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Dear Colleagues:

As you know, the FY12 budget prescribed changes to our policy, including an increase in work participation hours and a reduction in the amount of funding allocated for employment services.

Clothing allowance

During the first few days of September, the Department issued a clothing allowance of \$150 per eligible child in each TAFDC household. This amount is consistent with previous years.

Employment services

The Employment Services Program (ESP) is a joint state and federally funded program to assist TAFDC clients in finding jobs, resolving barriers to employment, and providing a means to self-sufficiency. In the final FY12 budget, we received \$7.1 million for ESP. This is less than half the funding we had in FY11, and a 75% reduction since 2007. We are committed to focusing these limited resources on making the most difference for our clients, and we are targeting programs with the greatest impact, for people with the greatest barriers to self-sufficiency.

The ESP line-item for FY12 includes a number of specific funding requirements, including \$3 million for Competitive Integrated Employment Services (CIES), \$3.1 million for Young Parents Program (YPP), and \$50,000 for DTA Works Internship Program. In addition, there are other requirements to fund transportation, an interagency agreement with the Massachusetts Office for Refugees and Immigrants (MORI), and learning disability assessments, with no specific amounts attached.

For CIES, we are using an outcome-based system to make funding decisions. Providers who achieved employment outcomes for at least 40% of the individuals they have enrolled are being considered for FY2012 contracts, ranging from 50% to 125% of their FY11 contracts. The average employment rate for FY11 was 44%.

We will no longer be offering CIES Models I and IV. Available slots for each provider will be divided equally between Model II and Model III.

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Commissioner's Corner Continued from Page 1

Clients appropriate for Model I, which provided services to individuals with the fewest barriers, will now be referred to the DTA Works Internship Program and *Volunteer to Succeed*, our community service program. Model IV is targeted to clients with the greatest barriers to employment, many of whom are not required to work in order to receive benefits.

For YPP, providers with FY2011 contracts already have partial FY2012 contracts in order to continue working with existing clients. We anticipate contracting with all FY2011 YPP Providers.

Since most of our ESP funding is earmarked for CIES and YPP, we are left with less than \$850,000 to cover more than \$4 million in services. As a result:

- Beginning in October 2011 (for costs incurred in September 2011), the maximum reimbursement for transportation to training programs will be reduced to \$40 per month. We will continue to fund transportation at a maximum of \$80 per month for transportation costs incurred through the end of August 2011.
- We estimate spending \$75,000 for Learning Disability Assessments for FY2012.
- We plan to fund the Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants at \$130,000, which includes Jewish Vocational Services, Lutheran Social Services, and administrative costs.
- We estimate spending \$60,000 for GED testing for clients receiving cash assistance.
- There will be significantly reduced funding available for Vocational Specialists. We are working with the University of Massachusetts' Institute of Community Inclusion to target offices with the greatest need.
- We will no longer be able to fund the following: benefits planning through the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC); Community College skills training programs; assistance with SSI applications from Disability Evaluation Services at UMass; and Project SAFE's five-week pre-employment course.

(Continued on page 3)



Commissioner's Corner Continued from Page 2

Work program hours

Another significant change this fiscal year is an increase to the number of required weekly work participation hours for families whose youngest child is eligible school age (six) or older. As of October 1, 2011, these families will be required to participate in a work program activity for 30 hours per week (previously, the requirement was 24 hours per week). We are planning to release the notice to clients on September 12th and the Operations Memo on September 2nd.

EBT cash restrictions

As part of the budget process, a new law was passed at the end of July that prohibits clients from using their cash assistance benefits (whether on an EBT card or as cash withdrawn from their benefits) for the purchase of alcohol, tobacco, and lottery tickets. If a client is found to have purchased a prohibited item with cash assistance, he or she will be required to reimburse DTA for the cost of that item. There are also penalties for store owners who sell prohibited items to people who pay for them with an EBT card.

In early September, we plan to issue a comprehensive notice to TAFDC clients with details about changes to transportation reimbursements, required work program hours, and EBT cash restrictions. We will issue separate notices to EAEDC clients regarding EBT cash restrictions. We are also calling providers, legislators, and other stakeholders to let them know about these changes.

Thank you for your assistance and patience throughout the budget process, and for the incredible work you do every day.

With much appreciation,

Julia E. Kehoe

Commissioner

Quality Corner

This month, we will review two errors. The first error was caused by unreported earnings while the second error (negative error) was caused by an invalid denial.

