MEPD and Texas Works Bulletin 19-8

Date: September 9, 2019

To: Eligibility Services – Regional Directors
   Program Managers
   Eligibility Services Supervisors
   Regional Attorneys
   Hearings Officers

From: Todd Byrnes, Associate Commissioner
       Access and Eligibility Services Eligibility Operations
       State Office 9926

       Gina Carter, Deputy Associate Commissioner
       Access and Eligibility Services Program Policy
       State Office 2115

Subject: 1. Revised SNAP Income Limits, Deductions, and Allotments
          2. Revised TANF Maximum Grant Amounts
          3. Public Benefit Integrity Unit Messages in Data Broker
          4. Quality Control Sanctions in Data Broker

Bulletins are sent to supervisors and other regional managers. Supervisors must share this information with all eligibility staff. Please ensure copies are provided to staff that do not have access to e-mail. If you have any questions regarding the policy information in this bulletin, follow regional procedures.

Active bulletins are posted on the following websites:

- Texas Works Handbook (TWH) at http://hhs.texas.gov/laws-regulations/handbooks/texas-works-handbook/texas-works-bulletins;
1. Revised SNAP Income Limits, Deductions, and Allotments

Background

As part of the annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients, effective October 1, 2019, the following limits and amounts have changed:

- maximum SNAP income limits;
- standard deduction;
- standard utility allowance (SUA);
- basic utility allowance (BUA);
- maximum excess shelter deduction;
- homeless shelter deduction;
- SNAP allotments; and
- minimum monthly SNAP allotment for one and two-person households.

Note: The telephone standard and standard medical expense deduction did not change.

Current Policy

SNAP

Staff must use the SNAP income limits found in TWH C-121, Maximum Income Limits; deductions found in TWH C-121.1, Deduction Amounts; and allotment amounts found in TWH C-1431, Whole Monthly Allotments by Household Size, effective October 1, 2018, to determine eligibility for SNAP eligibility determination groups (EDGs).

New Policy

SNAP

Staff must use the following income limits, deductions, and allotment amounts effective October 1, 2019, to determine eligibility for SNAP EDGs.

Maximum SNAP Income Limits Effective October 1, 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Size</th>
<th>Gross (130%)</th>
<th>Net (100%)</th>
<th>165%**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,354</td>
<td>1,041</td>
<td>1,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,832</td>
<td>1,410</td>
<td>2,326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2,311</td>
<td>1,778</td>
<td>2,933</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**The figures in the 165% column are used to determine whether an elderly person with a disability living with others may claim separate household status even though the individual purchases or prepares food with the others. The figures in this column are also the gross income limits for categorically eligible households.

**Standard or Maximum Deduction Amounts Effective October 1, 2019**

- **Standard Deduction:**
  - If household size is three or less — $167
  - If household size is four — $178
  - If household size is five — $209
  - If household size is six or more — $240
- **Standard Medical Expense** — $137 (minus $35)
- **Maximum Excess Shelter** — $569
- **Standard Utility Allowance** — $355
- **Basic Utility Allowance** — $324
- **Telephone Standard** — $38
- **Homeless Shelter Standard** — $152.06

**SNAP Allotment Amounts Effective October 1, 2019**

The minimum monthly SNAP allotment for a one or two-person household has increased from $15 to $16. SNAP allotment charts providing the whole monthly allotments by household size are included as an attachment to this bulletin.

**Policy for EDGs Processed After September Mass Update**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For the benefit month of:</th>
<th>eligibility is determined using the:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 2019 or earlier,</td>
<td><strong>Previous</strong> income limits, standard deduction amount, SUA/BUA amounts, maximum excess shelter deduction,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and allotment amounts for determining that month’s benefits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>October 2019,</th>
<th><strong>Updated</strong> income limits, standard deduction amounts, SUA/BUA amounts, maximum excess shelter deduction, telephone standard, and allotment amounts for determining that month’s benefits.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This includes households applying after September 15, 2019 who meet the combined allotment eligibility criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The updated 130% federal poverty level (FPL) amounts are used to notify a streamlined reporting household of the reporting requirement at application, recertification, or incomplete review when the action is disposed on or after October 1, 2019.*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*TIERS will automatically use the correct amounts for each month.

