

Transitions

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this month in...

Transitions

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

When we first set out to increase our food stamp participation rate, few of us envisioned how rapidly we would progress. Over the past three years, the number of food stamp households in Massachusetts has increased by nearly 50,000. This means approximately 50,000 more households are better able to absorb the rising costs of food and blunt the harsh effects of poor nutrition. You have played a key role in this turnaround, and your achievement fuels my aspirations for what can still be accomplished. In 2005, we are poised to expand our food stamp outreach efforts.

One of the best examples of this is Bay State CAP (Combined Application Project). Most of you have heard about Bay State CAP, and some of you have already been trained on it. Many of you will begin servicing food stamp households that have been approved through this application process. Bay State CAP is a new vehicle for increasing food stamp participation in the Commonwealth. It enhances resources from our Department with resources from the Social Security Administration (SSA). Our partnership with SSA will broaden the sweep of eligible food stamp households by streamlining the application process for those who are SSI eligible. Low income seniors and the disabled may at times face additional barriers to applying for food stamp benefits. Bay State CAP is a way of expanding our efforts to meet the needs of this underserved population. Under Bay State CAP, information about SSI clients is gathered by SSA staff during the eligibility interview. Once a client's eligibility information is collected, the data is transmitted through SDX to BEACON for an automatic eligibility determination. Massachusetts is leading the way in this innovation—being the fifth state to implement this new approach to food stamp outreach.

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From the Hotline

Below are questions and answers related to the TAFDC work program requirement. TAFDC regulations concerning this topic are found at 106 CMR 203.400. Good cause regulations are located at 106 CMR 701.380.

- Q.** A woman is claiming good cause for not meeting the work program requirement after she received her first community service site referral. She has not yet shown proof of her good cause. Should she be given a “Meets Compliance” on BEACON right away?
- A.** Yes. If the recipient claims good cause or returns the Warning Notice with the good cause reason(s) circled but no verifications are returned, then the AU Manager must perform the following steps in BEACON:
- set the “Meets Compliance” radio button on the TAFDC tab to “Yes,”
 - select the appropriate Compliance Reason (other than “Participation”) from the drop-down box, and
 - enter the expected date the situation will be resolved in the Compliance End Date field.

AU Managers must make this a priority in their daily workload to prevent an erroneous sanction from occurring.

The AU Manager must then generate a Verification Checklist (VC-1) and mail or give the form to the recipient allowing her 10 days to provide proof of a good cause reason.

- Q.** A TAFDC father wants to perform community service at a site where a referral was made by an AU Manager during the previous week. At that time, the site had 20 openings. Is a telephone call by the AU Manager to this community service site necessary?
- A.** Yes. Even though the community service site had 20 openings last week, that count could change. Calls to community service sites are **always** required before the AU Manager makes a referral. ESP has updated the listing of community service sites to prevent referrals to unavailable sites. If the site is no longer available, the AU Manager should continue assisting the father

in locating an appropriate and available community service site.

- Q.** A parent in my caseload is homeless and living in a shelter. She is work program required and meeting the requirement by doing housing search. Can she be approved for an extension and if so, what activities must she perform during the extension?
- A.** This parent’s EA Self-Sufficiency Plan should include work-related as well as housing search activities. If the parent is cooperating with these work-related activities, a TAFDC extension is appropriate. **If, for some reason, the plan lacks work-related activities, the parent must show that she is cooperating in work-related activities to get an extension.** (For example, the AU Manager should refer the parent to Structured Job Search (SJS) while the extension is pending and monitor her participation.) Unless good cause exists, the TAFDC Extension Plan should focus on the parent increasing her work-related activities that lead to full-time employment while

continuing to meet EA housing search requirements.

Q. When both parents in a two-parent AU are work program required, living in an EA shelter and meeting the Self-Sufficiency Plan (including doing housing search), must both parents also meet the work program requirement?

A. Yes. Each parent must sign the one Self-Sufficiency Plan for the AU and agree to meet all activities listed on the Plan. Unless good cause exists, failure by one parent to meet the activities listed in the Self-Sufficiency Plan will result in a finding of EA Noncompliance for the entire AU, even if the other parent is meeting the work program requirement.

“Everybody can be great because anybody can serve. You don’t have to have a college degree to serve. You don’t have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

While we’re excited about the gains that will result from Bay State CAP, we also plan to continue gains made by earlier food stamp outreach initiatives. Our collaborations with the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and the Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) will continue. The DMR group home initiative has been extended to residents of group homes licensed by other agencies in the Commonwealth, and the DMH initiative will be expanded statewide in the coming months. Likewise, given the link between a child’s nutritional demands and educational achievement, the continued need to enroll families in the Food Stamp Program through the Child Nutrition Access Project (CNAP) is clear. In addition, our promotional materials remain available to the Greater Boston Food Bank and other food pantries. Mutual Aid Associations (MAAs) across the state remain committed to the distribution of our outreach materials to eligible noncitizens. Finally, a sustained effort to provide easy access to our food stamp application through the web-based Virtual Gateway will also continue producing participation gains.

