

Transitions

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this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

In February I wrote to you about some planned changes in the Emergency Assistance program, particularly the introduction of the Self-Sufficiency Plan currently being piloted in several offices. I remain convinced of the importance of the Self-Sufficiency Plan and of the coordination of all individuals and groups involved in assisting homeless families. I am particularly concerned about homeless families whom we are forced to place in motels because we lack sufficient family shelter capacity. Families placed in Department-funded shelters have the benefit of professional staff and a variety of programs to help the family end its homelessness. Although families placed in motels have housing search services available to them, they unfortunately lack most of the other structured assistance available to families in shelters. That is one reason that I am so insistent that we work hard to move families from motels to family shelters as quickly as possible.

I meet on a regular basis with central office staff to review the situation of families who have been sheltered in motels for more than 30 days. One thing has become clear to me as a result of these meetings: many of these families have a variety of issues, ranging from substance abuse to mental health issues to domestic violence, which result in their involvement with multiple state agencies. Frequently, these agencies, including DTA, act independently of one another. The result for the family can be that services provided by these agencies are not coordinated. This lack of coordination concerns me because it results in a family – at its most vulnerable point – perhaps receiving less than the best assistance possible. I

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From the Hotline

- Q. Do I need to make a referral to DOR for a child born after the family cap date?
- A. Yes. You must make a referral to DOR for a child born after the family cap date and you must include the following two forms: (1) CA/CS: Absent Parent Information, unless good cause exists, and (2) T-A34/36: Assignment of Support Rights to assign medical rights to the Commonwealth.
- Q. I have an applicant applying for TAFDC with a specially equipped van for her child who is in a wheel chair. How do I determine the asset value of the van?
- A. To determine the countable fair market value, disregard the first \$10,000 of fair market value. To determine the equity value, subtract the balance of any liens or legal encumbrances from the full fair market value of the vehicle and disregard the first \$5,000 of equity. If there is an excess in both the fair market value and the equity value, only the excess which is the greater amount is counted toward the asset limit. The value of the vehicle is not increased by any special apparatus or other optional equipment for the handicapped. See 106 CMR 204.120(G).



TAFDC and EAEDC: Limitation on Program Eligibility

TAFDC, EAEDC State Letter 1202

- An individual is ineligible for TAFDC and EAEDC if he or she has an outstanding default or arrest warrant against him or her issued by any court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
- Technical corrections were made to 106 CMR 321.240 and 106 CMR 150.210.
- Option Code W and Action Reason 96 (Policy Online - Systems Procedures PID Codes and Action Reasons) were updated to reflect this change.

BEACON Stress Test II

All Field Operations Memo 2001-13

This Field Operations Memo informs TAO Staff about the BEACON Stress Test that took place on March 14, 2001 which evaluated response time, user capacity and time needed to complete various activities on BEACON for TAO and Central Office Staff.

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Customer Service Center

All Field Operations Memo 2001-17

- This Field Operations Memo updates the process to receive and respond to BEACON Release 2.0 issues.
- The responsibilities of the BEACON Action Center have been assumed by the Customer Service Center. All BEACON Release 2.0 issues, bugs, unresolved conversion problems and other issues are now called into the Customer Service Center (Help Desk) at (617) 348-5290 by the Implementation Manager.
- Field Operations Memo 2001-11 is obsolete.

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raised this concern to the Executive Office of Health and Human Services and with their support a Multi-Agency Action Team (MAAT) has been formed. In addition to DTA, the team consists of staff from the Department of Public Health FOR Families program, Department of Social Services, Department of Mental Health, Department of Education and Department of Housing and Community Development. Other agencies, such as the Division of Medical Assistance and the Department of Mental Retardation may be asked to join the team on an as-needed basis.

