

Transitions



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues,

This month, I have had the pleasure of meeting and hearing from more of you, and as always, I continue to be impressed and heartened by your hard work and commitment. I was particularly honored to host a breakfast for nominees and winners of the Pride and Performance awards, and to attend the fabulous luncheon that was held at the Sheraton Boston earlier this month. The event honored many of our colleagues from Central and the field for their creativity, teamwork and dedication to the Department's mission. It was truly inspiring to learn more about the many instances in which our staff has gone above and beyond the call of duty to assist people in need. I was, and am, proud to work with so many talented individuals, and to be part of such a terrific organization.

I am equally proud of the high quality work you all do every day in order to meet the three main goals of the Department: assisting our clients to increase their levels of economic self-sufficiency; reducing homelessness; and continually improving service delivery. While we may not be able to control factors that contribute to poverty and homelessness, we are laying the groundwork for real change-in programs and in peoples' lives. I cannot thank you enough for your patience, flexibility and dedication during a time of increasing need. Your efforts are noticed, not only by me, but by many others, including Governor Patrick, who visited the Springfield-Liberty Street TAO this month (more below) and EOHHS Secretary JudyAnn Bigby, who visited the Dudley Square TAO and was particularly interested to learn about our efforts to address rising homelessness.

The ability to transform our mission into workable solutions is apparent in local offices across the Commonwealth. One particular initiative that has focused on the goal of increasing economic self-sufficiency is the DTA orientation sessions for TAFDC clients. The roots of this initiative began in the field and were formalized when supervisors (and Pride in Performance winners!) in the Springfield-State TAO developed the approach and began offering the service to their clients. Over the past months, a team of field and Central Office staff worked collaboratively to conduct the orientation sessions statewide. These sessions allow us to formally introduce ourselves to our clients and to make them aware of the opportunities available for increasing their economic self-sufficiency. This is just one example of how your good ideas are translated into effective service delivery.

More good news arrived last month when the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) awarded Massachusetts with two Food Stamp Program (FSP) High Performance Bonuses totaling \$3M for its exceptional administration of the Food Stamp Program, including our outstanding work in the timely processing of food stamp applications and having one of the most improved Program Access Indexes (PAI) for FY 2006. Once again, I would like to thank those of you who helped make these awards possible. In capturing both of these bonuses, Massachusetts is continuing our commitment to ensuring that all individuals and families eligible for the Food Stamp Program are enrolled and provided nutritional assistance as quickly as possible. This is the fourth consecutive year that DTA has received the bonus award for timely application processing and we have continuously improved our PAI, placing fourth among the fifty states for the most improved PAI. All of the hard work has also been recognized by the Governor who was only able to visit one TAO, but clearly expressed his thanks and appreciation to all of you. He made specific mention of the incredible progress in the Food Stamp Program, which will allow us to fund innovative programs that are aligned with our overall anti-poverty approach, including initiatives to increase economic self-sufficiency, reduce homelessness and further increase access to programs and services.

Yet, while the orientation sessions and the bonus awards are both satisfying developments, they are just the beginning. The DTA

Quality Corner

This month we will discuss two shelter expense errors, both caused by the misapplication of the homeowner's insurance amount.

Homeowner's Insurance

In the first error, the household consisted of an employed single mother, her three children and her mother. All five persons were active members of an NPA FS case that was certified as Universal Semiannual Reporting. At the time of the last recertification, the household's shelter costs were taxes and homeowner's insurance only; there were no mortgage payments on the house. The client erroneously listed the yearly amount of her homeowner's policy as a monthly amount on her recertification form. She provided a bill for the insurance which showed the one-year effective dates for the policy and the yearly cost. The AU Manager entered this amount on BEACON as a monthly amount. The client had also provided a tax bill. The AU Manager correctly averaged the property taxes over a 12-month period; however, because he did not average the homeowner's insurance over a 12-month period, this caused an overpayment error.

In the second error, the case consisted of an elderly person who lived alone in a mobile home park. Her only source of income was RSDI. Her shelter expenses consisted of a monthly mortgage payment, a monthly maintenance fee, and homeowner's insurance. Although the client did not record an amount for homeowner's insurance on the recertification form, she listed the frequency of payments as monthly. The verification provided a yearly amount for homeowner's insurance. The AU Manager entered the yearly amount on BEACON as a monthly amount. This caused a significant overpayment error.

What's an AU Manager to Do?