**Automation**

TIERS updated all active SNAP EDGs during the weekend of August 31, 2019. The updated income limits, deductions, and allotments are budgeted in TIERS for benefit month October 2019 and ongoing. The appropriate income limits, deductions, and allotments are automatically applied for each benefit month, whether the benefit month is before or after the October COLA (including combined allotment situations). TIERS converts the amount of benefits for SNAP EDGs in ongoing status without an override designation and produces a combined Form TF0001, Notice of Case Action, for any SNAP/TANF/Medical Assistance (MA) EDG with a benefit change.

**Note:** A TIERS exception report for EDGs not included in the mass update are distributed for staff action. EDGs not updated will receive an explanation of the October cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) on the next Form TF0001 produced for that EDG.

**Correspondence**
SNAP households with an increased or decreased allotment will receive the following notice included on the Form TF0001:

*Benefit amounts for many people have changed. This is due to new federal and state laws or rules. Changes go into effect October 1, 2019.*

**Effective Date**

The policy is effective beginning with benefit month October 2019.

**Handbook**

The Texas Works Handbook will be updated in the October 2019 revision.

**Training**

Training is not required.
2. Revised TANF Maximum Grant Amounts

**Background**

State law requires that the monthly Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) maximum grant amounts be adjusted to 17 percent of the current federal poverty level (FPL). Policy is revised to reflect the annual TANF maximum grant increase.

**Current Policy**

**TANF**

Staff must use the TANF Budgetary Allowances chart, effective October 1, 2018, found in TWH C-111, Income Limits, to determine the maximum grant amount for TANF eligibility determination groups (EDGs).

**New Policy**

**TANF**

Staff must use the TANF Budgetary Allowances chart, effective October 1, 2019, to determine the maximum grant amount for TANF EDGs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Size</th>
<th>Non-caretaker Cases</th>
<th>Caretaker Cases Without</th>
<th>Caretaker Cases with Second Parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>$104</td>
<td>$126</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>$149</td>
<td>$262</td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>$209</td>
<td>$303</td>
<td>$332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>$249</td>
<td>$364</td>
<td>$372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>$320</td>
<td>$404</td>
<td>$432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>$345</td>
<td>$464</td>
<td>$473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>$430</td>
<td>$504</td>
<td>$531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>$473</td>
<td>$574</td>
<td>$572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>$542</td>
<td>$615</td>
<td>$642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>$584</td>
<td>$685</td>
<td>$683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>$654</td>
<td>$726</td>
<td>$753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>$695</td>
<td>$796</td>
<td>$795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>$765</td>
<td>$837</td>
<td>$864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>$807</td>
<td>$907</td>
<td>$906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>$875</td>
<td>$949</td>
<td>$975</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For each additional member | $70 | $70 | $70

Policy for EDGs Processed After September Mass Update

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For the benefit month of:</th>
<th>Use:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 2019 or earlier,</td>
<td>Previous maximum grant amount.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2019 or later,</td>
<td>Updated maximum grant amount.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Automation

TIERS updated the TANF grant amounts during the weekend of August 31, 2019. The updated TANF grant amounts are budgeted in TIERS for benefit month October 2019 and ongoing. TIERS converts the amount of benefits for TANF EDGs in ongoing status without an override designation and produces a combined Form TF0001, Notice of Case Action, for any SNAP/TANF/Medical Assistance (MA) EDG with a benefit change.

Note: A TIERS exception report for EDGs not included in the mass update are distributed for staff action. EDGs not updated will receive an explanation of the October cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) on the next Form TF0001 produced for that EDG.

