



Transitions

May 2013

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Dear Colleagues,

I wanted to share our mid-term status update for our 100 day action plan with you. As you know, the plan makes several program integrity enhancements that will help improve client services and protect benefits for those who truly need them.

Our [100 day plan](#) incorporates operational and technological enhancements to address specific issues raised by the offices of the inspector general, state auditor and federal regulators. The plan balances program integrity enhancements with improved client services.

Bridge to Stability Mid-Term Status Update:

Phase I – Program Integrity Enhancements

Enhancements	Initiative Descriptions	Status
ATM / POS Transaction Monitoring	DTA launched bi-weekly monitoring of ATM and POS withdrawals to identify purchases made at prohibited establishments; notifying retailers and law enforcement of potential violations.	Implemented – DTA has reviewed 630,000 transactions in 14,000 unique locations and has personally reviewed nearly 600 stores. Database being constructed with information obtained, with more results to be shared in future.
Implement \$5 fee for replacement EBT cards	DTA implemented \$5 fee for replacements EBT cards for both SNAP and cash assistance clients.	Implemented – DTA has collected more than \$22,000 through March as a result of fee.
Notice and monitor clients who request multiple EBT card replacements	DTA instituted new notice and review process that requires clients who have received three or more EBT replacement cards to meet with office director.	Implemented – Combined with \$5 fee, DTA has seen a 62% drop in requests for additional replacement cards following third replacement.

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From the Commissioner *(Continued from Page 1)***Phase I – Program Integrity Enhancements**

Enhancements	Initiative Descriptions	Status
Absent Non-Custodial Parent Verification	DTA has increased file examination that will help identify non-custodial parents in the household. Information also being shared with DOR, which can result in increased child support collection.	Implemented – DTA identifying cases where non-custodial parents living in home while client says otherwise. This can result in investigation and overpayment recoupment for taxpayers.
Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education Match	DTA now verifying statewide school attendance via new electronic data match, addressing issue raised in inspector general's report.	Implemented – New match helping DTA verify residency and school attendance requirements, while reducing paperwork for clients and caseworkers.
Residency and Address Verification	Caseworkers increased address verification controls. DTA revised landlord verification and shared housing forms to require clients to sign “under penalty of perjury.”	Implemented – Enhances residency and address verifications measures when client addresses are reported or change.
Social Security Number Verification Enhancements	DTA enhanced verification of names, date of birth and gender of clients who have a systems generated number, through the SSA and EVS verification process for updated SSNs	Implemented – Improves accuracy and integrity of social security verification process.
Department of Correction Match	DTA launched new weekly match with Massachusetts Dept. of Correction to supplement existing federal quarterly match.	Implemented – New process will eliminate any lag time between incarceration and closure of benefits.

(Continued on Page 3)

From the Commissioner *(Continued from Page 2)*

Phase I – Program Integrity Enhancements

Enhancements	Initiative Descriptions	Status
Department of Criminal Justice Information Services (DCJIS) Warrant Match	DTA match now conducted on monthly, as opposed to quarterly basis, with automated notices being sent to the recipient.	Implemented – Will insure match is conducted more frequently and efficiently so no cash assistance recipient with outstanding warrant will receive benefits.
Income Verification	DTA launched pilot front-end income verification through Equifax national database. Pilot to significantly increase timeliness of employment information available, while reducing reliance on “pay and chase” system.	Pilot implemented – Implementation will improve efficiencies, and act as deterrent to fraudulent activities.
Dept. of Revenue Match	New match will make employment information available at the time of application, and expands data received by DTA to include self-employment income, rental income, and alimony.	In process – Pilot to be completed in July
Registry of Motor Vehicles Match	New match will allow DTA to verify all vehicles owned by the applicant to eliminate reliance on client self-disclosures, while also cross-checking license photos.	In process – To be completed in July

(Continued on Page 4)