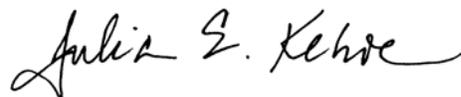
Homeowner's insurance can be billed in various ways: monthly, quarterly, semiannually, or yearly. In both cases above, the amounts on the bills should have been averaged over the length of the policy (often - times one year) to determine a monthly amount, since the AU Manager intended to enter a monthly payment. Alternatively, the AU Manager could have entered a yearly amount on BEACON, using the totals

orientation session represents only one example of a local, "home-grown" approach to improving customer service and client access, but the pattern for developing this initiative is far from unique. Likewise, while our Food Stamp Program access index improved by 6.31 percentage points in FY 2006, I look forward to achieving an even higher score in the next fiscal year.

Before closing, I'd like to also mention that October is Domestic Violence Awareness month. The problems resulting from domestic violence continue to plague certain residents of our cities and towns, and it is critical for us to connect our clients with the resources available at our TAOs to identify and minimize the impact of these problems. Each TAO is assigned a domestic violence specialist. If you are new to the Department and have not yet had an opportunity to meet the specialist assigned to your office, I urge you to make a point of doing so. In the event that you are helping a family that is experiencing domestic violence, working collaboratively with your domestic violence specialist will contribute towards a safe outcome for the family.

Together, we are reframing the entryway to our Department's benefits and services. Please join me as we continue along this path, and thank you for your help and support.

Sincerely,



Julia E. Kehoe, Commissioner



Quality Corner (cont.)

indicated on the bills. As a precaution, AU Managers must be mindful of the amount being entered, and the frequency being selected on BEACON for that specific amount. For example, a payment of \$1,000 per month is an unlikely amount for homeowner's insurance.

From the Forms File

New Poster

02-655-1007-05

02-656-1007-05 (S)

DV-Poster-1(10/2007)

You Deserve to Be Safe

The *You Deserve to Be Safe* poster tells clients that Domestic Violence Specialists are available to assist them. The poster must be displayed in TAO waiting areas.

Revised Forms

02-032-1007-05

02-130-1007-05 (S)

NFL-5 (Rev. 10/2007)

Notice of Denial of Application

02-033-1007-05

18-055-1007-05 (S)

NFL-5A (Rev. 10/2007)

Denial Notification

Minor changes have been made to the above forms including the addition of a line for a Social Security number on the NFL-5 and a line for the TAO name on the NFL-5A.



From the Hotline

The questions and answers below pertain to child care eligibility and services. For more information on this topic, refer to 106 CMR 207.210(A).

Q. I recently approved the Employment Development Plan (EDP) of my TAFDC client who is working at home and is self-employed. She has asked for a child care referral. She believes the ages of her children and the nature of her job prevent her from caring for her children during the hours that she is working. Can I make this child care referral?

A. Yes. Even though your client is working from her home, a child care referral is appropriate.

NOTE: Self-employed individuals are exempt from the Monthly Reporting requirements as outlined in 106 CMR 702.930.

Q. My TAFDC client has an approved EDP and is currently providing child care to other children at a day care center. He is requesting a child care referral for his own six-year-old child because he

says that the day care center doesn't accept children who are over four years of age. Can I make a child care referral for this client?

A. Yes. There are several reasons why a TAFDC client with an approved EDP who is employed as a child care worker may request and be eligible for a child care referral. Below are two basic reasons:

- If your TAFDC client is working at a day care center or for another employer, he may not have the option of enrolling his own child at the same location.
- If your TAFDC client is working at a day care center or for another employer, the day care center or employer may allow your client to enroll his own child, but only for a substantial fee.

Q. Under the list of job titles on the Employment Status window in BEACON, how do I know whether to select "Babysitter" or "Formal Child Care Worker" for my TAFDC client?

A. If your client's earnings are equal to or greater than the state's minimum wage (currently \$7.50 per hour but \$8.00 per hour beginning January 1, 2008), then select "Child Care Worker" as the job title.

If your client's earnings are less than the state's minimum wage, then "Babysitter" is the appropriate job title.

NOTE: In the Food Stamp Program, remember that certain non-reimbursable dependent care expenses may be deducted from the gross earned income when determining the food stamp benefit amount. Refer to 106 CMR 364.400(D) for further details.

Dependent care deduction information in the TAFDC program is found in 106 CMR 204.275.

EA Alternative Placements - Hotels/Motels

EA
Field Operations Memo 2007-54

Due to the increased number of requests for EA shelter placements, alternative placement in hotels/motels is being used to ensure that all EA-eligible homeless families are provided with shelter.

This memo advises TAO staff about the procedures related to hotel/motel placements, such as documentation, BEACON, and SSPS.

EAEDC: Agencies Helping Noncitizen Clients Become Citizens

EAEDC
Field Operations Memo 2007-55

The Department is issuing a current listing of agencies that help our noncitizen clients become citizens. These agencies are grouped by region and provide assistance with the naturalization process in the form of citizenship classes and assistance with completing the N-400 Application for Naturalization form. These organizations receive some state funding through the Citizenship for New Americans Program.

