

## **0802 THE APPLICATION PROCESS**

### **0802.05 SCREENING AND APPLICATION PROCEDURES**

REV:05/1997

Anyone may request information about the agency's assistance programs either by telephone, by mail, or in person. Authorized agency staff must furnish information to the inquiring person in accordance with the instructions in Sections 0802.05.05 through 0802.05.15. A request for information may be followed by an application for cash or another form of assistance.

The purpose of the formal application procedure ensures an individual's right to apply without delay for assistance. It affords the person an opportunity to state her/his needs and to learn what the agency can do to help meet them. It also affords the agency an opportunity to apprise the person of her/his responsibilities in relation to the agency, both as an applicant and, if eligibility is established, as a recipient.

An applicant may be assisted in the application process, including completion of the DHS-2, by one or more individuals of his/her choice and, when accompanied by such individual(s), may be represented by him/her/them. However, the agency requires a face-to-face interview with the applicant during the application process.

#### **0802.05.05 Screening**

REV:12/2004

Requests to the Family Independence Program (FIP) case worker may be for applications for assistance or for information about applying for assistance. Such requests may come from different sources, e.g., in person, by telephone, by mail, or as a referral from another agency. Application packets are available to any person who requests one.

The application packet, which contains information about the agency, the applicant's rights and responsibilities, and the conditions under which assistance is provided, includes:

- Application for Assistance - Part I (DHS-1)
- Statement of Need (DHS-2)
- Notice Concerning Good Cause for Refusal to Cooperate (AP-35)
- Literature on Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) Program
- Statewide List by Location of DHS Offices (DHS-14)
- Other notices and/or informational forms, as appropriate (e.g., Motor Voter Registration forms).

When a request for information about assistance is received in the district office and the inquiring person expresses a desire to apply for assistance, a face-to-face screening interview is arranged.

The screening interview is the beginning of the application process. The FIP case worker elicits the presenting problem(s) and the salient facts of the applicant's situation which prompted the applicant to seek the agency's assistance. The Family

Independence case worker then determines whether any crisis exists and works with the applicant to resolve it by utilizing suitable DHS and community resources.

During this initial contact, the Domestic Violence Notice (Form WVR-1) is presented to each applicant. Every applicant must be informed that s/he may be excused from certain FIP requirements under the Family Violence Option if meeting these requirements puts the applicant or her or his children at risk due to domestic violence. The Domestic Violence Notice form should be signed by the applicant acknowledging that s/he understands the contents of the notice. After signing the notice form, a copy is given to the applicant.

If there is disclosure of neglect, risk, or abuse to children, immediate referral must be made to DCYF as specified in Section 0118. The procedures following an applicant's claiming of the Family Violence Option or disclosure of abuse are outlined in Section 0814.10.

The FIP case worker informs applicants about services and opportunities offered by the various assistance programs administered by DHS including Medical Assistance, Rite Care, the Child Care Assistance Program, Office of Rehabilitation Services, the Family Independence Program (FIP), General Public Assistance, and Food Stamps as well as other agencies and community resources which may be of assistance to the applicant.

Part of the overview of FIP is an explanation of the time-limited nature of cash assistance under FIP of sixty (60) months for adults.

At the same time, the FIP case worker evaluates whether the family is a likely candidate for an up-front lump sum payment in lieu of continuing FIP cash assistance. If the applicant family appears to be a potential candidate for the Alternative Cash (lump sum) Assistance program, whose criteria are detailed in Section 0814.15, the case worker informs the applicant of this option.

During this initial screening process, the DHS-1, Application for Assistance-Part I, is completed to obtain the necessary identifying information. After the DHS-1 is completed, it is dated and signed by the applicant. The DHS-1 is date-stamped to establish the application filing date.

If the applicant is unfamiliar with the DHS-1 and DHS-2 or is likely to require guidance in their completion, the FIP case worker shows the applicant how to complete them and indicates what documentation must be furnished. At the same time, the applicant is advised that, if eligibility is found to exist, financial assistance may begin from the date the prepared and signed DHS-1 is date-stamped in the DHS district office.

If the applicant decides to apply for the Family Independence Program, the applicant is given either a prompt intake appointment or, if indicated, an emergency intake appointment to determine eligibility based on the following criteria.

#### Prompt Appointment

All applicants must be scheduled and such appointment interviews must be conducted within five (5) working days of the screening interview. For example, if an applicant is screened on a Monday, the intake interview must be scheduled as soon as possible but no later than the following Monday.

Any scheduling conflicts which arise are resolved with the eligibility supervisor in charge of the intake.

## Emergency Appointments

If an applicant indicates that s/he (1) has no available income or resources, and (2) during the current calendar month of application has not had and/or will not have income or resources in excess of the monthly Family Independence Standard of Assistance for the appropriate family size, the intake appointment must be scheduled within one (1) working day of the screening interview. If the applicant is unable to keep an appointment the following day, the intake appointment is scheduled for the earliest available time acceptable to the applicant.

