

STATE OF VERMONT
AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES

DCF

Department for Children and Families



FROM: Tricia Tyo, Interim Deputy Commissioner
Economic Services Division

BULLETIN NO.: 20-10

DATE: 11/25/20

SUBJECT: All Program Procedures

CHANGES ADOPTED EFFECTIVE 12/1/20

INSTRUCTIONS

- Maintain Manual - See instructions below.**
- Proposed Regulation - Retain bulletin and attachments until you receive Manual Maintenance Bulletin: _____**
- Information or Instructions - Retain Until _____**

MANUAL REFERENCE(S):

P-2150

This bulletin revises several sections of Desk Review Procedures by updating language and deleting obsolete practices. It also removes procedures pertaining to health care programs administered by the Department of Vermont Health Access.

Manual Maintenance

Vertical lines in the left margin indicate significant changes.
Dotted lines in the left margin indicate changes in formatting and minor changes in content such as updated form names or program names.

All Programs Procedures

<u>Remove</u>		<u>Insert</u>	
P-2150 A-B1	(B96-25)	P-2150A	(B20-10)
P-2150 B2	(B96-25)	P-2150B	(B20-10)
P-2150 B3	(B96-25)	P-2150B p.2	(B20-10)
P-2150 B4	(B96-25)	Nothing	
P-2150 C1	(B96-25)	P-2150C	(B20-10)
P-2150 C2	(B96-25)	P-2150C p.2	(B20-10)
P-2150 C3	(B96-25)	P-2150C p.3	(B20-10)
P-2150 C4	(B96-25)	P-2150C p.4	(B20-10)
P-2150 C5	(B96-25)	P-2150C p.5	(B20-10)
P-2150 C6	(B96-25)	P-2150C p.6	(B20-10)
P-2150 C7	(B96-25)	P-2150C p.7	(B20-10)
P-2150 C8	(B96-25)	P-2150C p.8	(B20-10)
P-2150 C9	(B96-25)	Nothing	
P-2150 C10-D1	(B96-25)	Nothing	
P-2150 D2	(B96-25)	Nothing	
P-2150 E1	(B96-25)	P-2150D	(B20-10)
P-2150 E2-F1	(B96-25)	P-2150E	(B20-10)
P-2150 F2	(B96-25)	Nothing	
P-2150 F3	(B96-25)	Nothing	

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P-2150A

P-2150 Desk Reviews

A. General Information

A desk review is a primarily automated process for implementing a mass change, usually of one or more standards, to a large number of cases. ACCESS is programmed to apply the change to all affected cases, causing these cases to have eligibility redetermined. Occasionally, a policy change must affect all cases simultaneously, so a desk review is necessary. Policy changes are often made at the same time as standards changes. Standards changes (and any policy changes) will be published in one or more bulletins prior to desk review. Examples of mass changes are

- changes in the COLA (cost-of-living adjustment) for social security, SSI/AABD, veteran's pension and compensation, and railroad retirement income;
- Reach Up ratable reduction, basic needs or shelter standard;
- Room/board and day care business expenses for all programs;
- 3SquaresVT thrifty food plan tables, standard deduction, shelter deduction, utility standard with heat, utility only standard, phone standard, gross and net income tests.

Desk reviews generally run on a weekend to allow enough time for case processing without needing to block users from working on cases during normal work hours. They process the following month's eligibility for pending and ongoing cases (example: a desk review to change July's Reach Up benefits will be run in early June). They are run as early as possible in a month to allow as much time as possible for workers to approve full transactions and closures (see below) and to give recipients sufficient notice of the change in eligibility or benefits. If the first of a month falls on a weekend (or a Friday or Monday holiday), the desk review may be run that weekend (example: the COLA desk review to affect February eligibility may be run December 30 or 31 because of the January 1 holiday).

These procedures include information and instructions common to all desk reviews and identify material unique to specific desk reviews. They will give you information on what ACCESS will do for you and what your responsibilities are. Prior to each desk review, a memo or email will be sent to you explaining specific changes and dates for that desk review and referring to these procedures for more information.

