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Reach Ahead

2500 Reach Ahead (7/1/2015, 15-08)

The Reach Ahead program assists employed families with unsubsidized earnings who have recently left Reach Up or the Postsecondary Education program. The purpose of the program is to assist these families in their transition from public assistance and to help them maintain employment by providing work supports and incentives. Reach Ahead is designed to improve family financial stability while the family transitions off of public assistance by providing work supports, services and food assistance.

Reach Ahead provides information and referrals to workforce development options, time-limited work supports, and food assistance. Participation in this program is limited to no more than 24 months in a participating adult's lifetime. When necessary, Reach Ahead provides individualized case management that addresses the individual participant's situation or barriers to self sufficiency and assists the participant to maintain employment.

Definitions

2501 Definitions (03/01/2017, 17-02)

Reach Ahead terms are either defined in Reach Up rules and incorporated into Reach Ahead rules or defined in this section.

- A. The following Reach Ahead terms are defined in Reach Up rule 2301 and incorporated into Reach Ahead rules by this reference:
1. Adult
 2. Barrier
 3. Caretaker
 4. Commissioner
 5. Department
 6. Dependent Child
 7. Living with a relative or caretaker
 8. Parent
 9. Relative
 10. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families or TANF
- B. The following definitions apply to these terms as used in Reach Ahead program rules:
1. “Eligible family” means a family that meets the requirements in rule 2502 and
 - a. has one or more dependent children living with one or both parents or a relative or caretaker of such children (the temporary absence criteria defined in Reach Up rule 2230.3 are incorporated into Reach Ahead rules by this reference); or
 - b. is a pregnant individual who is in her last month of pregnancy, in her final trimester of a medically verified high risk pregnancy, or in her final trimester of pregnancy and is under age 18.
 2. “Food assistance” means a monthly financial assistance benefit in the form of food support. If receiving food stamps, the food assistance may supplement the family’s food stamp benefit.
 3. “Participant” or “participating adult” means an adult member of a participating family.
 4. Participating family” means an eligible family that participates in the Reach Ahead program.
 5. “Reach Ahead services” means the service component of the Reach Ahead program consisting of case management services, support services, and referrals provided to eligible families to assist them in maintaining self-sufficiency.
 6. “Reach First” means Vermont’s diversion program established under chapter 10 of title 33 of the Vermont Statutes Annotated and operated in accordance with Reach First rules 2100 to 2199.
 7. “Reach Up” means Vermont’s financial assistance program established under chapter 11 of title 33 of the Vermont Statutes Annotated and operated in accordance with Reach Up rules 2200 to 2399.

INTERPRETIVE MEMO

Reach Ahead Rule Interpretation

Procedural Instruction

This memo remains effective statewide until it is specifically superseded – either by a subsequent memo or by a contradictory rule with a later date.

Please file in your manual facing the page indicated below.

Facing page 2502 **Effective date of this memo** 4/1/2016 **Page** 1 of 1

This memo: **is new** **Replaces one dated** _____

Question: If a Reach Ahead participant is meeting the work requirement, and we receive information that the participant has a job(s) in addition to the employment that has already been reported, should the participant’s Reach Ahead benefits close for non-cooperation if they do not return verification of the other job(s)?

Answer: No. A Reach Ahead participant who is meeting the work requirement should not be terminated from Reach Ahead for failing to return verification of additional jobs. If Reach Ahead is the only program in which the participant is receiving benefits, a 218E does not need to be sent to the participant.

Eligibility

2502 Eligibility (03/01/2017, 17-02)

In addition to the eligibility criteria enumerated below, Reach Ahead eligibility is limited to families who met the financial and non-financial eligibility qualifications for and received financial assistance from Reach Up or the Postsecondary Education Program. The 60-month time limit (rule 2238) does not apply to Reach Ahead eligibility.

2502.1 Initial Eligibility

To initially qualify for Reach Ahead, families must meet all of the following eligibility criteria.

- A. Meet the definition of family;
- B. live in Vermont;
- C. leave the Reach Up or Postsecondary Education Program on or after April 1, 2009 and apply for Reach Ahead within the six months directly following the last month in which the family received financial assistance in Reach Up or the Postsecondary Education program;
- D. be receiving income from unsubsidized employment; and
- E. include at least one work-eligible adult who is meeting the full, unmodified Reach Up work requirement applicable to the family's size and composition as established in Reach Up rule with hours in unsubsidized employment.

2502.2 Ongoing Eligibility

After the determination of initial eligibility, the family must continue to meet the following eligibility criteria for the duration of participation in the program.

- A. Meet the definition of family;
- B. live in Vermont;
- C. Provide verification under Reach Up rules at the times specified below:
 - 1. If there is no change in work hours or family members after eligibility is determined, the work eligible adult(s) meeting the work requirement shall verify work hours and income at 6-month intervals of consecutive months of participation. If feasible, income verification may be done at the same time as food stamps recertification.
 - 2. If there is a change in the family members or the work hours of the work-eligible adult(s) in the family, the family must notify the department of the change within the timeframes required by Reach Up rules and, if necessary, the department will determine if there is ongoing eligibility or a change to the work requirement.
- D. Failure to provide verification when requested and in accordance with these rules will result in termination from the program.

