



Transitions

April 2010

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From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues:

As you know, managing our caseloads and offering high-quality customer service are two of our Department's top priorities. Implementing the use of new technology and streamlining our business processes are critical to ensuring these priorities are met. One such example is the exciting, newly launched web-based application called My Account Page (MAP), described in detail in Field Operations Memo 2010-6.

MAP became accessible to the public in early February, and allows heads of household to view information about the health, food, and/or cash assistance benefits their families currently receive.

On a single screen, DTA clients can quickly view the following information about their SNAP, TAFDC, and EAEDC cases:

- the case status
- the benefit amount
- the date the benefit will be received
- TAO and case manager contact information
- the next recertification due date (for SNAP cases)
- most notices sent to clients in the last 90 days.

Providing this instant "self-service" access to case information improves customer service while reducing phone calls to local offices and Recipient Services. MAP is an excellent advancement which has been in development for several years.

MassHealth, Commonwealth Care and Health Safety Net heads of household are able to use this tool to view basic data and to update certain information about themselves and/or their household. Additionally, Commonwealth Care members with minimal changes to their cases can submit their annual eligibility reviews online, rather than using a paper form. Children's Medical Security Plan and Healthy Start information is also available on MAP. DTA intends to offer similar enhanced, interactive MAP capabilities to our clients in the future.

Clients interested in using MAP should visit www.mass.gov/vg/selfservice and click on "My Account Page." They will need to be the head of household (the

Continued on page 2

From the Commissioner (Continued from page 1)

person who signed the application for benefits) and must register with the Virtual Gateway to get a username and password. They will then need to enter their Social Security number, zip code, and EBT card number in order to view their case information. The self-service web page is also home to the Virtual Gateway screening survey and the online SNAP application. A link to My Account Page is now available on the DTA website (www.mass.gov/dta) under “Online Services.”

If clients have questions about the registration process, or are unable to access their information via MAP, they should contact the Virtual Gateway Customer Service Hotline at 1-800-421-0938 (TTY 617-988-3301). Representatives are available Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

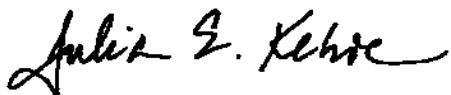
If clients have questions about their benefits, they should call their case manager or Recipient Services at 1-800-445-6604.

Please spread the word about MAP to our clients with internet access. Each local office should have received two copies of the MAP poster and 50 copies of the MAP flyer. The flyer is available online: http://170.154.109.59/refrence/curpol/form/10/map_flyer_0210.pdf; you may also order additional copies through the Document Production form ordering system. For those who are able to utilize MAP, it will provide a sense of control and peace of mind which will enhance their overall experience with our Department.

Please join me in thanking our Project Management team; Field Operations; Management Information Systems; Policy, Programs and External Relations; and our friends at the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, MassHealth, and the Virtual Gateway for making MAP a reality!

As always, thank you for everything you do to meet our mission to assist low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, increase their incomes, and improve their quality of life.

With much appreciation,



Julia E. Kehoe
Commissioner



Quality Corner

This month, we will discuss an error that occurred in a Non-Public Assistance (NPA) SNAP case that was caused by incorrect income and expense amounts.

Incorrect Income and Expenses Used to Anticipate Income for the Certification Period

This case included two adults and their five children. The case was certified as Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) from May 2009 through November 2009. The SNAP benefit calculation was based on earnings of \$1,659, rent of \$462, day care expenses of \$533 and the heating/cooling Standard Utility Allowance (SUA). The client provided four pay stubs. The first three paystubs averaged \$500 per week while the fourth pay stub was for \$73. The case manager used all four pay stubs, including the fourth paystub of \$73. This caused a lower income amount to be used in the SNAP benefit calculation.

