



Transitions

September 2013

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Dear Colleagues,

Over the past few weeks we have continued to implement strong initiatives to help improve client services and enhance program integrity. We are continuing to focus more on providing healthy eating alternatives and opportunities for our clients.

You may remember that last month I met with a company called the Fresh Truck, which is a “mobile healthy food market, serving up Boston neighborhoods with fresh and affordable fruits, vegetables, whole grains and other healthy food options.” Their mission aligns with our goal of helping clients eat healthier at a lower cost. The Fresh Truck received its EBT terminal and is now accepting EBT/SNAP benefits. We are happy to announce that starting next week on Oct. 1; the Fresh Truck will be parked at our New Market office every Tuesday afternoon between 2:30 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. We hope our clients will take advantage of this convenient access to top quality, discounted produce.

We have also been working with museums across the Commonwealth in an effort to establish discounted admission rates for EBT card holders. This will be a great opportunity for clients and their families to experience a culturally and educationally stimulating experience at an affordable price.

We have continued our series of Farmers Market tours with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, and the Executive Office of Elder Services. So far, I have traveled to Belmont and Westfield to promote healthy eating choices and the many programs our clients can take advantage of farmer’s markets across the Commonwealth. Our department is taking the lead on an event at the Ashmont Farmer’s Market in Dorchester on Oct. 4, 2013.

Thank you for your continued hard work and passion for the Department and our clients– I appreciate all your efforts.

Sincerely,



Stacey Monahan

Commissioner

If you have any comments or feedback, please feel free to contact me at

Stacey.Monahan@state.ma.us.

Quality Corner

This month we will review an error that was caused by unresolved match information. We will also review a negative error.

Earnings Not Reported at Interim Report Displayed on Earned Income Match

This NPA SNAP household included two parents and four children. At reapplication, the case was certified as Annual Reporting (AR) from July 2011 through July 2012. The client reported monthly earnings for the other parent's primary job in the amount of \$2,601.85. The client also provided a letter from the other parent's second job stating that he had been out of work from June 10, 2011 and would be out until September 3, 2011. An Interim Report (IR) was sent to the client on November 22, 2011. The IR was returned on December 5, 2011 indicating no change except for an increase in rent.

Quality Control determined that the client failed to report on the IR that the other parent had returned to work at his second job in September, earning a monthly gross of \$1,259. In addition, the client had also failed to report that in September 2011 the other parent had an increase in earnings to \$2,950 per month from his first job. The increase in earnings for the first job and the unreported earnings from the second job caused an overissuance in the amount of \$404 for the review month.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Although the client failed to report the other parent's earnings on the IR, the error could have been prevented if the DOR Wage Matches that appeared in BEACON had been processed. The matches were available in BEACON on November 14, 2011 prior to processing of the IR.

Since the case manager was informed at reapplication that the other parent had been on leave from his second job and would continue to be out until September, the case manager should have followed up at IR and inquired into whether or not the other parent had returned to his second job as noted at reapplication. Case managers must check the Match History tab at application, reapplication and recertification before submitting a case for sign-off. This practice aids in preventing payment errors.

Invalid Closing or Negative Error

This NPA SNAP household consisted of a 23-year-old client and her spouse. The case was certified as Annual Reporting (AR) with a certification period from December 14, 2011 to December 13, 2012. An Interim Report (IR) was sent to the client on April 30, 2012 and was to be returned by May 15, 2012. The report was returned by the client prior to the return-by date. The Interim Report was initiated in the Reevaluation page of BEACON. The client was mailed a *Thank You* notice on May 10, 2012 acknowledging receipt of the Interim Report. On the Interim Report, the client reported no changes. The NPA SNAP case closed on June 13, 2012 for failure to complete an Interim Report. Quality Control (QC) determined that this was an invalid closing or negative error because the client had returned the Interim Report on time.

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Quality Corner *(Continued from Page 2)*

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Case managers must not delay the processing of an IR or reevaluation to ensure that clients who submit their IRs or recertification timely are guaranteed uninterrupted SNAP benefits. Case managers and supervisors must monitor and track timeliness when completing recertifications and Interim Reports. There are several views and reports available to assist case managers and supervisors in prioritizing recertifications and Interim Reports. The most comprehensive is the *Reevaluation Status Detail Report* available in Actuate. For more information on prioritizing SNAP recertifications and processing the Interim Reports, see Operations Memo 2011-43 and Operations Memo 2011-8A.