The details of how MAAT will operate are being finalized but the broad purpose is to bring together all state agencies working with a particular family to produce a coordinated effort ensuring all appropriate services are provided. Equally important is making sure that all agencies are working together to move the family from a motel to a family shelter, or hopefully, to permanent housing. FOR Families will take the lead in bringing the various agencies together and will be scheduling case conferences at the DTA office (or a mutually convenient location) which is responsible for the family. I do not expect that MAAT will produce miracles. But I am excited about seeing a variety of state agencies brought together with a shared goal – to look at the family as a whole and to determine how best to work with that family to address both homelessness and other issues they may be facing.

You will hear more about MAAT in the future, particularly if you or your office serves a number of homeless families sheltered in motels. As in so many things, I know that your enthusiasm and your concern for these families will guarantee that DTA plays a key role in the MAAT process and that, with our sister agencies, we will better serve families in need.

Sincerely,



Claire McIntire
Commissioner

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 002

All

Chapter III: Eligibility Explorer Tabs - Section D: Verifications

- An example has been added to show the relationship between data entered and verifications listed on the Verification Tab.

Chapter XI: Work Requirements - Section B: TAFDC Work Requirements

- An expanded explanation of the TAFDC Work Program Requirement Tab includes the functionality of marking the status of grantees and dependents either Work Program required or Non-Work Program required. It also lists the reasons for the chosen status.

Chapter XIII: Assessed Person Nonfinancial Statement - Section C: Teen Parent

- The Department of Public Health Referral Form (Teen Parent Referral) (DPH-REF-2) must be completed by the Teen Parent Liaison or Specialist when referring the Teen Parent to the Department of Public Health for outreach services.

Chapter XIII: Assessed Person Nonfinancial Statement - Section G: Absence

- The references in Chapter XIII, Section G for entering child support income information have been changed to Chapter XIV, Section D, Other Income.

Chapter XV: Assessed Person Asset Statement - Section B: Assets

- The term "NOW" accounts has been removed from the *Liquid Assets* window. NOW accounts should be listed as checking accounts.

Chapter XVI: Program Administration - Section C: Benefit Issuance Mechanism

- If a recipient requests direct deposit, select the account and institution from the "Institution Information" dropdown list which contains information only on checking and savings

accounts listed in the *Liquid Assets* window. The information will not appear in the "Institution Information" dropdown list if the information in the *Liquid Assets* window: (a) is neither a checking nor a savings account, (b) is not yet verified or (c) is missing.

- A two-day process is required to change an institution or account for direct deposit. On day one, if not already there, the institution and account must be added to the *Liquid Assets* window, and the "No" radio button for direct deposit must be selected. On day two, the "Yes" button for direct deposit must be selected and the institution and account must be selected from the "Institution Information" dropdown list.

FYI

TAO Merger

The Newmarket Square Homeless Unit merged with the Newmarket Square Transitional Assistance Office (TAO 425). The Policy Online, Systems Procedures, Service Area Listing (Appendix D) has been updated to reflect this change.

Temporary MassHealth Cards for TAFDC and EAEDC Applicants and Recipients

TAFDC, EAEDC Field Operations Memo 2001- 15

- This Field Operations Memo clarifies when and how to issue temporary MassHealth cards.
- The two types of temporary MassHealth cards are:
 - the MASS REVS screen print that is used as a temporary replacement of a lost or stolen MassHealth card for an active TAFDC or EAEDC recipient, and
 - the blue and white, pre-printed “Temporary MassHealth Card” that is used as a temporary initial MassHealth card for a TAFDC or EAEDC applicant who has not yet been approved, but who is in a pending status, i.e., established on PACES with Action Reason 03.
- Field Operations Memo 94-35 is obsolete.

FYI

236 or 221D3 Housing Subsidy: Eligibility for EA Temporary Emergency Shelter Benefits and Rental Allowance

When a recipient is evicted for nonpayment of rent from an apartment for which the landlord received a 236 or 221D3 project-based federal subsidy, it is necessary to obtain additional information before determining whether the recipient may be eligible to receive emergency shelter.

