

MassHealth Provider Resource: Telephone and Internet Connectivity for Telehealth

Updated as of May 27, 2020

The following information is intended to be a resource to help providers guide members who have questions about engaging in services through telehealth. Members and providers have expressed concern about limited phone and internet access during the COVID-19 crisis. Both federal and state guidance support increased free and low-cost telephone and internet services during the COVID-19 crisis. The information contained herein is accurate as of the date of publication.

On March 13, 2020, MassHealth released [All Provider Bulletin 289](#) providing broad guidance for health care providers on the provision and billing of services via telehealth, including telephone and video conferencing. The federal government has also relaxed certain requirements related to telehealth: <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2020/03/17/ocr-announces-notification-of-enforcement-discretion-for-telehealth-remote-communications-during-the-covid-19.html>.

Lifeline Program - Subsidized Phone and Internet Service

Lifeline is a federal program that provides no cost or low-cost phone service to low-income households. All MassHealth members are eligible to participate in the Lifeline program, which provides a \$9.25 discount from a certified Lifeline service provider. Lifeline subscribers have the choice of applying their benefit discount to either home phone or internet plan or a wireless phone plan with internet, which includes a free mobile phone. Only one Lifeline program discount is available per household, defined as any individual or group of individuals who live together at the same address and share income and expenses. During the COVID-19 emergency, companies are offering unlimited minutes and extra data. See the chart below for more details on plans.

In response to COVID-19, to ease burdens on Lifeline subscribers, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has issued an [order](#) extending recertification deadlines out for 60 days. The FCC also temporarily waived its certification requirements to allow new customers to verify eligibility by means other than the national verifier.

Eligibility: There are two ways to qualify for the Lifeline program: income-based eligibility (household income is at or below 135% of the federal poverty guidelines) or program-based eligibility (Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Supplemental Security Income, Federal Public Housing Assistance, Certain Federally-Recognized/State Tribal Assistance Programs, and Veteran's Pension or Survivor's Pension benefit).

Unemployment: As of April 29, 2020 and until June 30, 2020, because of the COVID-19 emergency and due to high unemployment levels, the FCC has issued an [order](#) waiving the requirement to show three months of income documentation for individuals who have lost their jobs.; members can instead submit an official document that confirms their current income information, such as a notice of unemployment benefits. The FCC will monitor the situation to determine whether any addition extension of this waiver is appropriate.

Enrolling in Lifeline: As of January 22, 2020, prior to enrolling with a Lifeline service provider, Massachusetts Lifeline applicants need to first verify their eligibility for the Lifeline Program using the National Verifier, a centralized system that is managed directly by USAC, the administrator of the Lifeline Program under the direction of the FCC. In order to verify eligibility, members will need to complete the standard Lifeline program application. Medicaid and Lifeline databases are linked to enable automatic verification; if the system does not automatically verify eligibility, an individual will need to submit a copy of their MassHealth card with their application. Members can apply online by visiting www.CheckLifeline.org/lifeline/. After their eligibility is confirmed, members can enroll with a Lifeline service provider. In Massachusetts there are three mobile service providers: [Assurance Wireless](#) (partnership with Virgin Mobile), [SafeLink Wireless](#) (partnership with TracFone Wireless), and [StandUp Wireless](#). [Verizon](#) is the home phone and broadband service provider for the state. Lifeline service providers' monthly plan details are listed below. Lifeline service providers offer plans compatible on most existing devices and in some cases, may provide a device.

Members can also call the Department of Telecommunications and Cable's hotline, 800-392-6066, for assistance in applying or to get support with any challenges in the process (e.g., eligibility verification). Please note: When members call between business hours (Monday – Friday, 9am-5pm), there are 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 the member is an existing Lifeline customer.

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

Service Provider	Lifeline Monthly Plan covered by the \$9.25 discount	COVID-19 Response
Assurance Wireless (partnership with Virgin Mobile)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 350 voice minutes • Unlimited texts • 3GB data 	Through June 30, 2020, all Assurance Wireless Lifeline customers will receive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free unlimited domestic voice minutes • Free unlimited texting • Extra 20GB data in addition to regular monthly data allotment • Free mobile phone with plan
SafeLink Wireless (partnership with TracFone Wireless)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 350 voice minutes • Unlimited texts • 3GB data 	Through June 30, 2020, all SafeLink Wireless Lifeline customers will receive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free unlimited domestic voice minutes • Free unlimited texts • Additional 5GB of data

StandUp Wireless	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 300 voice minutes • Unlimited texts • 3GB data 	As of May 25, the extra minutes and data for the COVID-19 crisis have ended.
Verizon (Home landline phone plans only)	Home phone: -Unlimited minutes, including long distance *need to have landline phone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No fees on late payments and service will not be disconnected. • No voice service fees for current Lifeline customers

Eligibility and enrollment information available online at <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/>

