



Financial Assistance Contracts Guidance (3780)

Published: August 14, 2026

Background

This financial assistance guidance establishes consistent parameters and expectations for the provision of financial assistance by the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). Financial assistance is intended to be short-term, limited in scope, and provided only when all other available funding sources and benefits have been fully explored and exhausted.

Financial assistance is not an entitlement and should only be considered as a last resort. Assistance must be time-limited, needs-based, and sustainability-focused, with an emphasis on helping individuals achieve long-term stability through benefits, employment, and access to subsidized resources. DDS will verify that all other resources have been pursued, including public benefits, community resources, and family support. This document is intended only as guidance and does not create an entitlement or enforceable expectation of funding.

Financial assistance contracts can be used for rental assistance, utilities, food, specialized equipment costs, and vehicle assistance, and must be within the parameters established below. Individuals may receive financial assistance if enrolled in the following services: Independent Living Supports (ILS, 3798), Shared Living (SL, 3150), Adult Long-Term Residential (ALTR, 3153), Supported Collaborative Living (SCL), and MassHealth Adult Foster Care (AFC).

All financial assistance is subject to appropriation, and all allocations are based upon existing DDS resources. Financial assistance is to supplement assistance available to the individual through other state or federal resources and generic funding sources. DDS funds shall not supplant other available resources. DDS is the payor of last resort. In addition, there must be a clear plan for sustainability for an individual if and/or when Department assistance ends.

Implementation

This policy is effective July 1, 2026, for all new 3780 financial assistance contracts. Existing 3780 contracts will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and whenever possible, adapted to fit within the parameters of this guidance. Exceptions to the parameters below, for existing or new contracts, must be approved in writing by the Regional Director.

Rental Assistance (ILS and SCL only)

Eligibility Criteria

- Rental assistance may only be provided when the individual has applied for Section 8 housing and is confirmed to be on the wait list; and all other affordable housing options have been explored and deemed unavailable or unsuitable.
- The individual must meet or be below the “Very Low-Income Limit” set by HUD, published on their website: [Income Limits | HUD USER](#) for the town where they reside.
- Individuals that reside in subsidized housing (e.g., Section 8, public housing) are not eligible for rental assistance.

Reasonableness of Costs

- Efforts must be made to secure reasonably priced housing, taking into consideration local Fair Market Rents (FMR) as published by HUD on their website: [Fair Market Rents \(40th PERCENTILE RENTS\) | HUD USER](#).
- Roommates should be considered whenever appropriate to reduce costs and promote sustainability.
- Provider-owned properties for SCL pilot program: rental assistance calculations are expected to remain within 20% of the applicable FMR. Exceptions may be considered if a provider documents the increased rental cost is related to property-specific costs, such as higher than usual mortgage, leasing, or insurance costs, and/or increased maintenance requirements for the home. Exceptions must be submitted using a DDS provided template and approved, in writing, by an Area Director.
 - NOTE: The property must be owned/leased by the provider qualified for and providing SCL services to the individual.

Individual Contribution

- The individual is required to contribute 43% of their total monthly income (including SSI, SSDI, earned income, or any other income source) toward rent.
- The Department may subsidize the remaining balance of the rent up to the FMR for private rentals or the allowable amount over FMR for provider-owned SCL properties.
- Examples: Rental Assistance Calculations
 - Private rental: An individual receives SSI of \$1,200 per month and their apartment rent is \$1,600 per month. FMR is \$1,400. The individual contribution is: 43% of \$1,200 = \$516. The Department subsidy may fund up to: \$1,400 - \$516 = \$884 per month (the individual is responsible for covering the difference).
 - SCL provider-owner property: An individual receives SSI of \$1,500 per month. FMR is \$2,000 per month. The maximum allowable amount above FMR should not exceed \$2,400 (20% above \$2,000). The provider’s rental cost is \$2,500, 25% over the FMR. DDS did not approve an exception. The individual contribution is: 43% of \$1,500 = \$645. The Department subsidy may fund up to: \$2,400 - \$645 = \$1,755 per month (the individual is responsible for covering the difference).

Assistance Duration and Review

- Rental assistance must be reviewed annually and prior to the start of the fiscal year to confirm an individual's eligibility for rental assistance. This review may also happen as needed during the fiscal year.
- Area Offices must verify an individual's Section 8 wait list status, evaluate ongoing efforts to secure subsidized housing, and reassess the individual's income and contribution level.
- Assistance should be reduced as needed or discontinued once the individual transitions to subsidized housing or becomes ineligible.

