



## Summer 2021 Advisory Board Statewide Updates

### Local Office Reopening

On June 28<sup>th</sup>, DTA [reopened](#) its local offices throughout the Commonwealth for in-person services. Since reopening, more than 6,400 clients have visited a DTA office, averaging about 278 clients per day visiting one of the agency's local offices. So far, the majority of people visiting an office have used self-service tools, including DTA Connect-enabled kiosks, to apply for benefits, request replacement EBT cards, and access or submit documents and verifications. DTA staff and interpreters are available at each office to help visitors, guiding them through available self-service options, teaching them how to use the DTA Connect platform to do business with the agency 24/7 from their home, or connecting them with caseworkers on DTA's Assistance Line for more in-depth support.

In response to the public health emergency, DTA quickly expanded and improved its online and telephonic access points, which has enabled families with reliable phone or internet access to conduct virtually all of their business with the agency without having to visit an office. To build on these enhancements, DTA's local office reopening is primarily focused on providing reliable access points to DTA services for people with limited or no access to technology.

Clients can continue using DTA's robust online and remote services to do business with DTA. Visit [Mass.gov/ContactDTA](https://www.mass.gov/ContactDTA) to learn all the ways people can contact and do business with the Department.

### TAFDC and EAEDC Benefit Increase

The Fiscal Year 2022 budget included increases to TAFDC and EAEDC monthly benefit levels by 20% above benefit levels in effect in FY20. DTA clients will see this increase reflected in their August 2021 benefits. Eligible clients will receive a supplement for a retroactive increase in their July benefits on August 4<sup>th</sup>. Benefit amounts will be updated on DTA's [website](#) in August and clients will be notified about these increases through noticing, text messages, and DTA Connect.

### TAFDC Clothing Allowance

DTA will begin issuing a \$350 per child clothing allowance for all eligible TAFDC clients under age 19 at the end of August. In helping families with the costs of winter clothes ahead of the coming school year, these payments also free up other resource's families can use for other essential and critical expenses.

### TANF Pandemic Emergency Payment

Governor Baker signed a supplemental budget that includes authorization for DTA to issue a federal, one-time supplemental benefit to families receiving TANF cash assistance, or TAFDC in Massachusetts. In mid-August, DTA will issuing supplemental payments of in mid-August to each child and pregnant woman who received TAFDC in the month of July. The payment amount is based on the total number of recipients. DTA estimates that about 42,000 children and pregnant women will receive a payment, resulting in payments of about \$665 per recipient. These payments, funded through the American Rescue Plan Act, are a direct response to the public health emergency and aim to support families who were hardest hit by the economic impacts associated with the pandemic.

### **Updated TAFDC Pages**

DTA continues its work to update and modernize its online resources on [Mass.gov/DTA](https://www.mass.gov/DTA). In July, the Department updated the [Apply for TAFDC](#) page to include clear and comprehensive information about program eligibility and the application process. A new page, the [While Getting TAFDC](#) page, was created to consolidate important information for clients to know once they're receiving TAFDC, including information about reevaluations, reporting requirements, program rules, and additional supports available for clients who are working, going to school, or participating in a training program. Both pages were developed in collaboration with DTA Works Interns who brought lived experiences with navigating the application for and receipt of TAFDC benefits to this work.

### **Summer P-EBT**

In late May, DTA [received approval](#) from the federal government to issue Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) this summer, providing families with continued financial assistance to buy food amid increased food insecurity. All students and children under six in SNAP households who have received P-EBT in the past, with the exception of 2020 graduates and children who have moved out of state, will receive a total of \$375 in P-EBT benefits in two equal payments of \$187.50 this summer. The first payment for K-12 was issued on July 1 and the second payment will be issued on August 1. The first payment for children under six in SNAP households was issued on July 25 and the second will be issued on August 25.

The Department's July issuances provided more than \$100 million to the families of nearly 550,000 school-age children and \$17 million to the families of more than 90,000 children under six in SNAP households.

### **Continuation of Emergency SNAP Supplements**

Governor Baker's [modified declaration of a public health emergency](#) has enabled Massachusetts to continue providing SNAP emergency allotments benefits. These temporary benefits will continue as long as there is a state and federal emergency declaration. The Department's [COVID-19 FAQ](#) includes additional information about these benefits.

### **Expanded Text Messaging Languages**

In July, DTA expanded its text messaging capability to include messages in Haitian Creole. This brings the total number of languages available for text message updates to 6, including English, Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Simplified Chinese, and Vietnamese.

### **SNAP Online Purchasing Vendors**

In July, DTA [announced](#) that Instacart has added Hannaford and Stop & Shop as retailers where people can use their SNAP benefits to buy fresh food and pantry staples online from a variety of participating stores for same-day delivery and pickup. In addition to these retailers, Aldi and Price Chopper are also approved retailers for SNAP online purchasing via the [Instacart online site and mobile app](#).

Since the roll out of the functionality in the state, Massachusetts residents have spent over \$81 million in SNAP benefits in online grocery purchases. More information about the program can be found at [Mass.gov/SNAPOnline](https://www.mass.gov/SNAPOnline).

### **DTA ADH Hearings**

As a part of the agency's response to the COVID-19 public health emergency, DTA temporarily suspended administrative disqualification hearings (ADHs). These hearings, which are required by the federal government, are central to the process of Department's investigation of alleged fraud. Throughout the pandemic, the Department's Program Integrity Division continued to review and refer appropriate cases to the Department's Division of Hearings. Beginning August 1<sup>st</sup>, the Division of Hearings will resume ADHs in order to adjudicate cases that have been referred for a hearing.

### **DTA Works Internship Programming**

The DTA Works Pharmacy Technician training recently graduated its first intern from the Spring 2021 Pharmacy Technician program. The training was conducted in partnership with Jewish Vocational Services (JVS) to provide the technical skills training, CVS to provide on the job interning experience, and MassHire to provide WIOA Title 1 funds to pay for this opportunity. DTA is actively recruiting for the Fall 2021 cohort, which begins August 31<sup>st</sup> in the Greater Boston region, as well as Greenfield, Springfield, Framingham, and Fitchburg. The agency is optimistic that this training will expand to other regions in the coming year.

### **MassHire Virtual Job Fair**

This week, the Baker-Polito Administration announced that MassHire will be hosting the largest virtual job fair the state's history between August 16 and August 20. The free, 5-day virtual event will connect job seekers, from entry level to executive, with employers from multiple industries. More information about the event can be found [here](#) and people can [register here](#). Questions can be directed to local [MassHire Career Centers](#) around the Commonwealth.

### **DHCD Policy Update Trainings**

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is hosting two training sessions in August focused on updated policies, best practices, and how our community organizations can help applicants submit complete applications. Sessions will take place on [Friday, August 6th](#) at 10am and [Wednesday, August 11th](#) at 1pm. For more information about rental assistance, tenants and landlords can visit [mass.gov/COVIDHousingHelp](https://mass.gov/COVIDHousingHelp) or call 2-1-1 for regional referrals in multiple languages.