



Transitions

August 2015

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Dear Colleagues,

The last several months have been extremely busy for DTA, and August has been no exception. There are some important changes on the horizon at DTA and I am looking forward to these enhancements improving the services we offer our clients.

Massachusetts, like every state across the nation, has seen a decline in SNAP caseloads. While the caseloads do fluctuate, I had tasked our staff with being proactive to ensure that eligible individuals receive benefits without being met with artificial barriers to access. As a result of the diligence of DTA staff and their commitment to our clients, we have seen an increase in our SNAP caseload over the last two months. This means more eligible individuals are receiving the food and nutrition benefits they desperately need to care for their families.

In the coming weeks DTA is shifting the SNAP Employment & Training Program from mandatory to voluntary. Moving to an all-volunteer program allows DTA to target the limited E&T resources available and to ensure appropriate time is dedicated to the delivery of excellent SNAP service. This change to a voluntary program is in keeping with the Department's continued focus on providing clients with training, education, and employment opportunities to help them secure employment and move to economic independence.

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Commissioner's Corner *(Continued from Page 1)*

DTA is always searching for ways to better serve our clients, and find efficiencies for our workers. In that spirit, our August BEACON build will be featuring some alterations which will serve to make things easier for our workers and our clients. One of the features in this build that I am most excited about is the EBC Notice Changes. This change will simplify the notices that are sent out to clients in order to ensure that they are comprehensive and easily understood. For example, notices will include new features such as who is included in the grant/household and a breakdown of how we have determined the earned income for each client. This will provide clients with vital insight into what is happening with their case.

DTA is committed to continually improving the service that we offer and aiding those on the path to self-sufficiency. Thank you for your continued hard work and dedication to serving those in need of assistance.

Sincerely,

Jeff McCue
Commissioner

From the DTA Mailbox

If you have any questions on this column or other policy and procedural material, please have your manager or supervisor contact the **DTA Mailbox**. The questions below pertain to SNAP medical expense deductions and the verification of these deductions for elderly or disabled clients. For additional policy information on this topic, refer to 106 CMR 364.400(C).

Q. 1. Do I need approval from a doctor before deducting over-the-counter medications from the income of an elderly or disabled client, as defined in 106 CMR 361.210?

A. 1. No. For verification of out-of-pocket costs associated with over-the-counter medications or medical supplies and equipment, use the client's proof of incurred expenses such as copies of receipts, bills or medical supply rental agreements. These expenses do not require a letter or documentation from a licensed practitioner, unless the information provided is inconsistent.
See Operations Bulletin 2015-2 for more details.

Q. 2. At application, all medical expenses must be verified for an applicant to receive a medical deduction. Is the same true at recertification?

A. 2. No. The following situations do not require verification at recertification:

- The client reports no change in medical expenses,
- The client with the Standard Medical Deduction reports a change in medical expenses but based on the amount (i.e. medical expenses are greater than \$35 but no more than \$190), the client would remain at the Standard Medical Deduction,
- The client reports a medical expense decrease to less than \$35 per month or reports zero medical expenses, or
- The client who is being credited with an actual medical deduction reports that his or her medical expenses have decreased to \$190.

For more information, refer to the SNAP Medical Deductions Job Aid.

(Continued on Page 4)

From the DTA Mailbox *(Continued from page 3)*

- Q. 3.** My SNAP client is behind in his rent. He initially reported zero medical expenses, but when I gave him examples of allowable medical expense deductions, he explained that he has very high monthly bills from a dentist that he's been unable to pay. Without paying on these dental bills, is this client still eligible for the medical expense deduction?
- A. 3.** Yes. Remember that an elderly or disabled client who is behind in paying any of his other financial obligations may also be struggling to pay medical bills. Also, a client need not be making payments on his medical bills to be eligible for the deduction. If asking applicants and clients about their medical expenses, remember to also include examples of the types of expenses that qualify. Allowable SNAP medical deductions include items that clients may not at first consider such as vitamins, foot and dental care products, batteries for hearing aids, mileage for private car, taxi, bus or subway when necessary to obtain treatment or care, securing and maintaining service animals and attendant services. For a complete list of allowable expenses in SNAP, refer to the SNAP Medical Deductions Job Aid.
- Q. 4.** Are there certain medical expense activities I should keep in mind helping elderly and disabled clients maximize?
- A. 4.** While the medical expense regulations at 106 CMR 364.400(C) have not changed, accurate and consistent medical expense deduction procedures are important. Clients may not realize certain items that can be counted towards the medical deduction such as adult diapers, over the counter medications or transportation. It is important to thoroughly review all eligible deductions as they may make a substantial difference in the SNAP benefit amount.



Online Guide Transmittals

SNAP, TAFDC and EAEDC: Address and Homelessness

OLGT 2015-35

All

This Online Guide Transmittal clarifies program requirements regarding client addresses and provides information and guidance on assisting homeless clients in identifying a mailing address. The case manager must ask the client to provide, if possible, the address of a friend, relative, authorized representative or shelter as a mailing address to receive Department mail. As a last resort, a case manager may offer the use of the address of the Transitional Assistance Office (TAO) that serves the client's area.

