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Quality Corner

This month we will review an active error that occurred in a Non-Public Assistance (NPA) SNAP case.

Incorrect Calculation of Group Home Shelter Expenses

On August 5, 2016, a household of one submitted a *SNAP Elderly Disabled Recertification* form. The case manager processed the case which included monthly RSDI income of \$1102, monthly rent total of \$758, and responsibility to pay for the heating/cooling expenses. The client reported living in a group home since 2004. The household was eligible for \$178 per month in SNAP benefits after recertification.

During the Quality Control (QC) Review, it was determined that the case manager did not enter the appropriate shelter costs for the group home client. The group home had submitted an *Other Agency Certification of Shelter Expenses for Licensed Group Home Residents (FS-ASCE)* form, but the case manager failed to deduct the maximum SNAP allotment of \$194 from the rent total. This resulted in an over-issuance of \$63 in SNAP benefits.

What's a Case Manager to do?

The case manager should have reviewed the FS-ASCE form. This form captures rent and utility expenses that the group home charges, if applicable, based on the client's income. The case manager must be sure to review the section on the form that is designated DTA Use Only and deduct the maximum SNAP allotment for a household size of 1 from the total rent amount. The remaining balance must be entered as the shelter expense in BEACON.

For more information about group home procedures, please refer to the Online Guide, SNAP, Expenses and Deductions, Household Expenses, Group Homes.

Online Guide Transmittals

Cross Programs: Suspected of Living Above Means (SLAM) Procedural Clarifications

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-71A

The purpose of this Transmittal is to obsolete OLGT 2017-71 and to advise staff of revised Online Guide content, including:

- how to address SLAM circumstances based on where the household is in its SNAP certification period; and
- the user-generated verification items related to SLAM – Living Above Means, Past Due Housing Costs and Past Due Utilities.

Cross Programs: Verifications Overview, Verification Types and Methods, and Verifications

Online Guide Transmittals 2017-89, 2017-93, and 2017-94

Whenever a client applies, is reevaluated, or notifies DTA of a change s/he must provide the necessary proof to be eligible for benefits. These proofs are called verifications. Verifications are the use of documentary evidence, collateral contacts, external databases, or self-declaration to establish the accuracy of client statements.

When determining if verification is sufficient, case managers must be primarily concerned with how adequately the document or other verification substantiates the household's statements in light of the case statements as a whole. The types, methods, and frequency of verifications for eligibility factors vary across programs (SNAP, TAFDC, and EAEDC). The *Verification Checklist (VC-1)*, *Pending Denial Notice*, INT-1, and INT-2 are the Department generated documents, that inform clients of the proofs needed to determine eligibility and benefit amount.

This December, a number of BEACON enhancements have been implemented to the verification process.

Online Guide Transmittals

SNAP: Contribution Income and Vendor Payments

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-95

Entering income appropriately is critical to ensuring an accurate benefit calculation for all programs. To accomplish this, staff must be aware of the means in which the income is received so that it can be appropriately entered into BEACON.

When someone external to the SNAP household gives the household the money to pay for all or a portion of their expenses, it is considered contribution income.

When someone external to the SNAP household pays an expense directly to the vendor (landlord, utility company, etc.) it is considered a vendor payment.

In accordance with SNAP regulations 106 CMR 363.230, contribution income and vendor payment for SNAP purposes may be countable or non-countable.

TAFDC: Absence Page Changes

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-96

Cooperation between DTA and the Department of Revenue Child Support Enforcement (DOR/CSE) is a requirement for TAFDC eligibility for households where a parent is absent. The Absence page in the Assessed Person Nonfinancial workflow in BEACON is the tool for DTA-DOR/CSE information-sharing. Effective December 4, 2017, changes are being made to this page.

Cross Programs: The 2018 Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Child Tax Credit (CTC), Massachusetts Earned Income Credit (EIC) and Child Care Assistance Mailing

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-97

In January 2018, the Department will issue the annual Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Child Tax Credit (CTC), Massachusetts Earned Income Credit (EIC), and child care assistance informational mailing.

This Online Guide Transmittal advises DTA staff about the scheduled EITC/CTC/EIC and child care assistance mailing. For details about this annual mailing, see the Online Guide book:

Topic: Scheduled Mailings/Projects

Book: EITC/CTC/EIC & Child Care Mailing

Online Guide Transmittals

Cross Programs: Field Requested BEACON Changes

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-98

The Department continually strives to enhance the tools developed to allow staff to do their work more efficiently. To that end, EHS IT visited the New Bedford TAO to elicit suggestions from staff for improving BEACON functionality and usability.

Many of the changes are intended to reduce both repetitive work and case errors. The hope is that these enhancements will increase BEACON efficiency to assist case managers perform their jobs and streamline processing client requests to provide them with services and benefits in a timely fashion.

