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From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues,

As you know, our Department's administrative funding is used for staff salaries, office leases, equipment, and other expenses necessary to fulfilling our mission to assist low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, increase their incomes, and improve their quality of life. In order to achieve administrative efficiencies, and to live within our funding for Fiscal Year 2011, we need to make difficult choices. **As a result, we will not be renewing our leases for local office space in North Adams and Milford.**

The leases are expiring for these offices, providing an opportunity to make change without breaking any contracts. We anticipate the North Adams office will downsize on November 29, 2010, and the Milford office will downsize on April 29, 2011.

There will be no layoffs as a result of this decision: in fact, merging these locations with larger nearby offices will maximize our resources, maintain critical staffing levels, and allow us to continue to effectively operate our programs. North Adams staff and client cases will be transferred to the Pittsfield office; Milford staff and client cases will be transferred to neighboring areas including the Framingham, Southbridge, Taunton and Worcester offices. In the event that an employee wishes to request a transfer to another DTA office, the Department will make every effort to accommodate that request, subject to the staffing needs in each office. Clients will be notified by mail of their new office assignment.

Although clients will need to travel further for face-to-face meetings, we will continue to explore the use of phone, fax, mail, and the internet to minimize the need for in-person interaction. We will maintain a presence in North Adams and Milford through outstations or satellite offices.

We have notified SEIU Local 509 and NAGE of these closings and will work with them to ensure a smooth transition. Thank you for your continuing commitment to the Department and the citizens of the Commonwealth.

With much appreciation,

Julie E. Kehoe
Commissioner

Quality Corner

This month we will review two errors that occurred in Non-Public Assistance (NPA) SNAP cases. The first error was caused by an incorrect BEACON entry, while the second error was caused by the use of incorrect shelter expenses.

Entering Countable Income in BEACON

This NPA SNAP household included a disabled adult, his spouse and their 18-year-old dependent. The case was recertified for 12 months from May 2010 through May 2011. The client reported income of \$704 in SSI benefits and \$491 in TAFDC benefits. The household was responsible for rent in the amount of \$251 per month and also paid for heating expenses.

In the review month, the household received the maximum allotment for a household of three in the amount of \$526. The case manager had indicated that the client received SSI benefits but inadvertently checked “No” in the Exists field of the Other Income window on BEACON 2. Consequently, the SSI amount was not counted in the SNAP benefit determination which caused an overpayment error of \$209 in the review month.

What’s a Case Manager to Do?

Case managers must pay close attention to the information that is entered into BEACON. Indicating that the SSI amount existed on the Other Income window of BEACON 2 was critical for the SSI income to be counted in the benefit calculation. On BEACON 3, there is no Exists field. However, if the SSI income was being entered in BEACON 3, the case manager would indicate that the income was “Active” in the Status dropdown list and countable by selecting “Yes” in the Countable FS field to ensure that the SSI income would count in the SNAP benefit calculation.

It is also good practice for case managers to check the result of recent case activity to see if the newly calculated amount corresponds to the action taken. For example, if a client reports that a household member has moved, when the household member is subsequently removed from the SNAP case, the result would be a decrease in SNAP benefits and not an increase.

Incorrect Shelter Expenses

The second case included the client, her spouse and six children. The family reported earnings of \$3,416 for the review month. A mortgage expense of \$1,593 and the heating/cooling SUA were used in the SNAP benefit calculation.

Quality Control (QC) review determined from the mortgage statement that the mortgage amount of \$1,593 was incorrect. The case manager had used an amount from the escrow information that was displayed on the mortgage statement. The client also informed the QC reviewer that the monthly mortgage payment was \$423 and not \$1,593. This caused an overpayment error of \$126 for the review month. Because this case had no elderly or disabled members, the shelter deduction is capped; otherwise the error amount would have been more significant.

What’s a Case Manager to Do?

Case managers must be careful when extracting information from paystubs, mortgage statements, and other documentation. If the case manager was unsure of the amount of the client’s mortgage, the case manager should have contacted the client or reviewed the application or recertification form to see if an amount was recorded. If the documentation provided is generally unclear or contradictory, the case manager should follow up with the client and request additional verification, if necessary.

