

Transitions

January 2004
Vol. XIX No. 1



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

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From the Commissioner

"Too many people think Martin freed black people; in truth he helped free all people."

— Martin Luther King Sr., in speaking of his son

Dear Fellow Employees,

Greetings! I hope everyone enjoyed their New Year celebrations. Although the holiday season is behind us, it's good to know that the month of January brings with it yet another reason to celebrate. The issuance date for this month's *Transitions* is scheduled just days prior to Martin Luther King Day. At a time when we find ourselves entwined in violence around the globe, it is fitting to honor an American who symbolized peace and social justice. Dr. King's legacy can inspire us to believe in ourselves as ordinary Americans and in our ability to perform extraordinary acts of courage against injustice and poverty. His work is far from complete.

There are many ways in which we can continue the work of Dr. Martin Luther King. Dr. King lived at a time when racial injustice was both legal and overt. Today, most Americans understand that intolerance against any kind of "difference" is wrong. Although overt discrimination is illegal, intolerance can at times still be expressed in more subtle ways.

As I have taken the time to get to know many of you, I am heartened by the broad palette of countries, religions, orientations and ethnicities represented within our department.

This diversity enriches us all. Taking the extra time to get to know and learn about our neighbors at home and at work broadens our minds and our future experiences. It is also very American.

From the Hotline

Q. A father came into our office this morning applying for TAFDC. He recently won the Massachusetts State Lottery and slightly over two months ago, he received a check for \$7,000. He claims that because of back bills and other responsibilities, he was unable to save any of this money. He says that all of the income was spent. If this is true, should I still be considering this income? Is there a lump sum income amount I can enter on BEACON?

A. No, you would not enter a lump sum income amount on BEACON. Although the money from this father's lottery winnings is a lump sum payment, the regulations concerning lump sum income do not apply to applicants. Policy on lump sum income may only be used with TAFDC *recipients*. (Refer to 106 CMR 204.240 for more details on lump sum income.)

However in the situation you described, it is still important to ask the father how much of the money is still available or accessible. For example, it is possible that a portion of the payment was spent on a countable asset, such as a car or life insurance policy. Refer to 106 CMR 204.120 for policy concerning countable assets in TAFDC.

Also, remember that when an applicant receives a large sum of money prior to application, it is important to determine whether or not regulations concerning the transfer of income and/or assets apply. Refer to 106 CMR 204.135 for more details.

Q. Since the individual described in the question above is also applying for food stamp benefits, how is the lump sum treated in the Food Stamp Program?

A. Lump sum payments in the Food Stamp Program are treated as an asset in the month received. (Refer to 106 CMR 363.230.) Since the individual received the payment over two months ago, the payment itself would not be considered an asset. However, you would still want to determine whether or not the applicant is categorically eligible as well as whether or not he has access to other countable assets that were acquired as a result of the lump sum payment. Information on countable assets in the Food Stamp Program is found in the regulations at 106 CMR 363.130.

It is also important to determine whether or not food stamp regulations concerning the transfer of assets apply. Refer to 106 CMR 363.150 for details.

FYI

BEACON Help Revisions

The following is a list of Help windows that have been added or revised.

Added:

Web Applications

Revised:

Completed Referrals
EA AUs in Shelters Within
Last Two Months

ESP AUs Requiring an
Appointment
Monitor Participation
Youngest Child Turns 6

FYI

Department Banking Change

Effective in February, 2004, all Department of Transitional Assistance bank accounts will be transferred from Fleet Bank to Sovereign Bank. Recipients who receive cash assistance by check will be notified of the change on their check remittance advice. To find the nearest branch to cash a check a recipient can call **Sovereign at 1-877-768-1145, option # 6.**

From the Forms File

Revised Forms

AU Managers must discard the old version of any form and use the new version.

15-042-0104-05

CTC (Rev. 1/2004)

Checklist for Transfer AUs

02-185-0104-05

CTC-2-A (Rev. 1/2004)

Centralized TAFDC Transfer Checklist

Minor changes were made to the above forms, including the changing of “case record” to “assistance unit” record and “case name” to “AU name”.

Revised Brochure

02-820-1203-05

02-822-1203-05 (S)

CC-1 Mail (Rev. 12/2003)

Child Care: Getting and Keeping Child Care

This brochure includes updated information about the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency. The description of eligibility for subsidized childcare has also been revised.

Obsolete Brochure

17-900-0600-05

ATJ Brochure

Access to Jobs Brochure

The ATJ Brochure is obsolete because of a program change. Refer to FO Memo 2003-32B.

