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## Local Commissioners Memorandum

### Section 1

<b>Transmittal:</b>	04-LCM-13
<b>To:</b>	Local District Commissioners
<b>Issuing Division/Office:</b>	Division of Temporary Assistance
<b>Date:</b>	September 21, 2004
<b>Subject:</b>	New York State Nutrition Improvement Project
<b>Contact Person(s):</b>	Tom Hedderman at 1-800-343-8859, extension 3-1469
<b>Attachments:</b>	x
<b>Attachment Available On – Line:</b>	x

### Section 2

#### I. Purpose

This Local Commissioners Memorandum (LCM) is being jointly issued, under separate agency letterhead and signatures, by the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) and the New York State Office for the Aging (OFA) to their respective local district agencies. The purpose of this LCM is to inform local district OFA Commissioners and staff and to remind local district Department of Social Services (DSS) Commissioners and staff about the New York State Nutrition Improvement Project (NYSNIP).

Phase 2 of NYSNIP, which recently commenced, will automatically open food stamp cases for single Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients living alone in the community. This phase of the project will result in the phased, automatic creation, over a span of six months, of approximately 100,000 new food stamp cases statewide. Only single SSI recipients who are classified by the Social Security Administration (SSA) as living alone in the community (i.e., not in a group living arrangement or living with others as a member of a household,) and who currently are not receiving food stamp benefits, will have cases automatically opened for them during Phase 2. **In order to continue receiving benefits in NYSNIP, these new food stamp recipients must use some of the benefits within 3 months of the case opening date. Therefore, we are asking that local OFA and DSS staff assist these new participants in NYSNIP and encourage them to begin using their food stamp benefits within the three month limit.**

#### II. Background

NYSNIP is a federally-approved demonstration project to build and implement an automatic case creation process in the Food Stamp Program, similar to the one that already exists for the Medical OTDA (Rev. 9/2004)

Assistance program. NYSNIP will use information transmitted to OTDA from the SSA via the State Data Exchange (SDX) to automatically create food stamp cases for SSI recipients. Only single SSI recipients who live alone in the community are eligible to participate in the project.

Phase 1 of the project, the conversion of project-eligible SSI recipients already in receipt of food stamp benefits into NYSNIP, was completed in New York City in July 2003 and in all other districts of the State in December 2003. Approximately 83,000 individuals were converted to the project in New York City and a more than 33,000 were converted in the Rest-of-State districts.

Phase 2 in the implementation of NYSNIP, the phased automatic opening of food stamp cases for current, project-eligible SSI recipients not currently active in a food stamp case, began on June 16, 2004. When Phase 2 implementation is completed in December 2004, approximately 63,000 new food stamp cases will have been opened in New York City and approximately 37,000 new food stamp cases will have been opened in the Rest-of-State districts.

### III. Program Implications

The process for opening food stamp cases during Phase 2 of NYSNIP is a completely automated one. **The case openings are based solely on information about SSI recipients provided by SSA via the SDX process. No applications, paper or electronic, have been filed by the recipients for whom the cases are being opened.** As such, the opening notice packets being sent to the new project participants arrive unexpectedly in the participant's mailbox. Undoubtedly, many clients will have questions about the notices. Others may be wary about the program. Many of these new NYSNIP participants will contact their local DSS seeking additional information. Others may contact their local OFA for assistance and information.

By necessity, the opening notice packets contain a comprehensive but perhaps daunting amount of information. In brief, however, there are five critical pieces of information that we wish to impress upon and reinforce with these new NYSNIP participants:

- **In order to continue receiving food stamp benefits in NYSNIP, project participants whose food stamp cases have been opened as a result of this automatic process must redeem some of their food stamp benefits within three months of the date the case opened.** Since the individuals for whom these cases are being opened automatically have not filed an application for the Food Stamp Program, they have no rights within the program as either an applicant or recipient until they access their food stamp benefits. They are advised in the opening notice that their initial redemption, via the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) system, of any amount of food stamp benefits following the automatic opening of the food stamp case is considered an electronic signature on a food stamp application. **It is only after redeeming benefits that a participant in NYSNIP whose case was opened automatically possesses the rights that normally attend to a Food Stamp Program applicant or participant.** It is that initial use of food stamp benefits that permits the State to continue to issue benefits to them.
- **If a participant in NYSNIP whose case was opened automatically does not redeem any of the food stamp benefits that have been issued to them within three months of the automatic case opening, the benefits will be pulled from the EBT food stamp benefit account, and their food stamp case will be closed without notice.** If a participant does not wish to receive food stamp benefits, the participant may request that the local DSS close his/her case, or simply not redeem any benefits and the case will be closed automatically. Anybody whose case is closed for failure to redeem or who requests that their case be closed would have to file an application for food stamp benefits at either the local DSS office or the SSA District Office in order to receive food stamp benefits again.

- **Receiving food stamp benefits has absolutely no impact on the amount of SSI or Social Security benefits someone receives.** SSI recipients identified by the SSA as living alone in the community (the people for whom we automatically are opening food stamp cases) are categorically eligible to receive food stamp benefits.
- **If a NYSNIP participant is having trouble using the EBT system, help is available.** An EBT brochure and a set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about EBT were provided in each opening notice packet. Clients should be instructed to refer to those documents for numbers to call, depending upon the issue. Local DSS workers may be able to provide assistance on certain EBT-related matters. Additionally, Nutrition Outreach Education Program (NOEP) providers have been trained to assist Food Stamp Program applicants and recipients on a variety of food stamp-related matters, including NYSNIP and EBT. A list of NOEP providers is attached to help you determine if there is a NOEP in your county.
- **If a NYSNIP participant is having trouble completing the Information Collection Sheets, help is available.** All NYSNIP participants having a new food stamp case opened as part of Phase 2 of NYSNIP will receive either \$20 or \$16 in monthly food stamp benefits, depending on their sources of income. They will receive \$20 if their only source of income is SSI and \$16 if they have other income (most commonly, Social Security Disability income) in addition to SSI. Each opening notice packet contains an Information Collection Sheet. **We have asked NYSNIP participants to complete and return the Information Collection Sheets, but they are not required to do so. However, it is recommended that any communication with NYSNIP participants reinforce the message that completing the Information Collection Sheets and providing the required verification could result in a higher food stamp benefit.** The Information Collection sheets give project participants an opportunity to provide shelter cost and utility information and verification that could entitle them to receive a higher food stamp benefit amount, up to the current maximum for a one-person household (\$149). The Information Collection Sheet also gives participants an opportunity to provide information that would enable OTDA to include them in the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) annual automatic payments. Currently, the target population for Phase 2 of NYSNIP has had to file annual applications for the HEAP benefit. Local district DSS staff and NOEP staff have received information and training on how to complete and return these Information Collection Sheets.

For further information, please contact Tom Hedderman of OTDA at (518) 473-1469, or e-mail Mr. Hedderman at [tom.hedderman@dfa.state.ny.us](mailto:tom.hedderman@dfa.state.ny.us) .

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