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P-2150B

P-2150 Desk Reviews (continued)

B. All Desk Reviews

1. Type of Transaction

Abbreviated

If the case does not meet any of the criteria listed in the full transaction section below, the case will receive an abbreviated transaction. This means that ACCESS will recompute each benefit amount.

If the case continues to be eligible, ACCESS will automatically approve the new eligibility results and create a notice (see #3 below). If the case becomes ineligible, see #2 below.

Full

A full transaction is created for all programs if any program being processed has

- edits that inhibit eligibility,
- unapproved eligibility results (i.e., pending cases or ongoing cases with unapproved results), or
- FIAT eligibility results.

A list of FIAT and cases for the programs being processed will be sent to districts prior to each desk review.

Any case that receives a full transaction will require worker attention, eligibility approval, and a district notice. To identify these cases, look on the daily report, on ELIG panel 1 or on the edit summary panel (STAT/SUM): the date processed will be the same as the date of the desk review.

ACCESS will compute new eligibility for each FIAT program. Check the result carefully. If it is correct, approve it. If the program must remain FIAT, recalculate the following month's eligibility and re-enter FIAT results. In either instance, send a district notice with the appropriate Mass Change Notice (22OCT-DR or 22ORTA-DR).

2. Closures

If desk review causes any program to close, approve the closure and send a district notice, along with the desk review Mass Change Notice (22OCT-DR or 22ORTA-DR).

P-2150 Desk Reviews

B. All Desk Reviews (continued)

3. Notice Letters

Automatic Notice for Abbreviated Transactions

Notice letters for cases that have a benefit change in Reach Up or 3SquarestVT (other than a closure) will be mailed to the client directly from BGS on behalf of state office. They are generally mailed on the fourth working day after the desk review. A copy of the notice will be available in the notice system. As-is notices will not be produced. If one program benefit changes, but another remains as-is, a notice with information on both programs will be produced.

Each notice will include the desk review Mass Change Notice (220OCT-DR or 220RTA-DR) for the explanation of changes/right to appeal/budget explanation.

District Notices

All closures and cases that require worker approval also require a district notice (computer-generated or manual). Add SEE ATTACHED to the notice and include the desk review Mass Change Notice (220OCT-DR or 220RTA-DR) with each notice. The Mass Change Notice (220OCT-DR or 220RTA-DR) will be sent as an attachment in desk review communication so each district can pre-print a supply prior to the desk review weekend. The Mass Change Notice is also available in the forms library.

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P-2150C

P-2150 Desk Reviews (continued)

C. COLA Desk Review

1. Case Processing

The COLA (cost-of-living adjustment) desk review is run around January 1 for February eligibility to update all active or pending cases with the annual adjustment to SSI (UNEA type 02) or social security income (UNEA type 01). Several other changes are also usually part of this desk review:

- veteran's pension or compensation (VA) or railroad retirement (RR) COLA updates,
- Medicare part A or B premium changes,
- SSI/AABD payment levels (P-2740 A),
- SSI federal benefit payment rate,
- AABD/EP payment levels (P-2740 B).

Supplemental Fuel (SF) cases will be processed only if the case requires a full transaction. SF clients are held harmless from the COLA increase until another change happens. The fuel notice language will be suppressed. ACCESS will use the UNEA type 01 or type 02 amount before desk review if the difference between the increased amount on the COLA interface (after desk review) and the amount on the panel is less than or equal to 5 percent of the amount on the panel (allowing room for error). If the difference is more than five percent, ACCESS will use the COLA amount. This programming will be in effect only for the desk review version of eligibility. We will assume that any case processed after that version is approved will have another change and, therefore, should have the COLA counted.

Example: Before desk review, SSA income is \$1200. The amount on the COLA interface is \$1230. Since \$30 is less than 5 percent of \$1200 (\$60), ACCESS will use \$1200 in the budget.

