

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES MANUAL

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113 QUALITY ASSESSMENT

113-1 PURPOSE OF QUALITY ASSESSMENT

The Quality Assessment (QA) review provides valuable statistics and information on how well the agency delivers services. It helps measure:

- Payment accuracy,
- Case management techniques,
- Effectiveness of policy and procedures, and
- How well we perform in our mission to promote self-sufficiency and provide basic living expenses to Alaskans in need.

The QA review is one of the tools used by staff to develop training, policies, and techniques that will enhance the delivery of services and benefits to DPA's recipients. For the Medicaid and Food Stamp programs, the QA review is a federal requirement. For other DPA programs, we use the process to ensure policies and procedures meet state laws and achieve our agency's mission and desired outcomes.

A. MEDICAID PROGRAM

The Medicaid program allows the opportunity to conduct a targeted review of specific services. By targeting reviews, we get information needed to design effective and efficient Medicaid policies. The QA and Medicaid policy staffs design the project for a specific period of time, with endorsements from the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services agency.

B. ALASKA TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Alaska Temporary Assistance Program obtains information about the quality of work from the QA review. In addition, QA gathers information about the accuracy of the benefit payment and effective management of work activity requirements. The QA Reviewers provide data to evaluate the effectiveness of the program's policies and procedures, and may include related childcare programs. QA Reviewers conduct a full case review, including a home visit when possible or contact the client by telephone. The type of information gathered changes depending on the program's performance measures and the focus or desired results of new policies. Legislative Audit randomly selects cases once a year from the completed reviews to validate the QA Reviewer's findings.

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C. FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

The Food Stamp Quality Assessment review includes specific elements to review, required documents and verifications, and strict time frames for completing the review process. The federal agency, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), closely regulates and monitors the process, from the random sampling of cases to the transmission of the review findings. FNS randomly selects cases from those transmitted to monitor Alaska's Food Stamp Program compliance with federal regulations, and ensure QA follows the required FNS review process. When the year's process is complete it results in Alaska's final Food Stamp Program payment error rate.

D. OTHER PROJECTS

Often the QA Unit performs ad-hoc review projects for the Director's Office. This includes Site Assessments, Management Evaluations, and case readings that target an office, unit, worker, or type of client, such as case reading all Food Stamp cases with members who are commercial fishing. The QA Program Officer works directly with the office manager, policy specialist, or Director to define and organize the project.

113-2 METHOD OF QUALITY ASSESSMENT REVIEW

An EIS program randomly selects open, closed, denied, and suspended cases once a month for a QA review. The QA Field Manager assigns reviews to each reviewer.

When the QA Reviewer requests a case file, the field or regional office must send the case file to QA within three working days. QA may need to keep the file for up to seven working days before returning it.

The case record is the QA Reviewer's primary source of information regarding the eligibility determination and case management (work activities). The QA reviewer obtains information from recipient case files, the Eligibility Information System (EIS), and other interagency databases. QA Reviewers also make independent collateral contacts to determine if the information used in the eligibility process is accurate. It is permissible for the QA Reviewer to contact the caseworker or case manager for clarification and understanding of the case record documentation.

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Reviewers use the Alaska Temporary Assistance, Food Stamp, and Medicaid program policies in effect at the time of the eligibility decision to determine if the caseworker appropriately applied the policies to factors of eligibility, work activities, benefit amounts or authorized payments of childcare. The Reviewer also uses state statutes and federal regulations to ensure the manuals accurately reflect laws.

The Federal Quality Control FNS Handbook 310 provides guidance on how to conduct the review, verify and document information, and determine errors for the Food Stamp Program. Generally, the same standards apply to the Alaska Temporary Assistance and Medicaid review processes.

113-3 REVIEW OF QUALITY ASSESSMENT FEEDBACKS

After reaching a decision on a review (error or no error), the QA Reviewer completes the electronic Q-Form to notify the field staff of the review findings. The QA Reviewer forwards the Q-Form to the QA Supervisor for distribution to the Quality Assessment Review Committee (QARC).

The regional designee, usually the case reader or a supervisor, distributes the Q-Form to the appropriate field supervisor and caseworker or case manager.

For a no-error review, the supervisor and caseworker or case manager review the Q-form for other information found during the review process. The caseworker or case manager makes the case corrections as needed. The supervisor follows up on the review to ensure the caseworker or case manager takes appropriate action on “other information”.