The federal subsidy the landlord received to build the housing complex is irrelevant to the recipient’s request for EA shelter benefits.

You must determine if the recipient has a housing subsidy (Section 8, JOBLink, etc.) or if the rent amount is based on a percentage of the household’s income. Not all tenants (recipients and others in their household) have a housing subsidy while living in the 236 or 221D3 project-based housing and the rental amount may not be based on a percentage of the household’s income.

- If the recipient or someone sharing the housing costs has a housing subsidy or the rental amount is based on a percentage of the household’s income, the recipient is not eligible for temporary emergency shelter benefits because of eviction from subsidized housing for nonpayment of rent.
- If the recipient or someone sharing the housing costs does not have a subsidy or the rental amount is not based on a percentage of the household’s income, the recipient, if otherwise eligible, may receive temporary emergency shelter benefits because he or she was not evicted from subsidized housing.

Note: While living in 236 or 221D3 housing:

- if the recipient has a subsidy or the rental amount is based on a percentage of the household’s income, the recipient is not eligible for the rent allowance;
- if the recipient does not have a subsidy or the rental amount is not based on a percentage of the household’s income, the recipient is eligible for the rent allowance.

See 106 CMR 309.040(B)(3) and 705.910.

Quality Corner

During the most recent federal fiscal year (October 1999 to September 2000), the food stamp error rate was initially very high because of errors in correctly allotting federal and state food stamp benefits, but hard work by all units lowered it by the end of the year. We believed we had corrected the problem of noncitizens and state-funded food stamp benefits. Unfortunately, this year, to date, we have seen an increase in these errors. Several of these errors are reviewed below.

Right, Then Wrong

A mother and her three children were correctly allocated between federal and state food stamp benefits, with the children on federal stamps and the mother on SSFSP. Her case closed on December 1, 2000 and was reopened on December 2, 2000 as one AU of four. Incorrectly including the mother and not prorating her wages, rent and utility costs or the child support she received directly created an overpayment. Her lack of 40 quarters was clear on PRISM making her case correct before closing. Though the PID included a comment about SSFSP, it was never coded for SSFSP nor was the mother coded SSFSP on the dependent file.

No Noncitizen Information

The head of the AU entered the country in 1994. While the Quality Control reviewer saw her alien registration card during the home visit, no copy was in the case record. With no information on PRISM about citizenship or noncitizen status, there was no SSA match for 40 quarters. Since she entered in 1994, she would not likely have 40 quarters on her own. The head of the AU was not removed from the federal food stamp benefits and no proration was done, resulting in an error.

Transcription Error

The third case involved a father included incorrectly in the food stamp AU. The father was not eligible as an AU member, and lacked the work quarter history to be an exception. Because he was incorrectly included in the AU, no proration was done and the resulting food stamp allotment was too high.

Parolee Errors

Quality Control also found two parolee errors. The first was a parolee dependent under 18 years, on federal food stamp benefits, who entered

the country after August 22, 1996. Since this parolee would only have been eligible for federal food stamp benefits if entering the country before August 22, 1996, this was a Quality Control error. The second Quality Control error was a parolee who was neither elderly/disabled nor under 18 years old, therefore ineligible as a parolee for federal food stamp benefits.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

Each of these errors occurred after the training on noncitizen eligibility and AU proration. Each also occurred after the extensive case record reviews done last spring and summer. Each resulted in a problem we thought had been corrected.

While we cannot repeat the training and desk review instructions here, be sure to follow the instructions in Field Operations Memo 2000-18 for properly including members in the federal food stamp AU. When one or more members are removed, some proration must be done for the number of households that exist.

PRISM can be a valuable tool about appropriate quarters, but may not include all relevant information. Upon reopening a case, a thorough review of the circumstances of prior cases should always be done while paying special attention to cases

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containing individuals not born in the United States. Be sure to carefully apply the policy from the training and the Field Operations Memos.