From the Commissioner *(Continued from Page 3)*

Phase II – Long-Term and On-Going Initiatives		
External Audit	DTA hired Ernst & Young to perform independent audit and recommend further improvements and processing efficiencies in program integrity, administration and finance, and field operations.	To be completed in June
Bridge to Stability Listening Tour	DTA Interim Commissioner Monahan launched state-wide listening tour to allow residents all across the Commonwealth to share ideas, provide feedback and suggestions on how the Department can improve.	On-going – DTA has held 16 sessions with over 400 public attendees, 20 members of the Legislature and more than 100 comments submitted. More events are scheduled throughout June.
Process Improvements	DTA implementing process enhancements to improve timeliness of processing new benefit applications and re-certifications. Will also find technological solutions to improve service delivery and reduce client wait times.	On-going
Program Integrity Unit Staff Additions	DTA’s program integrity unit has been increasing its staff to carry out the aggressive matches and enhancements detailed in this plan.	In process - 10 new investigators are set to be added this calendar year.

Quality Corner

This month we will review an error regarding Retirement, Survivors and Disability Insurance (RSDI) income and disability coding on BEACON.

Incorrect Disability Code

The Non Public Assistance (NPA) SNAP household included a 38-year-old client and her three children. The client applied for SNAP benefits in July 2012 and reported that she was receiving RSDI income of \$1756 each month (\$439 per household member). The case manager indicated on BEACON that the client was disabled and certified the case as a change reporting household for 24 months.

Quality Control (QC) determined through a State Verification Exchange System (SVES) inquiry that the client was not disabled but was receiving RSDI as a widow. A Beneficiary Data Exchange (BENDEX) inquiry also confirmed that the client was not disabled. For both inquiries, the disability onset date field was blank and the SSA claim suffix number was Beneficiary Identification Code “E00” indicating benefits were issued to a *mother-widowed*. Since the disability indicator on BEACON had been incorrectly coded, there was no gross income test applied and the shelter cap was lifted in the SNAP benefit calculation. This caused a \$204 overissuance for the review month.

What’s a Case Manager to Do?

Receipt of RSDI benefits does not always mean that the client is disabled. RSDI income is also received by survivors and retirees. Case managers must always verify disability status before entering it in on BEACON. In this case, a closer look at the proofs provided should have alerted the case manager that the client may not be disabled. Case managers can access SSA Claim Number information by going to Policy Online, *Related Systems Information*, BENDEX and looking at the table to view the meaning of the SSA claim number suffix (letters at the end of the number).

In addition, the correct certification type for the SNAP household based on the actual case circumstances is Annual Reporting (AR). For more information on processing SNAP applications for disabled households, see 106 CMR 361.210.

Diversity Quote

“The whole idea of a stereotype is to simplify. Instead of going through the problem of all this great diversity - that it's this or maybe that - you have just one large statement; it is this.”

Chinua Achebe



Training Corner

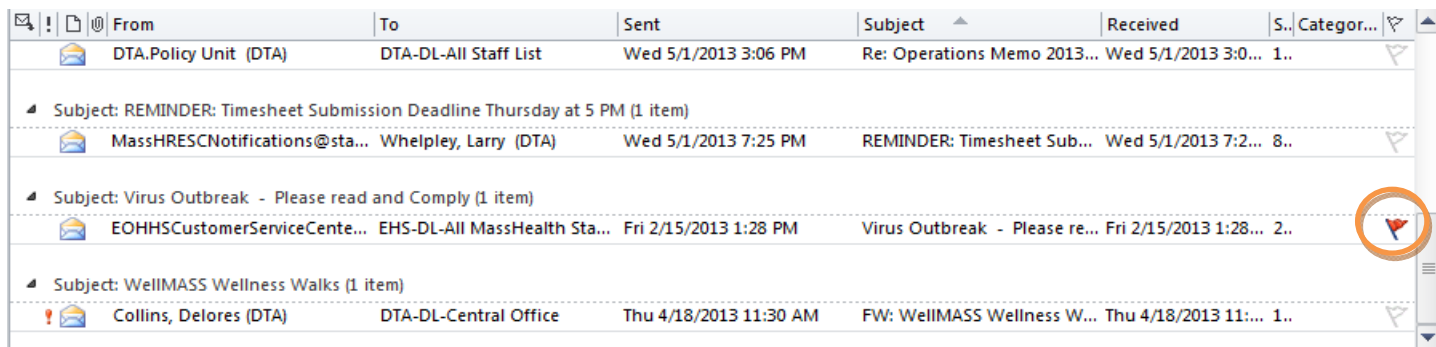
Flagging Emails

You get lots of emails. Some are more important than others or require more time to digest. But you don't always have time to reply to an email the minute you receive it. How do you keep track of these important emails? One solution is to flag the emails. This will give you a visual reminder to follow up on them at a later time.