Correspondence

TANF households with an increased allotment will receive the following notice included on the Form TF0001:

*Benefit amounts for many people have changed. This is due to new federal and state laws or rules. Changes go into effect October 1, 2019.*

Effective Date

The policy is effective beginning with benefit month October 2019. There are no changes in the budgetary or recognizable needs amounts for these eligibility tests.

Handbook

The Texas Works Handbook will be updated in the October 2019 revision.

Training

Training is not required.
3. Public Benefit Integrity Unit Messages in Data Broker

Background

The Public Benefit Integrity Unit (PBIU) is a strategic initiative implemented by HHSC to prevent inaccurate benefit issuance, provide case insight and enhance case quality to ensure that program benefit amounts provided to SNAP, TANF, Medicaid, MEPD and CHIP recipients are accurate according to federal and state policy.

As an initiative to increase case accuracy and to identify and prevent fraud, the Data Broker combined report will now include information related to previous PBIU findings and potential identity theft, when applicable.

Current Policy

SNAP, TANF, Texas Works Medical Programs

The Data Broker combined report collects and combines information from several sources into one report which includes information such as residence address, individuals living at that address, vehicle and real property ownership, credit, employment, income verification, and other information reported to other sources. Staff must request a Data Broker Report without a Credit Report for household members ages 16 and up (TWH C-820, Data Broker).

There are various ways to submit PBIU referrals since not all HHSC eligibility offices have PBIU staff assigned to their offices. HHSC offices that do:

- have PBIU staff assigned to their office,
  - use the PBIU case-referral functionality in the Eligibility Workload Management System (EWMS), which is the tool used to send case referrals; and
  - follow the PBIU case-referral process listed in the Eligibility Operations Procedures Manual (EOPM), IX Appendix, for PBIU review.
- not have PBIU staff assigned to their office,
  - refer cases to the PBIU mailbox (PBIU_InquiriesReferrals@hhsc.state.tx.us) for review.

For all discrepant information found, staff must follow policy in TWH C-920, Questionable Information, to resolve all discrepant information.

Case comments may indicate that a case has either been referred to PBIU or has been reviewed by PBIU.
New Policy

SNAP, TANF, Texas Works Medical Programs

In addition to TIERS case comments indicating that a case has either been referred to PBIU or has been reviewed by PBIU, two new sections will be added to the Data Broker combined report.

**Previous PBIU Findings** and **Potential Identity Theft** indicators are now displayed as new sections in the Data Broker combined report. Each section will include the following checkbox:

☐ I have reviewed and addressed all Previous PBIU Findings

If the *Table of Contents: Records*, which now includes these two sections, says *Yes*, click on the appropriate section. In addition to clearing any other discrepant information from the last case action and the application, staff must also review and address all the information displayed in each appropriate section. Once staff have reviewed and processed the information, as appropriate, staff must click the box and then the **Confirm** button affirming they have reviewed and addressed the information.

The validation checkbox can only be confirmed by accessing a combined report from the TIERS link or by requesting a Data Broker combined report from the Data Broker Portal and not in the Data Broker combined report in Case History.

**Previous PBIU Findings**

When a combined report indicates previous PBIU findings, the following message is provided:

*This case had previous PBIU findings related to **TOPIC**. Please review previous case comments and explore all case clues.*

The PBIU related finding (**TOPIC**) could be related to topics such as Household Composition, Income, Questionable Management, etc.

This indicator identifies people with a previous PBIU finding for any case in which a person did not:

- disclose information that PBIU discovered during their review which resulted in either a case denial due to the information received or a benefit reduction.
  - For example, the second parent was found to be in the household. The second parent was added to the household,
making the household ineligible for benefits altogether or eligible for less benefits.
  o These cases will show up on the report for 12 months.
  • provide verification resulting in denial for failure to provide.
  o These cases will show up indefinitely and do not have an end date.

