MEPD and Texas Works Bulletin 20-19

Date: August 28, 2020

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

From: Access and Eligibility Services Program Policy
      State Office 2115

Subject: COVID-19 Policy Updates #13

The information in this bulletin provides temporary guidance regarding policies and procedures for processing case actions during the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Staff will be notified when the COVID-19 policy and clarifications should no longer be used for processing case actions and determining eligibility. If you have any questions regarding the policy information in this bulletin, follow regional procedures.

Active bulletins are posted on the following websites:

COVID-19 Policy Updates #13

Background
On March 13, 2020, Governor Greg Abbott declared a state of disaster for all counties in Texas due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. On the same date, President Donald J. Trump declared a national emergency. Guidance from state and federal leaders emphasize the need for social distancing and limiting contact with others during this time. In light of this guidance, HHSC is providing the following policy clarifications and temporary changes to eligibility policies to accommodate processing of case actions during this emergency period.

On August 8, 2020, President Trump authorized the use of disaster relief funds to provide supplemental payments for lost wages. The Lost Wages Assistance (LWA) Program provides additional unemployment payments to eligible claimants who are experiencing unemployment due to circumstances related to COVID-19. On August 21, 2020, Texas received approval to implement the Lost Wages Assistance Program.

Lost Wages Assistance (LWA)

COVID-19 Policy
LWA payments are for certain people who are eligible for unemployment benefits due to circumstances related to COVID-19, including regular unemployment benefits, extended unemployment benefits, Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA), Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC), or Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA).

An eligible person will receive an LWA payment of $300 per week in addition to the other unemployment payments they are receiving. The LWA payments are available retroactively beginning with benefit weeks on or after August 1, 2020, and will end the earlier of the following:

- on December 26, 2020;
- when all LWA funds are exhausted; or
- when Federal legislation is enacted which authorizes supplemental unemployment compensation, or similar compensation, for unemployed or underemployed individuals.

Note: LWA payments are not Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) payments.
All Programs
LWA payments count as unearned income (MEPDH E-4600, Unemployment Benefits and TWH A-1324.19, Unemployment Compensation).

Staff Procedures
LWA payments will not be identified separately on the Benefit Payments section under the TWC Wages and Benefits section in Data Broker. The Amt column will include both the LWA payment and the other unemployment payment the person is receiving. Continue to calculate the bi-weekly unemployment payment amount by using the last two BWE weeks with the same Date paid and adding the following amounts together:

- Ddct amount;
- Dist amount; and
- Amt amount.

In the Unearned Income LUW in TIERS, on the Unearned Income – Details page, select Unemployment Compensation as the Unearned Income Type and enter the total countable bi-weekly amount.

Automation
Automation changes are not required.

Correspondence
Correspondence changes are not required.

Handbook
Handbook updates are not required.
**Training**
Training is not required.

**Effective Date**
This policy is effective with the release of this bulletin. Staff will be notified when the COVID-19 policy and clarifications no longer apply.