COVID-19 Response from Broadband and Telephone Service Providers

In response to COVID-19, most broadband and telephone service providers are providing customers with unlimited or additional minutes and data until June 30, 2020 (see Appendix for specifics for each service provider). In addition, on March 13, 2020, the FCC launched the [Keep Americans Connected Initiative](#) to ensure that people do not lose their broadband or telephone connectivity during the pandemic. The majority of broadband and telephone service providers in the country have signed on to commit to the following until June 30, 2020:

- (1) not terminate service to any residential or small business customers because of their inability to pay their bills due to the disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic;
- (2) waive any late fees that any residential or small business customers incur because of their economic circumstances related to the coronavirus pandemic; and
- (3) open its Wi-Fi hotspots to public

Appendix: Specific service provider information

Service Provider	COVID-19 Response Offers active through June 30, 2020 unless otherwise noted
AT&T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiving fees on late payments and not terminating service. Customers must contact AT&T to inform them of the hardship by submitting a waiver request. • Public Wi-Fi hotspots open for all • Waiving domestic wireless plan overage charges for data, voice and text • Unlimited internet data for home internet customers • Two months of complimentary internet access through the Access from AT&T service for new customers who have at least one member of the household participating in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), National School Lunch Program or Head Start. • The timeframe to return DIRECTV, U-verse TV, or AT&T Internet equipment is extended from 21 days to 60 days

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing mobile hotspot data by 15GB/month for each line on an unlimited plan that includes a monthly tethering allotment. See website for more details Visit https://about.att.com/pages/COVID-19.html for updates
Boost Mobile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complimentary international calling rates from the U.S. to countries defined by the Center for Disease Control as Level 3 Reactivation fees for customers waived Customers with unlimited data plans will receive an additional 20GB of mobile hotspot on their plans Customers without unlimited plans will receive an additional 20GB of data on their plans Visit https://www.boostmobile.com/about/covid-19-response.html for updates
Comcast/Xfinity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two months of complimentary internet access through the Internet Essentials service to new customers who are eligible, which includes MassHealth members. No credit check, shipping fee or term contract required for the service. Waiving fees on late payments and not terminating service Public Wi-Fi hotspots open for all Increasing speed from 15/2 Mbps to 25/3 Mbps for new and existing internet customers Unlimited data for home internet customers Visit https://www.xfinity.com/prepare for updates
Cox	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waiving fees on late payments and not terminating service. New customers of their low-income internet service for families with school-aged children, Connect2Compete, will receive their first two months of service free effective 3/16/2020 through 5/15/2020 Starter internet package is offered at \$19.99 until July 15, 2020 Data usage overages are being eliminated Visit https://www.cox.com/residential/support/coronavirus-response.html for updates
Spectrum Mobile - Charter Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waiving fees on late payments and not terminating service Public Wi-Fi hotspots open for all Free Spectrum broadband and Wi-Fi to households with children in grades K-12 and college students. To get the deal, you cannot already have Spectrum internet service at any level up to 100 Mbps Waiving installation fees Visit https://www.spectrum.net/support/internet/coronavirus-covid-19-information-spectrum-customers/ for updates

Sprint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiving fees on late payments and not terminating service • Free international calling rates to countries defined by the Center for Disease Control as Level 3 • Customers without unlimited plans will get 60 days of unlimited data (a minimum of two bill cycles) for free • Extra 20GB of mobile hotspot data to customers with hotspot-capable devices • Free next-day shipping for all orders on sprint.com • Visit https://www.sprint.com/en/landings/covid-19.html for updates
T-Mobile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiving fees on late payments and not terminating service • All T-Mobile customers as of March 13, 2020 who have plans with data will automatically have unlimited smartphone data (excluding roaming) • An additional 5GB of free data per month for Lifeline partners • An expanded network capacity boosted by 600 MHz of spectrum (frequency capacity) • More roaming access for Sprint customers on T-Mobile's network • An extra 20GB of hotspot for all T-Mobile and Metro by T-Mobile customers • Visit https://www.t-mobile.com/support/account/covid-19-updates for updates
Verizon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiving fees on late payments and not terminating service. Wireless customers must fill out a short form to let Verizon know they are experiencing hardship • Waiving activation and upgrade fees when purchased through specific channels (see website for more information) • Free international calling rates to countries defined by the Center for Disease Control as Level 3 • Consumer Fios and DSL broadband internet plans have no data caps • Visit https://www.verizon.com/about/news/covid-response-customers for updates <p>Please note: As of April 7, due to COVID-19, Verizon is no longer going into homes for installations. Self-installation options are available for some services.</p>

Note: This Lifeline program is regulated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and administered by the Universal Service Administrative Company, an independent not-for-profit. Lifeline is funded by Universal Service Fund (USF). Federal law requires

telecommunication companies to contribute 25% of their revenue to the USF, which in turn pays for Lifeline. In Massachusetts, Lifeline providers are certified by the [Department of Telecommunications and Cable \(DTC\)](#) within the Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation (OCABR), which is part of the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development.