

Transitions



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

Transitions

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From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues,

Already, 2008 is shaping up to be an exciting and productive year! There is much news to report and there will be many more Department activities to share with you over the coming months.

As you may be aware, the Commission to End Homelessness released its report on January 11th. The Commission's recommendations may sound familiar, as our Department has already embraced the "Housing First" philosophy, emphasizing the importance of permanent housing for the overall stability of individuals and families. Broad strategies recommended in the report include:

1. Prevention supports to keep as many people housed as possible;
2. Housing placement, subsidy, and production responses that result in stable, permanent housing options; and
3. Asset development supports to enhance economic stability.

The Commission's plan will transform the shelter system and foster collaboration between service providers. The key to this new approach is targeting the right resources to the right people at the right time - which all of us at DTA already strive toward, every day. Next, the Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness (ICHH) will convene to determine how best to implement the Commission's recommendations.

An important aspect of housing stability is a steady income: to that end, I am pleased to report on the initiation or expansion of several employment services options for our clients which will begin this month:

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- **Community College Vocational Education and Skills Training Programs:**

With the expansion of this program, the Department will serve an additional 100 clients with educational, training, transitional and retention services as well as providing supplies needed for work. The program guarantees employment in the health care field for 70% of the participants. Opportunities are available at the Bedford campus of Middlesex Community College, Holyoke Community College, Roxbury Community College, Middlesex Community College and Bristol Community College.

- **Project Hope's New Initiative:**

Ten to twelve homeless families from Boston's Crittendon-Hastings House will be placed in permanent housing and provided with intensive case management including assistance with daily living, employment and training.

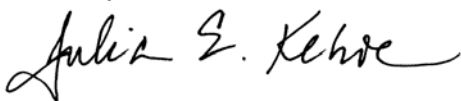
- **Jewish Vocational Services' (JVS) Training Programs:**

JVS staff will work with TAFDC participants to determine a career path which best meets their needs and interests, **concentrating on the customer service, culinary arts, and medical office support fields.** These programs will serve approximately 75 families living near the Dudley Square, Malden, Newmarket Square, and Revere TAOs.

In addition to offering more training opportunities for our clients, these initiatives will help us to reach our work participation goals.

With all of this progress, it's hard to believe it's only February! None of these accomplishments would be possible without your continued commitment and dedication. As always, words cannot express how proud I am of the work of our Department. Thank you for all of your efforts.

Sincerely,



Julia E. Kehoe, Commissioner

Quality Corner

Keys to Preventing Errors

This month Quality Corner will highlight general error prevention strategies instead of focusing on specific errors. This approach provides a broader look at errors and identifies some of the planning and organizational tools that can aid staff in the discipline of on-going error prevention.

One of the most successful tools in attaining and maintaining high payment accuracy is a good case review system. At DTA, the supervisor has the responsibility to sign off on a wide range of case activities: application processing, recertifications, transfers, and other case maintenance activities. However, AU Managers can assist supervisors by taking a few precautions before presenting the case for sign-off. AU Managers are encouraged to:

- Maintain an organized case folder.
- Enter a clear and concise narrative at application, recertification and also for specific case maintenance activities. This is especially crucial in instances when it is necessary to explain or substantiate a seemingly contrary case

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activity or time frame to a reviewer. More significant, a narrative entry helps the supervisor to know what it is that the AU Manager has set out to do.

- Use Policy Online, and Job Aids when appropriate, to ensure the correct application of policy.
- Look at the Interview Wrap-Up window and review the transaction that was just processed to see if the FS benefit amount, deductions and AU Members identified are correct. For example, if an incorrect dependent care deduction showed on the Financial tab, or an extra household member showed on the AU Member tab, the inaccuracy would be more readily identified by the AU Manager since the AU Manager is most familiar with the circumstances of the case.

As mentioned above, the supervisor is the primary reviewer of cases. This is an enormous

responsibility. To achieve accuracy in case reviews, supervisors are encouraged to:

- Look at the BEACON Narratives tab to see if a related entry has been made for the case that is being reviewed. This gives the supervisor a summary of the case activity submitted for review.
- Check error-prone cases, such as those with self-employment and rental income, to ensure that the cost of doing business is correctly tabulated.
- Check BEACON matches, especially on cases with earnings or cases with a history of earnings.
- Check the Results tab, especially the Financial and AU Member tabs.
- Check the Benefit History window and compare the new calculated benefit amount with the old benefit amount.
- Ensure that the new calculated benefit amount is consistent with the case activity that was just entered. If not, check the case to determine if it is necessary to delete the transaction. If the transaction is deleted, instruct the AU Manager to reenter the correct information.
- Have regular unit meetings to update your staff on any area of policy where there is a demonstrated need for clarification or just to review policy updates such as FYIs in *Transitions*, etc.
- Refer to the Hotline designee who will call in your inquiries to clarify policy or procedure.