Steps:

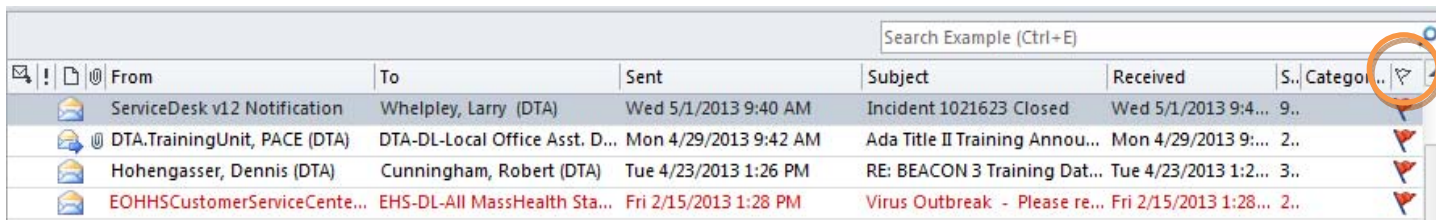
1. Click on the flag next to the email to mark it as needing attention later.

Result – the flag turns red.



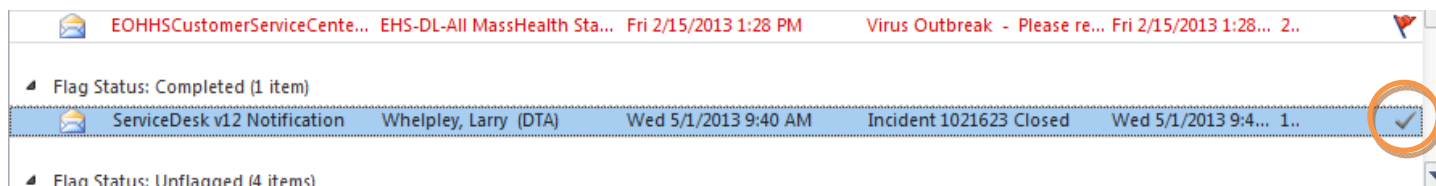
2. Later, when you have time to attend to all of your important emails, click on the Flag column heading.

Result – all of your flagged emails appear in a group.



3. When you are finished with each email, click on the flag.

Result – the flag will turn into a check mark, indicating you are done with it.



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. 1. My TAFDC applicant is a veteran of the Iraq War. Is she eligible for TAFDC?

A. 1. This applicant may be eligible for federal or state, non-federal Veterans' Services Benefits (VSB). If eligible for state VSB, the applicant may elect to participate in either the TAFDC or the VSB program, but cannot participate in both. Remember to advise individuals of their option to apply for either program. See 106 CMR 702.720(A) for more details.

Important: A TAFDC client receiving Federal Veterans' Benefits must have this income deducted from his or her cash assistance. See 106 CMR 204.210(B).

Q. 2. My EAEDC applicant is a veteran of the Iraq War and is currently in receipt of monthly VSB. Is this individual eligible for EAEDC?

A. 2. No. An EAEDC applicant eligible for state, non-federal VSB is ineligible for EAEDC. Also, remember that if your applicant is a Veteran who is not currently receiving VSB, he or she must be advised that he or she must apply for these benefits and provide written notification of ineligibility from the Veterans' Services office. This is a condition of continuing EAEDC eligibility. See 106 CMR 702.720(B) for more details.

Important: An EAEDC client receiving Federal Veterans' Benefits must have this income deducted from his or her cash assistance. See 106 CMR 321.210(B).

Q. 3. My SNAP client is receiving \$90 a month in VSB. If otherwise eligible, can this client still qualify for SNAP benefits?