The proof of your ongoing commitment is evident in the success of these past outreach efforts. Thank you in advance for your continued support and your efforts to add Bay State CAP to the list of successful food stamp outreach ventures.

On a different note, I’d like to close with a mention of our state’s tsunami relief efforts. Most of what we do each day is designed to help people within our borders. Now more than ever, it is clear that other parts of the world are in need of our assistance. For those of you who have reached out independently or online through COMECC, your contributions are appreciated. If you haven’t had an opportunity, you can still give by accessing COMECC.net or contributing to a charity of your choice. As always, I am proud of the combined power of DTA’s generosity and dedication to those in need.

Sincerely,



John Wagner, Commissioner

Medicare Prescription Drug Discount Program (MPDDP)

FS

Field Operations Memo 2005-3

This memo obsoletes Field Operations Memo 2004-43 issued on November 2, 2004. The instructions in that memo were inaccurate as a result of subsequent USDA guidance. Field Operations Memo 2005-3 implements the MPDDP for 2004 and 2005 based on the following rules:

MPDDP participants are eligible for either:

1. the appropriate monthly subsidy *based on the MPDDP enrollment date*, the flat allowance of \$23 plus current verified prescription drug expenses;

OR

2. pre-MPDDP verified prescription drug expenses if these expenses total more than the monthly subsidy amount, the \$23 flat allowance plus any current verified prescription drug expenses.

MPDDP participants may always claim and verify other out-of-pocket medical expenses such as fees for eyeglasses, dentures, hearing aids, attendant care, and hospital fees.

The MPDDP subsidy amount is determined by the MPDDP participant's enrollment date and the year the MPDDP participant verifies MPDDP participation with DTA.

FYI

Fuel Assistance Flyer

A *Fuel Assistance Programs* flyer (a publication of the Massachusetts Division of Energy Resources) will be made available to all TAOs in February. This flyer provides applicants/recipients with information on a wide range of energy assistance programs available throughout the Commonwealth. Flyers must be made available in TAO reception areas.

FEBRUARY

Bay State CAP Implementation

FS

State Letter 1292

Field Operations Memo 2005-4

State Letter 1292 and Field Operations Memo 2005-4 implement the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Combined Application Project (Bay State CAP). Bay State CAP was developed through the cooperative effort of DTA, the Social Security Administration (SSA), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The project is part of DTA's continued effort to increase participation in the Food Stamp Program (FSP).

All existing SSI/FS AUs meeting Bay State CAP criteria that would receive higher benefits under Bay State CAP will be switched from regular FS benefits to Bay State CAP benefits. Approximately 20,000 AUs will be converted beginning January 26, 2005 and continuing through February 8, 2005 based on the last digit of the AU's SSN.



2005 Social Security/SSI COLA Update for TAFDC, EA, EAEDC and the Food Stamp Program

All
Field Operations Memo
2005-2

Effective January 2005, Social Security benefits and SSI payments increased by 2.7 percent. The base level Medicare Part B premium increased from \$66.60 to \$78.20. The Medicare Part B penalty premium also increased, as identified in the 2005 Medicare Part B Surcharge Premiums chart.

This Field Operations Memo:

- explains how BEACON updated APs with the 2005 Social Security/SSICOLA amounts and recalculated eligibility for the active AUs containing the updated APs;
- explains which AUs listed on the “Clients With RSDI and/or SSI” View require AUManager action;
- gives procedures for AU Managers to update AUs with discrepant 2005 Social Security/SSICOLA amounts; and
- informs TAO staff about a report which may also be used to update AUs with discrepant 2005 Social Security/SSICOLA amounts.

FYI

Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Care Mailing

During the second and third week in January 2005, an informational mailing was sent to all active TAFDC AUs, all TAFDC AUs closed since January 2004, and all active FS AUs, excluding FS AUs in SSI Regional Offices and FS AUs receiving TAFDC. The mailing included information about:

- the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which is available to a person who worked in 2004 and whose income was below certain limits, even if income tax is not owed;
- the Massachusetts Earned Income Credit (MEIC), which is available to taxpayers who have earned income for 2004 and meet the requirements of the federal Earned Income Credit; and
- the Child Care brochure, which explains how to get and keep child care, provides information for review with the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency, including how the child care fee is determined, and provides a listing of the names and addresses of CCR&R agencies.

Undelivered mail will be returned to Central Office and then forwarded to the AU Manager who must take the appropriate action.

In addition to the mailing, English and Spanish EITC flyers are being sent to Transitional Assistance Offices and should be placed in the reception areas.

Card Issuance System

ALL

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 056

This update transmits the following changes:

Chapter XVI, Section C: Benefits Issuance Mechanism:

- Bay State Access Card “Issuance Tips” have been developed for the EBT Card Initiator and EBT Card Creator.
- Additional instructions have been developed to assist the CIS Clerk in issuing a Bay State Access Card if the Card Issuance System becomes inoperable.

From the Forms File

New Forms

The following forms and brochure are used with the Bay State Combined Application Project (CAP). Refer to Field Operations Memo 2005-4 for more information.