From the Forms File

TAOs are reminded to remove the posters entitled “Notice of Resolution Agreement” (OCR-Poster 2). These were to remain posted in TAO lobbies until January 2008. The poster entitled “Do You Have a Disability?” (OCR-Poster 1) must remain posted in TAO lobbies.

MassHealth Health Care Request (HCR) - 2 Application Packets

MassHealth Health Care Request HCR - 2 Application packets have been revised. The revised HCR-2 packets are dated January 2008. TAOs must destroy any HCR-2 packets with a date prior to January 2008.

Revised Form

18-083-0108-05

LL/VER (Rev. 1/2008)

Landlord Verification

The revised *Landlord Verification* form is dated 1/2008. Please discard any form with a date prior to 1/2008. The *Landlord Verification* form is available in the *Online Forms* section of *Policy Online*.

18-867-0108-05

EBT-15(Rev. 1/2008)

EBT Card Signature Sheet

This form has been revised. Please discard all prior versions and use the revised version of this form.

From the Hotline

Q. Twelve months ago, a TAFDC client in our TAO reported that she received a lump sum payment from her insurance company. The amount of this payment closed the TAFDC case until December 11, 2009. Today, the client has requested that we recalculate her period of ineligibility because of recent personal problems, including an abusive relationship. What should I do?

A. According to 106 CMR 204.240(F), there are certain situations when a recalculation of the lump sum ineligibility period may be completed. A client who has been in an abusive relationship may request a recalculation **if as a result of an abusive relationship:**

- the ineligible assistance unit needed to spend the lump sum payment on day-to-day living expenses as defined in 106 CMR 204.240(B) or spent it on shelter, fuel, utilities, food or clothing; or
- the ineligible assistance unit no longer has access to the lump sum and is therefore unable to pay for day-to-day living expenses as defined in 106 CMR 204.240(B) or is unable to pay for shelter, fuel, utilities, food or clothing.

Refer to 106 CMR 204.240(B) and 106 CMR 204.240(F) for acceptable verifications.

If you have any questions on this, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478.

Q. If a recalculation of a lump sum ineligibility period is performed due to an abusive relationship, must the TAFDC client also request a good cause domestic violence waiver as specified in 106 CMR 203.110?

A. No. In this situation, while a good cause domestic violence waiver request(s) should be explored with your client, it is not required. Remember, however, that any instance requiring a recalculation of a lump sum ineligibility period due to an abusive relationship should be accompanied by a referral to your TAO's domestic violence specialist.

Q. Can I recalculate the lump sum ineligibility period due to an abusive relationship, even if the abuse is no longer ongoing?

A. It depends on the circumstances. While your client may not currently be in danger as a result of an ongoing abusive relationship, the recalculation of the lump sum ineligibility

period may still be appropriate, if as a result of the past abusive relationship the regulation requirements are met.

- Q.** Since the lump sum regulations are also in the EAEDC manual, does the same policy apply to clients in the EAEDC Program?
- A.** Yes. An abusive relationship is an example of a situation that can result in the recalculation of a lump sum ineligibility period in the EAEDC Program as well.

For more information, please refer to 106 CMR 321.240(F).

NOTE: In the Food Stamp Program, a nonrecurring lump sum payment is excluded as income and considered an asset in the month received, unless otherwise excluded. Refer to 106 CMR 363.230 and 106 CMR 363.140 for details.



Employment Services Program (ESP) - Expansion of Activities at Certain Community Colleges

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2008-1

This memo tells TAO staff that Employment Services Program (ESP) activities at Community Colleges are being expanded to address the need for more ESP activity slots. This is an expansion of the Vocational Education/Skills Training Program (specifically in the medical field) for the remainder of this fiscal year (through June 2008). The program's projected start date is February 1. The program runs 30 hours per week and is four weeks to four months in duration (specified by the provider on the returned Referral and Response Form). This program will help TAFDC clients to transition from welfare to successful employment.

Family Self-Sufficiency Program Contact List

TAFDC

Field Operations 2008-3

Field Operations Memo 2008-3A

Field Operations Memo 2007-60 introduced TAO staff to the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program. To ensure continued communication between the Regional Non-Profit housing agency (RNP) and the TAO FSS contact person, Field Operations Memo 2008-3 provided TAO staff with a listing of contact people at each RNP and the regions they serve.

Field Operations Memo 2008-3A provides TAO staff with an amended listing of contact people at each RNP and the regions they serve.

Community Service and the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) Calculation and Massachusetts Minimum Wage Increase

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2008-4

This memo informs TAO staff:

- that the Massachusetts minimum wage increased from \$7.50 to \$8.00 per hour on January 1, 2008;

- that MIS has recalculated the FLSA hourly amount for all active TAFDC clients engaged in community service; and
- that a special project is taking place to inform certain clients that their work requirement hours have changed due to the FLSA recalculation.

