

Office of Developmental Disabilities Services

Assistive Technology Policy Change During COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions for Individuals, Families, and Case Managers

Updated May 13 & May 20, 2020

This policy change temporarily streamlines the process to authorize certain assistive technology such as webcams, tablets, and laptops, to reduce isolation and support individuals to communicate with people outside their home while complying with Governor Brown's Executive Order to "Stay Home, Save Lives". This includes assisting people to participate in case management services and connect with their family, friends, and others through videoconferencing.

Question: Who does this policy change impact?

Answer: The guidelines in the transmittal apply to people of all ages receiving K Plan services who live in all settings.

Question: What does it mean to find the most cost-effective option as outlined in APD-PT-20-071?

Answer: We expect case managers to help people and families identify other resources that may be available in their local community, including technology resources. If other resources are not readily available or do not meet a person's need to communicate with others outside their home, a case manager can purchase items or services outlined in APD-PT-20-071. Case managers need to document the other resources that were explored and explain why the item purchased is the most cost-effective item that supports a person to communicate with people outside their home during Stay Home, Save Lives.

Question: Does this cover cell phones and cell phone data plans?

Answer: This policy change is intended to cover items that facilitate video conferencing using home Internet services. Cell phones are typically available through other resources, such as the Public Utilities Commission. However, if a smart phone is the most cost-effective way to meet a person's need according to the transmittal, it is allowable under this policy change. Data plans are not allowable.

Question: Are exceptions required to purchase technology as outlined in APD-PT-20-071?

Answer: For purchases under \$1200 that meet the criteria in APD-PT-20-071, an exception is not needed. For purchases over \$1200, prior written approval from ODDS is needed. Case managers are expected to identify the most cost-effective option that supports a person to communicate with people outside their home during Stay Home, Save Lives.

Question: If there is already a device in the person's home that is shared between family members or residents, can a person obtain their own device?

Answer: Yes. Assistive technology purchases are based on a person's own needs. Some people may need more technology access than others. If a shared device does not meet a person's needs due to availability or other reasons, the case manager can authorize a device for that person according to the instructions in the transmittal.

Question: Are tablet cases and/or screen protectors covered through this policy change?

Answer: Yes.

Question: What kinds of tablets or laptops are allowed through this policy change?

Answer: Case managers are expected to assist a person to find the least expensive option that supports the person to communicate with people outside their home. This may be different for different people, based on accessibility, familiarity, needed applications, or other considerations. Case managers must document why the item purchased was the most cost-effective item.

Question: What if free internet is not available where a person lives?

Answer: If free internet services are not available or do not meet a person's needs, the case management entity can authorize the most cost-effective internet services on a month-to-month basis temporarily.

Question: How long is this policy change in effect?

Answer: This change is intended to be temporary. If a device is purchased, a person can keep the device even after Stay Home, Save Lives. Month-to-month services, such as internet connection services, are intended to be temporary.

Updated May 20, 2020

Question: Is a doctor note or prescription needed to authorize assistive technology described in APD-PT-20-071?

Answer: No. The case manager is expected to work with individuals and, as appropriate, members of their ISP team to determine if assistive technology is needed. The case manager can authorize assistive technology according to the transmittal without a doctor note, prescription, or recommendation from another professional.

Question: Does this include specialized communication devices for people who don't use verbal communication?

Answer: Please see the Guide to Assistive Technology for information on accessing augmentative communication supports. A person may need augmentative communication supports AND assistive technology outlined in APD-PT-20-071 to connect with people outside their home. Please reach out to the ODDS COVID-19 Team for additional support.

Question: What if there are safety concerns related to internet use?

Answer: Case managers are expected to refer to the person's Risk Management Plan, and update it if needed, based on any safety concerns related to using the internet or technology. A case manager can offer safety resources to a person, family, or team, and can authorize Professional Behavior Services in order to address risks or concerns. For additional safety questions, please reach out to the ODDS COVID-19 Team for support.

May 13 Update:

Question: How does an SC/PA plan for the use of Assistive Technology?

Answer: If an individual in services is isolated from others and unable to communicate with people outside their home and/or participate in case management due to a lack of technology during the Stay Home, Save Lives executive order, the SC/PA may consider purchasing Assistive Technology in line with the APD-PT-20-071.

Question: Can a provider cancel their internet then asking for it to be covered under the new policy?

Answer: While the provision of internet services to an individual is not a requirement of services providers, the availability to use Department funding

for the purchase of connectivity is limited only to the period of time that the Stay Home, Saves Lives executive order is in place. Further, the need for connectivity is based on a **person's** need to connect with people outside their home and/or participate in case management services. It is not for the convenience or primary use of a person's provider.

Question: Is there an end date when the assistive technology policy will no longer be valid?

Answer: Yes, APD-PT-20-071 is only valid during the Stay Home, Save Lives executive order. When Stay Home, Save Lives is lifted, the Department will issue guidance explaining the end of this policy.

Question: What if the case management entity purchased assistive technology using code OR 528, believing that the primary intended use is so that the individual can participate in case management activities, and the individual finds other ways to participate in case management activities and the assistive technology is used solely to connect with others?

