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*Executive Office of Health and Human Services*  
**Department of Transitional Assistance**  
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**Field Operations Memo 2010-17**  
**February 24, 2010**

**To:** Transitional Assistance Office Staff

**From:**  John Augeri, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations

**Re:** Changes to the Virtual Gateway Consumer and Provider Face Common Intake Applications

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**Overview**

Since its inception in August 2004, the Common Intake version of the Virtual Gateway (VG) online application for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has provided an easy and accessible method for clients and providers who assist our clients to apply for SNAP benefits. In evaluating the success of this initiative, the Department has learned the following:

- many applications are abandoned before being submitted;
- many applications cannot be processed because they are submitted by current clients who mistakenly think they can recertify their SNAP benefits in this manner; and
- many applications are denied because the applicant fails to complete the application process.

In an effort to improve the success of applying for SNAP benefits through the VG, the Department has requested changes to the application, to address the issues described above and provide potential applicants with a better understanding of SNAP and the application process. These applications also serve as a common intake vehicle for Medicaid and other assistance programs. This new version of the VG online SNAP application is scheduled to be implemented on February 24, 2010.

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<b>Purpose of Memo</b>	<p>The purpose of this memo is to inform TAO staff about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the changes made to the consumer face and provider face Common Intake Virtual Gateway applications; and</li><li>• case manager responsibilities due to these changes.</li></ul>
<b>Changes to the Consumer Face Application</b>	<p>The opening page or “landing page” has been reformatted to allow the user to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• screen for SNAP, Medicaid, and other public benefits without actually applying;</li><li>• apply for SNAP using the VG; and</li><li>• access “My Account Page” so that users may check the status of their SNAP, TAFDC, EAEDC and/or Medicaid applications or benefits.</li></ul> <p><b>Note:</b> Currently the VG is not configured to accept applications for TAFDC or EAEDC benefits.</p> <p>The consumer face application’s general instructions page has been simplified, and a visual, step-by-step representation of the application process has been added. The application begins with a short introduction that includes information needed to complete the application, as well as the caveat that the user can suspend the application for up to 60 days, if necessary.</p>
<b>Warning to Existing Clients</b>	<p>The user will then encounter a stop sign graphic that warns the user not to use this application method if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the user is currently receiving benefits;</li><li>• the user is currently a member of a household receiving SNAP benefits; or</li><li>• the user has submitted an application within the last 30 days.</li></ul> <p>The instructions then go on to explain that once the application has been submitted a case manager will make contact to conduct an interview. The user is also instructed that, although minimal information is required to apply for SNAP, it is important to answer completely as many questions as possible in detail so that the application may be processed quickly.</p>
<b>Expedited SNAP Benefits Screening Questions Removed</b>	<p>The screening questions for expedited SNAP benefits have been removed from the Q&amp;A section of the VG. The narrative explains that, during the interview, the case manager will ask questions to determine eligibility for expedited issuance.</p> <p>The user is then advised that an interview must be completed and that verifications or proofs must be submitted for the application to be approved.</p>

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**Changes to the  
Consumer Face  
Application  
(continued)**

Except for the removal of the screening questions for expedited SNAP benefits, the Q&A section of the application remains the same.

The user is also informed that an EBT card will be sent and will only be activated if the user is found to be eligible for benefits.

**Confirmation Letter  
Changes**

A streamlined confirmation letter, generated and printable when the user finishes the application, includes the following:

- the application number;
- the date of application receipt; and
- an explanation of the application process beginning with the interview and ending with the submission of verifications. The explanation also states that a decision will be rendered within 30 days of the date of application.

The verification (proof) section of the letter will display the verifications required based on the answers provided in the Q&A section of the application. The user will be able to click on a particular verification and a list of acceptable verifications for that eligibility factor will be displayed.

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**Changes to the  
Provider Face  
Application**

The changes to the consumer face application have also been made to the provider face application, with slightly different page formatting. The provider face application also acts as a common intake application for MassHealth and other public benefits.

The provider face confirmation letter has been changed to be similar in appearance to the new consumer face confirmation letter, including a popup display of acceptable verifications. However, it may also include an explanation of other benefits, including the MassHealth process and the verifications required for the MassHealth application if the provider submits a combination application for other programs. It can also be printed and given to the applicant.

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**Case Manager  
Responsibilities**

Virtual Gateway Applications are to be processed in accordance with the procedures transmitted in Field Operations Memo 2006-30: *FS (NPA or PA) Application Processing Guidelines*. Due to the fact that the screening questions for expedited SNAP benefits have been removed from the VG, SNAP applications will no longer be flagged as expedited. **This does not mean that they are not eligible for expedited issuance.** Once the application is received it is particularly important for the case manager:

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**Case Manager  
Responsibilities  
(continued)**

- to attempt contact with the applicant on Day One and immediately screen the user for expedited eligibility: or
- to mail the appointment letter on Day Two for a telephone interview or an in-office interview if no contact can be made on Day One so that a determination of expedited eligibility can be made as quickly as possible.

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**Questions**

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

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