From the Forms File

Revised Brochure

How to Get SNAP Benefits

09-075-1013-05

09-076-1013-05(S)

SNAP-BB (Rev. 10/2013)

The **SNAP Income Standards** chart in the *How to Get SNAP Benefits* (SNAP-BB) brochure has been updated. Please discard old versions of this brochure and use the revised version.

Revised Inserts

Community Information - How may we help you? Inserts

25-666-1013-05 (Cambodian/Khmer) (Rev. 10/2013)

25-677-1013-05 (Chinese) (Rev. 10/2013)

25-660-1013-05 (English) (Rev. 10/2013)

25-661-1013-05 (Spanish) (Rev. 10/2013)

25-662-1013-05 (Portuguese) (Rev. 10/2013)

25-663-1013-05 (Haitian Creole) (Rev. 10/2013)

25-664-1013-05 (Vietnamese) (Rev. 10/2013)

25-665-1013-05 (Russian) (Rev. 10/2013)

The *Community Information* (CI-DTA) *Income Eligibility Charts* have been revised. Please discard old versions of these Inserts and distribute the revised versions with the *Community Information* (CI-DTA) brochure.



Training Corner

How to Calculate a Prorated Supplemental Benefit for SNAP

When a client reports a change to a case manager that results in an increase in benefits, the case manager should review regulations at 106 CMR 366.120(A) to determine if this increase requires an expedited action. The following example shows how to calculate a prorated supplemental benefit.

Example: A SNAP client with an SSN ending in 8 reports on September 5th that his 11-year-old son is now living with him. This information is not processed until September 19th. The addition of this new household member to the case increased the family's SNAP benefit from \$173 to \$285 a month.

Calculating a supplement:

Step 1: Calculate the difference between the old and new monthly benefit allotment.

$$\$285 - \$173 = \$112$$

Step 2: Multiply the monthly allotment difference by twelve (months in the year) to determine the yearly allotment difference.

$$\$112 \times 12 = \$1344$$

Step 3: Divide the yearly allotment difference by 365 (number of days in the year) to determine the daily benefit difference.

$$\$1344 / 365 = \$3.68$$

Step 4: Multiply the daily difference by the number of days the client is owed a supplement (rounding to the nearest dollar amount).

$$\$3.68 \times 38 \text{ days (9/5- 10/12)} = \$140$$

Important: After entering the correct supplemental amount owed, as well as the start and end date for the supplemental period in the related benefit page (above), it is important to leave a detailed narrative that shows how this related benefit amount was calculated.

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 and SNAP client's name appears on the Out-of-State EBT Card Usage view. Do I take action on BEACON to close this case?

A. 1. No. Your TAFDC and SNAP client's name appears on the Match History tab because Central Office has been monitoring his out-of-state EBT usage. When an EBT transaction occurs exclusively out of state, BEACON will indicate if the transaction occurred In Region (Vermont, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Maine, New York), or Out of Region (all remaining states). Before any actual automated closing can occur, Central Office sends a Residency Verification notice to SNAP-only clients. A standard EBC closing notice for 'No longer MA resident' would later be issued on any automated TAFDC or SNAP closing.

Note: TAFDC and EAEDC clients may be absent for up to 60 days for certain pre-approved reasons. Remember to enter any verified and approved reason on the Temporary Absence page. If a valid, current reason has been verified and entered into BEACON, the centralized case closing will not occur. For more information on acceptable temporary absences from the Commonwealth, refer to 106 CMR 203.660.

For more details on the Out-of-State EBT Card Usage match and FIDM activities related to out-of-state EBT usage, refer to Operations Memo 2013-34.

Q. 2. My TAFDC and SNAP client's name appears on the Match History tab for out-of-state EBT card usage. What action should I be taking, if any?

A. 2. It depends on the circumstances.

- If the client provides verification of residency to the TAO timely, disposition the Out-of-State EBT Card Usage match and annotate the Narrative tab to prevent a case closing.
- If the client provides verification of residency to the TAO after an automated case closing has been initiated, disposition the match and if still pending to release, remember to remove the closing. If the closing has already released, process the case according to existing procedures.
- If the client does not verify residency in Massachusetts, an automated closing will occur.

