

Exploring Resources for Telehealth Equipment and Service Access

As providers respond during the COVID-19 Emergency Period to provide access to services to people in need, agencies are expanding systems to deliver care beyond the lens of the current emergency. Developing a longer-term strategy and robust telehealth system may be a pathway to improving client experiences, outcomes and operational sustainability.

A number of helpful resources are available to agencies looking to extend their capacity in this important area. We've recapped them below and the details can also be reviewed [here](#):

▶ CARES Act

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) established a [\\$200m COVID-19 Telehealth Program](#), which allows eligible providers (including community mental health and substance use disorder organizations) to apply for grants to fund technology and equipment to bolster service delivery via telehealth.

- ⦿ The application portal is accessible [here](#).
- ⦿ The FCC has issued [application guidance](#) explaining the process, eligibility and application requirements. **The National Council encourages members to apply as soon as possible, as funding is distributed on a rolling basis.**
- ⦿ Questions? Contact Policy@TheNationalCouncil.org.

▶ Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) opened a second application window for funding under the [Distance Learning and Telemedicine](#) grant program, which helps rural communities use the unique capabilities of telecommunications, including telemedicine, to connect and overcome the effects of remoteness and low population density.

- ⦿ The application is open now and National Council encourages members in rural areas to apply.
- ⦿ Questions? Contact Policy@TheNationalCouncil.org.

The **New York State Office of Mental Health** has outlined options to support members with limited or lack of access to devices and services in its [COVID-19 Disaster Emergency FAQ](#).

▶ **Q: How can I help clients obtain mobile phones, additional data or minutes and/or Wi-Fi for telehealth services?**

A: Complete information on this topic is provided in the DOH issued Comprehensive Guidance Regarding Use of Telehealth including Telephonic Services During the COVID-19 State of Emergency: [Medicaid Update May 1, 2020 Volume 36 | Number 9 Special Edition](#).



Options to Support Members with Limited or Lack of Access to Devices and Services

✓ **Free Wi-Fi/Internet**

- Charter Communications (Spectrum) and Comcast are giving households with K-12 and college students, and those who qualify as low-income, complimentary Wi-Fi for 60 days.
- Families who do not have the service will also receive free service installation.
- Both companies are expanding Wi-Fi hotspots to the public within the company's available regions.
- Call (844) 488-8395 (Charter/Spectrum) or (855) 846-8376 (Comcast) to enroll.
- Individuals must call company after 60 days of the service installation, or they will be automatically billed.

✓ **Unlimited Data**

- Charter, Comcast, AT&T and Verizon are offering unlimited data plans or waivers to customers until June 30 for no additional charge.

✓ **SAFELINK WIRELESS®** — a program provided by TracFone Wireless, Inc., serving eligible households. Eligibility requirements are set by each State where the service is provided.

- To qualify for Safelink, subscribers must either have an income that is at or below 135% of the federal Poverty Guidelines, or participate in one of the following assistance programs:
 - Medicaid or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Food Stamps
 - Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Federal Public Housing Assistance (Section 8)
 - Veterans and Survivors Pension Benefit
- Service is limited to one person per household.
- Call 1-800-SafeLink (723-3546) for enrollment and plan changes support.
- Subscribers can use their own phones:
 - SafeLink Keep Your Own Smartphone plan requires a compatible or unlocked Smartphone. Most GSM Smartphones are compatible.
 - Subscribers can get up to 350 minutes and 3GB of data, which includes voice minutes and unlimited texts, voicemail, nationwide coverage and 4G LTE on 4G LTE compatible devices

▶ **Q. Can our organization buy phones, minutes or data for clients using Service Dollars or other discretionary funds? Will the State reimburse agencies for this expense?**

A: Prior to purchasing any of the above resources to meet client needs, organizations are encouraged to help guide their clients to the resources available to households (as described above). However, to meet additional needs:

- ⦿ Organizations may buy phones, minutes and/or data for clients in order to support the provision of telemental health services. **This may be done using OMH Service Dollars or other agency funds, using contract flexibility already outlined by OMH.**
- ⦿ For more information, see [OMH COVID-19 Guidance — State Aid Funded Contracts](#).

We're Here to Help...

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