Continued from Page 1

When Columbus arrived here, he discovered not only a new land but many different tribes. Since then, cultures in this country have continued to collide and eventually blend together. To remain curious and open to the rituals and traditions of others not only benefits our own personal lives but also becomes a useful tool in our jobs and in working with our clients. Our diversity here at the Department of Transitional Assistance makes us better able to assist the clients who come into our offices each day asking for help.

Many of you have recently attended diversity training. I hope you enjoyed the session as much as I did. I also hope you are able to embrace the values reflected in the class. Ultimately, all of us hope to be accepted for who we are as individuals so that, together, we can work towards a shared future where all of our differences are understood and even celebrated.

My best wishes to you for 2004 and happy Martin Luther King Day!

Sincerely,



John Wagner, Commissioner



COMMUNICATION is the KEY

FYI

Changes to the Department's Website Home Page

This month you will see the following changes to the Department's Internet Website Home Page. This page is accessed from Mass.Gov.

ESP

Parents Fair Share: Parents Fair Share and the link to the Parents Fair Share summary were deleted as this is no longer an ESP program.

Transportation: Transportation and the link to a summary of Transportation benefits were added to the list of ESP Programs.

Other Services

F.O.R. Families: F.O.R. Families and the link to the F.O.R. Families information have been deleted. This service is no longer available to recipients.

Transportation-Access to Jobs: Transportation-Access to Jobs and the link to the summary with information about Access to Jobs have been added to the list of Other Services.

Unemployment Benefits: The phone number to call for general information about Unemployment Benefits has been changed and a toll free number has been added.

Career Centers: The Department of Employment and Training's phone number has changed and a link to DET's website has been added.

TAFDC - Correcting Inconsistent AU/AP Exempt/ Nonexempt Information

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2003-31 A

This Field Operations Memo reinstates Field Operations Memo 2003-31. It provides additional AU instructions and important reminders when processing the affected AUs listed on the report.



2004 Social Security/SSI COLA for TAFDC, EAEDC and FS

All

Field Operations Memo 2003-33

This Field Operations memo:

- informs TAO staff that effective January 2004, Social Security benefits and SSI payments will increase by 2.1 percent. The basic Medicare Part B premium will increase from \$58.70 to \$66.60 per month;
- identifies general BEA-CON activities for processing the 2004 Social Security/SSI COLA; and
- identifies AU Manager and Supervisor activities required to prepare for the 2004 Social Security/SSI COLA.

ESP – Structured Job Search – TAFDC

TAFDC

State Letter 1269

This State Letter transmits the following change.

TAFDC recipients' enrollment in Structured Job Search is limited to the last three months of TAFDC time-limited benefits and extension AUs.



EBT Cards, TAFDC Transportation and Transfers to the Centralized TAFDC TAO

All

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 48

This update transmits the following changes:

- Chapter XVI, Section C: Chargeable replacement EBT cards can be paid only by cash or food stamp debit through EBT. Checks and money orders will no longer be accepted as a form of payment.
- Chapter XVI, Section E: Deletes Attachment D.
- Chapter XII, Section C and Chapter XVI, Section H: Updates transportation changes that were issued in State Letter 1267, and Field Operations Memos 2003-32B.
- Chapter XIX, Section B: In addition to making technical corrections, incorporates transfer procedures to the Centralized TAFDC TAO.

We have flown the air like birds and swum the sea like fishes, but have yet to learn the simple act of walking the earth like brothers.

Dr. Martin Luther King

FYI

Changes to Policy Online

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

Policy Online Window

As part of the Department's initiative to move away from a paper environment to an electronic environment, Policy Online enhancements allow access to the information and products summarized in the current month's issue of *Transitions*. A new topic titled *Publications* appears directly beneath Policy Online. The current month and year precede the title. To display a specific summary or product for the current month **only**: click on the *Publications* button – the current month's *Transitions* appears; click on a specific topic and the summary for that topic appears; click on the title of the product summarized (ex. State Letter or Field Operations Memo) and the product transmitting the detailed information appears. The functionality of the other options listed on the Policy Online window remains the same.

The option *BEACON Today* no longer appears on this window and now appears as an option on the Related Systems Information window. The *BEACON Today* publication is no longer issued but the information remains available for reference purposes.

Related Systems Information Window

BEACON Today appears as an option and allows access to the *Index by Subject and BEACON Today's* issued in 2000-2003.

Reference Documentation Window

The *Region Number/TAO Number/TAO Name* table is now titled *TAO Information Listing* and includes the address and phone number of each TAO.