Reminder: Verification of residency in Massachusetts should not be limited to any one specific type of document. Refer to Operations Memo 2010-55, 106 CMR 361.640(A) and 106 CMR 702.340 for more details.

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From the Hotline *(Continued from Page 5)*

- Q. 3.** My TAFDC and SNAP client's name appeared on the Match History tab for out-of-state EBT card usage. Today, this same client brought in a copy of his child's school enrollment. He provided this verification of Massachusetts residency 31 days after the TAFDC and SNAP closings. Can I reinstate this case on BEACON?
- A. 3.** No, since the Massachusetts residency was verified 31 days after the closing, the TAFDC and SNAP benefits cannot be reinstated. This client must reapply for both programs and the benefits must be determined based on the reapplication date.

For more information, refer to 106 CMR 702.150 in the TAFDC Program, and 106 CMR 364.650 in SNAP.

Operations Memos

TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP - Temporary Protective Status (TPS)

Extension for El Salvador

All

Operations Memo 2013-44

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) may designate a foreign country for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) because conditions in that country temporarily prevent its nationals from returning safely. TPS is a temporary immigration status, authorized under Section 244 of the Immigration and Naturalization Act (INA) granted by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). It allows nationals of a designated country to remain in the U.S., and work for a limited time period. This Operations Memo:

- advises staff about the extension of TPS for El Salvador;
- reminds TAO staff about eligibility for foreign nationals with TPS; and
- reminds TAO staff about how to enter INA designation information in BEACON for El Salvador nationals with TPS and of resource materials available for noncitizens.

TAFDC and EAEDC - Verifications

TAFDC and EAEDC

Operations Memo 2013-47

To establish eligibility for assistance, applicants and clients must submit verifications, as required by policy, to demonstrate that they meet financial and nonfinancial eligibility factors. This Operations Memo:

- informs case managers about procedures for recording efforts to obtain documentary and collateral verifications before accepting self-declarations;
- reminds staff about client responsibilities in obtaining required verifications; and,
- reminds staff about the Department's obligations to assist applicants and clients in obtaining required verifications.

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Operations Memos *(Continued from Page 7)*

TAFDC and EAEDC – BEACON Changes: Screening for Chronic Mismanagement of Funds

TAFDC and EAEDC
Operations Memo 2013-48

State law requires the Department to provide cash benefits in the form of vendor payments, for housing and utility payments, when a determination is made that the TAFDC or EAEDC grant has not been used in the best interest of the child, or the assistance unit, or that other chronic misuse of benefits is occurring. The purpose of this Operations Memo is to advise TAO staff about:

- the screening process to determine potential cash mismanagement in BEACON;
- the referral process to an Housing Consumer Education Center (HCEC) in BEACON; and
- when to place clients on vendor payments and when vendor payments may be terminated.

TAFDC – Automating the Learnfare Process

TAFDC
Operations Memo 2013-49

TAFDC Learnfare requires that any child of a nondisabled grantee who is age six (or in first grade, whichever occurs later) through age 13 must attend school regularly. Verification of attendance must be obtained for any child who is subject to the Learnfare requirement. To comply with Learnfare rules, a child may not have more than eight unexcused absences in each quarter. (See 106 CMR 203.900 for Learnfare policy.)

DTA has a process to track school enrollment and attendance to meet the Learnfare requirement, that has been dependent on Mainframe, PC systems and manual tracking (including mailing reports to schools and letters to grantees) to collect absentee information to then be processed by Central Office.

DTA is automating the Learnfare tracking process on BEACON by working with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to enhance the transfer of enrollment and attendance data more accurately. The purpose of this Operations Memo is to advise DTA staff about:

- a mailing to grantees whose children do not have current school information entered on BEACON, requesting the updated information;
- new reports regarding the mailing, Learnfare Probation and other Learnfare reports;
- how to process the returned school information;
- how to treat cases when the school information is not returned;
- BEACON changes;
- the automated Learnfare tracking process;
- case manager responsibilities in conjunction with the automation; and
- Learnfare intervention.

