

MassHealth Provider Resource: Telephone and Internet Connectivity for Telehealth

Updated as of April 2, 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.

In response to COVID-19, to ease burdens on Lifeline subscribers, the 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).

Enrolling in Lifeline: To enroll, members can apply online or by phone 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. Free mobile phones are provided with the wireless plans.

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). 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.

Service Provider	Lifeline Monthly Plan	COVID-19 Response
Assurance Wireless (partnership with Virgin Mobile)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 350 voice minutes • Unlimited texts • 3GB data 	<p>Through May 15, 2020, all Assurance Wireless Lifeline customers will receive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free unlimited voice minutes • Free unlimited texts • Additional 6GB (9GB total) for two months
SafeLink Wireless (partnership with TracFone Wireless)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 350 voice minutes • Unlimited texts • 3GB data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional 5GB of data added for both the current cycle and April cycle (8GB total)
StandUp Wireless	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 300 voice minutes • Unlimited texts • 3GB data 	<p>Through May 20, 2020, all new and current StandUp Wireless Lifeline customers will receive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free unlimited voice minutes • Free unlimited texts • Additional 5GB (8GB total)
Verizon (landline or broadband internet service only)	<p>Home phone: -Unlimited minutes, including long distance *need to have landline phone</p> <p>Home internet: -Fios internet service at a speed of 18 megabits per second or above -250GB monthly data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiving coverage charges and late fees • Two months waived internet and voice service charges for current Lifeline customers

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 May 13, 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 for next 60 days:

- (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 May 13, 2020 unless otherwise noted
AT&T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiving fees on late payments and not terminating service • 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.
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
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 broadband service at any level up to 100 Mbps. • Waiving installation fees
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

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
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) for the next 60 days • 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
Verizon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiving fees on late payments and not terminating service • Waiving activation and upgrade fees when purchased through the specific channels (see website for more information) • Free international calling rates to countries defined by the Center for Disease Control as Level 3 • Extra 15 GB of mobile hotspot data to be used between 03/25/2020 and 04/30/2020. To be eligible, you must be on a qualifying postpaid (unlimited or shared), Jetpack or prepaid plans. • Two months of waived internet and voice service charges for current Lifeline customers

Note: This 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.