Systems User's Guide Update 156

EA

Volume 3: *SSPS User's Guide*

- A new mouse-based functionality allows users to navigate in a "drill-down" manner on certain informational fields in SSPS.
- The SSPS Vendor Inquiry Browse Select screen includes two new display options: Approved Hotel/Motel Vendors and Contracted Shelter Vendors.

Quality Corner

This month we will discuss two errors, one involving a new SSI recipient, and the other a change in rent for an ongoing AU.

New SSI Recipient

In November 2002, a client became eligible for SSI. At her food stamps application interview, however, she told her AU Manager that she had not received her SSI check for November or December. Based on this, her AU Manager zeroed out the SSI income on December 20, 2002. This action overrode the SSI COLA update. Since that update is the base for the remainder of the year's SSI benefits, it also removed the SSI income from the food stamp calculations until the AU Manager restored the SSI income in November 2003.

What Can the AU Manager Do?

If a client does not receive an SSI check for a month but the benefits are ongoing, the AU Manager should check SVES to verify the continuing receipt of SSI and make sure the amount is correctly entered into BEACON.

Rental Increase

A PA AU was closed following a reevaluation. The next day the food stamp AU was reopened for a one year certification period. At the time of the reopening, the AU Manager failed to enter the new rental amount being paid by the recipient. When a recipient's rent changes during the certification period, the recipient does not have to report such a change unless this change is also related to a change in address, see 106 CMR 366.110(A). In this situation, the food stamp AU was established for a new certification period so all changes had to be considered in processing the AU, so this case was found to be in error.

What Can the AU Manager Do?

Since the FS AU had a new certification period, all elements of eligibility had to be verified and the new rent should have been included in the calculations.



FYI

Using Appropriate Exempt TAFDC Work Program Reasons

A recent Central Office review of two-parent AUs showed that in some instances AU Managers are not selecting the appropriate reason from the Required Status Reason dropdown box on the TAFDC tab of the Work Requirements window when the parent is exempt from the Work Program Requirement.

When a parent in a two-parent AU is exempt from the Work Program, AU Managers must select the "No" Work Program Required Radio Button on the TAFDC tab and the reason why that parent is exempt from the Work Program Requirement.

For example, if a parent is taking care of a disabled grandmother, the AU Manager should not select the old Exemption reason "2 Parent AU - AP Not Work Program Required." Instead, the AU Manager should select "Caring for a Disabled Person."

"2 Parent AU - AP Not Work Program Required" and the other obsolete reasons are no longer selectable from the

Required Status Reason dropdown box.

AU Managers should review any two-parent AUs to determine if the reason selected is appropriate. If the reason is not appropriate for the parent in question, the appropriate change must be made. These AUs, as well as AUs that have not yet been reviewed, are identified on the report received weekly from Field Operations by the TAO: "2 to School Population Remaining."

OCCS Memo to CRRs

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo
2004-2

- This memo alerts DTA staff about a memo that was sent by the Office of Child Care Services (OCCS) to the Child Care Resource Referral (CRR) agencies on December 18, 2003. The memo addresses issues from local DTA offices and the OCCS's resolutions. Issues include:
- CRRs must respond to DTA clients within one week;

- Accepting the Child Care Authorization as proof of relationship for DTA clients;
- Acceptable evidence of participation in community service can be a copy of the ESP Referral Notice that lists the days, hours of participation and start/end date of activity; and
- Acceptable initial evidence of employment can be a letter from the employer, Department of Employment and Training (DET) or the Employment and Services Program (ESP) indicating the client's work schedule (days and hours), rate of pay, telephone number of employer and a contact person.

FYI

Earned Income Credit and Child Care Mailing

During the third week in January 2004, an informational mailing was sent to all active TAFDC AUs, all TAFDC AUs closed since January, 2003, and all active FS AUs, excluding FS AUs in SSI Regional Offices and FS AUs in receipt of TAFDC. The mailing included information about:

- the federal Earned Income Credit (EIC), which is available to a person who worked in 2003 and whose income was below certain limits, even if income tax is not owed;
- the Massachusetts Earned Income Credit (MEIC), which is available to taxpayers who have earned income for 2003 and meet the requirements of the federal Earned Income Credit; and
- the Child Care brochure, which explains how to get and keep child care, provides information for review with the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency, including how the child care fee is determined, and provides a listing of the names and addresses of CCR&R agencies.

Undelivered mail will be returned to Central Office and then forwarded to the AU Manager who must take the appropriate action.