For the purposes of determining an "emergency appointment", the Family Independence case worker considers the family's income and resources including all of the applicant's income and resources and the income and resources of those persons for whom s/he is applying which would be counted in determining eligibility for cash assistance. Deemed income must also be included. Income and resources do not include the income and resources of non-legally-liable relatives and friends. Income which is anticipated in the month of application is counted only if it is reasonably expected to be received, for example, the next regular paycheck or receipt of a government benefit. If it is doubtful that income will be received in the month of application, it should not be considered for the purpose of scheduling an intake appointment.

An applicant who has been scheduled for a prompt intake appointment may have a change in circumstances which makes her/him eligible for an emergency intake appointment; s/he may request to be rescheduled as an emergency intake. The Family Independence case worker reschedules the appointment for the next business day and corrects the intake book.

Prior to the intake, the transfer of any electronic INRHODES record, as well as paper file(s), as appropriate, is accomplished as soon as possible. The paper record with the new DHS-1 is routed to the appropriate supervisor to assign the eligibility intake. A copy of the DHS-1 is returned to the Family Independence case worker and incorporated in the service record.

### **0802.05.10 Data Entry Requirements During Screening**

REV:05/1997

Using the DHS-1, the Family Independence caseworker inquires through the Person Search (PERS) function of INRHODES to find whether an applicant is known to INRHODES. If the applicant is known to INRHODES her/his program status and person information is displayed. If the individual is not known to INRHODES, or is closed, the Application (APPL) must be entered in INRHODES.

### **0802.05.15 Application for Assistance**

REV:05/1997

An application is the action by which a person signifies in writing to the agency administering public assistance a desire to receive assistance. The parent or relative with whom a child(ren) is living, or will live, ordinarily makes application for the child(ren) for the Family Independence program. An application is thus distinguished from an inquiry or a request for information about public assistance eligibility requirements and benefits.

For the individual to be considered an applicant, s/he must complete and sign a DHS-1. The application period formally begins on the date the signed DHS-1 is date-stamped in the DHS district office and ends with the agency's decision either to authorize or deny benefits. The stamped date constitutes the official filing date from which assistance begins if eligibility is later determined to exist and to have existed when the application was filed.

An applicant wishing to participate in the Food Stamp Program must be encouraged to file the DHS-1 in order to establish the earliest possible filing date for Food Stamp purposes and be screened for expedited service. If the information offered on the DHS-1 indicates the applicant may be eligible for expedited service, the DHS-2 Statement of Need itself must be completed in full. If eligibility exists, expedited service must be afforded according to the processing standards located in Food Stamp Manual Section 1016.10.

## **0802.10 COMPLETION OF THE APPLICATION FOR ASSISTANCE**

REV:05/1997

The Statement of Need (DHS-2) is the basic document used in the application process through which eligibility or ineligibility for assistance is determined. The DHS-1 and the DHS-2, along with appropriate supplementary forms, constitute the complete application for assistance. Families eligible for the Family Independence program are also eligible for Medical Assistance without filing a separate application. The application also serves as the Food Stamp application.

The DHS-2 must be completed and signed under penalty of perjury by the parent(s) or caretaker relative (acting in loco parentis) responsible for the support and care of the child(ren) under eighteen (18), or between eighteen (18) and nineteen (19) if enrolled full-time in and expected to complete secondary school prior to the nineteenth birthday. At the close of the interview and upon completion of the DHS-2, the form must be dated and signed by the applicant and the signature witnessed by the agency representative in the signature box on the last page.

A new DHS-2 must be completed and signed if reapplication for assistance is made in a case that has been closed for more than thirty (30) days. A new DHS-2 must also be completed if a former recipient reapplies within thirty (30) days of closing and a significant change in circumstances (e.g., family composition) has occurred or if a redetermination of eligibility (REDT) is due. When reapplication occurs within thirty (30) days, however, a new Intake, including screening, is generally not necessary.

In an active case when a person, such as a newborn, is added to the assistance unit, a new DHS-2 need not be completed. However, the record must reflect through a CLOG entry and documentation of the birth date, etc., inclusion of the new member in the request for assistance.

## **0802.15 INTAKE INTERVIEW**

REV:01/2002

The Intake interview is scheduled by appointment or plan. The DHS-2 is reviewed with the applicant, and the eligibility and need factors are verified through the appropriate documents supplied by the applicant, or if not supplied by the applicant, by obtaining the document or information. The applicant(s) is required to read, or have read to him/her, the statements in the Rights and Responsibilities page and the Declaration of Applicant/Recipient pages of the DHS-2, and sign the form in the

signature block. The agency representative must witness the signature of the applicant(s).

