



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for MassHealth Members about Telephone and Internet Service During COVID-19

July 24, 2020

During of the state of emergency related to COVID-19, many members are receiving care from providers via telehealth, which includes phone calls and live video conversations (such as FaceTime or Zoom). Members have expressed concern about limited phone and internet access during this time. Below are questions members may have about telephone and internet service. Please keep checking back for FAQ updates. The information contained in this document is accurate as of the date of publication.

I do not have a mobile phone plan but I think I need one now to talk to my doctor and have telehealth appointments. Are there resources to help?

Yes, all MassHealth members are eligible for the Lifeline program, which provides a monthly \$9.25 discount on phone services. You can choose to apply the discount to either **(1)** a mobile phone plan with internet data OR **(2)** a home phone (landline) plan. In most cases, the \$9.25 discount will cover the cost of the basic monthly plan; you will be charged if you use additional minutes or data. See the chart below for more details on plans. Only one Lifeline program discount is available per household. A household is a group of people who share an address and expenses.

How can I sign up for the Lifeline service?

To apply online for Lifeline, visit www.CheckLifeline.org/lifeline/. If the system is not able to automatically confirm your eligibility, you may be asked to submit a picture of your MassHealth insurance card. There is also a mail-in paper application option in [English](#) and [Spanish](#). Lifeline will send you confirmation by mail or email within 7-10 days. After you are approved, you will be asked to choose a Lifeline service provider (phone companies) and can start services immediately.

What companies can I choose from?

In Massachusetts there are three Lifeline mobile phone service providers: [Assurance Wireless](#) (partnership with Virgin Mobile), [SafeLink Wireless](#) (partnership with TracFone Wireless), and [StandUp Wireless](#). For home landline phone plans, Lifeline is partnered with [Verizon](#). Lifeline service providers' monthly plan details and contact information are listed in the chart below.

Do I need to use my own phone for the Lifeline program?

Lifeline mobile service providers offer plans that will work on most mobile phones and in some cases, may provide a free mobile phone with the plan. Depending on where you live, some mobile phone providers may provide a better signal than others. Verizon does not provide a home landline phone with its Lifeline plan.

If I have questions or issues with the Lifeline program, who should I call?

If you need help applying for Lifeline or have any questions, you can call the Massachusetts Department of Telecommunications and Cable's (DTC) hotline, 800-392-6066. For more details, on the Lifeline program and the application process, visit: <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-a-discounted-communications-service-through-the-lifeline-program>. *Please note:* When you call between business hours (Monday – Friday, 9am-5pm), you have two options: (1) to leave a message for a call-back by DTC staff; or (2) to be automatically connected to a service provider if you are an existing Lifeline

customer. If you leave a message, you will receive a call-back by DTC staff. After business hours, consumers can use DTC's email (consumer.complaints@mass.gov) or webform (<https://licensing.reg.state.ma.us/pubLic/oca-support/mg-dtc-complaint-form.asp>) to request contact or file a complaint.

I have lost my job during COVID-19 and do not have the required three months of income documentation to meet eligibility. Can I still qualify?

Yes, as of April 29, 2020 and until August 31, 2020, because of the COVID-19 emergency, if you lost your job, you can submit notice of your unemployment benefits instead of three months of income documentation.

For Current Lifeline Program Customers

I am a current Lifeline customer; do I need to re-apply?

No, in response to COVID-19, Lifeline has lifted the recertification requirement. This will impact Lifeline subscribers with anniversary dates that fall on or between April 14, 2020 and November 29, 2020.

Are there any additional resources for current Lifeline customers?

Yes, Lifeline service providers are providing additional minutes and data in response to COVID-19. See chart above for details on what each Lifeline service provider is offering. These changes are automatic and do not require contacting the company.

I was a Lifeline program customer but I have not used my Lifeline phone in months and it doesn't work anymore. Who should I contact?

If you do not use your Lifeline phone at least once every thirty days, your service is stopped. To re-enroll, contact the company that you initially received the phone from.

If you have any problems re-enrolling, please contact the Massachusetts Department of Telecommunications and Cable's (DTC) hotline, 800-392-6066.

Please note: When you call during business hours (Monday – Friday, 9am-5pm), you have two options: (1) to leave a message for a call back by DTC staff; or (2) to be automatically connected to a service provider if you are an existing Lifeline customer. If you leave a message, you will receive a call-back by DTC staff.

After business hours, consumers can use DTC's email (consumer.complaints@mass.gov) or this webform (<https://licensing.reg.state.ma.us/pubLic/oca-support/mg-dtc-complaint-form.asp>) to request contact or file a complaint.

General Questions about Phone and Internet Resources

Can I apply for the Lifeline Program?

All MassHealth members are able to receive a monthly discount on **either** a mobile phone plan with internet data **OR** a home phone (landline) service through the national Lifeline program. See above for more details on how to apply.

I am worried about paying my phone and internet bills on time. Are there resources for that?

In response to COVID-19, some phone and internet service providers are waiving fees for customers who cannot pay their bills. Some companies require customers to submit a form in order to waive the fees. Please check with your specific service provider for more details.

I have a mobile phone but I do not have internet at home. Are there resources to help me get internet at home?

Some companies are offering home internet deals for new customers:

- Xfinity/Comcast is offering 60 days of free internet access through the Internet Essentials service to new customers who are eligible, which includes MassHealth members, until December 31, 2020, with no credit check, shipping fee or term contracts.
- Verizon has extended its home internet offer for low-income households through December 31, 2020.
- Cox is not terminating service and is waiving late fees to any residential customer with an inability to pay a bill due to disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic. This is currently in effect through July 31, 2020 for up to 60 days.
- AT&T will waive data overage fees for home-internet service through September 30, 2020.

Many internet service providers are providing free access to all WiFi hotspots for customers. WiFi hotspots are public areas that allow you to connect to a WiFi network using your computer, smartphone or another device. The location of WiFi hotspots, depend on the company. Xfinity WiFi hotspots can be found here: <https://hotspots.wifi.xfinity.com/>; Spectrum WiFi hotspots can be found here: <https://www.spectrum.com/wifi-hotspots>.

Massachusetts Lifeline Service Providers

Service Provider	Lifeline Monthly Plan <i>covered by the \$9.25 discount</i>
<u>Assurance Wireless</u> (partnership with Virgin Mobile) Phone number: 888-321-5880	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 350 voice minutes • Unlimited texts • 3GB data
<u>SafeLink Wireless</u> (partnership with TracFone Wireless) Phone number: 800-723-3546	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 350 voice minutes • Unlimited texts • 3GB data
<u>StandUp Wireless</u> Phone number: 800-544-4441	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,000 voice minutes • Unlimited texts • 3GB data
<u>Verizon</u> Home landline phone plans only Phone number: 800-922-0204	Home phone plan: -Unlimited minutes, including long distance *need to have landline phone

For more details, on the Lifeline program and the application process, visit: <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-a-discounted-communications-service-through-the-lifeline-program>