



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 6, 2020

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IUB oversees programs offering financial and communications assistance to lowans

State, federal programs help low-income residents and those needing speech or hearing-assisted devices stay connected during COVID-19

(Des Moines) – Access to emergency services and local community resources is vital to all lowans. The Iowa Utilities Board (IUB) supports efforts to help consumers stay connected during the COVID-19 outbreak and throughout the year by accessing communications programs available to income-eligible residents or those with hearing or speech issues that make communicating via telephone difficult.

Lifeline program assists low-income lowans

Basic telephone service, broadband internet access service, or bundled services are available to qualified low-income lowans through the Lifeline program. Lifeline participation enables lowans to stay connected to jobs, family, community resources, and government and emergency services. The program provides applicants limited monthly financial assistance to help defray costs.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, temporary changes have been made to the Lifeline program by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). For current program participants already receiving assistance, recertification is on hold for anniversary dates between April 14 and August 14, 2020, and all new reverification activity is on hold through May 18, 2020.

Learn more about the Lifeline program at usac.org/lifeline and get information and updates on FCC changes at fcc.gov/keep-americans-connected.

Telephone programs aid lowans with hearing, speech difficulties

The IUB, by authority of the Legislature, oversees programs that provide telephone accessibility for people who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, or have difficulty speaking. Relay Iowa is a program that assists these individuals and is available at no cost, 24 hours a day, with services including captioning that can be read while listening to a call, speech-to-speech services, and relay services for Spanish-speaking users. Visit Relay Iowa's website, hamiltonrelay.com/iowa for information on how to use Relay Iowa.

The Iowa Equipment Distribution Program, called Telecommunications Access Iowa (TAI), helps pay for specialized telephone equipment for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing or have speech difficulties. Qualified individuals can receive a voucher for approximately 95 percent of the average cost of specialized telephone equipment such as amplified phones, captioned telephones, cell phone amplifiers, and iPads. Visit TAI's website, teleiowa.com, for information on how to apply for an Equipment Distribution Program voucher.

The goal of the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program (NDBEDP) is to ensure that every person with combined hearing and vision loss has access to telecommunication tools and the training necessary to use them. The program provides outreach, assessments, telecommunications technology and training free of charge to those who meet federal eligibility guidelines. The administrator of Iowa's NDBEDP is the Helen Keller National Center, Great Plains Regional Office, in Kansas. Visit iCanConnect.org for more information and eligibility requirements.

Information on all these programs also can be found on the IUB website, iub.iowa.gov, under the Consumers tab.

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The Iowa Utilities Board regulates utilities to ensure that reasonably priced, reliable, environmentally responsible, and safe utility services are available to all Iowans.

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