



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

June 18, 2021

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.

There are currently two federal programs offering assistance with phone and internet service: the Lifeline Program and the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBB).

The Lifeline Program (for help with phone or internet service)

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 either phone, internet or bundled services. You can choose to apply the discount to either:

1. wireless phone service (mobile phone plan), or
2. a wireless internet service (a mobile phone data plan), or
3. home phone service (landline), or
4. home internet service.

The Lifeline program does not cover the cost of a wireless device or phone, but some Lifeline Providers may offer a free device upon enrollment. 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 live together at the same address and share income and expenses.

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 but do not cover the initial cost of a phone or mobile device. In some cases, Lifeline providers 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.

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:

Provider	Phone Number
Assurance Wireless (partnership with Virgin Mobile)	888-321-5880
SafeLink Wireless (partnership with TracFone Wireless)	800-723-3546
StandUp Wireless	800-544-4441
Verizon (Home landline phone plans only)	800-922-0204

Available Lifeline options may include plans with 4GB of data per month, unlimited text messaging, internet discounts, and other features. Some plans may be free to Lifeline members.

Exact details of Lifeline service providers' monthly plans and contact information may vary based on where you live. For the most updated information, call or visit the providers' websites for the specific plans that may be available to you. You can also go to: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/massachusetts-lifeline-providers-covid-response/download>.

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, because of the COVID-19 emergency, if you lost your job, until June 30, 2021, you can submit notice of your unemployment benefits instead of three months of income documentation.

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

No. In response to COVID-19, Lifeline lifted the recertification requirement through June 30th, 2021.

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 below 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.

Who can I call if I have questions or issues with Lifeline, including problems with re-enrollment,?

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, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm.

Please note: when you call during business hours, 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.

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>.

The Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) Program (for help with internet service)

I need help paying for internet- are there any programs that can help me?

Yes. As of May 12, 2021, The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has launched the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) Program to help families and households struggling to afford internet service during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The EBB provides a temporary discount of up to \$50 per month toward broadband (internet) service and associated equipment rentals for eligible households and up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands.

Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100, with a \$10-\$50 required co-payment, to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from certain providers.

The EBB is limited to one monthly service discount and one device discount per household.

The EBB Program will continue to offer help to families until all the funds are gone, or until six months after the end of the federal public health emergency.

Who is eligible for the EBB program?

Households are eligible for the EBB program if at least one member is enrolled in MassHealth. Other individuals may also be eligible – for more information about eligibility, visit: <https://getemergencybroadband.org/do-i-qualify/>.

Households cannot be excluded from the program because of any past or present debt to a broadband provider.

How do I sign up for the EBB program?

There are three ways to apply for the EBB Program:

1. Contact your preferred participating broadband provider directly to learn about their application process. You can find a list of participating service providers here: <https://www.fcc.gov/emergency-broadband-benefit-providers#Massachusetts>
2. Go to GetEmergencyBroadband.org to apply online. Once approved for the program, you will need to select a participating provider and contact them to complete enrollment.
3. Complete the application process by mail. You can download a copy of the EBB application in English or Spanish (instructions also available in 9 additional languages). Complete the application and send with proof of eligibility to:

USAC Emergency Broadband Support Center
P.O. Box 7081 London, KY 40742

Once approved for the program, you will need to select a participating provider and contact them to complete enrollment.

Which providers are participating in the EBB program?

A list of participating EBB providers in Massachusetts is included at the end of this document.

For the most up to date information, visit: <https://www.fcc.gov/emergency-broadband-benefit-providers#Massachusetts>

Who can I call for more information about the EBB program or to get help with an EBB application?

For assistance with the EBB application process, you can contact the **Emergency Broadband Support Center** at 1-833-511-0311, 7 days a week, from 9am to 9pm.

Massachusetts consumers can also contact the **DTC’s Consumer Hotline** at 1-800-392-6066, Monday to Friday, from 9am to 5pm. The hotline can help with any questions about program eligibility, the application process or provide support with any challenges in enrolling in the EBB Program.

For additional information about the EBB Program, please visit <https://www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit>.

List of Participating EBB Providers In Massachusetts as of May 26, 2021

Programs with a * may be offering connected devices (laptop, desktop, tablet)

Home Internet Service (Where Available)	Home or Mobile Internet Service (Where Available)	Mobile Internet Service
Charter (Spectrum) Comcast (Xfinity) Cox* Greenfield Community Energy and Technology Hilltown Networks Otelco RCN* Starry Whip City Fiber	T-Mobile Verizon	Assurance Wireless* AT&T Wireless Boost Mobile* Cricket Wireless Excess Telecom* Good2gomobile Human-I-T* PCs for People* Metro by T-Mobile* QLink Wireless* Ready Wireless Sano Health Selectel Wireless* StandUP Wireless* Tracfone Wireless* TruConnect* UVNV

For more information visit:
<https://www.mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-a-discounted-communications-service-through-the-lifeline-program>

Additional FAQs and Resources

Can a consumer (or household) receive benefits from both Lifeline and the EBB Program?

Yes. If a consumer qualifies for both programs, they are eligible to receive both the Lifeline and EBB Program benefits. For more information, visit: <https://www.usac.org/about/emergency-broadband-benefit-program/webinars-and-trainings/ebb-program-frequently-asked-questions/>.

Can the Lifeline and EBB Program benefit be applied to the same service?

Yes. If the consumer qualifies for both the Lifeline and EBB Program benefit, the benefits can be applied to the same service, up to the total cost of the service. For example, a consumer whose home broadband service costs \$29.25 per month could apply the \$9.25 Lifeline benefit and a \$20 EBB Program benefit to cover the cost of their broadband service. The full Lifeline discount must be applied first and the remainder will be offset by the EBB Program benefit, up to the monthly benefit limit.

Can consumers receive the Lifeline benefit from one service provider and the EBB from another?

Yes, if a consumer qualifies for both programs, they can choose to receive the Lifeline benefit from one provider and the Emergency Broadband Benefit from another.

Are there any other resources for help paying my phone or internet bills?

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.

Some companies are offering home internet deals for new customers. These offers may be time-limited, and many expire on June 30th, 2021. Some may be available even to existing customers who have overdue debt or bills with the companies.

- **Comcast/Xfinity** offers Internet Essentials, a discounted broadband program for low-income households.
 - For more information: <https://www.internetessentials.com/covid19>
- **Cox Communications** offers a low-income internet service for families with school-aged children called Connect2Compete
 - For more information: <https://www.cox.com/residential/internet/connect2compete/faq-low-cost-internet.html>
- **Charter Communications/Spectrum:** Spectrum offers a discounted broadband program for qualifying low-income households called Internet Assist.
 - For more information: <https://www.spectrum.net/support/internet/spectrum-internet-assist/>
- **T-Mobile:** Under Project 10Million, T-Mobile is offering eligible student households a free mobile hotspot for 5 years, which includes 100GB of data per year.
 - For more information: <https://www.t-mobile.com/brand/project-10-million>

WiFi Hotspots:

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 locations 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>