



Eligibility Operations Memo 12-04
April 23, 2012

TO: MassHealth Eligibility Operations Staff

FROM: Amy Andrade, Director, Member and Provider Services *Amy Andrade*

RE: **Best Practices for Ensuring Effective Communication with Members and Applicants with Disabilities**

Introduction

It is the policy of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to support and comply with the requirements of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), M.G.L. c. 151B, and the Americans with Disabilities Act to ensure that persons with disabilities are afforded equal access to its facilities, programs, and services. Whatever is written or spoken must be clear and understandable to people with disabilities. People who have disabilities that affect hearing, seeing, speaking, reading, writing, or understanding may use different ways to communicate than people who do not.

This memo sets forth required protocols to be used by MassHealth staff to ensure effective communication with members and applicants who self-identify as a person with a disability.

**Updating
Member Records**

Effective immediately, disabilities and preferred accommodations of members will be tracked in the Notes to Person (NTP) event in MA21.

When an applicant or member self-identifies as a person with a disability, MassHealth staff will consult the NTP event in MA21 to determine which, if any, accommodation the person prefers.

If there is no disability or accommodation data in the NTP event, or if the applicant or member's preference has changed, the staff will document the disability and preferred accommodation in the notes field using the categories below.

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**Updating
Member Records
(cont.)**

Disability

- Deaf
- Hard of hearing
- Deaf-Blind
- Blind
- Low vision
- Developmentally disabled
- Intellectually disabled
- Physically disabled
- Other

Accommodation Preferred (Indicate all that apply.)

- TTY
- VRS - Video Relay Service (A deaf or hard of hearing individual contacts MassHealth through a real-time ASL interpreter who is communicating with them by video device.)
- ASL interpreter
- Assistive Listening Device
- CART - Communication Access Real Time Translation
- Large print
- Publications in Braille
- Electronic format (If material is not available electronically, indicate the preferred method.)
- Regular mail
- E-mail
- Telephone (work)
- Telephone (cell/home)
- SMS text messages
- Other

Protocol

MassHealth staff must provide the following accommodations to members and applicants with disabilities when they are communicating with them by phone, in person, or by e-mail. For assistance beyond what is immediately available to MEC staff, MEC staff will forward the TTY call to the Disability Accommodation Ombudsman.

- When deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals request an in-person appointment that requires an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter, or Communication Access Real Time Translation (CART) services, MassHealth staff must immediately forward the requests to the MassHealth Disability Accommodation Ombudsman by e-mail. (See the MassHealth Disability Accommodation Ombudsman section below for contact information.)

Protocol
(cont.)

The Ombudsman will schedule the appointment with the individual and arrange for an ASL interpreter or CART services by contacting the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH).

- A deaf or hard-of-hearing individual who walks into an office without an appointment will be advised by MassHealth staff of the option to schedule an appointment and specify his/her preference for an ASL interpreter or CART service. If the deaf or hard-of-hearing individual asks to communicate in writing rather than schedule an appointment, written notes may be used by MassHealth staff.
- When deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals contact MassHealth staff through use of an ASL interpreter, or through a relay service, access to information will be given in the same manner and to the same extent as all other language interpreters.
- TTY calls will be promptly answered by MEC staff using MassHealth's TTY application.
- MassHealth staff must check TTY messages regularly and respond the same day to messages received before 3:00 P.M. All messages received after 3:00 P.M. will be responded to no later than the next business day.
- If a TTY caller inquiring about a long-term-care intake application reaches a different MEC location from where the application resides, MEC staff must take down the caller's information and contact the appropriate MEC location who, in turn, will respond the same day the original call was received. If the call is received after 3 P.M., MEC staff must respond no later than the next business day following the call.
- For assistance beyond what is immediately available to MEC staff, MEC staff will forward the TTY call to the Disability Accommodation Ombudsman.
- Many MassHealth publications are available in Braille and in large print. MassHealth staff should offer to read documents, or portions of documents, to members and applicants with disabilities who say that they have difficulty reading print, and must read any document if requested to do so. MassHealth input documents, like applications, are not available in Braille. MassHealth staff must offer to assist the applicant or member to read, and if necessary, fill out such forms
- MassHealth staff must offer to provide documents to members and applicants electronically, by e-mail, in a format (such as MS Word) that can be read by screen readers, and using a 20 point Arial font or larger.
- MEC staff must offer to print or e-mail large print forms to the individual.

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**MassHealth
Disability
Accommodation
Ombudsman**

MEC staff should make every reasonable effort to assist members, and potential members, with disabilities who need accommodations with MassHealth eligibility or services. For assistance beyond what is immediately available to MEC staff, EOHHS has designated a person to assist MassHealth members and applicants with disabilities.

MassHealth Disability Accommodation Ombudsman
100 Hancock Street, 6th Floor
Quincy, MA 02171
617-847-3468
TTY: 617-847-3788 (for persons with partial or total hearing loss)
masshealthhelp@ehs.state.ma.us

Other Resources

Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH)
www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/mcdhh/

Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB)
www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/mcb/

Department of Developmental Services (DDS)
www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dds/

For general information on ASL interpreters and CART services from MCDHH by phone, online, fax, and Virtual Gateway:
www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/mcdhh/request-an-interpreter.html

Disability Handbook for the Executive Branch
www.mass.gov/anf/docs/mod/executivebranchdisabilityhandbookfinal2007.pdf

Information for MassHealth Members and Applicants with Disabilities
www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/insurance/masshealth-member-info/masshealth-members-and-applicants-with-disabilitie.html

ADA Best Practice Toolkit for Governments
www.ada.gov/pcatoolkit/chap3toolkit.htm

ADA Technical Assistance Manual
www.ada.gov/taman2.html

Questions

If you have any questions about this memo please have your MEC designee contact the Policy Hotline.
