

DATE: June 17, 2019

TO: Subscribers

SUGGESTED DISTRIBUTION: Commissioners, TA and SNAP Directors, HEAP Coordinators, WMS Coordinators, Accounting Supervisors

FROM: Jeffrey Gaskell, Deputy Commissioner
Employment and Income Support Programs

SUBJECT: Necessary Action by HEAP, TA, and SNAP Workers to Directly Issue HEAP Heat-Included Payments to Utility Vendors

EFFECTIVE DATE: Immediately

CONTACT PERSON: HEAP Bureau: (518) 473-0332
SNAP Bureau: (518) 473-1469
TA Bureau: (518) 474-9344

The purpose of this General Information System (GIS) message is to notify social services districts (districts) that heat-included Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) benefits of \$21, \$30, and \$35 which were previously directed to a HEAP recipient's Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card should now be directed, whenever possible, to the recipient's utility account if they pay a vendor directly for domestic electricity.

Issuing heat-included HEAP benefits directly to a recipient's utility account is the preferred method of payment for all heat-included benefits. Districts that are not currently issuing heat-included HEAP benefits directly to a recipient's utility account must now begin issuing these payments directly to the recipient's utility account whenever possible.

Direct payments made to utility vendors will help vendors identify these recipients as low-income, which is beneficial to the recipient as it may allow for enrollment in utility low-income discount programs (ULIPs). These programs can offer significant savings to low-income households.

To ensure heat-included HEAP benefits are paid to customer's domestic electric vendors, HEAP, Temporary Assistance (TA) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) workers must attempt to collect, verify, and store utility vendor account information in the Welfare Management System (WMS) at the time of application or recertification and when changes are reported (e.g. recipient moves and/or utility account information changes). It is also important for workers to discuss with recipients the benefits of providing this information as it could lead to potential enrollment in ULIPs.

Current customer utility account information can be collected using the PRE-AUTOPAY REQUEST FOR VENDOR INFORMATION outreach tool, and entered into WMS to ensure the heat-included HEAP benefit is paid to the customer's domestic electric vendor. Please refer to

[GIS 19 TA/WMS006](#) - “2019-2020 Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) Pre-Autopay Vendor Information Report” for further information on the Pre-Autopay Vendor Information Report, the PRE-AUTOPAY REQUEST FOR VENDOR INFORMATION outreach tool and entry of vendor ID and account data into WMS.

Method of Payment (MOP) 02 (vendor as authorized) or MOP 04 (vendor as billed subject to limit) should be used on WMS screen 06 to issue a direct payment to a utility vendor.

Negative action must not be taken on a case if utility vendor information is not provided by the household, and processing should not be delayed past the normal processing time in order to obtain the information. If utility vendor account information is not collected, recipients may still receive heat-included HEAP benefits on their EBT card and districts should notate in case comments what action was taken to attempt to collect utility account information.

Please contact the HEAP, TA, or SNAP Bureau at the phone numbers listed above with any questions.