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. I received a SNAP application today from a 75-year-old disabled man who receives \$800 per month in Social Security benefits. He lives with his 31-year-old son and the son's two children. His adult son's total gross income is \$1,033 per month. Because of my applicant's age and disability, his son has been purchasing food and preparing meals for the entire household, including the 75-year-old applicant. Since this applicant is both disabled and age 60 or older, can he apply as a separate SNAP household?

A. Yes. An individual may qualify as a separate SNAP household if permanently disabled and age 60 or older and if the income of the other people living with the applicant is less than 165 percent of the federal poverty level.

In this case, as long as the adult son's income is below 165 percent of the federal poverty level for a family of three (below \$2,518 for the son and his two children), your applicant may apply separately for SNAP benefits.

This 31-year-old son can also choose to apply separately for SNAP benefits for himself and his children. See 106 C.M.R. 361.200(B) for more information on this policy.

NOTE: Determining whether or not the income of the remaining household members is below 165 percent of the federal poverty level is a manual task. Remember to exclude the applicant's own income and to consider only the gross income of the others living with the

applicant. See 106 CMR 364.975 for more information.

Q. If the permanently disabled applicant described in the previous question was living with his wife, in addition to his adult child and grandchildren, how would the composition of the households change?

A. It is important to remember that the "Spouse" rule supersedes the elderly and disabled exception described in the previous answer. Therefore, this disabled husband and his wife would need to be together in the same SNAP household, apart from any children and/or grandchildren.

The adult son could still choose to apply separately for SNAP for himself and his children.

Q. If the permanently disabled 75-year-old applicant described in the first question was living with his daughter under age 22, in addition to his adult son and grandchildren, how would the composition of the households change?

A. The "Parent/Child" rule supersedes the elderly and disabled exception as well. Therefore, the applicant and his daughter under age 22 would need to be in the same SNAP household, apart from the 31-year-old son and his two children.

As in the previous answers, the adult son in this situation can choose to apply separately for SNAP for himself and his children.

Field Operations Memos

Domestic Violence (DV) General Procedures

All

Field Operations Memo 2010-35

The purpose of this memo is to provide written guidance about domestic violence procedures to promote greater collaboration between case managers and DV Specialists by providing more detailed DV procedures.

Verifying Noncitizen Status

All

Field Operations Memo 2010-36A

The Fiscal Year 2011 State Budget requires that the Department use the federal Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) program to verify the immigration status of any noncitizen applicant for SNAP, TAFDC and EAEDC to determine whether the individual meets noncitizen requirements for benefit eligibility purposes. The Department continues its practice of verifying citizenship status prior to issuing benefits.

This memo was reissued to:

- advise TAO staff how to get passwords to log in to SAVE;
- remind TAO staff how to verify noncitizen status; and
- advise TAO staff about a fact sheet to give to clients who need to correct erroneous status information.

Fuel Assistance – Change in Communicating Information

All

Field Operations Memo 2010-42

The Department is changing the way we provide income verification letters and Fuel Assistance information to clients applying for the benefit. Unlike in past years, income verification letters and Fuel Assistance information will not be mailed to clients. This memo advises TAO staff about new resources which are now available to meet this need.

Field Operations Memos

Certain CIES Vendors Reaching Slot Capacity

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2010-44

The Department instituted the Competitive Integrated Employment Services (CIES) procurement process as part of an EOHHS Secretariat-wide initiative to purchase an array of ESP services to support clients in obtaining work and reaching self-sufficiency. Funding for CIES slots was reduced in this year's budget. As a result, certain CIES vendors are already reaching their slot capacity for the fiscal year.

The purpose of this memo is to advise TAO staff about this situation and provide instructions for processing clients referred to these vendors.