TAFDC and EA Changes Due to the Increase in the Federal Poverty Level

TAFDC, EA State Letter 1203

This State Letter transmits changes to the regulations due to the increase in the Federal Poverty Level.

- The amount of income available from the parent(s) of a teen parent under age 18 to the teen parent's filing unit is based on 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.
- To be eligible for Emergency Assistance, the assistance unit's income must be equal to or less than the EA Eligibility Standard, which is based on 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

DEFRA February Food Stamp Benefit Errors

FS

Field Operations Memo 2001-14

- Due to a systems problem, the January DEFRA checks received by TAFDC recipients were not applied as unearned income to affect their February food stamp benefits. Only TAFDC recipients with CAT 9 food stamp cases were calculated correctly.
- Two reports identify the recipients who were underpaid or overpaid:
 - the *DEFRA February Food Stamps Underpayment* report, dated 3/14/2001; and
 - the *DEFRA February Food Stamps Overpayment* report, dated 3/14/2001.
- MIS has corrected the underpayments. The AU Manager must correct the overpayments. The AU Manager must confirm that the recipients on the *DEFRA February Food Stamps Overpayment* report got an overpayment in their February food stamp benefits. Then complete the RFI-OP-1 form indicating a Department error, food stamp overpayment in February and complete the *AR Referral Folder* window in BEACON to indicate that an overpayment has occurred. See *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter II, Section E for instructions.

Food Stamp Program - Increased Maximum Excess Shelter Deduction

FS

Field Operations Memo 2001-12

- This Field Operations Memo issues procedures implementing the increased food stamp maximum excess shelter deduction, which applies to food stamp AUs with no elderly or disabled member.
- The Maximum Excess Shelter Deduction increased from \$300 to \$340 per month, effective March 1, 2001 and was transmitted by State Letter 1201.

FYI

Inaccessible Assets and Domestic Violence

An inaccessible asset is an asset to which the individual has no ready access and the value of the asset is *not counted* when determining eligibility for TAFDC (106 CMR 204.125), EAEDC (106 CMR 321.125) or food stamp benefits (106 CMR 363.140). The inaccessibility of an asset is verified at application, eligibility review or when there are other changes in the case.

An asset may be determined inaccessible if:

- the individual is a victim of domestic violence; and
- attempting to access the asset puts her at risk of further domestic violence.

For some victims, one asset may be considered accessible while others are not. For example, although a domestic violence victim may own a car, accessing or disposing of the vehicle may increase the risk of the abuser locating the victim and then causing more harm. However, this same individual may have cash on hand or safe deposit box holdings that may be accessed safely and are therefore countable assets.

In such cases, an individual must document that she is a victim of domestic violence and that attempting to access the asset may put her at risk. The AU Manager cannot require specific documentation from the domestic violence victim. However, in consultation with the DV Specialist the AU Manager should inform the individual of documentation that will help verify that she is a victim of domestic violence and attempting to access her assets may put her at risk of further domestic violence. Verification may include records from a:

- domestic violence program,
- court,
- hospital,
- law enforcement agency,
- psychologist, or
- if none of the above documentation is available, a signed statement from the individual claiming to be a victim of domestic violence.

In addition, in the following situations assets are not counted in determining eligibility for food stamp benefits. Since the assets of a victim of domestic violence in one of these situations would not be counted in determining food stamp eligibility, she would not have to demonstrate that the assets were inaccessible. The situations are:

- a food stamp AU where all members are residents of a battered woman's shelter (106 CMR 365.550(D));
- a food stamp AU in which all members receive TAFDC, SSI and/or EAEDC or where at least one member receives benefits or services under a TANF program (these AUs are categorically eligible for food stamps and are considered asset eligible.) (106 CMR 365.180)
- food stamp AU members who receive SSI or TAFDC (106 CMR 363.140 (H)).