Utilities, Food Assistance, Furniture and Emergency Housing Support (ILS and SCL only)

- Assistance with utilities (electric, gas, heat), food, or emergency housing costs may be provided on a short-term, emergency basis when the individual is at immediate risk of loss of service, eviction, or food insecurity, and all other resources have been exhausted.
- Utilities assistance is limited to no more than three (3) months of utility service, including any arrears, within a fiscal year.
 - Example: utilities assistance
 - An individual receives a shut-off notice for electrical service totaling \$300 for the past two (2) months of service. Other resources, such as LIHEAP, local energy assistance programs, etc., have been explored and exhausted. The Department may authorize the payment of \$300 to prevent service interruption. The individual may submit for assistance for one (1) more month's electrical service before exhausting the three (3) allowable months of support.
- Food assistance should be limited to one-time or short-term emergency support, no longer than three (3) months in duration, while efforts are made to connect the individual to ongoing resources such as SNAP, food pantries, or community meal programs.
 - Example: food assistance
 - An individual experiences sudden job loss and has no access to food or income. The Department may provide financial assistance as a one-time payment to support either a grocery gift card or food delivery, and amount is to be consistent with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) levels found at [Department of Transitional Assistance program eligibility charts and tables | Mass.gov](#). The individual must then be assisted in applying for SNAP benefits and connected to community meal programs by the provider.
 - NOTE: all gift cards must be to grocery stores and cannot be generic Visa/Mastercard/etc. or to a restaurant. Grocery gift card purchases must follow all guidelines as outlined in the [Family Support Manual and Guidelines](#), Section VII.D, Q1 (page 17).
- Furniture assistance may be authorized on a limited basis when necessary to establish or maintain safe and habitable living conditions. Furniture may only be funded after all other resources have been explored and exhausted, including but not limited to, family resources,

community donations, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, local housing stabilization programs.

- Allowable purchases are limited to basic household furnishings necessary to establish a minimally furnished home.
 - Furniture assistance is intended to be a one-time support and must be tied to health, safety, or basic habitability needs.
- Emergency housing costs should be limited to short-term emergency support, tied to loss of income or benefits and is outside an individual's control. Emergency housing costs can be provided for no more than three (3) months in duration. Emergency housing support may include:
 - Short-term rental assistance (up to three months)
 - Payment of arrears directly tied to risk of evictions (not to exceed 3 months)
 - Cleaning, sanitation or pest control services necessary to maintain safe and habitable living conditions when such conditions place the individual at risk of housing loss and are not the responsibility of the landlord.

Furniture Assistance (ALTR and SL only)

- Furniture assistance may be authorized for purchase of essential bedroom furniture when an individual first moves into the home upon demonstrated financial hardship and after all other resources have been explored and exhausted, subject to available funding and discretionary approval by the Area Director. Financial assistance may not be used to purchase replacement furniture after the individual has moved into the home.
 - Allowable purchases are limited to essential furnishings necessary for a habitable bedroom.
 - Furniture must be reasonably priced. DDS may require providers to solicit multiple quotes.
 - If the home is eligible for ALTR start-up funding, bedroom furniture must be funded through the start-up contract.

Specialized Equipment (ILS, SCL, SL, and ALTR)

- Specialized equipment is defined as equipment used to increase an individual's mobility at their housing situation, such as a removable wheelchair ramp, portable lifts, and shower chairs. Specialized equipment cannot be a permanent installation.
 - Purchases of specialized equipment are not to be made if it is the landlord's responsibility to meet governmental accessibility requirements.
 - When necessary, individuals may need to undergo an AT Assessment to determine appropriate supports.
- The Department may provide financial assistance for specialized equipment for an individual when all other resources have been exhausted. DDS is the payor of last resort.
 - A letter of denial and appeal denial from insurance to cover the specialized equipment is required, when applicable.

- Where appropriate, individuals should receive specialized equipment through DDS's Assistive Technology service and only utilize financial assistance where that option is not practicable.

Specialized Transportation (SL and ILS)

- For individuals who require specialized transportation due to documented mobility or medical needs, and all other transportation resources have been explored and documented, the Department may consider funding transportation-related costs.
 - These costs may include subsidizing a lease for a wheelchair-accessible or adaptive transportation services, and other associated costs, such as insurance.
- Costs will be reviewed to ensure they are reasonable, necessary, and aligned with the individual's documented needs.
 - Example: An individual residing in a Shared Living arrangement requires a wheelchair-accessible vehicle due to mobility limitations. The caregiver is unable to transport the individual using a standard vehicle, and public or paratransit options are not available or appropriate.
- Requirements specific to Shared Living: If the Department subsidizes a lease for a vehicle, the lease must be in the provider's name, not the individual or caregiver.
- Requirements specific to Independent Living Support: subsidies for specialized transportation are only allowed with written approval of the Regional Director.

Authorizing, Documenting and Monitoring Financial Assistance

- All requests for financial assistance must include verification of the individual's income, housing status, and Section 8 application/waitlist status (for rental requests); documentation of efforts to secure alternative funding or supports; and a clear plan for sustainability once Department assistance ends.
- A roster will be used to track individuals, their respective funding allocations, and reason for the expenditure. This roster will be reviewed and updated as needed in the regularly scheduled program review meetings with the Area Office.
- Providers with financial assistance contracts must have written internal policies and procedures, which are updated regularly, for the administration of financial assistance to individuals. These written procedures must be made available to DDS upon request.
- Providers will maintain back-up documentation to justify amounts invoiced and paid each month. Back up documentation and the DDS Flex Funding/Financial Assistance Invoice Documentation Form, must be submitted to the Regional Contract Office monthly for review before payment is made. Submission of this form is required for all 3780 contracts regardless of when the contract began.