If the amount on the interface is \$1275, the difference of \$75 is greater than \$60, so ACCESS uses \$1275. The \$75 increase indicates a change other than the COLA, so it is reasonable to use the larger figure.

Note: If the amount on the COLA is any amount less than the amount on the panel, another change has happened, and ACCESS will use the COLA amount.

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P-2150 Desk Reviews

C. COLA Desk Review (continued)

2. Social Security and SSI/AABD Update

Information for both SDX (SSI/AABD) and Bendex (social security) is sent to us via electronic transmissions.

The process date for Bendex will be the date desk review runs. The date on SDX will be the date of the desk review. You will be given these dates and the SDX ID number (ex. 0196U2FA) at the time of the desk review. Bendex and SDX transmissions update the interface fields on the February UNEA panel (second line on the panel) for cases with SSA income (type 01) through Bendex, or SSI income (type 02) through SDX. Panels are not updated if the person is not active in that household.

Desk review will then do one of the following to the February UNEA panels and recompute eligibility when possible:

- If the amount on the transmission is within 5 percent of the INCOME AMT on the first line of UNEA; or, if the amount on the transmission is not within 5 percent of the INCOME AMT, but the difference between the amount on the panel and the amount on the transmission is less than or equal to \$50:
 - the interface fields on Feb UNEA (amount, process date, and verification) will be updated,
 - the INCOME AMT on the Feb UNEA panel will be updated, and
 - the case will receive an abbreviated transaction.

- If the amount on the transmission is not within 5 percent of the INCOME AMT and the difference between the amount on the panel and the amount on the transmission is greater than \$50:
 - the interface fields on Feb UNEA (amount and process date) will be updated; the verification field will be set to a ?,
 - the INCOME AMT on Feb UNEA will not be updated, and
 - the case will receive a full transaction.

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C. COLA Desk Review (continued)

- If there is an UNEA panel with type 01 (social security) income, but no update transmission:
 - the INCOME AMT on Feb UNEA will be increased by the amount of the COLA increase,
 - the interface fields (second line of the panel) will be cleared on Feb UNEA, and
 - the case will receive an abbreviated transaction.

NOTE: Type 02 (SSI) UNEA panels not on the transmission will not be automatically updated. ESD Central Office will send you a list of the few cases where UNEA is not updated so you can determine whether you need to update the panel.

- If there is a transmission amount, but no UNEA panel with that type income:
 - a UNEA panel will be created for Feb,
 - the interface fields on Feb UNEA (amount, process date) will be entered,
 - the verification flag will be set to ?, and
 - the case will receive a full transaction.
- If the transmission shows a deletion (i.e., client no longer receives the income) and there is a UNEA panel:
 - interface amount field (Feb UNEA) will be cleared,
 - process date will be updated,
 - the verification flag will be set to ?, and
 - the case will receive a full transaction.

If the case is scheduled to receive an abbreviated transaction due to Bendex or SDX processing but meets one of the other desk review criteria for a full transaction, it will receive a full transaction.

The change notice usually printed in the districts after a Bendex or SDX transmission will be suppressed for all desk review transactions.

All cases receiving abbreviated transactions will receive an automated desk review notice unless the benefit remains the same. As-is notices will be suppressed.

For cases receiving a full transaction, send a district notice (computer-generated or manual) and a desk review right-to-appeal Mass Change Notice (220RTA-DR).

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C. COLA Desk Review (continued)

3. Medicare Premiums

ACCESS will update Medicare part A and B premiums if a new amount is on the Bendex COLA transmission. Few individuals pay their own part A premium, so we expect few Part A panels to be updated.

If the premium change results in a decrease in net social security benefits (social security amount less the Medicare premium), the premium amount will be adjusted by SSA so that the individual will not be adversely affected.

The change in Medicare premium (if payor = self) may create new eligibility results in 3SquaresVT benefits for elderly or disabled customers whose medical expenses (FMED plus Medicare premiums) are over \$35.

A list of cases with MEDI panels will be sent to districts for further research and manual update. This list will include payor = RRB (railroad retirement) cases. It will not include Medicare part A or B cases with a future start date.