09-510-0205-05

09-511-0205-05 (S)

FSP/SSA-1 (2/2005)

Application for Food Stamp Benefits (for Pure SSI Households)

09-500-0205-05

09-501-0205-05

FSP/BSC-1 (2/2005)

Bay State CAP Food Assistance Benefits Statement (for Pure SSI Households)

09-520-0205-05

09-521-0205-05(S)

FSP/BSC-2 (2/2005)

Your Bay State CAP Food Assistance Benefits Brochure

The following form is to be used when a request for interpreter services is made for an applicant/recipient.

15-120-0105-05

IRF (1/2005)

Interpreter Request Form

Revised Forms

02-720-0105-05

TAFDC-GCMS (Rev. 1/2005)

Good Cause Medical Statement

This revised form reflects the change in the TAFDC Work Program hourly requirement.

25-105-0105-05

25-106-0105-05 (S)

BEA/CCA (Rev. 1/2005)

Child Care Referral Notice

This form replaces the BEA/CCA (Rev. 5/2004) and is to be used when the system-generated document is unavailable or inappropriate,

such as when child care is needed for EA homeless families. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2005-1 for more information.

New Flyers

15-125-1204-05

FAP/Flyer

Fuel Assistance Flyer

This flyer is to be made available in TAO reception areas. Refer to the FYI in this month's *Transitions* for more information.

BYF-Flyer

Boston Youth Fund Flyer

This flyer is to be made available in TAO reception areas.

Revised Flyer

18-300-0205-05

18-301-0205-05(S)

EITC

Claim the Earned Income Tax Credit

This flyer is to be made available in TAO reception areas. Refer to the FYI in this month's *Transitions* for more information.



Quality Corner

This month we will discuss two errors, one involving the SUA and the other related to TBA. We will also make a clarification of last month's Quality Corner.

Utility Allowance

A recent Quality Control error occurred when the recipient checked that she had cooling costs, and included an electric bill as verification. Despite this, the AU Manager allowed the \$268 utility allowance (non-heating). Quality Control determined that the client did have an air conditioner, and was paying the ongoing cost for it. She, therefore, was entitled to the heating/cooling SUA of \$442.

What Can the AU Manager Do?

Over the last year, there has been a growing number of errors involving the assignment of the correct SUA for cooling expenses. The April 2004 Quality Corner addressed a similar error when someone in public housing was charged an extra fee for air conditioning and was not allowed the heating/cooling SUA by the AU Manager.

In the error this month, the AU manager should have noticed that the recipient indicated on the

application that she paid for cooling expenses. It is also recorded that she pays for electricity. Based on the facts of the case, the AU should have been allowed the heating/cooling SUA – even during the winter months. AU Managers must review the SUA at every recertification of the AU and ensure that the correct SUA is used on BEACON.

Transitional Benefits (TBA)

When a TAFDC AU closes for certain reasons, the AU may receive a fixed amount of food stamps for five months after the case has been closed. This is called Transitional Benefits Alternative or TBA. During the TBA period, BEACON will adjust the AU's FS benefits only when a reported change causes the FS benefits to increase. Likewise, during the TBA period, BEACON is hard-coded to prevent the TBA AU from closing except for six limited closing reasons (see *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter IX, page10).

In one Quality Control case, the TBA benefit was established in March. In April mail was returned with the recipient's whereabouts unknown, and the TBA AU was closed. Closing an AU for *whereabouts unknown-mail returned* is an allowable closing reason during the TBA period. However, in this situation, the recipient had not moved. Her sister, with whom she had recently shared an apartment, had moved, and had accidentally changed the address for the entire household when she notified the post office. The recipient was still eligible for TBA but could not be re-instated because of system constraints.

What Can the AU Manager Do?

When mail for an AU is returned, the AU Manager may close the case immediately - which sometimes leads to the situation described above - or the AU Manager may contact the grantee by phone to discuss the matter and better determine if the case should be closed given the circumstances. While *whereabouts unknown-mail returned* is an allowable TBA closing reason, AU Managers may exercise their discretion in deciding what steps to take. Remember, TBA AUs do not have any reporting requirements during the TBA period.

Child Care Referral Notice

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo
2005-1

The *Child Care Referral* notice, formerly known as the *Child Care Authorization*, has been revised. BEACON Increment 2.1.13, scheduled for 2/22/05, will revise the *Child Care Referral* notice. Until then, continue using the current system-generated Child Care Authorization. This revised notice is both a system-generated document and a paper document used by a recipient to secure child care services through the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R). Revisions to the referral include:

- The system-generated child care referral notice has expanded into a three-page document. The recipient is given all three pages. The TAO fax number appears on the notice;
- The CCR&R will use the *Child Care Referral* notice to report to the AU Manager on the disposition of the child care referral, whether accepted, refused or child care was not available;

- DTA and Office of Child Care Services (OCCS) appeal information has been added to the notice; and
- The paper document is a stand-alone English version or Spanish version. Spanish is not on the reverse side of the English notice.

TAFDC: ESP Child Care for Americorps Participants

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo 2005-6

Recipients who are otherwise TAFDC eligible and participating in an Americorps-funded program are eligible to receive child care. AU Managers must refer these recipients to the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency.



Winter