

DATE: March 23, 2020 – **April 8, 2020, May 19, 2020**

OPERATIONS MEMORANDUM #20-03-03

SUBJECT: **Revised** - Families First Coronavirus Response Act - Coronavirus (COVID-19) Emergency

TO: Executive Directors

FROM: Inez Titus
Director
Bureau of Operations

PURPOSE

To inform County Assistance Offices (CAOs) and Processing Centers (PCs) of the temporary policies and procedures that are being implemented in response to the COVID-19 emergency. This policy is effective immediately.

BACKGROUND

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (**FFCRA**) signed into law on March 18, 2020, provides states funding and policy flexibilities amid the COVID-19 emergency. Temporary policy changes outlined in this document will remain in effect until the end of the emergency.

~~Federal regulations at 7 CFR §273.14 state that no households may participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) beyond the expiration of the certification period assigned in accordance with §273.10(f) without a determination of eligibility for a new period. Under the FFCRA, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has approved the Department of Human Services' (DHS) request to extend certification periods and adjust SAR requirements for SNAP.~~

In addition, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has approved the Department of Human Services' (DHS) request to extend certification periods and adjust SAR requirements for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). As discussed below, this will extend the period of time in which the CAO must process a renewal under 7 C.F.R. § 273.14, as set in 7 C.F.R. § 273.10(f).

DISCUSSION**No Closure of Medical Assistance (MA), Long Term Care (LTC), and Home and Community based Services (HCBS) Program Budgets**

With the issuance of this document, CAOs and PCs **will not close any MA, LTC, or HCBS budget** at renewal, SAR, case maintenance, or change in circumstance other than for the following reasons listed:

- An individual is no longer a resident of Pennsylvania.
- An individual request that their benefits be closed (Voluntary withdrawal)
- An individual has passed away.

MA will also be closed in the following circumstances:

- Presumptive Eligibility (PS17 and MG17) – the CAO will allow MA to close at the end of the presumptive eligibility period if the individual is not eligible for ongoing MA.
- Inpatient Inmates MA (categories with program status codes 38 and 39) – the Central Unit will continue to process MA for inpatient inmates for a period of hospitalization only.
- Inter-County Transfers (ICT) – The losing CAO will follow the existing process to close MA when completing an ICT. The gaining CAO will open MA from the day after MA closed.
- MA for lawfully residing non-citizens turning age 21 and pregnant women at the end of the postpartum period – the CAO will allow MA to close if the individual is not eligible for another MA category.

Additionally, CAOs and PCs **will not make changes to MA budgets that result in a reduction of MA coverage**. For example, if an individual eligible for full MA coverage becomes eligible for Buy-In only or Family Planning Services only, then the CAO or PC will not make changes to the MA budget. Likewise, if a Qualified Medicare Beneficiary (QMB) becomes eligible as a Specified Low-Income Medicare Beneficiary (SLMB) only, the CAO or PC will not make changes to the MA budget.

NOTE: CAOs and PCs will make changes to MA budgets if individuals transition from one MA budget to another and MA coverage and benefits are maintained at the same level or increased.

When an individual enrolled in MG91 or MG90 turns 65 or becomes enrolled in Medicare, the CAO will request resource information and verification.

- If resource information and verification are not provided or if the individual becomes ineligible for MA based on the provided verification, the CAO will keep the individual open in MG91 or MG90.
- If the resource information and verification are provided and the individual continues to be eligible for MA with the same level of MA coverage, the CAO will enroll the individual in the category the individual is eligible for.
- If the individual becomes eligible for Buy-In only, the CAO will complete an override to open PH80 to enroll the individual in Healthy Horizons with Buy-In, so that the individual's MA coverage continues.

For Foster Care and Adoption MA (categories with program status codes 30-37), the CAO will allow MA to close in the category with program status code 30-37 when the child is discharged or ages out. Children who are discharged and returned to the home of removal where they previously had MA will be reopened in that case in the appropriate MA category. For all other discharges and age outs, the CAO will open MA in an appropriate category based on age (MG27, MG00, MG91, etc.).