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Operations Memos *(Continued from Page 8)*

SNAP Cost-of-Living Changes and Initial Communication Regarding November Benefit Decrease

SNAP

Operations Memo 2013-51

The annual SNAP COLA was processed during the weekend of September 21, 2013. This is a mass change affecting the entire SNAP caseload. This recalculation impacts the household's monthly benefit for October.

The COLA will cause the following elements to change effective October 1, 2013.

Shelter Deduction - The maximum shelter deduction (for households without an elderly or disabled member) **has increased to \$478.**

Standard Deduction - The Standard Deduction has increased for all Household Sizes, as follows:

AU Size	Old Standard Deduction	New Standard Deduction
1	149	152
2	149	152
3	149	152
4	160	163
5	187	191
AU size 6 or more	214	219

Standard Utility Allowances (SUAs)

- The Heating/Cooling SUA will **increase from \$586 to \$608;**
- The Nonheating SUA will **increase from \$360 to \$374;**
- The Phone SUA will **increase from \$41 to \$43;** and
- The Bay State CAP SUA will **increase from \$586 to \$608.**

Unchanged COLA Standards

- **Maximum Benefit Levels** - The maximum SNAP benefit levels for all household sizes **remain unchanged until October 31, 2013.**
- **Minimum Benefit Level** - The minimum benefit level for eligible one - and two-person households **remains at \$16 until October 31, 2013.**
- **Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction** - The Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction remains at **\$143.**

Attachment A includes a series of eligibility tables with the updated COLA standards.

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Operations Memos *(Continued from Page 9)*

Update to Eligibility Charts and Issuance Tables

All necessary updates will be made to the eligibility charts and issuance tables at the www.mass.gov/dta website by October 1, 2013.

ARRA Public Information Materials

In preparation for the decrease in SNAP benefits that will occur on November 1, the following materials informing clients of this change are included with this memo:

Attachment B – Poster: This poster will be available in English and Spanish. It must be displayed in TAO waiting rooms and SNAP rooms.

Attachment C – Flyer: This flyer will be available in English and Spanish. It must be distributed to all DTA clients by clerical staff and case managers. Copies may be provided to clients in TAO waiting rooms.

Attachment D – Website Language: This information may be viewed on DTA's Internet home page. A link is included that provides a Q & A document and other materials from USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS).

FYI

Fuel Assistance 2013

The Fuel Assistance Program begins accepting applications for fuel assistance on November 1, 2013.

TAOs will receive a supply of Fuel Assistance brochures in October for clients who are interested in applying for fuel assistance and in how the program works. The brochure will also be available on our website at www.mass.gov/dta.

The Department no longer mails income verification letters or Fuel Assistance brochures to clients. Clients can obtain income verification letters to submit with their Fuel Assistance application in the following ways:

- Clients may use their “My Account Page” (MAP) screen, which displays their case information. For more information on how clients can access MAP, see Field Operations Memo 2010-6 and Operations Memo 2012-41.
- Clients may use the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) telephone number to request an income verification letter. The IVR telephone number is 1-877-382-2363, and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Clients will receive an income verification letter within five days at the mailing address identified in BEACON.
- Clients may visit a TAO to request an income verification letter. Clients who visit a TAO to request an income verification letter must receive the letter before leaving the TAO. Clients who telephone their case managers requesting an income verification letter should be directed to use the IVR telephone number or to access MAP to print out their case information.

Each TAO was previously sent a poster advertising the availability of income verification letters through the IVR telephone number and MAP. Contact Schrafft's if a new poster is needed in your office.

FYI

Repayment History Letter

Effective with BEACON Build 45.8 which was deployed on September 16, 2013, the Recoveries Unit will be able to generate a Repayment History letter for those clients requesting verification of repayments they made for benefit overpayments. These letters will include:

- the benefit type(s) that was overpaid;
- the obligation and account number(s) for the overpayment(s);
- the total amount of the overpayments;
- the date each repayment made; and
- the amount of each repayment.

This letter also informs clients about any outstanding amounts that must be paid back to DTA.

These letters will be available in the client's Document History. Case managers cannot generate this letter. If a client has questions or wants to request a Repayment History letter, he or she should call the Recoveries Unit at 1-800-462-2607.

Diversity Quote

Human diversity makes tolerance more than a virtue; it makes it a requirement for survival.

René Dubos

TAO Meeting Notes