Cross Programs: Unreadable Documents

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-99

Occasionally, a scanned document cannot be processed because parts or all of it are unreadable. For example, the document is blurred or too dark or light. A BEACON change will add a new inadequate document type called Unreadable to the Scanned Document Details page. Effective with the change, a new processing procedure will be implemented for all unreadable documents.

SNAP: Follow-Up Actions

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-100

SNAP case manager's document and schedule any next-steps that must be taken on a case. A BEACON change will add a new case maintenance action called a Follow-Up Action, to be created by SNAP case managers to schedule follow-up work.

Online Guide Transmittals

SNAP: ABAWD Clock Reset and Procedural Updates

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-101

This Transmittal advises staff of updated Online Guide content related to ABAWD clients, including:

- the ABAWD clock reset;
- how previous sanctions will appear in BEACON;
- the *SNAP Work Requirement Medical Report* form; and
- the ABAWD Requirements Script that case managers must use. Detailed instructions and a link to this script were added to the ABAWD Work Program Requirements Overview page.

SNAP: SNAP Path to Work Program

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-102

This Transmittal advises staff that SNAP Path to Work Program content was moved into its own Book in the Online Guide.

SNAP Path to Work pages were revised to add instructions for the Google Translate, provider contact requests, and ABAWD volunteer search functionalities on the www.snappathtowork.org website.

The chart of services offered by SNAP Path to Work components was also updated.

Cross Programs: Assisting Person Roles

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-103

Clients may authorize a person or agency to assist with applications, case maintenance, recertifications/reevaluations, and any other DTA requirements, depending upon the role that is designated. The Assisting Person page in BEACON captures the various roles that a client may designate. Each role serves a specific purpose and requires different information and documentation. Clients may designate one person/agency to assist with all roles or may designate multiple people to perform different roles.



Online Guide Transmittals

Cross Programs: DESE Direct Certification for Meal Programs

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-104

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in conjunction with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) work together to provide nutritious meals to low-income students. DTA and DESE collaborate to exchange data identifying children in households that receive SNAP and/or TAFDC assistance who attend public schools. This exchange of data is known as direct certification.

As part of the direct certification data exchange process, eligible families receive a notice from the Department in the summer and fall that informs their eligibility for free and/or reduced school meals programs. These notices are available in the Document History in each eligible family's Electronic Case Folder (ECF).

Cross Programs: Confidential Addresses

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-105

This Online Guide Transmittal advises staff about an Online Guide page revision that includes steps to ensure that the addresses of clients in DV shelters and the Address Confidentiality Program are maintained as confidential on the Address page.

SNAP: Overview of the Senior Assistance Office

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-107

A new Senior Assistance Office (SAO) which will be located in the Holyoke TAO is scheduled to open January 8, 2018. Its goal is to decrease access barriers for SNAP seniors. The implementation will occur in phases. System enhancements operationalizing the new business processes for Phase I will follow at a later date. Guidance for all staff will be available prior to the implementation of the system enhancements.

Online Guide Transmittals

SNAP: The Treatment of Certain Payments Made to Clients Participating in Employment and Training Services

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-108

Certain payments made to clients participating in employment and training services such as Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs, Employment Services Program (ESP) or from other state agencies and organizations are disregarded in part when determining a household's eligibility and benefit level.

Payments intended to reimburse education or training-related costs for specific goods or services are noncountable. These payments cannot be in addition to any other payments intended to reimburse the same expense; any duplicate payments provided are countable.

Stipends that are received for employment and training purposes that are not intended to reimburse a specific cost are disregarded in part. The first \$130 of the monthly stipend must be disregarded and the balance treated as countable unearned income.

TAFDC: DOR/CSE Safety Concerns Team

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-109

The purpose of this Transmittal is to advise staff that Department of Revenue Child Support Enforcement (DOR/CSE) has established a Safety Concerns Team for DTA staff to contact for help or questions regarding a TAFDC client who has good cause or other safety concerns related to child support.

SNAP: Updated Reporting Requirements for Change Reporting and Simplified Reporting Households

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-110

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) issued a number of regulatory changes via the finalized rules of the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (Farm Bill of 2008). To bring the Department into compliance with updated SNAP regulations, pages in the Online Guide were revised to reflect federal guidance concerning reporting requirements for Change Reporting and Simplified Reporting households.

Online Guide Transmittals

SNAP: Excluding Combat Pay from Household Income

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-111

SNAP regulation mandates the exclusion of certain combat-related pay from household income. Combat pay earned by a service member while s/he is actively deployed or serving in a Federally-designated combat zone is noncountable for SNAP purposes. This allowance is usually paid in addition to the service member's basic pay. Only the portion of a service member's income that is available to the household may be counted for SNAP purposes.

