

DATE: July 16, 2024

OPERATIONS MEMORANDUM #24-07-03

SUBJECT: Cash Assistance Telephone Interview and Agreement of Mutual Responsibility (AMR) Policy

TO: Executive Directors

FROM: Robert Hixson
Director
Bureau of Operations

PURPOSE

To Inform County Assistance Offices (CAOs) of procedures for authorizing assistance at application and renewal when conducting telephone interviews and an AMR signature is needed.

BACKGROUND

Signing the AMR is a condition of eligibility for cash assistance. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) requires each member of the budget group who is required to sign the Application for Benefits (PA 600) to complete and sign the AMR. An individual who refuses to complete or sign the AMR without good cause is ineligible for TANF cash assistance. For Extended TANF (ETANF) the entire budget group is ineligible.

The law requires a non-assistance specified relative to complete and sign an AMR at the personal interview. However, their refusal to complete and sign the AMR, does not affect the remaining budget group's eligibility.

The granting of good cause for an AMR signature is a short-term reason for not complying with the eligibility requirement. During the COVID pandemic, CAOs were encouraged to provide AMR signature good cause due to the interruption of operational services associated with the pandemic.

DISCUSSION

Effective immediately, [OPS Memo 22-07-03](#) Cash Assistance Interview Procedures is obsolete. Cash assistance applicants/recipients choosing to participate

in a telephone interview at application or renewal must complete and sign an AMR to be eligible or remain eligible for TANF benefits.

The CAO should attempt a screening interview with the applicant(s) in accordance with [CAH 104.3](#) but may proceed with scheduling an application interview within 13-calendar days if unable to make contact. When conducting screening and application interviews by phone, the CAO will discuss options for returning signed AMRs and the implications for failing to return the signed AMR. The CAO will explain that a person who has refused or failed to complete and sign the AMR, without good cause, may not receive assistance.

The CAO will only grant good cause when the individual establishes a valid good cause claim. Potential instances of good cause where an individual may be unable to sign and return the AMR within 30 days include, but are not limited to:

- Personal or family illness
- Hospitalization
- Risk or threat of injury due to domestic violence
- Homelessness
- A personal emergency

Be prudent when reviewing an individual's circumstance in determining and granting good cause for this eligibility requirement.

When the CAO does grant good cause for not signing the AMR at application or renewal, the CAO will review continued eligibility if the signed AMR is not returned. The CAO will follow the procedures outlined below, along with the new Cash Assistance Telephone Interview and Agreement of Mutual Responsibility (AMR) Procedures Desk Guide.

PROCEDURES

A personal interview for cash assistance is required for all applications and renewals. When the applicant/recipient chooses a phone interview, the following applies to the completion of an AMR:

- Applicant Phone Interviews:
 - The CAO will provide a copy of the AMR to the individual(s) if the individual(s) agrees to complete and sign the AMR at the time of the interview. The CAO will inform the individual that delays in returning signed AMRs will cause a delay in issuing benefits. The CAO can have the individual sign the AMR by e-mail, in person or through regular postal service. Guidance for e-mailing the AMR for signature through the CAO resource account is detailed in [PCA-21619-107](#) the CAO must use the CAO resource account and the

[O365 Message Encryption Email Encryption Procedure](#). Options for returning the signed AMR should be listed on the AMR Signature Letter [PA 1753](#) in [CAH 176 Appendix C](#). The CAO will provide individuals the option to return mailed AMRs by dropping them off at the CAO, uploading them into the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Access to Social Services (myCOMPASS) account, or emailing them back to the CAO. The individual's selection for returning the signed AMR must be narrated.

- Renewal / Partial Renewal Phone Interviews:
 - If an updated AMR is needed, the CAO can e-mail the AMR for signature using the CAO resource account, have the individual sign at the CAO or mail the AMR for signature. Mandatory Road to Economic Self-Sufficiency through Employment and Training individuals can also sign at their next appointment with the contractor. The individual's selection for returning the signed AMR should be narrated.
- An individual who is required to sign an application for assistance who fails, without good cause, to sign or cooperate in the completion of an AMR is ineligible for cash assistance until the individual completes and signs an approved AMR. For ETANF the entire budget group is ineligible. See [CAH 107.5](#).
- The CAO should review for good cause if the individual(s) states they cannot complete the AMR. See [CAH 107.51 and 107.53](#).

NOTE: If granted good cause, the CAO should manually set an alert to review at 30 days.

Once the interview is completed, the CAO will authorize cash assistance as indicated in the attached **Cash Assistance Telephone Interview and Agreement of Mutual Responsibility (AMR) Desk Guide**.

Employment and Training (E&T) Program Referrals:

E&T program referrals for RESET participants must still be completed within seven days of budget opening.

NOTE: The contracted program must act on the CAO referral within 14 calendar days of the referral date. E&T program start dates may be delayed when necessary to ensure that supports and services, like childcare, are in place to support participant activities ahead of enrollment. The reason for the delay must be noted in the case comments. A delay beyond 14 days should be reviewed for good cause.

NEXT STEPS

1. Review this Operations Memorandum and attachment with appropriate staff.
2. Implement these changes effective immediately.
3. Direct questions regarding this Operations Memorandum to your Area Manager.
4. This Operations Memorandum is obsolete once all changes are incorporated into the cash assistance handbook.

ATTACHMENT

Attachment 1: Cash Assistance Telephone Interview and Agreement of Mutual Responsibility (AMR) Desk Guide.