Earnings and BEACON Match

The first case is a non-public assistance (NPA) SNAP household of one adult. The client received \$712 in RSDI and \$96 in SSI benefits each month. The client reported rent of \$575 per month and was eligible for the heating/cooling SUA. At the most recent recertification, the case was certified as Change Reporting with a certification period of March 2011 through October 2011.

The QC reviewer determined that the client had been working since August 2010 and had earnings in the amount of \$337.97 per month. The client did not report this income at recertification or at any time during the certification period. The unreported income caused an overissuance error of \$77 for the review month.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Matches must be checked at recertification. If the outstanding matches in BEACON had been dispositioned prior to the recertification of the case, the error could have been avoided. Two quarterly matches were available in BEACON. Neither of the matches was acted on prior to recertification. For more information on preventing errors, refer to Quality Corner in *Transitions* of February 2008, entitled "Keys to Preventing Errors."

Invalid Denial: Interview and Notice of Missed Interview

The second error is an invalid denial. The client was late submitting the semiannual recertification form.

The certification period had ended on April 6, 2011. The client subsequently submitted a reapplication form on April 25, 2011. On April 26, a verification checklist requesting proof of residency was mailed to the client. A denial letter was sent on May 25, 2011.

The QC reviewer found no evidence in the case record or in BEACON that an interview had taken place. There was also no Notice of Missed Interview (NOMI) which would have indicated that a scheduled interview had been missed.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

In recent months, a number of the invalid denial of applications or negative errors have been caused by applications being denied without an interview and applications being denied for missing the first interview but without a NOMI being sent to the client.

Case managers are reminded that if the client can not be reached by phone Day 1, an appointment letter for a telephone interview must be sent through BEACON by Day 2. If the client misses the first scheduled interview, a NOMI must be completed manually and sent to the client as soon as possible but no later than two days after the date of the missed interview. See Field Operations Memo 2007-16 for more information of the SNAP application appointment letters and the NOMI.

Field Operations Memo 2007-39, and Field Operations Memo 2008-59 contains detailed information about negative errors. More recently, Operations Memo 2011-38 reiterated the importance of the application interview which is a requirement for SNAP.

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 has been on Annual Reporting for the past few years. Today she called the TAO and reported that her two sons had moved out of her house. Should I indicate this change on BEACON?
- A.** Yes. The action to remove a dependent for nonfinancial reasons may be completed on BEACON at any time during this client's 12-month Annual Reporting period. In this particular client's situation, the reported change will only affect her SNAP benefit level if:
- the total gross income from any remaining household members exceeds the new household eligibility income limit, thereby closing the case; or
 - the calculation results in a benefit increase. When the calculation results in an increase, the information used in the calculation is released and the increased benefit amount is paid to the client.
- Q.** My SNAP client is on Annual Reporting as a single individual. He is moving to Texas and wants his case closed. As a one-person Annual Reporting household, can I close this entire case?
- A.** Yes, you must close this case. An Annual Reporting household may be closed for a nonfinancial reason at any time during the 12-month AR period.
- Q.** My SNAP client is currently unemployed and receives a small, monthly pension. Recently, she asked about deducting dependent care expenses from her unearned income because she is incurring these expenses while looking and interviewing for jobs. She is a single grandparent with a one-year-old grandson. Can I deduct this expense from her income?
- A.** Yes. Dependent care expenses are an acceptable deduction in SNAP for earned as well as unearned income. The costs associated with the care of this grandchild may be deducted so that your client may accept or continue employment. See 106 CMR 364.400(D) for more information.
- Q.** My TAFDC client is not work program required, but is requesting a child care referral so that he can look for work. Can I make this referral?
- A.** Yes. As long as this grantee has an approved EDP and appropriately completes his *ESP Participation and Attendance Record*, ESP-7, the child care referral should be approved. See 106 CMR 207.210(A) for more information on approving child care referrals.
- Q.** My TAFDC client is engaged in self-directed Job Search/Job Readiness. She does this at the local career center. Can I authorize a transportation reimbursement?
- A.** Yes, clients with an approved EDP, who are in a self-directed Job Search/Job Readiness component and have an appropriately completed *ESP Participation and Attendance Record*, ESP-7, may be eligible for transportation reimbursement. See 106 CMR 207.210(B) for more information.

Operations Memos

TAFDC – FY '12 Budget: Transportation Payments Reduction

TAFDC

Operations Memo 2011-39

Due to the Fiscal Year '12 state budget reduction in the Employment Services Program, the Department is reducing transportation payments for all clients. The maximum transportation reimbursement payment will be \$40 monthly. This change is effective for October's reimbursement of September's costs and any previous months' costs not reimbursed prior to October 1.

