

**Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services**  
**Flexible Funding Guidance**  
**Supporting Families during the Coronavirus Pandemic**  
**UPDATE - March 25, 2020**

In light of these challenging and stressful times and the extraordinary demands on families as they care for their loved one with a disability at home, DDS is providing updated guidance for the use of flexible funding allocations. We want to be as helpful and responsive as we can in addressing the emerging needs of families by creating more *flexibility* in the use of flexible funding. It will also be important to maintain adequate reporting and tracking mechanisms. This guidance will be updated as needed to address any changing circumstances.

**Short-Term Emergency Needs**

Many families will be experiencing the need for short-term emergency assistance to help them continue to provide care for their family member with a disability. We will be temporarily waiving the current allowable limit of 3 months per fiscal year of short-term emergency assistance per family. Examples of short-term emergency needs may include: food, short-term rental assistance to prevent homelessness, clothing, car rental, car repairs, or general household costs.

**Gift Cards**

The use of gift cards and online ordering may be an effective way to provide some types of short-term emergency assistance. The allowable use of gift cards will be expanded to help families address basic needs, such as the purchasing of groceries for the family, or other essential items including cleaning and medical supplies.

- It is strongly advised to purchase gift cards from local supermarkets (such as, Market Basket, Stop & Shop, Big Y, Costco, and Target) to better support our local community. However, it is also understood that in certain areas there may be a need to shop at local and independent grocery stores, and in those situations, other gift cards can be made available (VISA or MasterCard).
- The recommended amount of gift cards at any given time is \$100/week but this may vary depending on family size or other circumstances.
- When gifts cards are used, providers must have procedures in place for authorizing and monitoring their distribution and usage. This must include keeping of a Card/Voucher Log or other system that tracks the following information:
  - Identifier number on card; purchase date; amount; abbreviation of individual's name receiving card/voucher; date of issuance; purpose; name/title of person authorizing release of card/voucher.
  - When possible, the signature of individuals who received gift cards/vouchers should be obtained, but it is recognized this may be difficult and is not required at this time. Gift cards should be distributed in a timely way that allows them to be used before the end of the current fiscal year.

### **Online Ordering**

Providers may order food and supplies online for home delivery.

- Providers must track these orders, identifying: the recipient, purchase date, amount, and purpose.
- It is recommended that these orders be limited to \$100/week but this may vary depending on family size or other circumstances.

### **Adaptive Equipment and Supplies/Assistive Technology**

Flexible funding allocations can be used to purchase adaptive equipment and assistive technology devices, such as tablets and Chromebooks, to help create access for individuals with disabilities and family members to a variety of online resources and virtual supports. This funding may also be used to purchase a variety of technological supports that can be used at home to help individuals communicate with family and friends and engage in activities for educational or recreational purposes, including art supplies, games, and sensory items.

### **Prior Approval to exceed the \$3,000 limit in use of Flexible Funding**

It is also recognized that during this time of greater need, families may exceed the annual limit of \$3,000 that typically requires prior approval from the DDS Regional Director. For the remainder of this fiscal year (FY20), the approval for use of funding above this limit can be made by the Area Director or the Area Office Designee.

### **Authorization / Communication**

Family Support Centers should be in regular communication with DDS Area Office and/or Regional Office, dependent on which entity manages the contract. Authorizations for funding allocations will be done by email. Phone authorizations are permissible but must be followed by email verification.

Expenditure plans still need to be created for new families and amended for currently enrolled families. Providers should document that the family has agreed to the plan verbally on the signature line with the date of the call. These plans can be submitted to the area offices at a later time.

### **Reporting and Tracking Expenditures**

It will be important for us to document funding given to families related to COVID-19.

In the interest of streamlining data collection and documentation, we will be using existing reporting tools. This data will be recorded on a provider's Invoice Documentation Spreadsheet that is currently used to submit billing for their existing 3779 Flexible Funding contracts. We will make use of the categories in the Transaction Detail Tab, choosing the category that most closely matches the expenditure. You then must use the comment column and enter C19. This will help track and record all costs related to COVID-19.

### **Questions**

All questions regarding this guidance should be directed to a Regional Family Support Director.