The applicant is advised that pursuant to Rhode Island General Laws, Section 40-6-9, and without signing any document other than the DHS-2 Statement of Need, he or she has assigned any and all rights that he or she may have for and on behalf of himself or herself and for and on behalf of a child or children to the Department of Human Services against any parent failing to provide for support and maintenance of any minor child(ren) for whom assistance is paid by DHS. Additionally, DHS through the Department of Administration, Division of Taxation - Child Support Enforcement is authorized to act to institute suit to establish paternity and/or to collect support for said child(ren) who receives or received assistance from DHS.

The eligibility technician reviews the AP-35, the Notice of Requirement to Cooperate and the Right to Claim Good Cause for Refusal to Cooperate in Child Support Enforcement, with each applicant with children whose parent(s) is not in the home and obtains the applicant's signature. The Information on the Family Violence Option sheet (Form WVR-1a) is reviewed with the applicant. If the applicant relates that s/he wishes to claim the option or discloses abuse, the procedures the eligibility technician must follow are outlined in Section 0814.10.

The applicant is further advised that s/he must present the agency with personal identification, such as a driver's license, Social Security Number, birth certificate, or other form of identification.

Items on the DHS-2 are indicated as verified by the agency representative entering in red ink a verification mark (V) beside the item in the verification area of the DHS-2. The documentary source for each factor of eligibility and need is noted in the verification area.

If any potential resource exists, or further verification is needed, the applicant is advised of the necessary steps s/he or the staff member must take to obtain the information. S/He is advised that the agency uses, but is not limited to, on an ongoing basis, public records, other State agency files, such as State Employee records, ESB records, TDI records, State Income Tax records, Social Security Administration records, IRS records, and bank clearances to document the applicant's information.

However, the applicant is advised that s/he is responsible also to inform the agency of any changes in her/his situation such as income, resources, family composition, or other factors that affect her/his eligibility and/or payment level within ten (10) days, or as otherwise directed.

If the application for cash assistance is necessary by reason of accident, injury, or illness for which a third party may be liable, such applicant is informed that she has assigned any or all rights for amounts recoverable from a third party equal to the amount of financial and medical assistance provided as a result of accident, injury, or illness (see Section 0808.20).

All applicants are informed of the requirement of assignment and of their further responsibility to report a pending settlement which may occur during the receipt of assistance.

If such assignment is appropriate, the applicant is advised that eligibility to receive medical services shall continue to exist, although payment of medical bills shall be suspended by the Department and is not the responsibility of such applicant pending the settlement.

If outstanding verification exists and collateral sources of information must be used to obtain such documentation, the applicant is informed of why the information is necessary and how it will be used by the agency. If the applicant is unwilling to obtain further verification, or have the agency obtain it, the applicant may choose to have the application rejected.

If the applicant decides s/he does not want assistance and does not complete the DHS-2, the applicant is requested to sign the area on the DHS-1 confirming her/his withdrawal of the application.

### **0802.15.05        Forms Needed at Intake Interview**

REV:01/2002

The forms and materials that may be needed at the Intake Interview are:

- DHS-2        Statement of Need - should be completed prior to the interview if possible with the exception of the signature on the last page.
  
- AP-35        Notice Concerning Good Cause for Refusal to Cooperate - the applicant must sign the form when a child's parent(s) is absent. The original is filed in the case record and a copy given to the applicant.

### **0802.15.10        Review of the DHS-2**

REV:05/1997

The agency representative reviews the DHS-2 for completeness, helping the applicant, as needed, to rectify any omissions.

Additions or changes are made, in red ink, by the agency representative, and the date and initials of both the applicant and the agency representative are entered on the page to denote authorization of the change.

Eligibility for the Family Independence program is based on both financial and non-financial criteria. In determining eligibility, the DHS-2 is reviewed and evaluated as described in Section 0802.20.

### **0802.20            COMPLETING INITIAL ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION**

REV:12/2004

All items on the DHS-2 which were not verified at intake must be verified in the following contact through a source document in accordance with policies relating to resources (Section 0822) and income (Section 0824).

The eligibility technician gives the applicant the opportunity to clear up any inconsistencies or to provide any additional information needed to clarify or complete the information on the DHS-2 by whichever is the most appropriate method: telephone, mail, or an office or field interview. If the applicant is unable, either alone or with the help of the eligibility technician, to clear up any inconsistencies or to provide any additional information needed, the eligibility technician advises the applicant that it will be necessary to use collateral sources of information. If other sources must be used to obtain such documentation, the applicant is informed of

why the information is necessary and how it will be used by the agency and plans with the applicant how this is to be done. Under certain circumstances, the eligibility technician must refer the case to the Front End-Detection (FRED) Unit for investigation before the determination of eligibility can be made. See Section 0112.10.05 for policy and procedures.