The purpose of this Operations Memo is to advise TAO staff about this change.

TAFDC – Clothing Allowance, September 2011

TAFDC

Operations Memo 2011-40

Operations Memo 2011-40A

The Department will issue a nonrecurring clothing allowance of \$150 per eligible TAFDC client under the age of 19 for September 2011.

The purpose of Operations Memo 2011-40 is to remind TAO staff about:

- who is eligible for the clothing allowance and the amount clients will receive;
- payment dates; and
- how September applications are processed.

Operations Memo 2011-40A was issued to correct erroneous dates found on page 3. It obsoleted Operations Memo 2011-40.

Operations Memos

TAFDC and EAEDC – Limitations on Use of Cash Benefits

TAFDC and EAEDC

Operations Memo 2011-41

On July 28, 2011 the Legislature passed and the Governor signed a law which prohibits:

- DTA cash clients from using any direct cash assistance received from the Department to purchase alcoholic beverages, lottery tickets and tobacco products;
- stores from selling alcoholic beverages, lottery tickets and tobacco products to DTA cash clients using electronic benefit cards for these purchases. Store owners caught making these sales are subject to fines;
- anyone from embezzling, stealing or fraudulently obtaining DTA funds, assets or property. Anyone who receives, conceals or retains such property for his or her own interest knowing that it has been embezzled, stolen or obtained by fraud is subject to criminal penalties.

Welfare fraud is also prosecuted under previously existing statutes.

The purpose of this Operations Memo is to advise:

- TAO staff about the new law;
- case managers about their responsibilities with respect to the new law; and
- case managers about revised forms.

TAFDC – FY '12 Budget: Increased Work Participation Hours

TAFDC

Operations Memo 2011-42

The Fiscal Year '12 state budget increases clients' work program requirement from 24 hours per week to 30 hours per week if their youngest child is between mandatory full-time school age and eight years old.

This Operations Memo informs case managers:

- about the Work Program requirement changes;
- how to process nonexempt clients impacted by these changes; and
- how to process new applications as of October 1, 2011.



Operations Memos

SNAP – Annual Reporting Process Phase Two: The Interim Reporting Process

SNAP

Operations Memo 2011-43

This Operations Memo advises Department staff that the Interim Report, which is Phase Two of the Annual Reporting (AR) process, has been programmed into BEACON as of September 12, 2011. Beginning the week of September 12th, the first Interim Reports were sent to NPA households currently on AR. Changes reported on the Interim Report (IR) must be acted on for the remaining six months of certification; however no interview is required unless the information provided is questionable or contradictory to prior information reported by the household.

The memo also introduces the Interim Report form and a new BEACON “No Change” functionality that allows the case manager to immediately wrap-up a case that reports no change in household circumstances.

SNAP: Household Misfortune Related to Hurricane Irene

SNAP

Operations Memo 2011-44

This Operations Memo reminds staff about the SNAP household misfortune benefit clients could access in the wake of recent hurricane damage to many areas of the state. The memo also outlines household misfortune rules and the situations in which clients would be eligible for replacement.

FYI

EAEDC Refugee SSI Terminations

FO Memo 2009-59 had advised TAO staff that the “SSI Extension for Elderly and Disabled Refugees Act” temporarily extended SSI eligibility for certain noncitizens, from seven years to nine years. The law is expiring on September 30, 2011. As result, it is expected that 216 individuals statewide will have their SSI benefits terminated. Accordingly, there may be an increase in EAEDC applications. Please process these applications following the EAEDC application standards.



From the Forms File

New Poster

25-425-0911-05

25-426-0911-05

EBT LAW Poster (9/2011)

New Law – EBT Poster

The EBT Law poster must be displayed in every TAO until further notice. This poster informs our applicants and clients about the new law passed on July 28, 2011 that makes it unlawful to buy certain items with cash benefits. Refer to Operations Memo 2011-41 for more information.

Revised Form

15-120-0811-05

IRF (Rev. 8.2011)

Interpreter Request Form

Instructions for completing the *Interpreter Request Form* (IRF) have been updated. The IRF is available in the Online forms section of Policy Online. Be sure to use the revised version of the IRF.

Diversity Quote

“Never do things others can do and will do, if there are things others cannot do or will not do.”

Amelia Earhart

TAO Meeting Notes