To use the TAO mailing address, the client must sign a *Using TAO for Mailing Address (TAO-MA)* form, which details restrictions in the use of the TAO address.

In this Online Guide update, clarification has also been added regarding verification of Massachusetts residency using the External Agency RMV page.

EAEDC: Noncitizen – Temporary Protected Status (TPS) Page

OLGT 2015-40

EAEDC

The purpose of this transmittal is to inform DTA staff about a new Online Guide Noncitizen page titled, Temporary Protected Status (TPS).

This new page:

- provides guidance on EAEDC eligibility for applicants/clients claiming the USCIS Temporary Protected Status and
- instructs staff on how to enter the TPS immigration status on the INS Designation page.

SNAP Nutrition Education

OLGT 2015-42

SNAP

This Online Guide Transmittal adds a new book to the SNAP section of the Online Guide to include Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education and Obesity Prevention (SNAP-Ed). The primary goal of SNAP-Ed is to provide people who are eligible for SNAP with information and tools to help make healthy food choices within a limited budget.

Following the current *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and USDA's *MyPlate* system, SNAP-Ed helps clients to improve eating habits and encourages them to choose physically active lifestyles. In this way, SNAP-Ed helps with obesity prevention.



Online Guide Transmittals

Community Supported Agriculture

OLGT 2015-43
SNAP

In September 2014, the Department, in collaboration with Project Bread and a number of local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) partners developed a CSA program initiative in which our clients participated for the remainder of the 2014 CSA Season. Under this initiative, SNAP clients purchased CSA shares on a monthly basis using their EBT benefits.

Clients received their weekly shares at predetermined community sites.

The Department recently reinstated the initiative for the 2015 CSA Season. Beginning in August 2015, participating clients will also be able to make partial payments using their EBT SNAP benefits. The remaining balance may be paid by cash, check or credit card. In addition, participating clients may now call a designated DTA staff member to request cancellation.

This Online Guide Update incorporates information about the CSA program operation for DTA clients.

TAFDC – Clothing Allowance, September 2015

OLGT 2015-45
TAFDC

The Department will issue a nonrecurring clothing allowance of \$200 per eligible TAFDC client under the age of 19 for September 2015.

A payment (separate from the semi-monthly payment) will be issued for eligible TAFDC clients under age 19 on August 29, 2015 if they are eligible effective September 1, 2015. If a client becomes eligible effective September 1 at a later date, he or she will receive a supplemental payment on one of the following dates: September 18, October 23, November 20 or December 18. Clients will receive a notice about their eligibility for a clothing allowance on or about the same date.

TAFDC clients under age 19 will receive a prorated amount if they become eligible after September 1, 2015. These clients will also receive a supplemental payment and notice.



FYIs

New BEACON Hard Edit

DTA staff had been advised that they must not process matches handled by the Fraud Investigation/Data Match Unit (FIDM). Effective with BEACON Build 47.6 (scheduled for August 31, 2015) a hard edit will prevent field staff from processing these matches. The hard edit will read:

“You must email the Data Matching Unit at DTA.DataMatchInquiry@state.ma.us to disposition this match. If the case must be acted on immediately please contact your supervisor.”

For complete instructions on processing matches, please see the External Agency Matches book in the Cross Program topic of the Online Guide.

Transportation for Employed Clients

Clients who are meeting their work program requirement solely through employment are eligible for up to \$80 transportation reimbursement payments. Currently DTA staff must issue these payments as a related benefit.

Effective with BEACON Build 47.6 (scheduled for August 31) these clients can be issued transportation reimbursement payments the same as other clients who are meeting the work program requirement through non-employment activities.

For complete instructions on issuing transportation reimbursement payments, please see the Transportation chapter in the Services book in the TAFDC topic of the Online Guide.

Diversity Quote

I think diversity can also be a resource, an asset, especially in a world that is becoming globalized, to deal with difference, to deal with variety, to deal with complexity.

José Manuel Barroso



From the Forms File

New Form

09-620-0815-05

TAO-MADD (8/2015)

Using TAO for Mailing Address

Clients use the *Using TAO for Mailing Address (TAO-MADD)* form to request the use of the TAO as their mailing address. In addition, the *Using TAO for Mailing Address (TAO-MADD)* details restrictions in the use of the TAO address.

Revised Forms

DVW-CHF (Rev.8/2015)

02-830-0815-05

TAFDC Case History for Domestic Violence Waiver Request

DVWR-CL (Rev. 8/2015)

02-557-0815-05

Domestic Violence Waiver Request Checklist

DVWR (Rev. 8/2015)

02-559-0815-05

Request for a Waiver of TAFDC Program Requirement(s) Due to Domestic Violence

The above Domestic Violence Forms have been revised. The Spanish version of the *Request for a Waiver of TAFDC Program Requirement(s) Due to Domestic Violence* will be available soon. Please discard old versions of these forms and use the revised versions.

TAO Meeting Notes