



Adult Home Residents Can Get Free Cell Phone Service

HOW CAN I GET FREE CELL PHONE (WIRELESS) SERVICE?

You can get free cell phone service through the Lifeline program. The Lifeline program has existed for many years to provide telephone service to low-income customers at reasonable rates. Recently, several telephone carriers began offering cell phone service through the Lifeline program. They provide a free cell phone and a set number of wireless minutes each month for customers who qualify for the program.

DO I QUALIFY FOR THE PROGRAM?

If you receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Medicaid and do not already have Lifeline telephone or wireless service, you likely qualify for this program.

WHO PROVIDES THIS SERVICE?

Multiple telephone carriers provide wireless service through the Lifeline program using the Universal Service Fund. Two providers in New York State are TracFone, which created the Safelink Wireless program for low-income consumers, and Virgin Mobile, which created the Assurance Wireless program for low-income consumers.

WHAT IS INCLUDED WITH THE SERVICE?

This varies by provider. For example, Safelink Wireless provides a free phone. The minutes of wireless service per month may vary by applicant, but starts at 68 minutes per month. Assurance provides a free phone and 250 minutes of wireless service per month. Both services include local and long-distance wireless calling, voicemail, call waiting, caller ID and access to 911 for free. Other features, such as rollover minutes and the quality of the service, may vary by provider.

WHAT IF I RUN OUT OF FREE MINUTES BEFORE THE END OF THE MONTH?

The phone will not allow you to make additional calls until the next month. Both Safelink and Assurance give users the option of purchasing additional minutes each month.

HOW DO I SIGN UP FOR SERVICE?

Call the wireless provider you prefer. If you want to use Assurance Wireless you can apply by calling 1-888-898-4888. To apply with Assurance, you need to have a copy of your Medicaid card or SSI award letter. To apply with Safelink Wireless call 1-800-SAFELINK (723-3546). **Be sure to provide a unique room number. (For example, if you have a roommate, list your room number as 201A and your roommate, if he or she applies for service, should list their room as 201B). This will ensure that you and your roommate will not be considered part of the same household.**

A helpful tip

Many adult home residents have already signed up for free cell phone service. **It's possible that many residents in your adult home may have the same model of phone as you.** Once you receive your free phone, be sure to put a sticker or some kind of identifier on the phone so you know that it's yours.

IS IT TRUE THAT ONLY ONE RESIDENT PER ADULT HOME QUALIFIES FOR THE PROGRAM?

No. In the past some applicants were denied service once another resident of the home applied for the program. However, each adult home resident who is income-eligible and does not already have a Lifeline phone should be able to receive the service. **This is why it is helpful to provide your room number and a bed number**, which you can determine with your roommate, so that you are considered a separate household from all other residents in your adult home.

WHAT IF I NEED HELP SIGNING UP FOR SERVICE?

You can ask your case manager to help you sign up for the service. If you are having difficulties getting Safelink or Assurance service, please call Coalition of Institutionalized Aged and Disabled (CIAD) at 212 481-7572.

WHO CAN I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You may call Mobilization for Justice, Inc.'s Adult Home Advocacy Project toll free at 877-417-2427 Monday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

DISCLAIMER: This fact sheet gives general information for NYC residents; it is NOT legal advice.