Fall Food Stamp Heat and Eat (H-EAT) Fuel Assistance Program Update and Ongoing Households Recalculation

FS
Field Operations Memo
2007-56
2007-56A

In July, 39,000 FS households received increased food stamp benefits and a \$1.00 fuel assistance benefit as a result of the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program.

Over the weekend of October 20, approximately 15,600 additional FS households were selected for H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program benefits. Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) will enroll these households in the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program and make \$1.00 in H-EAT fuel assistance benefits available to these households in November. In addition, November FS benefits will be automatically recalculated using the Heating/Cooling SUA for these anticipated recipients of the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program.

Field Operations Memo 2007-56 identifies H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program criteria, explains the responsibilities of DTA and DHCD, and describes the revised DHCD client brochure.

As followup, Field Operations Memo 2007-56A:

- informs AU Managers about the October Heating/Cooling SUA restoration to approximately 1,100 households who received H-EAT benefits in June. The Heating/Cooling SUA had been inadvertently removed during the period of June to October. MIS recalculated November benefits for these households since the H-EAT eligibility is for a one year period;
- describes a report to be emailed to TAOS; and
- instructs AU Managers to review each household on the report and issue supplemental FS benefits to any household who lost benefits as a result of the removal of the Heating/Cooling SUA.



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EAEDC: Personal Needs Allowance (PNA) Increase

EAEDC

State Letter 1330

Field Operations Memo
2007-58

Effective July 1, 2007, the Legislature increased the Personal Needs Allowance (PNA), which affects EAEDC clients in Living Arrangements C and E (see 106 CMR 321.420).

The PNA was increased from \$60.00 to \$72.80 monthly.

Field Operations Memo 2007-53 informed TAO staff about the automated BEACON update of clients' benefits with the increased PNA amount.

State Letter 1330 issues revised EAEDC regulations based on this increase and is retroactive to July 1, 2007.

Field Operations Memo 2007-58 informs staff in the Holyoke, Hyannis, Greenfield, Malden, North Shore, Taunton and Worcester TAOs about potential problems with certain cases and issuing retroactive benefits, if necessary.

TAFDC: Orientation Session Incentive Payments

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2007-59

This memo informs TAO staff about incentive payments for TAFDC applicants and clients who attend an Orientation Session. The memo also describes how these payments will be issued.

Effective with the issuance of this memo, applicants and clients who attend an Orientation Session, including each parent in a two-parent household who attends and dependent teen parents, will receive a \$20 incentive payment. Applicants and clients may attend more than one session but will receive only one incentive payment, after attending the first session.

New Initiative Memo: Moving Policy Online to a Web Environment

In June, the Department began a three-phase project to move Policy Online to a web-based environment.

- Phase one of this project is complete and included the redirection of Policy Online to the web-based environment.
- Beginning the week of October 29 and continuing through November 30, phase two of the project will direct all staff in the Springfield State, North Shore, Brockton and Holyoke TAOs to access Policy Online through DTA Online only.



FYI

BEACON Online Help Update Issued in October 2007

BEACON Online Help Update Issue #14 (10/26/07)

FYI

Changes to DTA Online

This month you will see the following changes to DTA Online:

Diversity - Events

The Diversity Event for November is entitled *National American Indian Heritage Month*. Selecting the Events option displays a summary on *National American Indian Heritage Month*.

Training

The following changes have been made to the Training component of DTA Online:

- The links entitled *Available Training, Request Your Transcripts, 2005 Training Summary, Center Staff Development Courses, and Human Resources Division Courses* have been deleted.
- The link to PACE has been renamed *PACE and Available Training*.
- The Professional Development Form has been revised.
- The Job Aids entitled *Changing the Exemption Status When the Youngest Child Turns 2* and the *New EBT Card Issuance System (CIC)* have been revised.

Welfare Reform Q/A's

The Welfare Reform Q/A's link has been removed from the list of available options. The questions and answers are being reviewed for accuracy and will be added to Policy Online. You will be notified when this occurs.

“Encouragement is like a premium gasoline - it helps to take the knocks out of living.”

Anonymous

FYI

Entering Child Support Income on BEACON

A recent Program Accuracy meeting identified an error caused by a duplicate entry of child support income on BEACON. The child support income was originally entered under the mother's name. Subsequently, the AU Manager entered the same income under the child's name.

Child support income must be entered under the child for whom the income is being paid except in instances when:

- the child no longer lives with the parent to whom the child support is being paid; or
- the child is institutionalized; or
- the child lives in the same household as the parent receiving the child support, is 22 years of age or older, and is no longer in that parent's food stamp case.

If you have any questions about entering child support on BEACON, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline.