

Transitions

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this month in...

Transitions

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

As I write to you in mid-September, the world is a very different place from what it was only a few short weeks ago. The images of September 11 replay on our televisions and in our minds. The enormity of the human toll is difficult for most of us to even comprehend. And the change in our sense of security is underscored in newspaper and television stories. In the midst of nationwide grief and mourning, there seems to be a commitment to coming together, to acknowledging common bonds and to respecting differences. Like you, I do not know where this road will take us.

Things that seemed vitally important several weeks ago may now seem mundane and even foolish. And yet they are neither. How we go about our day-to-day lives, how we do our jobs, how we talk to our children, how we greet our neighbors, how we interact with our coworkers are just as important as they were on September 10. What has changed is how we put these things in perspective. It is not trite to say that this horrific event brings home the old adage "no one ever wished they had spent more time at the office." 21st century media coverage allowed us to share personal conversations at a time of great crisis. No one was asking about the next deal, or where the report was. Instead, love and encouragement to live a happy life were sent.

Do not misinterpret what I am saying. I am your Commissioner and I still believe that we have an important job and we must do it to the very best of our ability. But doing that job is just that, doing a job. We have been under stress for the past few months as we moved to implement BEACON. I know that occasionally tempers have been short and demands have been made. The events of September 11

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FYI

Authorization for Reimbursement of EAEDC from Retroactive SSI Payment

To become or remain eligible for EAEDC, anyone 65 or older, or anyone with a physical and/or mental impairment expected to last a year or more must sign a new AP-SSI-1 form at application and at each eligibility review. Since this form is valid for only one year, it is imperative that a new form be signed at least once per year. The AP-SSI-1 form authorizes reimbursement to the Department for EAEDC benefits received pending the SSI approval. The Department will receive the individual's SSI retroactive check, deduct any EAEDC benefits and forward the balance, if any, to the individual.

A copy of each AP-SSI-1 must remain in the AU record. Do not replace the previous signed form with the newly signed form. Retaining all AP-SSI-1 forms will ensure proper reimbursement if an SSI application is filed and approved.

If an SSI application is denied, be sure to have another AP-SSI-1 signed; the previous one is no longer valid once a decision has been reached. It must, however, remain in the AU record.

The Recovery Unit will request AP-SSI-1 forms, as needed, from the appropriate Transitional Assistance Offices. Copies of the form should be faxed back to the Recovery Unit within two days. Without a copy of the AP-SSI-1 form in the Recovery Unit's file, no recovery can be made.

If an SSI application is approved, the individual is ineligible for EAEDC.

For more detailed information, refer to 106 CMR 702.710(B).



Food Stamp Program - 10/1/2001 Cost-of-Living Increases

FS, SSFSP
State Letter 1209
Field Operations Memo
2001-34

State Letter 1209 and Field Operations Memo 2001-34 implement the following cost-of-living changes in the Food Stamp Program effective 10/1/2001.

Maximum Benefit Allotments - The maximum benefit allotment levels for all assistance unit sizes have increased.

Gross, Net and 165 Percent Income Eligibility Standards - The Gross, Net and 165 Percent Income Eligibility Standards have increased.

Shelter Deductions - The Shelter Deduction increases to \$354.

Standard Utility Allowances - The heating standard utility allowance increases to \$391. The nonheating standard utility allowance increases to \$237. The telephone standard utility allowance increases to \$28.

Standard Deduction - The Standard Deduction remains at \$134.

Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction - The Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction remains at \$143.

FYI

PNA Checks and Detoxification Services

DTA Centralized Eligibility Unit has stopped issuing Personal Needs Allowance (PNA) checks for MassHealth members who are living in long-term-care facilities with monthly incomes of \$60 or less. The Division of Medical Assistance (DMA) is now responsible for distributing PNA checks to this group **only**. DTA will continue to issue PNA checks to EAEDC recipients in a halfway house, licensed chronic hospital, licensed nursing home, approved public medical institution, licensed intermediate care facility, residential treatment center and public psychiatric institution.

DTA Centralized Eligibility Unit has also stopped processing applications for detoxification services. Detox applications will now be handled by designated staff at the Central Processing Unit (CPU) of DMA. All requests for detox services should be referred to the MassHealth Customer Service Center at 1-800-841-2900 or 1-800-497-4648 for the hearing impaired (TTY).

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provide a sad opportunity for us to step back and look at things in perspective. If it takes longer to complete a task, you will still go home at the end of the day. If you can't figure out how to make something work, someone else can probably help you. If you are totally stymied, you can go for a walk at lunchtime and clear your head. Now more than ever, we must respect one another and have patience. We have always worked together and acknowledged the different contributions each of us makes. I can only ask that we continue that.

Finally, to any of you who may have been more directly affected by this tragedy through the death of a loved one or a friend, my deepest personal sympathy.