A. 3. Yes. Massachusetts Veterans' Benefits are administered by local Veterans' Service Officers (VSOs) in cities and towns. Veterans' Services Benefits are countable unearned income in SNAP, but receipt of the income is not a disqualifying factor. See 106 CMR 363.220(B) for more details.

Q. 4. When determining SNAP eligibility, are there deductions and exclusions I could apply to reduce a veteran's VSB countable income amount?

A. 4. Yes. Aside from the usual SNAP deductions permitted per 106 CMR 364.400, certain portions of a client's VSB may be excluded. For example, if the VSO were to pay a portion of the income as a vendor payment directly to the veteran's landlord and/or utility company for the veteran's housing or heating/cooling costs, these vendor payments would be excluded from countable income for SNAP eligibility purposes, per 106 CMR 363.230(B). Also see Field Operations Memo 2009-13 for more details.

Note: In this situation, the case manager should remember to adjust the shelter expense amount on BEACON to reflect only the remaining shelter expenses the client is expected to pay, if any.

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From the Hotline *(Continued from Page 5)*

- Q. 5.** Are education benefits issued by the Department of Veterans Affairs countable income in SNAP?
- A. 5.** Certain education benefits issued by the Department of Veterans Affairs may be excluded, but only when the grant or scholarship terms preclude their use for meeting current living costs. See 106 CMR 363.230(D) for additional exclusions.
- Q. 6.** My SNAP client was overpaid in VSB payments by the state. As a result, his monthly VSB payment has been reduced from \$85 per month to \$25 monthly. Do I count this client's gross or net VSB?
- A. 6.** If the overpayment was the result of fraud or a failure to comply with VSB program requirements, then the full \$85 monthly payment must be counted as unearned income. If, on the other hand, the overpayment was the result of a mistake or error, on the part of the VSO, then the income may be excluded. See 106 CMR 363.220(C) for more details.
- Q. 7.** My TAFDC client was overpaid by the Social Security Administration. Her dependent's monthly RSDI payment has been reduced from \$115 per month to \$35 monthly. Do I count this client's gross or net RSDI for cash purposes?
- A. 7.** Always use the gross amount for both TAFDC and EAEDC clients. See 106 CMR 204.210(B) and 106 CMR 204.260 in the TAFDC Program and 106 CMR 321.210(B) and 106 CMR 321.290(C) in the EAEDC Program for more details.

From the Forms File

Revised Brochures

Your Right to Know

18-130-0413-05 (Vietnamese)

18-127-0413-05 (Haitian Creole)

18-134-0413-05 (Khmer)

18-131-0413-05 (Chinese)

18-135-0413-05 (Russian)

YRTK (Rev. 4/2013)

Other language versions of the *Your Right To Know* brochure are now available for ordering from Document Production at Schraffts. Please discard all old versions (Rev. 12/2012) of these brochures and use the revised (Rev. 4/2013) versions.

Operations Memos

SNAP, TAFDC and EAEDC - Verifying Noncitizen Status: Required SAVE Documentation

TAFDC

Operations Memo 2013-14A

Department policies and procedures require verification of citizenship status prior to issuing benefits. A recent report by the Massachusetts Office of the Inspector General highlights the importance of confirming a noncitizen's status and documenting this status in the case record. The Department is required to use the federal Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) program to validate the immigration status of any noncitizen to determine whether the individual meets noncitizen requirements for benefit eligibility purposes. This Operations Memo was reissued one week after initial issuance to clarify who may call the Systems Support Help Desk to have passwords reset.

TAFDC – Noncustodial (Absent) Parents

TAFDC

Operations Memo 2013-17

Clients must cooperate with the Department of Revenue (DOR) Child Support Enforcement Unit (CSEU) to obtain child support and medical benefits from a parent who is absent from the household. A client can satisfy this requirement by assigning his or her rights to DOR and by signing an affidavit stating that the child's noncustodial parent has been continuously absent from the household and that all other information provided is truthful to the best of the client's knowledge.

A report by the Massachusetts Office of the Inspector General (OIG) highlights the importance of cooperation with child support. DTA also reinforces with clients to cooperate with DOR to obtain child support and medical benefits as a step to reach self-sufficiency.