QC determined that dependent care expenses for this case were also incorrectly calculated. The case manager used the daily rate displayed on the subsidized day care expenses itemization sheet as the client's day care expenses. However, the client was responsible for only a portion of the daily rate. Consequently, the client was credited with \$533 in monthly day care expenses instead of the \$144 the client was responsible to pay. The inclusion of the irregular paystub coupled with the incorrect day care expenses caused an overissuance error of \$179 for the review month.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

During the application or recertification interview, case managers must review the information on the form, especially expense items that seem out of proportion to the income on the case. Case managers must also be careful when extracting information from proofs provided by clients. The fourth pay stub of \$73.00 should have been disregarded. This amount was not representative of the client's weekly wages of approximately \$500. Remember, the income used to certify a case at application and recertification must reasonably reflect what the client is expected to receive for the rest of the certification period. For more information on irregular paystubs, see *A User's Guide, Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter IV, Section C, page 24.

When determining dependent care expenses, case managers must always ask the client during the interview if the amount declared is the amount the client is responsible to pay. Many SNAP clients receive subsidized day care, so in this instance, using the full amount instead of the subsidized amount resulted in an incorrect SNAP benefit.

Diversity Quote

“Look at this window: it is nothing but a hole in the wall, but because of it the whole room is full of light. So when the faculties are empty, the heart is full of light.”

Chuang Tzu

From the Hotline

If you have any questions on this column or other policy and procedural material, please have your Hotline designee call the **Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478**.

- Q.** My SNAP client recently reported that she has volunteered for a job. As we discussed the details of her position, I learned that she got her job through the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP). Also, she mentioned that she is receiving pay for this work. Do I count the earned income she is receiving in determining her eligibility and/or benefit amount?
- A.** No. Earnings received by individuals under SCSEP or the National Senior Network, Inc. programs are excluded for SNAP purposes. See 106 CMR 363.230(K) for more information on funds received by individuals from the Older American Community Service Employment Program.
- Q.** I have a thirty-year-old EAEDC applicant who has temporarily lost movement in his limbs, due to a recent stroke. The EAEDC Medical Report completed by his physician indicates that while the applicant's disability is expected to last at least 60 days, the expected duration of the disability is between three to six months. Must this applicant apply for and cooperate in the SSI application process?
- A.** No. If your EAEDC applicant's disability is expected to last between three to six months, then he does not "appear to meet the age or disability standards" for SSI and therefore is not required to apply for or cooperate with the SSI application process. See 106 CMR 702.710(B) for more information on SSI application requirements in the EAEDC Program.

From the Forms File

MassHealth Benefits Requests packets updated with revision date of **03/10** packets will be available soon to TAOs. Older versions of *MassHealth Benefits Requests* packets should be recycled when new stock is received.

New Form

Cash Appointment Letter Telephone Interview

25-416-0410-05

Cash Appt-T (4/2010)

The *Cash Appointment Letter Telephone Interview* has been developed to be used when scheduling a telephonic interview for an Eligibility Review. The form is available in the Online Forms section of DTA Online. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2010-21 for more information.

Field Operations Memos

Suspension of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNA) Benefits

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2010-18

Field Operations Memo 2008-25 advised TAO staff about the issuance of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance benefits to certain households beginning May 1, 2008.

Field Operations Memo 2010-18 informed TAO staff that effective immediately, SNA benefits are suspended. This means no SNA benefits were issued for March.

TAFDC and SNAP: Elimination of the Eligibility Time Limit for Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrants

TAFDC and SNAP

Field Operations Memo 2010-19

This Field Operations Memo informs TAO staff about new federal legislation, entitled the *Department of Defense Appropriations Act of 2010*, enacted on December 19, 2009, that allows Iraqi and Afghan special immigrants eligibility for federal public assistance programs as refugees. Refugees are eligible for TAFDC and SNAP without a time limit, provided all other TAFDC and SNAP eligibility requirements are met.

The memo provides instructions for implementing the eligibility duration change.

DTA Works Program Expanded

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2010-20

DTA Works is a program developed to empower DTA clients to gain employment experience and become job ready. To accomplish this, DTA has established opportunities for clients to become job ready through a short-term internship at DTA TAOs. These entry level positions will serve as a stepping stone for our clients to obtain higher paying jobs.