Unless an exception (described above) applies, CAOs and PCs will complete an override to maintain existing eligibility if an MA budget would otherwise close or cause reduced MA coverage. The CAOs and PCs will suppress the notice. This override procedure applies to all MA categories in which existing eligibility must be maintained – including MA spenddown categories and GA-related MA categories. CAOs and PCs will enter a narrative in the Case Comments and explain that the reason for maintaining MA eligibility is due to the provisions of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act.

MA related Hearings and Appeals

With the issuance of this document, CAOs will follow the timelines for MA related appeals as outlined below:

- The CAO will accept MA appeals filed within 90 days from the date of the written notice of a CAO decision or action.
- The CAO will continue MA if the individual appeals after 15 days of the date an advance notice is sent **and** requests that their MA benefits be reinstated until the Bureau of Hearings and Appeals makes a hearing decision.

- If the CAO receives an appeal with an expedited fair hearing request, the CAO will continue MA benefits even if the appeal was received after 15 days of the date an advance notice is sent and follow the normal appeal process as outlined in the Supplemental Handbook Chapter 870.

Reminder: For MA, if an individual appeals within the 15 days of the date an advance notice is sent, the CAO should follow current procedure and maintain MA benefits.

Renewals and SAR processing for all Budgets

With the issuance of this document, CAOs and PCs will follow a new temporary procedure for processing MA, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) renewals and SARs:

- Budgets due for renewal or SAR are **not** to be closed for failure to provide a renewal packet, SAR form or verifications.

Changes have been made to the electronic Client Information System (eCIS) to prevent TANF and SNAP benefits from automatically changing to “Terminated” status if a SAR or Late/Incomplete Notice (L/IN) is not tracked as complete/processed. SNAP benefits will not automatically close at the end of the month if a renewal is not processed. The renewal or SAR date shall remain in overdue status until further notice.

NOTE: No SAR forms are being mailed for benefits with a SAR due in April, May, or June 2020.

With FNS’ waiver approval, **the system will adjust** all SNAP renewal due dates ~~are being adjusted~~ six months as follows:

- March renewals ~~will be extended with a due date of~~ **are now due** September 2020.
- April renewals ~~will be extended with a due date of~~ **are now due** October 2020.
- May renewals ~~will be extended with a due date of~~ **are now due** November 2020.
- **June renewals are now due December 2020.**

If a March or April renewal packet has already been completed and provided to the CAO, the interview has been completed, and the renewal can be processed, the CAO should process it and allow

the system to set a new renewal due date ~~or close the SNAP or TANF budget.~~

~~In addition, any pending renewal work items or alerts for SNAP only cases that have their due date extended will be systematically cleared. The system will clear any pending renewal work items or alerts for SNAP only cases that have their due date extended.~~

- ~~If a renewal packet or SAR form is returned with verification or data source information is reasonably compatible for MA and the individual will remain eligible, the renewal or SAR should be processed.~~
- If a renewal or SAR is returned with verification (or data source information is reasonably compatible for MA), ~~and will result in budget closure due to excess income,~~ the renewal or SAR **should not** be processed ~~for MA. for SNAP or TANF benefits. The SAR should be processed for SNAP or TANF benefits. The MA should remain open if required, as discussed above.~~

NOTE: For TANF a renewal interview must be ~~completed.~~ attempted. [See PCA 19824-176](#)

For more information on recent changes to the TANF interview, see [Ops Memo 20-03-01, Option for Cash Applicants/Recipients to Choose Interview Type.](#)

- This directive applies to renewals and SARs that are currently due as well as overdue renewals and SARs from previous months which have not yet been processed.

CAOs and PCs should process renewals and SARs following current timeliness standards whenever possible. However, due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) emergency, flexibilities in timeliness and verification standards are being utilized. See the following Ops Memos and Policy Clarifications for more information:

- [Ops Memo 20-03-02](#)
- [Policy Clarification PMA-19804 – 350](#)

~~The CAO or PC should process any reported changes through maintenance mode (using normal processing times) and issue a proper notice.~~

Processing SSI A/J/M category Suspensions

Process SSI A/J/M category suspensions following current procedures. If the MA review produces a failure for MA, then the CAO shall override the failure and build the appropriate SSI related MA category. Narrate that the reason for the override is per the provisions of the **FFCRA**.

NEXT STEPS

1. Share and review this information with appropriate staff members.
2. Direct questions regarding this Operations Memorandum to your Area Manager.
3. This policy is in effect until further notice.