This Operations Memo gives DTA staff guidelines for ensuring that accurate and consistent information about the noncustodial parent(s) is being given to DTA and DOR. This will assist DOR in establishing and obtaining child support from the absent parent(s). This Operations Memo also gives guidelines for making fraud referrals.

Operations Memos

TAFDC – Extension Procedures Revised

TAFDC

Operations Memo 2013-20

The Department has a process for clients requesting an extension of TAFDC benefits beyond the 24-month period. Any client who has exhausted 22 months of time-limited benefits must be given the opportunity to request an extension. Every client who has reached month 22 must be scheduled for an interview to discuss a request for an extension of benefits beyond the 24 months of time-limited benefits.

Operations Memo 2013-9 provided new instructions for processing extension denials or approvals without using forms generated by the Extension Tracking/Notice Application (ETNA).

The purpose of this Operations Memo is to:

- advise TAO staff about Central Office review procedures for extension requests;
- give TAO directors guidelines for completing the *Director's Decision Summary* form;
- remind TAO staff about the use of the *TAFDC State 24-Month Time Limit Tracking Actuate* report as a tool to process extension requests; and
- remind TAO staff when extension requests need to be processed.

TAFDC – Learnfare: DTA/DESE Match

TAFDC

Operations Memo 2013-21

TAFDC Learnfare requires that children of nondisabled grantees from age 6 (or first grade, whichever occurs later) through age 13 must attend school regularly or risk losing cash assistance. Verification of attendance must be obtained for any child who is subject to the Learnfare requirement. Under Learnfare, a child may not have more than eight unexcused absences in each school quarter. (See 106 CMR 203.900 for more information.)

At the beginning of each school year, school information must be entered in BEACON for all children entering first grade. In September of 2012, a mailing was sent to all TAFDC grantees who had a six-year-old child with no school identified in BEACON or had old school information identified in BEACON that Central Office knew was not current.

Operations Memo 2012-43 advised TAO staff about an initial mailing to this population. Operations Memo 2012-53A advised TAO staff about an additional mailing to this population. Operations Memo 2013-21 advises TAO staff about:

- a match being performed between DTA and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE); and
- new procedures for the Holyoke, Lawrence, Springfield Liberty, Springfield State and Worcester TAOs.

Operations Memos

EAEDC: Extension and Redesignation of Sudan and South Sudan for Temporary Protected Status (TPS); and TPS Extensions for Honduras and Nicaragua

EAEDC

Operations Memo 2013-23

Temporary Protected Status (TPS) granted by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) allows nationals of a designated country to remain in the U.S. and work for a limited time period because conditions in that country are preventing them from returning there. This Operations Memo:

- advises staff about the extension and redesignation of TPS for Sudan and South Sudan;
- advises staff about TPS extensions for Honduras and Nicaragua;
- reminds TAO staff about EAEDC eligibility for foreign nationals with TPS;
- provides information on USCIS filing fees and fee waiver requests that will benefit individuals filing USCIS applications to become TPS beneficiaries; and
- reminds TAO staff about how to enter INA designation information in BEACON for individuals with TPS.

Unemployment Benefits Reduced by Sequester Cuts

SNAP

Operations Memo 2013-24

As of claim-week ending May 4, 2013, **all** claimants on Federal Emergency Unemployment Compensation (EUC) extensions will have their benefits reduced by 12.8%. This reduction, known as sequestration, is mandated by federal law. This Operations Memo informs staff of:

- the automatic recalculation of certain cash and SNAP cases with EUC benefits;
- outlines case manager responsibilities for the recalculation of cash and SNAP cases with EUC benefits; and
- informs staff about a temporary DUA mailbox.

TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP – *Harper, et al. v. Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA): Initial Posting*

All

Operations Memo 2013-25

Harper is a class action lawsuit brought by disabled clients alleging that the Department violated the Americans with Disabilities Act by failing to provide disabled clients with equal access to Department benefits.

Operations Memo 2013-25 informs TAO staff that as part of the settlement agreement, effective immediately, the Summary of Settlement Notice must be posted in the waiting room of each TAO until further notice. The Operations Memo also informs TAO staff to whom questions about the lawsuit may be directed.

TAO Meeting Notes