BEACON Release 2.0 Pilot Activities - Phase II

All Field Operations Memo 2001-7A

This Field Operations Memo responds to Transitional Assistance Office Staff questions

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regarding Field Operations Memo 2001-7:

- Example 2 on page 3 applies to FS-only and SSFSP-only AUs. For combination (FS/SSFSP) AUs subject to proration rules, AU Managers should continue to follow PACES coding instructions in Field Operations Memos 97-66 and 2000-20; and
- Example 4 on page 4 incorrectly states that if the BEACON Benefit Amount and PACES Benefit Amount differ, the reason might be that the per diem rate was not entered on BEACON Release 1.0. However, per diem rates are not entered on BEACON Release 1.0: they must be entered on BEACON Release 2.0.

BEACON Release 2.0 Pilot Activities - Phase III

All
Field Operations Memo
2001-16

This Field Operations Memo provides procedures for the BEACON Release 2.0 Pilot Activities - Phase III:

- practicing planning the workday activities in BEACON Release 2.0 Pilot to prepare for BEACON Release 2.0 Production;
- continuing casework activities listed on the revised BEACON Pilot Activities Checklist; and
- reviewing BEACON-generated notices and calculations on BEACON Release 2.0 Pilot and BB options on Gateway.

AU Managers should spend at least eight hours a week performing these activities, which began on March 26, 2001.

Emergency Assistance

EA

The EA Reference Guide Update 006

The EA Reference Guide replaces the entire current guide and is based on the EA regulations in State Letter 1198 and State Letter 1200.

Included in this guide are procedures for:

- determining EA eligibility;
- approving and terminating shelter benefits;
- advising the EA AU on the NFL-9 when it has been determined eligible for EA benefits before it is referred to a shelter placement. If the shelter placement (whether a shelter or hotel) is refused by the EA AU, the shelter benefits must be terminated, not denied;
- issuing the appropriate transfer notice when transferring the EA AU to another shelter or hotel; and
- transferring the EA AU to the appropriate TAO covering the geographic location of the shelter. The AU should be transferred as soon as the record is satisfactory for transfer. The practice of holding the AU record for 30 days is eliminated.

Refer to "From the Forms File" in the March *Transitions* for a list of new and revised EA forms.

From the Forms File

New Form

18-260-0401-05
TMH (4/2001)
Request for Temporary MassHealth Cards

This form will be used by TAO Directors to reorder supplies of the Temporary MassHealth Cards from the Division of Medical Assistance (DMA).

Revised Forms

AU Managers are reminded to discard the old version of any revised form and use the new revised form.

02-327-0401-05
02-328-0401-05(S)
NMRI (Rev. 4/2001)
Notice of Multiple Reasons for Ineligibility

02-362-0401-05
02-363-0401-05(S)
SURI (Rev. 4/2001)
Status Update Regarding Ineligibility

02-685-0401-05
02-686-0401-05(S)
TP-TAFDC-TER (Rev. 4/2001)
TAFDC UPDATE

02-196-0401-05
TAFDC-App/Supp (Rev. 4/2001)
TAFDC Application Supplement

The above forms have been revised to reflect the policy change regarding ineligibility for TAFDC and EAEDC due to an outstanding warrant.

02-403-0301-05
TESR-1 (Rev. 3/2001)
Recipient Responsibilities While in a Temporary Emergency Shelter

This revised fact sheet explains the recipient's responsibilities while in a temporary emergency shelter.

The following forms are now available in Spanish.

13-044-0301-05
TES-WN-1 (S) (Rev. 3/2001)
Warning Notice of Noncompliance

13-043-0301-05
TES-WN-2 (S) (Rev. 3/2001)
Warning Notice of Noncompliance/ Temporary Emergency Shelter Placement

Revised Brochures

04-040-0401-05
04-041-0401-05(S)
EAEDC-PB (Rev. 4/2001)
Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children Program

02-210-0401-05
02-213-0401-05(S)
TAFDC-PB (Rev. 4/2001)
Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program

The above brochures have been revised to reflect the policy change regarding ineligibility for TAFDC and EAEDC due to an outstanding warrant.

