

October 2023 RHC Monthly Newsletter

October 5, 2023

Latest News

FCC Waives Certain RHC Program Rules in Response to the Hawaii Wildfires

On August 18, 2023, the FCC released [Order DA 23-723](#), waiving certain RHC rules and deadlines to assist health care providers and service providers located in areas affected by the Hawaii wildfires. Affected health care providers and service providers have up to 150 calendar days from the effective date of the Order (until January 15, 2024) to submit the filings required by RHC.

The order:

- Automatically provides affected program participants with an additional 150 days to file appeals and waivers. This waiver will be in effect for all deadlines of appeals and waiver requests from August 18, 2023, through 150 calendar days from the release of this Order (January 15, 2024).
- Waives the 14-day Information Request deadline for Information Requests related to funding requests, appeals and waivers, invoices, audits, and other documentation and applies to all funding years for all Information Requests that had a deadline on or after August 10, 2023, regardless of the funding year for which those requests relate.
- Waives the invoice filing deadline for FY2022 funding requests and grants an automatic 120-day extension; and
- Waives the September 30, 2023, deadline for Healthcare Connect Fund (HCF) program annual reports. HCF program participants will have up to 150 calendar days (January 15, 2024) to submit annual reports.

FCC Waives Certain RHC Program Rules in Response to Hurricane Idalia

On September 1, 2023, the FCC released [Order DA 23-805](#), waiving certain RHC rules and deadlines to assist participants and providers located in areas affected by Hurricane Idalia. This Order applies to healthcare providers and service providers located in the areas in Florida and South Carolina that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has designated as eligible for Individual or Public Assistance for the purposes of federal disaster relief as of the release date of this Order. The Order waives the following rules on a temporary basis:

- Automatically provides affected program participants with an additional 150 days to file appeals and waivers. This waiver will be in effect for all deadlines of appeals and waiver requests from August 27, 2023, through 150 calendar days from the release of this Order (January 29, 2024).
- Waives the 14-day Information Request deadline for Information Requests related to funding requests, appeals and waivers, invoices, audits, and other documentation and applies to all funding years for all Information Requests that had a deadline on or after August 27, 2023, regardless of the funding year. Affected health care providers and service providers have up to 150 calendar days from the effective date of this Order (January 29, 2024) to respond to Information Requests from USAC.
- Waives the invoice filing deadline for FY2022 funding requests and grants an automatic 120-day extension; and
- Waives the September 30, 2023, deadline for Healthcare Connect Fund (HCF) program annual reports. HCF program participants will have up to 150 calendar days from the effective date of this order (January 29, 2024) to submit annual reports.

Submit Funding Year (FY) 2024 Request for Services Now

HCF program applicants can submit the FCC Form 461 (Request for Services Form) along with any other competitive bidding documents such as a Request for Proposal (RFP) in RHC Connect. For the Telecommunications (Telecom) program, the FCC Form 465 (Request for Services Form) may be submitted in My Portal.

FY2024 Filing Window Opens December 1, 2023 – Register for Upcoming Training Today!

The FY2024 filing window will take place from December 1, 2023, to April 1, 2024. This means that you must submit your funding requests (FCC Forms 462 or 466) as early as December 1, 2023, and no later than 11:59 p.m. ET on April 1, 2024. We highly encourage you to submit your funding requests as early as possible in the filing window. Other forms for FY2024 (FCC Forms 460, 461, or 465) are accepted prior to December 1. Learn more about [filing windows](#).

To learn about changes to these forms for FY2024 and get a walkthrough of FCC Form 462 and 466 in RHC Connect, join the RHC Program Outreach team in November for the Funding Request Best Practices webinars. Register below:

- HCF Program: Funding Request Best Practices for FY2024 – November 15, 2023, 2 p.m. – 3 p.m. ET - [Register](#)

- Telecom Program: The Funding Request Best Practices for FY2024 will be announced once the FCC Form 466 moves to RHC Connect.

