



RHC Program News for April 2020

April 2, 2020

Latest News

USAC and RHC Remain Open for Business

At USAC, we are committed to the health and safety of our employees, contractors, and stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic. While USAC's Washington, DC office is closed, the RHC Division remains fully operational. RHC Program staff will work remotely and continue to process and review forms and implement guidance from the FCC. We will continue to update the [Announcements](#) page with all the latest news relating to COVID-19 and the RHC Program.

FCC Releases Order DA 20-345: Additional Relief Provided to HCPs Due to COVID-19

On March 26, 2020, the FCC released [Order DA 20-345](#), granting additional relief to Rural Health Care (RHC) Program participants to ensure that health care providers (HCPs) have the resources they need to effectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the Order takes the following actions: (1) extends the FY2020 RHC Program application filing window until June 30, 2020; (2) eases competitive bidding requirements for HCPs with expiring evergreen contracts; and (3) provides an extension of procedural deadlines to respond to information requests, to deliver non-recurring services in the HCF Program, to file invoices in the HCF Program, and to file appeals to USAC and the FCC.

Read a [summary](#) of the relief brought on by the Order and download [Guidance on Extending Your FY2019 Evergreen Contract](#).

FY2020 Filing Window Extended to June 30, 2020 Due to COVID-19

In order to minimize potential disruptions caused by COVID-19, the FCC released Order DA 20-345, directing USAC to extend the FY2020 filing window to June 30, 2020. This means that you must submit your funding requests ([FCC Forms 462](#) or [466](#)) by 11:59 p.m. ET June 30, 2020. We highly encourage you to submit your application forms as early as possible in the filing window. See below for helpful resources:

- Funding Request Webinars: [HCF Program](#), [Telecom Program](#)
- [Funding Request Summary](#)
- [FY2020 Recommended Submission Dates](#)
- [Information for FY2019 Applicants Applying in FY2020](#)
- [Urban and Rural Rate Information](#) (Telecom Program only)

FCC Announces Waiver of the RHC Program Gift Rules

On March 18, 2020, the FCC issued [Order DA 20-290](#), waiving the RHC Program's gift rules to provide assistance to rural health care providers (HCPs) responding to COVID-19. In the Order, the FCC recognizes that the pandemic will increase the need for connectivity and broadband services. The gift rules waiver removes regulatory obstacles that would otherwise prevent a service provider from voluntarily offering equipment or services to HCPs to help them improve connectivity and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic more effectively. Specifically, the Order:

- Allows service providers to offer, and for HCPs to solicit or accept, free upgrades, connected devices, networking equipment, services and other things of value.

- Waives the requirement that prohibits a service provider from reducing the unsubsidized portion of charges for services paid by HCPs.
- Waives the requirement that HCPs pay the urban rate for services provided in the Telecom Program.

These waivers are limited to HCPs involved in the screening and treatment of patients for COVID-19 and for providing services to other patients in an effort to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. The waivers are in effect through September 30, 2020.

FCC Announces Increase to RHC Program Funding for FY2019

The total RHC Program demand for FY2019 was \$719.48 million, which exceeded the \$677.29 million in available funding. In [FCC Order 20-30](#), the FCC permits USAC to carry forward additional unused funds from prior years to cover this funding gap and thus allows for full funding of all eligible RHC Program funding requests filed during the FY2019 filing window. The Order also waives the funding cap on multi-year commitments and upfront payments. Without this Order, pro-rated reductions in FY2019 support for rural health care providers would be necessary. RHC is currently issuing decisions on FY2019 funding requests, and will continue to do so on a rolling basis. RHC will communicate any updates via the email addresses the applicant has submitted in My Portal.

FCC Announces FY2020 Funding Cap

On March 12, 2020 the FCC released [Public Notice DA 20-263](#), announcing the RHC Program funding cap for FY2020. The RHC Program funding cap for FY2020 is \$604,759,306. The cap for upfront payments and multi-year commitments under the HCF Program is \$152,700,000. These new caps represent a 1.8% inflation-adjusted increase from FY2019.

New for FY2020

Starting on February 1, for FY2020, RHC began enforcing several new rules adopted in FCC Report and Order 19-78, including: elimination of the grace period for the consortia majority rural rule, gift rule, elimination of limitation on support for satellite services, and revised and harmonized funding request certifications. Read more and download the [Report and Order 19-78 Tip Sheet](#).

FCC Releases Supply Chain Order and Mandatory Service Provider Survey

On January 3, 2020, the FCC's [Supply Chain Order](#), became effective. The Order adopts a new rule that no universal service support may be used to purchase, obtain, maintain, improve, modify, or otherwise support any equipment or services produced or provided by companies that pose a national security threat to the integrity of communications networks or the communications supply chain. The FCC has initially designated Huawei Technologies Company and ZTE Corporation as companies covered by this Order.

The Order requires all USF program service providers that are designated Eligible Telecommunication Carriers (ETCs) to [complete a survey](#), identifying whether their networks contain equipment or services from Huawei and/or ZTE by April 22, 2020. Other USF program participants can complete the survey on a voluntary basis.

USAC will share additional information about this Order as it is available.

Urban and Rural Rate Database Feedback Opportunity

RHC is currently accepting feedback on urban and rural rates. RHC will consider this feedback as it develops the urban and rural databases that will be used beginning with competitive bidding for FY2021. As per FCC Report and Order 19-78, RHC will determine the median urban and rural rates for eligible services and publish these rates in publicly available databases. To assist in this process, service providers "are encouraged to bring their available urban and rural rate data to [RHC's] attention."

Interested in providing your feedback on urban and rural rates database? Feel free to email RHC-Assist@usac.org with the subject line "Urban and Rural Rate Database Feedback." Future feedback opportunities may be made available and publicized via the RHC newsletter.

Need Help? Contact Us!

For questions about the Rural Health Care Program, call the RHC Help Desk Call at 800-453-1546 or email RHC-Assist@usac.org.

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