The purpose of Field Operations Memo 2010-20 is to advise TAO staff about:

- expansion of client eligibility for DTA Works; and
- the responsibilities of the intern supervisor and case manager.

Field Operations Memos

Eligibility Reviews

TAFDC/EAEDC

Field Operations Memo 2010-21

Eligibility Reviews are an integral part of the case management process. They are designed to gather information that leads to the determination of a client's continued eligibility.

The purpose of Field Operations Memo 2010-21 is to:

- remind staff of the minimum timeframe for conducting Eligibility Reviews for TAFDC and EAEDC cases;
 - discuss the manner in which case managers may conduct Eligibility Reviews; and
 - introduce the letter entitled Cash Appointment Letter Telephone Interview.
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FYIs

Filling Out the 2010 Census

TAO staff are reminded to ask applicants and clients during the next three months to fill out and mail in their Federal 2010 Census forms. Completing the census is important to Massachusetts and to clients because funding of important programs that serve our clients is based on the census return rate. Additionally, representation in Congress is also based on the census return rate.

Reminder: Census earnings for our clients who are temporary census workers are considered noncountable income for TAFDC, EAEDC, and SNAP. See Field Operations Memo 2009-61 for more details.

Getting Ready for BEACON 3

Development of BEACON 3.0 is ongoing. This column will continue to appear in future *Transitions* so that you will be up to date on significant project milestones.

User Acceptance Testing (UAT) for BEACON 3.0 is wrapping up. You have worked diligently during this recent testing and your continued dedication will help make the implementation of BEACON 3.0 successful. Throughout the testing, regular contact with staff in the TAOs has continued and this ongoing communication plays a vital role in ensuring the quality of the system. Thank you to all for assisting with the User Acceptance Testing process. It has been hard work and your efforts are very much appreciated.

The Beacon 3.0 Implementation Team has been meeting each week to develop a plan for going live with BEACON 3.0 this summer.

FYIs

Microsoft e-learning

On March 31st Governor Deval Patrick announced the implementation of the new “Elevate America Program,” a major public-private partnership between the Commonwealth and Microsoft. This program provides 26,000 vouchers for Massachusetts residents to access Microsoft e-learning courses and select certification exams at no cost.

Clients who are interested in this program are urged to apply quickly at any one of the state’s 37 One Stop Career Centers. If an individual does not own a computer (s)he should be able to access this resource through computers available at the career centers or any other public venue (such as libraries, schools and non-profit organizations). Access to the full Microsoft Learning Library of e-learning courses is provided when you collect an access code voucher from the Career Centers. Once e-learning is activated, the client will have 12 months of access to the courses. This course will not have participation monitored, so it cannot be used to meet a client’s work program requirement. No referrals to the One Stop Career Center should be made for this activity. However, it is a good opportunity for clients to get e-learning courses for free. Clients should apply now at the career center in your area!

Policy for the Prevention and Elimination of Workplace Discrimination

The Department promotes a workplace that is free of any discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, genetics or active military or veteran status. The Department will promptly investigate any allegation of discrimination and will take necessary action based on the investigation. Retaliation against individuals who have complained about discrimination or cooperated with an investigation into a discrimination complaint is unlawful and will not be tolerated. Acting General Counsel Koren Christensen recently issued the Department’s *Policy for the Prevention and Elimination of Discrimination in the Workplace*. The policy outlines the procedure by which inappropriate conduct will be dealt with and includes:

- procedures for investigating complaints;
- disciplinary action; and,
- whom you can contact for help.

The policy can be found on DTA Online under “Administrative Memos” and on the Legal Division’s page under “Memos Related To Employee Conduct.”

Cultural Communication

Each month, the Diversity Council offers tips about communicating with people of different cultures.

This month’s tip:

Many Haitians consider it rude to leave a place without letting other people know about it.

TAO Meeting Notes