Use Bendex (BDX.01) to confirm premium amounts for self-payers. Look for a transaction date from the Saturday of desk review weekend.

When needing to confirm whether someone is enrolled in the Medicare Saving Program and therefore is not paying their own Part B premium, check the Buyin Status field in INFC D BYIN.

Overview of Bendex and Buyin is available in a video maintained by the ESD Training Unit.

P-2150 Desk Reviews

C. COLA Desk Review (continued)

4. VA and RR Income

IMPORTANT: Because recipients will not be informed of the veteran's pension or compensation (VA) and/or railroad retirement (RR) benefit changes in time for us to affect all cases for January 1, they will affect February benefits.

VA benefits will change as follows:

- Effective 1979, VA pension will increase by the COLA amount but will be offset by other income changes. Recipients will see the changes in the check received in January.
- VA pensions paid under the old law (pre-1979) will not change (they have not changed since 1979).
- VA compensation will also increase by the COLA amount in January.

Most RR benefits will also increase by the COLA amount.

ACCESS will create letters to all recipients who have an unearned income panel coded with an 08 (VA compensation), 11 (VA pension) or 06 (RR benefits), except those SSI/AABD recipients who receive only Medicaid benefits from DVHA. The letters will be mailed to individuals from BGS, on behalf of state office, in December. You will be told when these letters will be mailed, and when a response is due.

Each individual will receive only one letter, even if they receive both VA and RR benefits. ACCESS will print the appropriate benefit specific language and enter the current benefit amount. Copies of the notice will be available in the notice system.

After the run, you will be sent a list of individuals who received the letter. The letter is sent to the individual (and alternate reporter, if applicable). The case name (if not the same as the individual) will appear in the letter and list.

See program specific guidance below for cases where individuals receive VA/RR income.

For 3SquaresVT and Fuel eligibility:

- If the customer responds to the letter by sending verification, calling us with the information needed, or sends back the letter/calls the 1-800 number stating that they did not receive a letter, we will keep the case open using that verification or self-declaration.
- If the customer does not respond to the letter:
 - For 3SquaresVT, we will leave the case open at the customer's current benefit amount.
 - For Fuel, we close the case for non-cooperation.

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C. COLA Desk Review (continued)

For Reach Up and EP eligibility:

- If the RU/EP household responds to the letter by sending verification that their amount has remained the same or changed, leave the UNEA the same or update with the new verified amount.
- If the RU/EP household does not respond close the benefit.
- If the RU/EP household states they have not received a letter from VA/RR, send a VCR requesting them to contact VA/RR for another letter or other confirmation of what their new benefit is. If they do not respond to that request close the benefit. If they respond that they were still unable to obtain a letter or other verification of the new amount, they should remain open at the current amount until the letter/verification can be obtained.

5. Essential Person (EP) Desk Review

- All Essential Person (EP) cases must be reviewed to reflect the update in AABD-EP payment maximums (P-2740) as well as any change in social security, SSI/AABD, railroad retirement or veteran's benefits.
 - A list of active EP cases will be sent to each District at the end of December.
- After desk review and before the second adverse action in January, use the list of active EP cases to check STAT/PNLS, recompute and input February EP grants.
 - If the case has VA or RR benefits, wait for receipt of the letter from the individual.
- Use form 203E (AABD/EP Eligibility Worksheet) and the new payment maximums to determine the February EP benefit.
- Enter and approve the new grant amount in ACCESS (ELIG/EP for February). This will create a new eligibility result for any other pending or active program. Approve the EP grant prior to adverse action. If the case includes any other program, approve the EP and approve changes to the other programs as well.
 - Since the EP grant may be a medical expense in 3SquaresVT households when the caretaker is not the spouse, determine if the change in EP warrants adjusting the 3SquaresVT deduction. There is no need to contact the individual.