Sincerely,



Claire McIntire
Commissioner



Quality Corner

It has now been more than a month since BEACON was implemented. This is currently the highest priority of the Department and we all realize that it has changed the way we do business. While BEACON has automated much of the eligibility determination process, AU Managers remain the first and most important source of accurate benefits. One aspect, composition of the food stamp assistance unit, has largely remained the eligibility AU Manager's responsibility. This month's errors focus on this important area.

Foster Children

At the most recent eligibility review, a grandmother was receiving SSI for herself, TAFDC for two grandchildren and food stamp benefits for all three while she was providing foster care for the two grandchildren. Without reporting the change to her AU Manager, she had adopted one of the grandchildren five months before the eligibility review and was receiving DSS benefits as an adoptive parent. Once she became legally responsible for the grandchild, they both must be in the same food stamp assistance unit, which means that the child's income must also be included in the food stamp benefit calculations.

In a nearly identical case, a grandmother was receiving TAFDC and food stamp benefits for herself and her two grandchildren. She had reported them as foster children and was receiving foster care payments for one, as in the case above. She did not report, however, that she had adopted one of the grandchildren and was receiving a subsidy. As with the case above, the adopted child now must be part of the food stamp assistance unit and his or her income must be included in determining the food stamp benefit. The fact that the change remained unreported and undetected for more than two years is more of a problem since this case had a far greater chance of being selected for the Quality Control sample.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

Both errors were recipient-caused in that they did not report the change(s) in their circumstances, but both were also preventable. It is important to ensure, at each eligibility review or recertification, that the eligibility circumstances continue unchanged. Do not assume the circumstances continue. Instead, ask and verify that they continue. Foster care placements, especially among family members, often lead to adoption. As foster children they do not have to be part of the same

food stamp assistance unit and, if not included, their income (foster care payments) would not count. Once adopted, however, they **MUST** be included and their income **MUST** be counted. BEACON will treat the income properly, but the AU Manager must realize that the children belong in the same assistance unit. If they are not included, BEACON cannot treat the income properly.

An AU Manager-Caused Error

Finally, a mother and one child received TAFDC benefits as a result of a reapplication. She also received expedited food stamp benefits for an assistance unit of three, including an SSI child living with her. When the AU Manager reopened the food stamp assistance unit in the following month, she incorrectly excluded the SSI child. Policy, however, requires that a child under age 22 always be included in the same food stamp assistance unit as his or her mother, and that his or her income be included.



Child Support

TAFDC

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 013

- Send a copy of the absent parent affidavit(s) with the T-A34/36 to DOR;
- Write "Alert: Domestic Violence" on the T-A34/36 form to notify DOR when the assessed person and the absent parent have a history of domestic violence but the assessed person does not want to claim good cause for not cooperating with DOR or DTA; and
- Acosta payments are listed on the *DOR/CSE Acosta File Report* on ITD Gateway. Enter "DTA" on the Report/Topic line.

Interview Wrap-up

All

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 014

The Interview Wrap-up Chapter has been revised to include information on calculating release dates.

From the Hotline

- Q. A TAFDC AU was closed three months ago because the recipient failed to comply with the EDP requirements without good cause. The recipient is now working and has applied for child care for her three children. Is she eligible to receive child care assistance?
- A. Yes. Transitional Child Care may be authorized within 12 months of the TAFDC closing if the recipient is employed, cooperates with CSEU and provides all necessary information to determine eligibility. See 106 CMR 207.210 (A)(3) and *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter XII, Section B.
- Q. An individual subject to FS/ET completes the job search requirement within 60 days. According to food stamp policy, the FS/ET requirement has been met for 12 months. If the AU closes and the individual reapplies within the 12 months, must the FS/ET requirement be met at reapplication?
- A. No. The FS/ET requirement has been met for 12 consecutive months. See 106 CMR 362.310(D)(3).



From the Forms File

Revised Forms

The following 10 forms have been revised by replacing reference to the Disability Evaluation Services (DES) with Professional Review Organization (PRO) to reflect the term used by BEACON.

04-206-0901-05

04-207-0901-05 (S)

EAEDC-10 (Rev. 9/2001)

EAEDC Family Disability Exemption Denial Notice

02-608-0901-05

TAFDC-DSL (Rev. 9/2001)

Returning an Up-To-Date Disability Supplement Notice

02-606-0901-05

02-607-0901-05 (S)

TAFDC-6 (Rev. 9/2001)

Notice of Denial of Disability Exemption

02-712-0901-05

DTF (Rev. 9/2001)

Disability Determination Tracking Form

02-710-0901-05

02-711-0901-05 (S)

TAFDC/DS (Rev. 9/2001)

04-200-0901-05

04-201-0901-05 (S)

EAEDC/DS (Rev. 9/2001)

Revised Brochure

The brochure has been updated with the new cost-of-living income limits for food stamp benefits.

09-070-1001-05

09-079-1001-05 (S)

FSP-Info (Rev. 10/2001)

How to Get Food Stamp Benefits

Every

Job

is

a

Good

Job