For an error finding, the QA Field Manager distributes the Q-form to the core membership of the QARC and the regional designee. The field supervisor and caseworker or case manager research the error and the cause of the error. They communicate directly with the regional manager, policy specialist, QA Reviewer, the client, and other units as appropriate in researching the error finding to prepare for the QARC meeting.

The supervisor provides the pertinent research information to the regional manager or their designee for presentation at the next monthly QARC meeting. This packet of information should include:

- The error cause,
- New or overlooked information,

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- Clarifications received from policy,
- Corrective action plans to fix the benefit, if appropriate, and
- Corrective action plans to prevent the recurrence of the error.

The field staff processes claims, supplementals, fraud referrals and other corrections to the sample month after review and discussion by the QARC.

A. “CORRECT CASE” FEEDBACKS

Staff do not need to respond to a “No Error” QA finding.

During the review process, the QA Reviewer may find information that changes benefits for months before or after the review month, and will report this on the Q-Form. Caseworkers must follow-up on this information to correct the case, however, they do not respond to the Q-Form.

Payment errors under \$25 will be reported as “correct”. These errors do require corrective action by the field. They do not require a response to the Q-Form nor will the QARC address the error.

B. ERROR FEEDBACKS

The regional designee forwards the Q-Form to the field staff for review and response. Regions vary on who must formally respond. Some require a response from the supervisor; others designate a lead worker. The regional manager provides further instructions for presenting the information to the QARC.

Field staff must respond to QA eligibility and payment error findings by e-mailing the supervisor and regional manager (or their designee) with their response, including forwarding copies of relevant verifications.

Note: Wait to complete a claim determination (Gen 95) or fraud referral (Gen 40) form or issue a supplemental benefit on the actual sample month benefit until you hear from the QARC.

When challenging the findings, the caseworker must clearly state all pertinent facts and issues related to the challenge and include supporting documentation and policy manual sections. The district office manager or unit supervisor reviews the challenge for validity and content.

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113-4 QUALITY ASSESSMENT REVIEW COMMITTEE (QARC)

The QARC meets monthly to review and discuss Food Stamp, Temporary Assistance, Adult Public Assistance, and Medicaid errors found by QA Reviewers. The purposes of the QARC are:

- To determine if policy and regulations can support a change in the initial QA finding to a correct case or a lesser error amount; and
- To identify error causes and corrective actions.

Prior to the QARC, policy and QA staffs meet for a Pre-QARC session. Together the group discusses options in policy and regulation to determine whether or not the error(s) could be reduced or eliminated. Meanwhile, representatives from the regional offices review the QA findings and begin researching the case to determine if they have additional information that could result in a reduction or elimination of the case error. Additional information can be forwarded to the policy staff at any time in the process. The QA Field Manager notifies the QARC members of the Pre-QARC findings immediately following that meeting.

In addition, the QA Program Officer (or designee) develops a QARC meeting agenda and schedules time for each regional office's representative to present their cases.

The QA Program Officer or a designee facilitates the QARC meeting held the day after the Pre-QARC meeting. Representatives from each region present their cases. The representatives either concur with QA's error finding or present information that will reduce or eliminate the error(s). Once the regional representative presents information, all QARC participants have an open discussion to find ways to reduce or eliminate the error(s).

The QARC also is responsible to identify any policy, procedural, or system changes that need additional research and analysis.

Reviews pended for more research by members of the QARC are reviewed at the next QARC meeting. Findings that cannot be amended are sent to the QA Research Analyst for recording and transmission. Amended findings are returned to QA for revision of the review documents.

The QA Program Officer keeps record of the decisions and corrective actions discussed during the QARC meeting, and assumes responsibility for any cases changed during this process.

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113-5 AVAILABILITY OF COMPLETE REVIEWS

The QA review packet or verification obtained by the QA Reviewer may be used to correct or challenge a case. Field or policy staffs may request the additional documentation by contacting the QA Supervisor in the Anchorage QA Unit.

113-6 RECIPIENT REFUSES TO COOPERATE

Recipient cooperation is a condition of eligibility for only the Food Stamp Program. Occasionally, the recipient will not cooperate with the QA Reviewer by refusing to be interviewed or to provide information needed to complete the review. When this happens, the QA Reviewer takes the following steps:

1. The QA Reviewer sends a letter to the recipient requesting cooperation in completing the review.
2. The QA Reviewer requests the caseworker to send a letter to the recipient requesting cooperation with the QA review process.
3. If steps one and two are unsuccessful, the QA Supervisor in Anchorage sends a letter to the recipient requesting the recipient's cooperation.
4. If step three is unsuccessful, the QA Reviewer determines if the recipient meets the FNS definition of refusing to cooperate.
5. For recipients meeting the "refusing to cooperate" criteria, the QA Reviewer requests the caseworker to close the Food Stamp case via the Q-Form, and advises the caseworker of the effective dates for the disqualification period. For other programs, the caseworker follows instructions in the policy manual for a special case review.