2008 Social Security/SSI COLA for TAFDC, EAEDC and FS

TAFDC, EAEDC and FS
Field Operations Memo 2008-5

Effective January 2008, Social Security Benefits and SSI payments increased by 2.3 percent. The base level Medicare Part B Premium increased from \$93.50 to \$96.40. The Medicare Part B Penalty Premium also increased, as identified in the 2008 Medicaid Part B Surcharge Premiums chart on page 5 of this memo.

This memo:

- explains how BEACON updated clients with the 2008 Social Security/SSI COLA amounts and recalculated eligibility for the active cases containing the updated clients;
- explains which cases listed on the “Clients With RSDI and/or SSI” view require AU Manager action; and
- transmits procedures for AU Managers to update cases with discrepant 2008 Social Security/SSI COLA amounts.

New Initiative Memo: TAFDC - Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership (MBHP) Referrals

Beginning February 1, 2008, DTA will partner with Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership (MBHP) and Clinical and Support Options (a service provider of MBHP) to provide our clients who have behavioral health symptoms, such as mild to moderate depression and/or anxiety, additional access to screenings, assessments and support services. The goal of this initiative is to help these clients overcome barriers to meeting the work program requirement and become employable. This new initiative will first be offered in the Springfield Liberty TAO through June 30, 2008. If successful, it will be expanded to the Worcester TAO and then statewide.

The purpose of this New Initiative memo is to identify appropriate

referrals and inform TAO staff about the vocational specialist’s and the provider’s responsibilities.

New Initiative Memo: TAFDC - Vocational Specialists in TAOs (Phase One)

To help applicants and clients who have identified a medical disability or a learning disability overcome these barriers to employment, DTA will bring vocational specialists to all TAOs on an incremental basis. The vocational specialist will meet with work program required applicants and clients to assess their service needs and barriers to employment, and to provide coordination in obtaining community support services. The following TAOs will be the first group to receive a vocational specialist: Brockton, Dudley Square, Fall River, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, Malden, New Bedford, North Shore, Revere and Springfield State. TAO Staff will be notified as each phase of this new initiative begins.

The purpose of this New Initiative memo is to identify clients eligible for a referral to the vocational specialist, inform AU Managers about the vocational specialist’s responsibilities, and provide follow-up instructions.

New Initiative Memo: TAFDC/ESP - Project Hope

The Project Hope new initiative will provide supported work services to pre-selected families receiving TAFDC and living in Crittendon-Hastings House.

The new initiative is in place through June 2008 and is only for the following TAO: Boston Family Housing.

The goal of this program is to provide employment and permanent housing for these families.

EA - Right to a Fair Hearing

EA
SL 1332

The Department is required to provide notice to an EA family of its right to appeal when the family is placed in a temporary emergency shelter or transferred to another temporary emergency shelter.



FYI

Changes to DTA Online

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

Legal – Memos Related to Employee Conduct

The following memos have been added to the list of memos relating to employee conduct:

- *Federal Hatch Act (4-23-2007)*; and
- *Restrictions on Political Activities by State Employees (3-15-2007)*
- *Policy on Workplace Violence (2-6-2008)*.

These memos are also included in the list of **Administrative Memos**.

Diversity – Events

The Diversity Event for February is entitled *African American History Month*.

Diversity – Newsletter

The Diversity Newsletter entitled *Perspectives* dated January 2008 can be viewed by selecting *Diversity - Newsletter*.

Project Management

A new option entitled **Project Management** has been added to the list of available options displayed on the left side of the DTA Online homepage. When selected, the following options are displayed:

Introduction – provides an overview of Project Management at DTA;

Templates and Tools – provides access to the Project Management templates and instructions for completing the templates and describes other tools used in the Project Management process; and

Project Reporter – provides a description of and a link to Project Reporter, a Project Management tool.

FYI

Changes to Policy Online

This month you will see the following change to Policy Online:

Online Forms

The *Landlord Verification* form has been added to the list of available online forms.

FYI

Expansion of Office for Refugee and Immigrants (ORI) ESP Openings for TAFDC Clients

DTA currently funds Job Search/Job Readiness with ORI. This makes it possible for DTA to serve recent immigrants who have a wide range of cultural and linguistic barriers to employment. Program activities include: Assessment, intensive English for Employment instruction, Job Search, Skills Development, Job Matching and Job Development, Job Placement and Job Placement Follow-up.

Due to the success of this program, effective February 2008, 84 additional openings will be available in the following locations for referral to ORI:

Dudley Square, Malden and Newmarket Square: 24 openings;

North Shore: 12 openings;

Worcester: 12 openings;

Springfield State and Springfield Liberty: 24 openings; and

Revere: 12 openings.

Additionally, ORI has committed to finding full-time jobs for 10 of our clients by the end of June.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

FYI

T-A34/36 Form and Pregnant Women

AU Managers are reminded that a TAFDC applicant who reports the absence of a parent – including a pregnant woman applying only for herself – must sign a T-A34/36 Assignment of Rights form at application. Pregnant women must sign Section I only. Completing this form is an essential first step in locating an absent parent, establishing paternity and obtaining child support. Failure to sign the form will result in the case being denied benefits.

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