During the intake interview, the applicant's rights and responsibilities, as outlined in the DHS-2 are reviewed with her/him.

When the eligibility technician receives the Findings portion of Form WVR-2 from the Domestic Violence Advocate, s/he acts on the recommendation(s) in accordance with Section 0814.10, as appropriate.

When the family is found eligible for both FIP and Alternative Cash Assistance outlined in Section 0814.15, approval of FIP is postponed until after the evaluation by the case worker. If the eligibility technician is informed that the applicant has chosen standard FIP assistance, s/he approves the case in the regular manner. If the eligibility technician receives a signed waiver of on-going cash assistance, s/he approves the denial of on-going FIP and authorizes the lump sum.

The determination of eligibility and authorization of payment are completed as soon as possible.

## **0802.25 REFERRAL TO FRONT-END DETECTION (FRED) UNIT**

REV:05/1997

Agency representatives who note cases which exhibit an indication of questionable eligibility under the criteria of the indicators listed in Section 0802.25.05 must refer these cases to the FRED Unit.

Cases must exhibit at least one of the stated indicators in order to be investigated. The eligibility worker must inform the applicant that the information in the Statement of Need is being verified and that eligibility will be determined within thirty (30) days. Following receipt of the referral FRED investigators will make an unannounced home visit. The investigators will identify themselves as DHS representatives and will possess a DHS photo I.D. card to offer for identification purposes.

Findings by the investigators must be as well documented as any information currently gathered for an administrative hearing or court appearances. FRED investigators will present these findings at any administrative hearing or court appearance resulting from a denial or termination of assistance which occurred pursuant to a pre-eligibility investigation.

The FRED Unit must return its findings to the eligibility unit supervisor no later than ten (10) business days from the date the referral was forwarded. In order for the eligibility worker to determine eligibility properly and/or the correct assistance payment, the FRED Unit must include an explanation of its findings and attach appropriate supporting documentation to the response.

If the FRED Unit does not respond within the ten (10) business day time frame, the eligibility worker will determine the applicant's (in)eligibility based on the information contained in the case record.

### **0802.25.05 FRED Referral Indicators**

REV:01/2002

In general, eligibility workers should be aware of and note discrepancies and contradictions in written and verbal statements made by the applicant. A referral to the FRED Unit should be made when one or more of the specific indicators below are present:

- \* Fixed expenses (rent, utilities, etc.) exceed income and no reasonable explanation is given;
- \* Previously unreported changes in the household and/or false statements given;
- \* Previously unreported employment/earnings;
- \* Applicant unable to show any means of support for the last three (3) months prior to application for assistance;
- \* Moved to Rhode Island in the past three (3) months (except for Refugees);
- \* Assets appear greater than those reported; or
- \* Does not appear that child(ren) is with applicant parent.

### **0802.30 DECISION ON APPLICATION**

REV:05/1997

Applications are acted upon promptly. A decision on eligibility and payment or ineligibility must be made within thirty (30) days from the filing date. This standard is not used as a waiting period before granting assistance nor as a basis for denial of an application. The applicant must be informed of the reason for any delay in a decision and her/his right to a hearing if the delay exceeds thirty (30) days.

#### **0802.30.05 Notification of (In)Eligibility**

REV:12/2004

When the applicant is found to be ineligible, or makes the decision after signing the application that s/he does not want assistance, the applicant is notified of the denial and the reasons for denial through INRHODES. This notice informs the applicant at the same time of her/his right to appeal the decision, and the method by which the applicant can request a hearing.

When the applicant is found to be eligible for both FIP and Alternative Cash Assistance outlined in Section 0814.15 and chooses to take the lump sum and signs the waiver, the applicant is notified of the denial of on-going FIP and of her/his eligibility for the lump sum.

When the applicant is found to be eligible for FIP cash assistance, the acceptance date is the date that all factors of eligibility are met. However, it may be as early as the date the application was filed, if the applicant was eligible then, but cannot be prior to the date of application. If a monthly deficit exists for the month in which the application was filed, the initial payment is pro-rated according

to the number of days of eligibility from the date of application (see Section 0826.10).

INRHODES issues a notice notifying the applicant of her/his eligibility.

If the family's monthly deficit is less than ten dollars (\$10) per month, the case is considered eligible for the Family Independence program but no payment is issued (see Section 0826.10). The assistance unit is eligible as Categorically Needy for the Medical Assistance program.

The agency representative enters all actions taken in the Case Log (CLOG).

## **0802.35 REFERRAL TO DCYF**

REV:05/1997

Whenever there is reason to believe that the home in which the relative or child(ren) applying for or receiving assistance from the Family Independence program reside is unsuitable because of neglect or abuse, referral procedures must be followed as outlined in the DHS Manual General Provisions Section 0118.