Note: The caseworker takes action to close the Food Stamp case only after receiving the Q-Form advising the caseworker of the recipient's noncooperation. Follow instructions in the Alaska Temporary Assistance Manual if the ATAP recipient refuses to cooperate.

In some situations, the QA Reviewer can complete the review without the recipient's cooperation. Completing the review does not change the client's penalty for refusing to cooperate. With the Q-Form the reviewer will notify the caseworker of the refusal and the effective dates of the disqualification penalty.

If the recipient cooperates with QA after the closure, QA will notify the caseworker of the cooperation and the date to end the disqualification.

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Some clients do not refuse to cooperate, but fail to cooperate for reasons outside of their control. If this occurs, the case remains open, unless some other factor affecting eligibility is found to exist. In these cases, the caseworker may want to conduct a special eligibility review when the recipient fails to cooperate in an attempt to verify questionable information. Follow specific instructions in the related policy manual.

113-7 QUALITY ASSESSMENT REVIEWER CONTACT WITH THE CASEWORKER

QA and field staff can use their judgment in deciding the need to communicate during the Temporary Assistance evaluation process.

The design of a Medicaid project will determine the level of contact between the QA Unit and the field staff. The QA Program Officer or designee will notify the Chief of Field Services when field staff must participate in the review process.

The Food Stamp QA review must be unbiased, independent, and objective. This means that during the review process the QA Reviewer usually will proceed without assistance or contact with the caseworker. The QA Reviewer may contact a caseworker directly regarding a Food Stamp review when:

- The recipient cannot be located;
- The recipient refuses to cooperate;
- The case file documentation is unclear;
- The QA Reviewer found unreported information that impacts future benefits; or
- There is reference in the case record to documentation that cannot be located by the QA Reviewer.

The caseworker may contact the QA Reviewer to discuss the review findings and verifications obtained during the course of the review.

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113-8 QUALITY ASSESSMENT REVIEWER'S FRAUD REFERRAL

The QA Reviewer can recommend referral to the Fraud Unit. During the review process, if the QA Reviewer finds that the recipient or childcare provider willfully and intentionally lied or provided false verifications to the caseworker, the QA Reviewer marks the "Fraud Referral Recommended" on the Q-Form.

The QARC will consider fraud referral recommendations during the discussion of the case. In some cases the field might recommend the fraud referral. If the QARC agrees a fraud referral is warranted, the caseworker completes the Fraud Referral form to refer the case to the Fraud Unit.

Note: An overpayment claim is not sent to the claims unit if the caseworker submits a Fraud Referral.

If the recipient or childcare provider willfully and intentionally lied or provided false verifications to the QA Reviewer, the QA Reviewer marks the "Fraud Referral Recommended" on the Q-Form and the QA Reviewer completes the referral form to refer the case to the Fraud Unit.

113-9 Q-FORM PROCESS

*Note: This process requires **forwarding** of the e-mail and attachments.*

The following charts show the process for responding to Q-Forms for all programs.

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QUALITY ASSESSMENT Q-FORM PROCESS

If QA Reviewer finds the review is...

a "No Error" case	Send Q-Form and original hard copy of review documents to QA Supervisor.
an "Error" case	Send Q-Form and original hard copy of review documents to QA Supervisor.

If QA Supervisor finds the Q-Form is...

a "No Error" case	Send hard copy of the Review Schedule to QA Research Analyst. Forward e-mail Q-Form to QA Research Analyst, and the regional designee.
a "No Error" case with "Information Only"	Send hard copy of the Review Schedule to QA Research Analyst. Forward e-mail Q-Form to QA Research Analyst, DPA Policy, and the regional designee.
an "Error" case	Forward e-mail Q-Form to QA Research Analyst, QARC core membership, and the regional designee.

If Regional Office Designee finds the Q-Form is...

a "No Error" case	File or forward as directed by regional manager.
a "No Error" case with "Information Only"	Forward e-mail Q-Form to district office manager or unit supervisor. File and follow up as directed by regional manager.
an "Error" case	Forward e-mail Q-Form to district office manager or unit supervisor to prepare for QARC. File and follow up as directed by regional manager when QARC process is complete.

