's rent;
- Security deposit;
- Rental arrearage – limited to three months – (currently not available for prevention);
- Moving expenses – limited to \$150;
- Storage costs- limited to one month;
- Landlord incentive – not applicable if *RAFT* funds are also being provided to the AU; and/or
- Utility arrearage – limited to three months and must be directly connected to the AU's efforts in securing housing, such as the AU can not move out of shelter into the new housing unit because there is a utility arrearage that prevents the service from being turned on in the new housing unit.
- *Toolbox* is available for homeless families in shelter who are trying to obtain safe, permanent housing.
- *Toolbox* is available to an AU once in a 24-month period. The Housing and Homeless Services Unit (H&HS) will monitor and verify prior *Toolbox* usage.
- *Toolbox* is available to an AU that is **moving from shelter into public or subsidized housing.**

Toolbox Issued

When *Toolbox* is issued, H&HS e-mails the TAO's HAP Liaison the *HAP Services Payment Authorization* form indicating that *Toolbox* has been issued. The AU Manager or Homeless Coordinator must make an entry

Toolbox Issued (continued)	on the BEACON Narratives tab indicating that <i>Toolbox</i> was provided to the EA AU.
Impact of <i>Toolbox</i> on TAFDC and/or Food Stamp Benefits	<p>Questions have been raised regarding the impact a <i>Toolbox</i> payment has on Food Stamp or TAFDC benefits.</p> <p>For Food Stamps, any <i>Toolbox</i> payment made directly to the vendor for rent must be excluded as income.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the rent is fully paid, the Food Stamp recipient must not be allowed a shelter expense deduction; • If the rent is partially paid, the Food Stamp recipient will be allowed a shelter expense deduction for the portion of the rent he or she pays. • The Food Stamp recipient is eligible for the utility expense, if he or she is responsible for paying a utility cost separate from the rental amount. <p>For TAFDC, any <i>Toolbox</i> payment is considered noncountable income. If the TAFDC recipient receives a <i>Toolbox</i> payment, no income-in-kind should be deducted in calculating the TAFDC grant. Additionally, as long as the TAFDC recipient pays at least \$1 for rent, he or she is eligible for the rent allowance when the recipient does not live in public or state or federally subsidized housing.</p>
AU Becomes Homeless or Applies for EA Benefits	<p>The HAP Provider will provide stabilization services to the AU for the next 12 months to help the AU maintain the housing. Stabilization services include, but are not limited to, budgeting and counseling services, referrals to community programs, and landlord or utility company advocacy.</p> <p>If an AU becomes homeless <u>within 12 months after receiving <i>Toolbox</i></u>, the AU Manager or Homeless Coordinator must immediately advise the TAO's HAP Liaison of the AU's current situation. The TAO's HAP Liaison must call the H&HS Contract Manager at 617-348-5332. H&HS will contact the HAP Provider regarding the current situation. If the housing cannot be maintained, the family may be eligible for EA shelter benefits if 12 months have elapsed since the last day shelter was paid for by the Department. Also, some families received <i>Toolbox</i> for prevention and did not receive shelter benefits, therefore, the family may be eligible for shelter benefits.</p> <p>When an AU applies for EA shelter benefits, the AU Manager or Homeless Coordinator must determine if the applicant received EA shelter benefits within the preceding 12 months by checking the Results tab in BEACON for a prior EA AU and/or SSPS for prior shelter placement information. The AU also must be otherwise EA-eligible.</p>
Questions	If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478.