

01/01/24

Bulletin No. 23-38

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.

01/01/24

Bulletin No. 23-38

P-2150C p.2

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.

01/01/24

Bulletin No. 23-38

P-2150C p.3

P-2150 Desk Reviews

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).

P-2150 Desk Reviews

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.

01/01/24

Bulletin No. 23-38

P-2150C p.6

P-2150 Desk Reviews

C. COLA Desk Review (continued)

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.

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.

P-2150 Desk Reviews

C. COLA Desk Review (continued)

- 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.
- 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 an amount determined by the COLA percentage. In most years this amount is \$15. In years where the COLA percentage is greater than usual, that amount may be increased. (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.

01/01/24

Bulletin No. 23-38

P-2150C p.8

P-2150 Desk Reviews

C. COLA Desk Review (continued)

- 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.
 - 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.