FYI

Eligibility for Noncitizens

The Office for Civil Rights has raised concerns that some noncitizens are being discouraged from applying for TAFDC and Food Stamp benefits due to unclear messages regarding their families' eligibility for benefits and potential reporting to immigration authorities.

- 1) Please remind applicants during the application process (during alienage and/or SSN questions) that even if they are not personally eligible for benefits due to their alien status, other family members may still receive benefits.
- 2) Once an individual indicates an inability or unwillingness to provide verification of immigration status, all efforts to obtain documentation regarding immigration status must cease.
- 3) Likewise, when asking for Social Security Number information, if an applicant indicates an inability or unwillingness to provide, or apply for a SSN due to immigration status, further efforts to obtain documentation regarding the SSN shall cease.
- 4) Also, DTA will NOT report noncitizens to the immigration authorities EXCEPT in the rare instance that they have provided us with an order of deportation. In no case, will an AU Manager have the authority to make such a report.

Please note that TAFDC regulations and the User's Guide will be updated soon to reflect these changes.



FYI

MassHealth Program Changes

The Division of Medical Assistance has announced two changes to the MassHealth program. These changes concern new MassHealth coverage for certain women diagnosed with breast or cervical cancer, and a change in policy regarding co-payments for certain MassHealth services.

MassHealth Breast and Cervical Cancer Treatment Program

As of January 1, 2004, the Division is expanding MassHealth coverage to qualified women who have been diagnosed with breast or cervical cancer through a federally funded screening program that is operated in Massachusetts by the Department of Public Health's Women's Health Network. This coverage will be provided through the MassHealth Breast and Cervical Cancer Treatment Program (BCCTP).

To be eligible for the MassHealth BCCTP, women must:

- be under the age of 65;
- be screened or have received diagnostic services for breast or cervical

cancer through a screening site of the Department of Public Health's (DPH) Women's Health Network;

- be in need of treatment for breast or cervical cancer, including precancerous conditions or early stage cancer;
- have income at or below 250% of the federal poverty level (FPL);
- be uninsured or underinsured (that is, not have coverage for breast or cervical cancer treatment);
- not otherwise be eligible for MassHealth Standard; and
- meet other MassHealth eligibility requirements (such as, citizenship and residency requirements).

Women who are eligible for the BCCTP and are citizens or qualified noncitizens will receive MassHealth Standard coverage, through enrollment in the Division's Primary Care Clinician (PCC) Plan, for the duration of their cancer treatment. Women who receive MassHealth Standard coverage who have income over 133% of the federal poverty level will have to pay monthly premiums.

By federal law, women covered under this expansion must be uninsured or must not otherwise have "creditable coverage" for treatment of breast or cervical cancer. A woman is not considered to have "creditable coverage" when she is in a period of exclusion for treatment of breast or cervical cancer, she has exhausted her lifetime limit on all benefits under her plan, including treatment for breast or cervical cancer, or she has limited-scope coverage (e.g., covered only for dental, vision, or long-term-care) or coverage only for a specified disease. In addition, a woman who is an American Indian or Alaska Native who is provided care through a medical-care program of the Indian Health Service or of a tribal organization is not considered to have "creditable coverage."

Changes to MassHealth Co-payment Requirements

As of February 1, 2004, MassHealth will change the co-payment amounts for pharmacy benefits and introduce new co-payments for non-pharmacy benefits. Co-payments for pharmacy benefits will change from \$2 for all prescriptions, to \$1 for generic drugs and over-the counter drugs (OTC), and \$3 for all other pharmaceuticals. Additionally, MassHealth will introduce a co-payment of \$3 for acute inpatient hospital stays. This co-payment is in addition to the existing MassHealth hospital co-payment of \$3 for non-emergency use of the emergency room. Certain members are exempt from co-payments, and co-payments will not be charged on certain services. MassHealth members will have a calendar-year co-payment cap of \$200 for pharmacy services and \$36 for non-pharmacy services. Since this new policy will be effective February 1, 2004, MassHealth is adjusting the co-payment caps in 2004 to \$184 for pharmacy services and \$33 for non-pharmacy services. Members who have reached their annual cap for a calendar year will not be charged further co-payments within that calendar year and will be notified, when this occurs, through a system-generated notification.

MassHealth members have been notified of these changes. If there are questions concerning the changes in co-payments, MassHealth members are directed to call the MassHealth Customer Service Line at 1-800-841-2900 (TTY: 1-800-497-4648).

Tom Dehner in the Office of Medicaid may be contacted at 617-210-5625 if there are questions relating to the changes in coverage for certain women with breast or cervical cancer.