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If the District Office Manager or Unit Supervisor finds the Q-Form is...

a “No Error” case	File as directed by regional manager.
a “No Error” case with “Information Only”	Confirm information on the Q-Form is appropriately acted upon by caseworker, including case corrections and supplementals or claims as appropriate.
an “Error” case and agrees with the QA error finding	<p>Consult with caseworker, program policy and QA staff, if necessary.</p> <p>Take actions to ensure future months eligibility and benefit amount is correct.</p> <p>Do not complete and submit a claim determination or fraud referral form or issue a supplemental benefit to correct the error month until the QARC concurs with the error and determines a supplemental or claim is necessary.</p> <p>Forward e-mail Q-Form to the regional manager or designee with a statement that you concur, along with explanation as to the cause of the error. Explain planned corrective actions to prevent future errors.</p>
an “Error” case and disagrees with the QA error finding	<p>Consult with caseworker, program policy, and QA staff, if necessary.</p> <p>Fax supporting documents to Policy Specialist, if appropriate.</p> <p>Take actions to ensure future months eligibility and benefit amount is correct.</p> <p>Do not complete and submit a claim determination or fraud referral form or issue a supplemental benefit to correct the error month until the QARC concurs with the error and determines a supplemental or claim is necessary.</p> <p>Forward e-mail Q-Form to regional manager or designee with additional information for non-concur.</p>

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If the Policy Specialist receives an error Q-Form and...

Policy Specialist agrees with the QA error finding	Discuss with QA and the field staff as needed. Discuss the finding during the Pre-QARC meeting with QA staff.
Policy Specialist disagrees with the QA error finding	Obtain supporting documents and begin research of current policy and regulations as it applies to the error challenge. Consult with QA and field staff about error challenge, if appropriate. Bring supporting documentation to the Pre-QARC meeting.

If QA Program Officer or designee receives an error Q-Form and...

Policy Staff agree with QA error finding	Research the FNS310 and regulations. Bring supporting documentation to the Pre-QARC.
Policy Staff disagree with QA error finding	Discuss error finding with Policy Specialist. Contact QA staff for additional support of QA finding. Research the FNS310 and regulations. Bring supporting documentation to the Pre-QARC.

If QA and Policy staffs during the Pre-QARC...

agree on QA error finding	Pass the relevant research documentation to the QARC for final review and findings.
disagree with final QA error finding	Submit relevant documentation of all issues to QA Reviewer with instructions to amend findings. Notify QARC of amended findings prior to the next QARC meeting.

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If QARC members...

agree on QA error finding	<p>Pass the review to the QA Research Analyst for recording and transmission.</p> <p>Identify causes and corrective actions.</p>
disagree with QA error finding	<p>Notify the QA Reviewer of the research documentation and instruct to amend findings based on the QARC decision.</p> <p>Pass the relevant research documentation to the QA Research Analyst for recording and transmission.</p>
finds it needs more research information	<p>Notify the QA Reviewer of the needed research and to contact the regional designee to assist in obtaining documentation.</p> <p>Reschedule the review for the next meeting.</p>

If the Research Analyst finds the Q-Form is...

a "No Error" case	<p>Enter data from the Review Schedule into database and transmit data to FNS.</p> <p>Make hard copy of Q-Form for files.</p>
an "Error" case	<p>Notify QA Program Officer when Q-Form is due for transmission.</p> <p>Confirm the QARC completed the process with a committee finding agreeing with the error or amending the error prior to entering data from the Review Schedule into the database.</p> <p>Transmit completed Food Stamp reviews to FNS on the due date.</p>
pending for more research	<p>Monitor the FNS due date on Food Stamp reviews to ensure timely transmission.</p> <p>Notify the QA Program Officer if the delay to the next QARC means untimely transmission.</p>

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If the PI&A Public Assistance Analyst finds the Q-Form is...

a "No Error" case with "Information Only"	Research to ensure corrections were made by the caseworker. Notify regional manager and case reader if corrections were not made.
an error case and disagrees with QA error finding	Discuss error finding with Policy Specialist and QA Program Officer Research the policy and bring supporting documentation to the Pre-QARC.
an error case and the QARC agreed with the findings	Research EIS to determine if caseworker made corrections as instructed by the QARC. Confirm the caseworker completed a claim, fraud referral, or supplemental as instructed by the QARC and policy.