SNAP: Updates to ABAWD Work Program Exemptions

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-112

This Transmittal advises staff of updated Online Guide content related to ABAWD Work Program (WP) exemptions, including:

- changes to the list of communities waived from ABAWD WP requirement; and
- new criteria for using the 15% exemption.

Cross Programs: State Verification Eligibility System (SVES)

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-113

This Transmittal advises staff of updated Online Guide content related to SVES inquiries, including:

- how cases are impacted by SVES inquiries;
- the period that SSA calculates COLA each year; and
- how to verify RSDI during the SSA COLA calculations.

Online Guide Transmittals

Cross Programs: Outreach to Students

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-114

The Department is committed to supporting residents of Massachusetts in their endeavors towards self-sufficiency. One means of achieving this goal is the pursuit of higher education. As such, the Department has coordinated with external partners to complete targeted outreach to students enrolled in school beyond the secondary level.

Outreach will include a notice informing students that they may be eligible for SNAP if they are in receipt of the MassGrant. The Educational Income and Expense (EDUC-I) form will be included as an insert.

In addition, BEACON will automatically enter a narrative in the case record of all former applicants/clients who were removed from a household as an ineligible student.

Cross Programs: Verification Questions and Answers

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-115

Verifications are the use of documentary evidence, collateral contacts, database information, or self-declaration to establish the accuracy of client's statements. Verification of eligibility factors play a critical role in the timely and accurate delivery of benefits. To support DTA staff's comprehension of the verification process, a VC-I Q and A Online Guide page has been developed that contains examples about what to request, the rationale behind why we request it, and the frequency with which we request verifications.

The purpose of this transmittal is to advise staff of a new page in the Online Guide titled Verification Q and A.

SNAP: Updates to the Application Interview, Dependent Care Expense Deduction, and SNAP Asset Guidelines

Online Guide Transmittal 2017-116

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) issued a number of regulatory changes via the finalized rules of the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (Farm Bill of 2008). To bring the Department into compliance with updated SNAP regulations, pages in the Online Guide were revised to reflect federal guidance on Application Interviews, the Dependent Care Expense Deduction, and SNAP Asset Guidelines.

From the Forms File

New Form

25-020-1217-05

25-021-1217-05 (S)

FA-1 (12/2017)

Financial Assistance Form

The *Financial Assistance Form* has been developed to assist staff with the verification process for contribution income and/or vendor payments. Please refer to Online Guide Transmittal Update 2017-95 for more information. Document Production will send an initial shipment of this form to the TAOs.

Revised Forms

09-320-1217-05

FSPWR-WP-MED (Rev. 12/2017)

SNAP Work Requirement Medical Report

The *ABAWD Work Program Medical Report Form* has been replaced by the *SNAP Work Requirement Medical Report Form* effective 12/8/17. Please refer to Online Guide Transmittal Update 2017-101.

25-160-1217-05

25-161-1217-05 (S)

DTA RFS (Rev. 12/2017)

DTA Registration Face Sheet

The *DTA Registration Face Sheet* has been revised. A question about the need for an ADA accommodation due to a disability was added to the form. Please destroy old versions of this form and use the revised version. Document Production will send an initial shipment of this form to the TAOs.

25-642-1217-05

25-643-1217-05 (S)

CCFS (Rev. 12/2017)

Child Care Fact Sheet

The *Child Care Fact Sheet* has been revised. Refer to Online Guide Transmittal Update 2017-97 for more information. Document Production will send an initial shipment of this form to the TAOs. Please discard old versions of this form and use the revised version.

From the Forms File

Revised Brochure

25-650-1217-05

25-651-1217-05 (S)

EITC-B (Rev. 12/2017)

Earned Income Tax Credit

The *Earned Income Tax Credit* brochure has been revised. Refer to Online Guide Transmittal Update 2017-97 for more information. Document Production will send an initial shipment of this form to the TAOs. Please discard old versions of this brochure and use the revised version.

Obsolete Forms

02-201-0702-05

02-260-0702-05(S)

T-A34/36 (Rev. 10/2014)

Assignment of Support Rights, Cooperation with Child Support, or Good Cause Claim

This form is now obsolete. All existing supplies of the *Assignment of Support Rights, Cooperation with Child Support, or Good Cause Claim* form must be destroyed immediately. Please see Online Guide Transmittal Update 2017-96 for more information.

09-320-0917-05

ABAWD-WP-MED-RPT (Rev. 9/2017)

ABAWD Work Program Requirement Medical Report

This form is obsolete and replaced by *SNAP Work Requirement Medical Report Form* effective 12/8/2017. Please refer to Online Guide Transmittal Update 2017-101.

02-630-0797-05

TP-FCN (7/1997) (E & S)

Family Cap Notice

This form is now obsolete and should be destroyed immediately.

TAO Meeting Notes