P-2150 Desk Reviews

C. COLA Desk Review (continued)

- Complete and mail a desk review notice for EP (form 220EP-DR) prior to January adverse action. The forms library will have an updated version available. Send a notice if any other program benefits change as a result of the EP change.
- ACCESS is programmed to run an “EP Retro Check Run” to compare the benefit amount that went out in January to the new benefit amount in February.
 - The EP retro check run will occur after desk review, but before January adverse action.
 - The retro check will equal the difference between January and February benefit amounts.
 - This check will be in MONY and INQD but will not show in ELIG.
 - The checks will be mailed on a specified date.
 - Automatic checks will not be written for more than the maximum amount of the AABD/EP increase (AABD-EP payment maximums P-2740).
- ACCESS is also programmed to run an “EP Retro Check Exception List”. This list includes each EP Household who did not receive an ACCESS generated EP Retro Check along with the reason why.
 - These may include the following:
 - Cases granted or closed after January 1;
 - Cases with changes processed for January or February; and
 - Cases who were issued a district adjustment check for another reason.
 - Districts should review the exception list by the end of February at the latest to determine if the EP Household is entitled to a retro January check and compute and issue district checks, if appropriate.
 - If the exception list says January and February are equal, it may be because the SSI increase equaled the EP maximum increase. If this is the case, do not issue an adjustment check.
 - If January and February are equal, it may be because February was not recomputed as instructed. In this case, issue an adjustment check to cover both January and February and adjust March EP ELIG.

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C. COLA Desk Review (continued)

- If the difference is more than the maximum amount of the AABD/EP increase, it may mean that other income changed. Issue a check based on actual January income and the new EP maximums.
- For pending EP cases use actual income and the new EP payment maximum to compute January benefits.

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P-2150 Desk Reviews (continued)

D. Reach Up Desk Review

If changes in the Reach Up ratable reduction, basic needs standards, and shelter maximums occur, they are often effective July 1. It is possible, however, for the ratable reduction to change separately or for both to happen at a time other than July 1. These updates are rare.

When Reach Up standards change, ACCESS will redetermine 3SquaresVT eligibility for Reach Up households that receive both benefits. A mass change notice will be created by RU Central Office and should be included for all affected programs.

In-kind income: The ratable reduction and change in the shelter maximum affect the computation of shelter as in-kind income in Reach Up cases. After desk review runs, central office will inform districts of cases with an INKD panel. Recompute the in-kind income (if necessary) and enter the new amount on the effective month's INKD panel. Approve new eligibility results by the adverse action approval deadline. Include the desk review mass change notice with the district notice.

Example: Desk review runs June 10 to be effective July 1. Districts are informed of cases with an INKD panel on June 12. Make changes on July's INKD panel. Approve any eligibility results and send a notice by June 21 (adverse action approval deadline).

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P-2150E

P-2150 Desk Reviews (continued)

E. 3SquaresVT Desk Review

1. Standards Changes

The following 3SquaresVT changes usually are effective October 1 but may have a different effective date based on federal budget negotiations and approval dates for standards that Vermont calculates:

- standard household deduction
- maximum shelter cost deduction for non-senior/disabled
- fuel and utility standards with heat, without heat, and phone only
- homeless shelter deduction
- maximum gross and net income limits
- thrifty food plan (TFP) amounts
- allotment tables
- business expenses for providing room and/or board
- business expenses for providing day care meals and snacks

Since business expenses for providing room and board are based on food costs, those standards change with this desk review for all programs. Business expenses for providing day care meals and snacks, based on federal childcare program reimbursement rates, also change for all programs.

2. Room and Board Income Cases

• Household Member Status

When the thrifty food plan amounts change, there is a corresponding change in the minimum amount a person must pay for board or room and board to be excluded from the 3SquaresVT household.

For ongoing (NOT pending) cases at desk review, ACCESS will increase the board, or room and board, income amount for all 3SquaresVT cases with people paying at or above the current minimum (or two-thirds of it) but less than the new minimum (or two-thirds of it).

• Income to the Household

ACCESS will apply the new business expense deductions to clients with RBIN (room and board income) panels who were desk-reviewed.