This indicator does not require staff to refer the case back to PBIU but does require staff to continue to follow policy in TWH C-920, Questionable Information, to resolve any discrepant information found.

Potential Identity Theft

When a combined report indicates a person who may have been associated with potential identity theft in the past and previous PBIU findings, the following message is provided:

This individual has been associated with potential identity theft.
Please refer this case to PBIU. DO NOT DISPOSE THIS CASE PRIOR TO RECEIVING FINDINGS FROM PBIU.

When a combined report indicates potential identity theft, staff must refer the case to PBIU using either the PBIU case-referral functionality in the EWMS or via PBIU mailbox, as applicable, and continue to follow current policies and procedures for processing the Eligibility Determination Group (EDG).

Automation

Changes to the combined report will be implemented October 1, 2019.

Forms

Form changes are not required.

Effective Date

The policy is effective October 1, 2019 for applications, recertifications, and changes received as of that date.

Handbook

The Texas Works Handbook will be updated in the April 2020 revision.
Training

The new training module was made available through the Data Broker Portal on Tuesday, September 3, 2019.

To access the training, staff will need to log into the Data Broker Portal at https://portal.pcgtxdatabroker.com/Account/Login and select “Training” on the left navigation bar. The training module will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

To ensure that all staff are familiar with new Data Broker functionality, Field Operations and staff who support Eligibility Operations with Data Broker must complete the updated training by September 27, 2019.
4. Quality Control Sanctions in Data Broker

Background

When a person has refused to cooperate with the SNAP or TANF quality control (QC) review process, the person is sanctioned. A sanction is a disqualification, or a penalty, applied to a case because a person failed to comply with a program requirement. A person is ineligible for benefits until they comply or until the sanction expires.

Active QC sanctions can be easily overlooked and the person potentially certified with a sanction in error. As an initiative to increase case accuracy, the Data Broker combined reports will now include information related to QC sanctions, as applicable.

Current Policy
SNAP and TANF

When a person does not cooperate with the QC process, QC staff send the information to the Customer Care Center (CCC). CCC staff then enter the sanction information into TIERS and take the appropriate action (TWH C-1451, Dropped – Subject to Review but Not Completed and C-1453, Completed QC Reviews). Staff follow policy found in TWH C-1454, Reapplying for Benefits after a Quality Control Penalty, when a household reapplies.

New Policy
SNAP and TANF

QC Sanctions indicator is now displayed as a new section in the Data Broker combined report. This indicator identifies people who have an active QC sanction for non-compliance with QC reviews.

The following messages are displayed in the QC Sanctions section to provide staff with QC sanction information in addition now providing the designated QC Analyst’s contact information that the person must contact to comply:

- This client has refused to cooperate with Quality Control for review of their SNAP EDG. The client is not eligible for SNAP benefits until they cooperate with Quality Control.
This client has refused to cooperate with Quality Control for review of their TANF EDG. The client is not eligible for TANF benefits until they cooperate with Quality Control.

If the Table of Contents: Records, which now includes this new section, says Yes, click on the section.

When the combined report indicates a QC sanction, staff must now confirm cooperation with the QC Analyst listed in Data Broker and continue to follow policy in TWH C-1454, Reapplying for Benefits after a Quality Control Penalty.

Once staff have reviewed and processed the information as appropriate, staff must click the box and then the Confirm button affirming they have reviewed and addressed the information.

☐ I have reviewed and addressed all Previous PBIU Findings

Automation

Changes to the combined report will be implemented October 1, 2019.

Forms

Form changes are not required.

Effective Date

The policy is effective October 1, 2019 for applications, recertifications, and changes received as of that date.

Handbook

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Training

The new training module was made available through the Data Broker Portal on Tuesday, September 3, 2019.

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To ensure that all staff are familiar with new Data Broker functionality, Field Operations and staff who support Eligibility Operations with Data Broker must complete the updated training by **September 27, 2019**.