

Department of Social and Health Services

Olympia, Washington

**EAZ Manual**

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| Revision Author: | Bob Thibodeau   |
| Division         | CSD   |
| Mail Stop        | 45470   |
| Phone            | 360-725-4634  |
| Email            | <a href="mailto:thiborl@dshs.wa.gov">thiborl@dshs.wa.gov</a>        |

**Summary**

**WAC 388-418-0007** – “When do I have to report changes in my circumstances?”

**WAC 388-418-0020** – “How does the department determine the date a change affects my benefits?”

On January 29, 2010, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) published final rules related to the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (FSRIA, commonly referred to as the Farm Bill) that established new eligibility and certification requirements for the receipt of food benefits.

**Effective August 1, 2010**, as a result of these final rules, when a client voluntarily reports a move during the certification period (between recertifications and mid-certification reviews), it is inappropriate to use the old shelter expenses in the Basic Food budget. The following changes to the EAZ Manual reflect that clients must report their new shelter costs or risk a possible reduction in benefits.

Also the procedures for Returned Mail with forwarding address on envelope for cases on Basic Food are updated to meet Federal requirements for handling address changes and associated shelter cost changes.

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WAC 388-418-0007

~~Effective August 1, 2008~~ Effective August 1, 2010

## WAC 388-418-0007 When do I have to report changes in my circumstances?

\*\*\* Placeholder only - No proposed changes to WAC 388-418-0007 \*\*\*

## CLARIFYING INFORMATION

### 1. When a change happens:

#### Non-Income Changes

The date of a change is normally the date a change happens. Examples of this include the date:

- Someone gets married;
- A newborn comes home from the hospital; and
- Someone moves to a new home.

#### Income Changes

The date of an income related change is the date someone **receives income** based on the change. Examples of this include the date:

- On the first paycheck that reflects a wage increase; and
- On the person's first paycheck for a new job.

#### EXAMPLE

Sandy is hired for a new job on May 31st. She starts work on June 10th. Her first paycheck is July 5th.

Because this is a change in income, we count the date of Sandy's first paycheck on July 5th as the date of the change.

- If Sandy must tell us about the change based on her reporting requirement under [WAC 388-418-0005](#), she must tell us about this change by August 10th.
- If Sandy reported this change earlier, we would act on the change based on when we expect her to receive the income.

#### EXAMPLE

Nick is hired for a new job on May 1st. He receives his first paycheck on June 1st. Nick must report this change of employment status and income by July 10th.

### EXAMPLE

Stacey receives TANF and Basic Food. She had her employee evaluation on October 1st. Based on this evaluation, Stacey gets a promotion and a \$1.25 hourly wage increase. The wage increase takes effect October 15th. She will receive the first check showing this increase on November 10th. Because this is a change in income, we count the date of Stacey's first paycheck on November 10th as the date of the change.

- Stacey must report this change to us by December 10th.
- If Stacey reported this change earlier, we would act on the change based on when we expect her to receive the income.

## 2. **Changes a client voluntarily reports:**

If people report a change, we must act on the change they report even if they didn't have to tell us about the change under [WAC 388-418-0005](#). This includes asking for more information or proof of a change when we can't tell the impact on their benefits.

For Basic Food, under simplified reporting rules, clients do not have to report when they move until recertification or until the mid-certification review, whichever comes first. If they voluntarily report a move between mandatory reports or for another program, they must provide their new shelter costs. The new shelter costs do not need to be verified unless questionable. See "Worker Responsibilities" (4.) and (5.) below.

### EXAMPLE

Larry receives Basic Food only. He calls and reports that his monthly rent expense went from \$300 to \$500 monthly.

Larry's worker Bob chooses to verify this change as "questionable" because the \$500 plus utilities are so close to Bob's monthly income. After he receives proof of the expense, Bob updates the shelter cost for Basic Food.

### EXAMPLE

Ian receives TANF and Basic Food. He leaves a message with his worker reporting that he started a job and would like to close his TANF benefits today.

Ian's worker closes TANF benefits based on the request. Since Ian reported that he is now employed, his worker must follow up to see how this impacts his medical and Basic Food benefits.

## 3. **Unverified changes that increase benefits:**

If a client reports a change that would increase their benefits because of a decrease in income, we ask for proof of the change. We only ask for proof of an increase in expenses if the expenses are

questionable. We increase the AU's benefits based on the effective date rules under [WAC 388-418-0020](#).

- If we have asked for verification, and they fail to give us proof of a reduction in income or an increase in expenses, we do not update their case to increase benefits.
- We also do not close the case based on their failure to give proof of a change that would increase their benefits.

#### **EXAMPLE**

Susan's Basic Food certification period ends on July 31st. She turns in an Eligibility Review form for Basic Food only on May 31st.

Because Susan turned in the ER before the 15th of the month before the month her certification period ends, we treat the form as a change of circumstance report.

#### **4. Changes someone reports on an application or eligibility review:**

People may report a change in their circumstances on an eligibility review form or an application for benefits. If you receive an application or eligibility review form:

- a. **Before** the fifteenth day of the second to last month of their certification period, treat this form as a change of circumstances.
- b. **On or after** the fifteenth day of the second to last month of their certification period, treat this form as a request for review or recertification. See [ELIGIBILITY REVIEWS AND RECERTIFICATIONS](#) for procedures.
- c. **In the month before the mid-certification review is due**, use the information on the application / review form to complete the MCR for any related programs.
- d. **For medical**, you may use an application or review at any time to update the medical certification period.