Please use the following resources to submit these forms:

HCF Program:

- [Develop Bid Evaluation Criteria & Select Services](#) webpage
- [Welcome to RHC Connect – FCC Form 461](#) webpage
- [Competitive Bidding Exemptions](#) webpage
- [RHC Connect FCC Form 461 User Guide](#)

Telecom Program:

- [Prepare for Competitive Bidding and Request for Service](#)– webpage
- [Competitive Bidding Exemptions](#) webpage

FY 2023 Funding Reviews Status

As of September 15, 2023:

- FY2023 HCF – 81 percent of FCC Forms 462 are committed (Approved, Denied or Withdrawn)
- FY2023 Telecom – 72.9 percent of FCC Forms 466 are committed (Approved, Denied or Withdrawn)

Important Reminders

Invoice Filing Deadline

Per [FCC Order 19-78](#), the deadline for applicants and service providers in the HCF and the Telecom Programs to submit the [FCC Form 463](#) and the Telecom Invoice is 120 days after June 30, 2023, the service delivery deadline for FY2022. The invoice filing deadline for FY 2022 Telecom Program commitments and single-year FY 2022 HCF Program commitments is October 28, 2023. The invoice filing deadline for prior year multi-year commitments in the HCF Program may also be October 28, 2023. Applicants and service providers may request and receive a one-time 120-day extension to the invoicing filing deadline. **The one-time extension must be requested on or prior to October 28, 2023.**

For more information on the HCF Program, please visit the [Post-Commitment Actions](#) webpage on the USAC website. For the Telecom Program, please submit your invoice filing deadline request to the invoicing team at RHC-Invoicing@usac.org.

PLEASE NOTE: If you have submitted a post-commitment change request in RHC Connect, please log in to RHC Connect and request an invoice filing deadline extension. We have received a high volume of these requests and may not complete the review prior to the invoice filing deadline.

Unsure of your invoicing filing deadline?

The invoice filing deadline is included in your funding commitment letter (FCL), which USAC sends via email after processing the [FCC Form 462](#) (Funding Request Form for HCF) or [FCC Form 466](#) (Funding Request Form for Telecom). You can look up your invoice filing deadline using the [RHC Invoicing Deadline Tool](#) on the [Open Data](#) platform.

For more information, please use the following online resources:

- For the HCF Program: [Invoice USAC](#) and [Welcome to RHC Connect – FCC Form 463](#) webpages.
- For the Telecom Program: [Invoice USAC](#) webpage.

Invoicing Best Practices

Please keep in mind that once you receive an approved funding commitment, you should follow the necessary steps to invoice prior to your invoice filing deadline(s). Please be sure to respond to any invoicing Information Requests by the 14-calendar-day deadline listed in the email. For more information, please see the [HCF invoice page](#) or [Telecom invoice page](#).

As a reminder: When a service provider does not certify an invoice, USAC sends an Information Request to remind it to do so. USAC has no role or involvement in disputes between health care providers and service providers. Health care providers should work with their service providers to resolve any issues.

Duplicate Funding Prohibited

Please remember: FCC rules prohibit duplicate funding for the same service, for the same locations, during the same period, from more than one FCC program. This includes the RHC programs (HCF and Telecom), the COVID-19 Telehealth Program, and the Connected Care Pilot Program (CCPP).

Consortium Rurality Percentage

All current and new HCF Program consortia must be “majority rural.” [FCC Report and Order 19-78](#) eliminated the three-year grace period for consortia to become majority rural. “Majority rural” means that more than 50 percent of participating HCPs in a consortium must be rural. For example, if a consortium has five participating HCPs, at least three of those HCPs must be in a rural area for the consortium to be deemed “majority rural.” Funding requests filed by consortia that are not in compliance with this rule will be denied.

Download the [Consortia Rurality Compliance Tip Sheet](#).

Online Tools

Invoicing Deadlines

The [Invoicing Deadline tool](#) replaces the Invoicing Deadline spreadsheet. The tool allows service providers and HCPs to look up the deadline to submit invoices for funding commitments. The tool frees users from having to set up specific Excel configurations to find their deadlines.