2502.3 Resumption of Eligibility After a Break in Participation

- A. A break in Reach Ahead participation occurs when the family does not receive any food assistance in a month.

Eligibility

- B. Families who experience a break in Reach Ahead participation for one or more months must file a new application.
- C. Families applying for Reach Ahead after a break in benefits for one or more months must meet all initial eligibility criteria.

This subsection applies only to families that experience a break in Reach Ahead participation and are not transferred to Reach First or Reach Up pursuant to subsection 2502.4 below.

2502.4 Transition to Other Programs

If a family loses employment meeting or exceeding the work requirements for Reach Up for the family's size and composition and is financially eligible for Reach Up, the family shall be transferred to Reach First or Reach Up without an additional application process, unless the family chooses not to participate. Verification of income or other documentation may be required as provided for in Reach Up rule 2211.3.

Program Participation

2503 Program Participation (7/1/2015, 15-08)

A. Participation in Reach Ahead

1. Participation in Reach Ahead is limited to 24 months of a participating adult's lifetime.
2. The 24 months of participation are cumulative and do not have to be consecutive.

B. Participation in Blended Families

1. A blended family is a family that is in Reach Ahead and includes two work-eligible adults who have differing numbers of remaining months of Reach Ahead eligibility because one or both of the adults have previously participated in the program when they were not in the same family.
2. In blended families, the family's eligibility is determined by the eligibility of the head of the household.
3. Eligibility and benefits for blended families in which only one of two participating adults is eligible due to the other adult having used his or her lifetime limitation shall be based upon the eligibility of the head of the household.
4. Any month of participation by a family with two adults with differing remaining months of eligibility will count against each adult's lifetime months of eligibility, and if the cash value amount of the benefit varies between eligible adults, the family shall receive the benefit of the head of household.

Food Assistance Benefit

2504 Food Assistance Benefit (7/1/2015, 15-08)

Families eligible for and participating in Reach Ahead receive financial assistance in the form of a food benefit. The purpose of this benefit is to provide assistance and recognition for the adult's support of the family through unsubsidized wages.

2504.1 Food Assistance Benefit Amount (7/1/2015, 15-08)

- A. A participating family shall receive a monthly food assistance benefit of \$50.00 each month of the first 12 months of Reach Ahead participation.
- B. A participating family shall receive a benefit of \$5.00 for each month of their 12th through 24th month of Reach Ahead participation.
- C. Any family within the first six months of Reach Ahead participation on July 1, 2015 shall continue to receive a monthly food assistance benefit of \$100.00 until its seventh month of participation, at which time it shall receive a monthly food assistance benefit of \$50.00 for the remainder of the initial 12-month period. Families who experience a break in Reach Ahead participation for one or more months before reaching the seventh month of participation and subsequently re-enroll in Reach Ahead shall receive a monthly food assistance benefit of \$50.00 for the remainder of the initial 12-month period.

2504.2 Food Assistance Benefit and Distribution (7/1/2015, 15-08)

- A. The food assistance benefit is applied to the family's electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card's food account at the beginning of each month.
- B. Food assistance may be used only to purchase eligible food items as defined in the food stamp federal rules.
- C. The food assistance benefit is a food benefit and is not counted as income for determination of eligibility and benefits in other needs-based programs.

Services Component

2505 Services Component (7/1/2015, 15-08)

- A. Eligibility for participation in the Reach Ahead services component is simultaneous with eligibility for the Reach Ahead benefit and is limited to 24 cumulative months of the participating adult's lifetime.
- B. The Reach Ahead services component consists of support services (including a 100 percent child care services subsidy), referral to other agencies or programs, including workforce development, that provide the services needed by participating families to improve the family's prospects for employment retention.
- C. When necessary, the services component may include case management services.

2505.1 Case Management Services (7/1/2015, 15-08)

- A. If a family needs case management, the case manager and the family may develop a family development plan.
- B. Case management services and the family development plan shall focus on employment retention and advancement.
- C. In developing a plan and providing case management services, the department shall follow Reach Up rules 2302 through 2315 to the extent they are related to and limited to services necessary for job retention and advancement.
- D. When case management is provided, the case manager and adults in the family may develop a new or extend the operation of an existing Reach Up family development plan following the process of Reach Up rule 2332.
- E. If practicable, the case manager shall be the same case manager previously assigned to and working with the family.

2505.2 Family Development Plans (7/1/2015, 15-08)

For families requesting a family development plan, the department may assist the family in developing a plan relying on Reach Up rule 2330, but only to the extent that it is consistent with Reach Ahead rules and the program purposes to assist the family to maintain or enhance existing employment.

Notice and Appeal

2506 Notice and Appeal (04/01/2009, 08-10)

- A. A participant may appeal decisions in accordance with Reach Up section 2380 except that Reach Ahead food assistance payments do not continue while an appeal is pending.
- B. The commissioner shall provide notice to each participant of the standards and procedures applicable to such appeals. All federal and agency of human services rules regarding conciliation, notice, hearing, and appeal shall be followed in connection with such appeals.