#### **5. Temporary absence of an AU member:**

If an AU member is temporarily out of the home:

- For cash and medical assistance, follow the rules in [WAC 388-454-0015](#) to determine if the person is still eligible for benefits.
- For Basic Food, follow the rules in [WAC 388-408-0035](#) to determine if the person is still eligible for benefits.

#### **6. AU member moves out of Washington:**

People must be residents of the state in order to be eligible for most programs. If an AU member or the entire AU leaves the state, follow the rules in [WAC 388-468-0005](#) to determine if the person is still eligible for benefits.

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## WORKER RESPONSIBILITIES

### 1. During the application, recertification or eligibility interview:

- a. Inform clients what changes they must report and how much time they have to report the changes;
- b. Explain how to report changes either in writing, by phone, or in person. (See [RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES](#)); and
- c. Give them a DSHS 14-076(X), Change of Circumstance form, and a return envelope to report changes. ACES automatically mails the DSHS 22-900(X), How to Report Changes with the award letter.

### 2. When people report a change or when you learn of a change:

- a. Ask for more information or proof if needed. See [LETTERS](#) for the rules and the process on asking someone to take an action or give us information.
- b. Take action on the information using the effective date rules in [WAC 388-418-0020](#).
- c. If we averaged their income under [WAC 388-450-0215](#), recalculate this source of income if you expect this change to last at least a month beyond when you learn of the change.
- d. Document:
  - The details of the change;
  - The date we learned about the change or the date the change was reported;
  - The impact on benefits; and
  - The effective date for any change in benefits.
- e. Send written notice about the change based on requirements in [LETTERS](#) even if the benefits do not change.

### 3. For Basic Food, if the client does not report a change in medical expenses, but you learn about a change:

- a. Do not contact the AU about the change;
- b. Act on the change **only** if you can get proof of the change from someone other than the AU; and
- c. Set an alert to get proof of the change at the next recertification. Update the MEDX screen in ACES once you get proof of the medical expenses.
- d. Document in the ACES narrative whether or not we should use the medical expense at the next recertification.

**NOTE:** If you later approve medical assistance that covers a person's medical expenses, delete the medical expenses on the MEDX screen and recalculate the person's Basic Food benefits.

4. For Basic Food, when the client voluntarily reports a move in person or on the phone:
- a. Ask for the new out-of-pocket share of shelter costs associated with the new residence.
  - b. Do not require verification of the new shelter expenses unless questionable.
  - c. Make it clear that they do not need to wait for the first regular rental or utility payment to tell us the amount(s).
  - d. Update and document the new shelter costs in ACES.
  - e. Send notice to the client if there is a change in the benefit amount. Give advance notice if there is a decrease.
5. If the client reports a move in writing or we receive returned mail with a new forwarding address on the envelope:
- a. First, attempt to contact the client by phone. If successful, follow instructions in (4.) above.
  - b. If unable to contact by phone, send the client a general correspondence letter asking for the new shelter costs associated with the move.
    - Include a statement in the letter warning the client that the old shelter deduction will be removed from the budget and benefit will be recalculated using no shelter costs if new expenses are not reported within 10 days; and
    - Make it clear in the letter that they do not need to wait for the first regular rental or utility payment to tell us the amount(s);
    - Do not require verification of the new shelter expenses unless questionable
  - c. If client responds to the letter:
    - Update and document the new shelter costs in ACES;
    - Send notice to the client if there is a change in the benefit amount. Give advance notice if there is a decrease in benefits.
  - d. If client does not respond to the letter:
    - Do not close the BF AU.
    - Remove the old shelter costs;
    - Send advance notice to the client if there is a change in the benefit amount.

NOTE: Avoid using a "Request for Information" letter as this letter suggests a mandatory BF AU closure if the client does not respond.

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## 5. Return Mail:

If you receive returned mail for someone take, the following steps:

- a. Check the case record to determine if they have reported a change and it has not yet been recorded in ACES.
- b. If the post office returned the letter, take action on the case as described below:
  - i. If marked "Moved, left no forwarding address", "Undeliverable as addressed" , "Attempted - not known", or "Vacant" and there is no forwarding address: ,
    - **For Basic Food:** Take no action on the Basic Food AU until the household contacts you, until the next eligibility review/recertification, or at the mid-certification review.
    - **For all other programs:** Close the AU(s) without 10-day advance notice. Send the notice of termination to the last known address.
  - ii. If returned with a new address, update the address in ACES and ~~mail the no change letter to the client's new address. Clients need only report their move. All other verification can be postponed until the next application, review or mid-certification review. attempt to contact the household either by phone or through the mail to request information about new shelter costs. Follow procedures under *Change of Circumstance*, WAC 388-418-0007, "When do I have to report changes in my circumstances?" Worker Responsibilities, #5.~~

**Note: For all programs** – if the client's new address is out of state, terminate benefits without advance notice as described under WAC 388-458-0030 (3)(b).

- c. If we close a person's cash or medical benefits under (b.) (i.) above and they contact us with their new address at any time during the month following their termination, we reinstate these benefits back to the first of the month with no change. We treat any changes the person voluntarily reports at the time of contact as described in WAC 388-418-0020.
- d. Households receiving medical assistance for children or pregnant women with benefits closed for "loss of contact/whereabouts unknown" may have their benefits reinstated back to the month of termination if they provide the local office with their new address at any time during their original certification period. Also see clarifying information in [WAC 388-416-0015](#).

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