



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Office of Medicaid
www.mass.gov/masshealth

MassHealth
Acute Outpatient Hospital Bulletin 36
August 2020

TO: All Acute Outpatient Hospitals Participating in MassHealth

FROM: Amanda Cassel Kraft, Acting Medicaid Director

RE: Temporary COVID-19 Flexibilities for the Dispensing of Hearing Aids for Members Age 18 and Older

Introduction

MassHealth is issuing this bulletin to inform MassHealth-enrolled Acute Outpatient Hospital (AOH) departments of COVID-related flexibilities for MassHealth-enrolled providers that dispense hearing aids to MassHealth members. Pursuant to 130 CMR 426.404(A)(2) and Section 5.C.6., Audiology Dispensing, of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Office of Medicaid, Rate Year 2020 Acute Hospital Amended Request for Applications ([RY2020 RFA](#)), hearing aid services provided by MassHealth-enrolled AOHs are governed by 130 CMR 426.000: *Audiologist Services*. Hearing aid services provided to MassHealth members by MassHealth-enrolled AOHs are reimbursed according to the fees established in 101 CMR 323.00: *Hearing Services*.

In light of the state of emergency declared in the Commonwealth on March 10, 2020, by Executive Order 591 due to the 2019 novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and in order to facilitate continued access to care, MassHealth is temporarily extending certain Prior Authorizations (PAs) for hearing aids and waive a MassHealth hearing aid dispensing requirement applicable to MassHealth members age 18 and older. The flexibilities described in this bulletin apply only to members age 18 and older.

Temporary COVID-19 Flexibilities for the Dispensing of Hearing Aids

Extension of Certain Prior Authorizations for Members Age 18 and Older

MassHealth issues PAs for the dispensing of hearing aids for a period of 90 days. MassHealth requires PA for new hearing aids and for the replacement of a hearing aid regardless of cost, when replacement is needed due to a medical change; loss; or damage beyond repair. See 130 CMR 426.408(A)(2)(a), (b), and (c).

For members 18 years of age or older, upon request of a provider, MassHealth will extend the length of PA approvals for the dispensing of new or replacement hearing aids issued on December 1, 2019, through and including June 30, 2020, to September 30, 2020.

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PA Extension Process for PAs Issued between December 1, 2019, and June 30, 2020

- Providers should email requests for extensions of prior authorization approvals for dispensing of hearing aids issued on or after December 1, 2019, through June 30, 2020, to physicianservices@mass.gov.
- The subject line of the emailed request for extension of PA should read: “COVID-19 Hearing Aid PA extension request.” Your email should also include:
 - the PA number for which the request applies; and
 - the member’s MassHealth ID number.
- Approved extension requests will be valid for dates of dispensing through September 30, 2020.

MassHealth requests that providers pay close attention to any PAs that may have expired or may be expiring and request an extension if needed. Any hearing aids requiring PA that are billed to MassHealth should have an active PA in place.

Waiver of Six-Month Requirement for Audiological Evaluations for Hearing Aids for MassHealth Members Age 18 and Older

MassHealth requires that members have an audiological exam within the six months preceding the dispensing of a new or replacement hearing aid. See 130 CMR 426.414(A)(4).

Notwithstanding the provisions of 130 CMR 426.408(B) and 130 CMR 426.414(A)(4), MassHealth will accept audiological evaluations dated **on or after September 1, 2019**, for hearing aids dispensed to MassHealth members age 18 and older **on or after March 1, 2020, through September 30, 2020**. All other requirements of 130 CMR 426.000, 130 CMR 450.000, and MassHealth guidance continue to apply, including, but not limited to, the separate requirement for medical clearance by a physician within the six months preceding dispensing of a new or replacement hearing aid at 130 CMR 426.414(B) and 130 CMR 426.419(C)(3).

For hearing aids dispensed **on or after October 1, 2020**, to members aged 18 or older, the corresponding audiological evaluation must be within six months of the dispensing date.

Recordkeeping

All recordkeeping requirements of 130 CMR 426.000 and 130 CMR 450.000 apply. Providers must also clearly document in the member’s record:

- for members age 18 and older, extension of a member’s PA approval due to COVID-19;
- waiver due to COVID-19, for members age 18 and older, of the requirement for an audiological evaluation within six months of dispensing; allowing use of audiological evaluations dated on or after September 1, 2019, for hearing aids dispensed between March 1, 2020, and September 30, 2020; and
- the date of dispensing.

AOHs must continue to comply with applicable recordkeeping requirements, including those set forth in the RY2020 RFA, 130 CMR 450.000, and 130 CMR 426.000.

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Note: Unless specifically modified through this bulletin, all other criteria set forth in 130 CMR 426.000: *Audiologist* regulations regarding PA and dispensing of hearing aids remain unchanged.

MassHealth Website

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To sign up to receive email alerts when MassHealth issues new bulletins and transmittal letters, send a blank email to join-masshealth-provider-pubs@listserv.state.ma.us. No text in the body or subject line is needed.

Questions

If you have any questions about the information in this bulletin, please contact the MassHealth Customer Service Center at (800) 841-2900, email your inquiry to providersupport@mahealth.net, or fax your inquiry to (617) 988-8974.