Globe Santa Mailing – Eligibility Eliminated for Clients Living in Lowell, Lawrence and Haverhill

All

Field Operations Memo 2010-47

This year's Globe Santa mailing will take place on October 12th and November 15th. The "Boston Globe Santa – Holiday Gift Verification Notice" will be sent to active TAFDC, EAEDC, and SNAP clients who live in the Globe Santa geographical area. The mailing includes an informational notice about the Globe Santa program and a verification notice. This verification notice lists the name, date of birth and gender of all children age 12 years or younger. Clients may send the verification notice with their own letter to Globe Santa requesting to participate in the Boston Globe Santa Program.

The Globe has informed us that clients living in the cities of Lowell, Lawrence and Haverhill are no longer eligible for the program. Therefore, **no** mailing will be sent to clients living in those cities.

FYIs

BEACON 3.0 Update

At this time, Central Office continues to conduct regular teleconference calls with Field staff to review outstanding issues and questions.

- When calling issues into the Systems Help Desk, please continue to provide:
 - Case name and social security number;
 - Case manager name and weld;

(Continued on page 6)

FYIs *(Continued from page 5)*

- Case action attempted;
 - BEACON 3.0 page(s) affected;
 - Result expected; and
 - Problem experienced.
- If reporting issues by e-mail, also include screen attachments of the affected pages by:
 - pressing the **Print Scrn** button at the top of your keyboard to copy the page in BEACON 3.0 that you are on when an issue occurs.
 - opening up a blank MS Word document, and clicking edit/paste to paste the screen print of the BEACON 3.0 page into the Word document.
 - pressing enter twice and then typing the description at the blinking cursor.
 - double-clicking at the top of the word document to start entering a text description of the issue.

Remember, only the Help Desk Liaison, TAO Manager, or IT Site Manager should call the Help Desk. Other users should only call the Help Desk for BEACON 3.0 Password Resets.

As always, thank you to all DTA staff, particularly those working in TAOs, for all of your patience, cooperation and hard work.

Health Safety Net

The Health Safety Net (HSN) provides EAEDC clients not covered by MassHealth with coverage for medical services received at hospitals (acute care) and community health centers. This coverage is reflected on the MA-21 system used to convey client eligibility to providers. EAEDC applicants are not eligible for this coverage until they have been established as clients. Once the EAEDC case is approved, any services not paid between application date and approval date can be covered retroactively by the provider resubmitting the bill.

When NewMMIS was implemented on May 26, 2009, coding was inadvertently changed on the MA-21 system allowing EAEDC applicants coverage of medical services received at hospitals (acute care) and community health centers. HSN is covering all services billed for these applicants (without the need to resubmit the bill once the applicant becomes a client) until the system has been updated. You will be notified when the MA-21 system has been updated. There is no change to an EAEDC ongoing client's medical coverage.

FYI

Suspension of SNAP ABAWD Rules Extended

Recently, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) issued guidance advising that qualifying states may continue to suspend SNAP work program rules for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) for an additional 12-month period, provided the state has met the criteria of extended Unemployment Compensation (UC) benefits. Since Massachusetts continues to offer extended UC benefits, this waiver has been extended to cover the period from October 1, 2010 through September 30, 2011. Case managers are reminded to follow the procedures outlined in Field Operations Memo 2009-33 when processing SNAP cases that include ABAWDs.

Reminder for SNAP E&T: *Unfit for Work Observed* is not an exemption for SNAP E&T and should not be used.

Transportation

TAO staff are reminded that transportation benefits are still available as a support service for our clients to get to and from ESP activities. Transportation benefits can also be approved for up one month *before* the start of the activity for the time period the person may need transportation to get to that activity during the first month. This transportation payment must be manually calculated based on the number of days the client will be attending the activity during the first month and issued from the Related Benefit page. For more information, see Field Operations Memo 2009-69.

From the Forms File

Online Documents

Security Request SCR-1

Security Request Procedures for Directors

Please note the *Security Request (SCR-1)* has been revised and is available on DTA Online under the MIS/Forms. Also now available online are the *Security Request Procedures for Directors* to complete the *Security Request*.

Diversity Quote

“Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but not their own facts.”

Daniel Patrick Moynihan

TAO Meeting Notes