



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 decades to provide landline telephone service to low-income customers at reasonable rates. Now, the Lifeline program includes cell phone service. Eligible customers can get a free cell phone and a set number of wireless minutes each month.

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?

In New York City, Lifeline wireless services are available through Access Wireless by Sprint, Assurance Wireless by Virgin Mobile, and Safelink Wireless.

What is included with the service?

Plans are subject to change, but as of May 2017, each wireless carrier offers a free smartphone, 350 minutes and 500 megabytes of data per month, and includes local and long-distance 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. Each wireless carrier gives users the option of purchasing additional minutes and/or data each month.

How do I keep my phone service?

In order to keep your phone active, you must use your phone (to make a call or send a text, for example) at least once every 30 days. If you don't, the wireless carrier will send you a letter telling you that your phone will be discontinued if you do not use it within 15 days. You will also need to recertify that you qualify for your Lifeline phone once a year.

How do I sign up for service?

Call the wireless provider you prefer, or apply on their website. **When asked for your address, 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.

Access Wireless: must apply online at www.accesswireless.com

Assurance Wireless: 1-888-898-4888 or www.assurancewireless.com

Safelink Wireless: 1-800-977-3768 or www.safelink.com.

You might need to send the wireless carrier a copy of your Medicaid card or SSI award letter after you call or apply online.

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. Lifeline service is limited to one phone per household, but each adult home resident who is eligible and does not already have a Lifeline phone should be able to receive the service. **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 still have questions?

You can ask the case manager at your adult home for assistance. If you are having difficulties obtaining service from one of the wireless carriers, please call Coalition of Institutionalized Aged and Disabled (CIAD) at (212) 481-7572.

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