Answer: If the Assistive Technology item was purchased using OR 528 and then the item is used for other purposes, there is no need to change the coding after the fact.

Question: How much effort should an SC/PA put into looking at other resources to pay for this?

Answer: There should be documentation that this is the most cost-effective means of meeting the need for a person to connect with others and/or participate in case management services to the extent practicable during Stay Home, Save Lives. The Guide to Assistive Devices and Technology contains more information on alternate resources. At this time an insurance denial is not required for purchases under APD-PT-20-071.

Question: Since the release of APD-PT-20-071, are CDDPs still able to purchase assistive technology under Expanded Family Support Funds?

Answer: CDDPs are not prohibited from using EFSF for technology purchases due to the release of APD-PT-20-071. These two policy changes are different. EFSF is intended to be used to purchase items or services tied to a child's ADL, behavioral, or medical need(s) and changing circumstances due to COVID-19. The Assistive Technology changes described in APD-PT-

20-071 relate only to communicating with people outside the home and participating in case management services.

Question: Is it duplicative if a child accesses up to \$600 in Expanded Family Support Fund purchases and also accesses Assistive Technology through APD-PT-20-071?

Answer: If the need for a tablet, laptop, or webcam relates to the need to communicate with people outside the home and/or participate in case management, they should follow the guidance in APD-PT-20-071. If it relates to the purpose of Expanded Family Support Funds outlined in APD-PT-20-055, they should use its guidance. It is true that children may, depending on their needs and circumstances, obtain technology through APD-PT-20-071 criteria AND still have access to up to \$600 through Expanded Family Support Funds. These are distinct policies and they each have criteria that must be applied in order to access the service.

Question: If it's the most cost-effective option, can a smart phone be purchased for the purpose of face to face communication for case management activities and with others outside the person's household?

Answer: Yes, a smart phone may be purchased if this is the most reasonable response to meet the need for the individual. The Public Utilities Commission must be explored as they may have smart phones available for free. Further, the case management entity should assure that the individual understands that the funding of connectivity for the phone is temporary.

Question: Can Department funds be used to pay for a service such to help the client get set up and offer basic training to use the technology?

Answer: Training services related to technology cannot be funded under APD-PT-20-071.

Question: Can a case with a keyboard attachment for accessibility be an allowable purchase if the client needs it?

Answer: Yes, if the individual has accessibility needs then a special case or keyboard can be purchased.

Question: How much effort should an SC/PA put into looking at other resources to pay for this?

Answer: There should be documentation that this is the most cost-effective means of meeting the need. Additional guidance can be found in The Guide To Assistive Devices and Assistive Technology.

Question: Can a case management entity purchase a bulk order of to save on costs and speed up the delivery once a request is made?

Answer: The purchase of Assistive Technology must be tied directly to an individual's needs.

May 20 Update:

Question: What is the expectation for the individual to have WiFi, and what are ways that we would document that?

Answer: We do not require providers to offer Internet connectivity services. If a person does NOT have Internet connectivity, and needs it in order to communicate with people outside their home and/or communicate with their case manager during the Stay Home, Save Lives order, a case manager can help by either connecting them to free Internet services, or paying for temporary month-to-month Internet services as outlined in APD-PT-20-071.

Question: Do you have guidance to provide on how to locate/access those "free connectivity" resources?

Answer: ODDS recommends that the Services Coordinator or Personal Agent contact the internet services providers in the area in which the individual resides and inquire. FCC also has info on their site <https://www.fcc.gov/companies-pledging-keep-americans-connected-during-pandemic-go-above-and-beyond-call>. Some examples are below

- Comcast is providing internet service to low-income families in their service area through their Internet Essentials program. <https://www.xfinity.com/support/articles/comcast-broadband-opportunity-program>
- Xfinity hotspots are currently available to anyone who needs them for free. Visit Xfinity for a map of available hotspots. <https://wifi.xfinity.com/>
- AT&T is providing internet service to individuals who participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or the National School Lunch Program through their Access from AT&T program. For additional information please see their COVID-19 Response. <https://about.att.com/pages/COVID-19.html>

- Spectrum offers their Internet Assist program to provide low-cost internet service to qualifying Individuals. Additionally, Spectrum is opening their wifi hotspots for public access.

<https://www.spectrum.com/browse/content/spectrum-internet-assist>

Question: How can we purchase Internet services for a person without entering into contracts?

Answer: Internet services are not regulated by ODDS. Please contact your local provider. [https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/standards/Documents/Oregon%20Internet%20Service%20Providers%20\(ISP\).pdf](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/standards/Documents/Oregon%20Internet%20Service%20Providers%20(ISP).pdf)

Question: Can you expand upon what scenarios we would fund internet service?

Answer: Services Coordinators and Personal Agents can purchase month-to-month basic Internet services if Internet is needed for reasons described in APD-PT-20-071 and there is no free Internet available in the area in which the individual resides.

Question: Can we purchase of laptop for the primary purpose of communication with medical professionals and mental health professionals?

Answer: If the individual is only able to continue to communication with medical or mental health professional through the use of telecommunications technology and the individual does not have access to this technology, then the most cost-effective technology may be purchased for this purpose.