Note: The tool does not contain any additional information such as form submissions, payment status, or funds remaining. Contact the [RHC Customer Service Center](#) for questions about those topics. The Invoicing Deadline tool and all other RHC tools can be found on the [Tools webpage](#).

Eligible Rural Areas Search Tool

The Eligible Rural Areas Search tool has been removed from the [Tools webpage](#) and the HCF and Telecom eligibility webpages. HCP rurality and priority tiers can be searched using the [Rurality Tier Search Tool](#). For more information about how to use this tool, please use the [How to Use the Rurality Tier Search Tool tip sheet](#) on the USAC website.

Note: This tool is for information purposes only. Rurality tiers are formally assigned during the review and approval of the FCC Form 460 in the HCF Program and FCC Form 465 in the Telecom Program. Applicants should check approved forms for their assigned rurality tier.

RHC Connect Updates

Submit Your Post-Commitment Change Requests in RHC Connect

The following post-commitment change requests are now available in RHC Connect for HCF Program applicants:

- SPIN changes (corrective and operational)
- Site and service substitutions
- Service delivery deadline extensions for non-recurring charges
- Invoice filing deadline extensions

A webpage for [Post-Commitment Actions](#) is published on the USAC website as well as specific webpages for [SPIN Changes](#) and [Site and Service Substitutions](#). A step-by-step [Post-Commitments Change Request](#) user guide for applicants and an [Invoice Filing Deadline Extension Request user guide](#) for service providers are available to help you submit these requests correctly.

PLEASE NOTE: If you have submitted a post-commitment change request in RHC Connect, please log in to RHC Connect and request an invoice filing deadline extension. We have received a high volume of these requests and may not complete the review prior to the invoice filing deadline.

The FCC Form 463 Is Available in RHC Connect for FY2022 and FY2023 Funding Commitments.

The platform change only affects HCF Program participants. HCF Program applicants submitting FCC Forms 460 or 463 for funding years prior to FY2022 will continue to do so in My Portal. Telecom Program and CCPP applications will not be affected. To learn more, please visit the [Welcome to RHC Connect – FCC Form 463](#) webpage.

RHC Connect for Service Providers

For FY2022 and forward, the FCC Form 463 will be submitted in RHC Connect. As you submit the FCC Form 463, please keep in mind that the General Contact on the FCC Form 498 is the only user for the company who can create additional logins for other users in that company.

If you have trouble accessing RHC Connect, it may be a result of outdated information on the FCC Form 498 (Service Provider and Billed Entity Identification Number and General Contact Information Form). To correct the issue, please update your FCC Form 498 as soon as possible. For more information, please visit the [Manage Your 498 ID](#) webpage on the USAC website.

A [user guide for the FCC Form 463](#) specifically for service providers is now available on the [Step 5: Invoice USAC](#) webpage in the RHC service provider section of the USAC website.

News You Can Use

What To Do When You Receive an Information Request

As part of their review of any eligibility, requests for services, funding requests, and invoicing forms, RHC reviewers will contact all account holders (the primary and all secondary and tertiary account holders associated with the HCP) with a request for additional information (“Information Request”). This request will assist with the collection of any missing documentation, address deficiencies, or gather general information required to address FCC form reviewers' questions.

In our continuing efforts to deliver funding decisions as soon as possible, RHC began funding request reviews before the funding request window closes. This means that you may have received an Information Request before May 1, 2023. No final decisions will be made prior to the close of the filing window.

Information Request Tips for the Telecom Program

- HCPs can receive Telecom Program Information Requests through My Portal or by email.
- For Information Requests received through My Portal, HCPs should respond through My Portal only.
- For Information Requests received by email, HCPs should “Reply All” to the email message.
- Use only Chrome or Firefox Internet browsers when using My Portal.
- When uploading a document as a response, the file must be limited to 10MB and its file name should not contain any special characters, only letters and numbers.

Information Request Tips for the HCF Program

- For FY2023 FCC Forms 462, an auto-generated email will be sent directing HCPs to RHC Connect to respond. HCPs should respond through RHC Connect only. Please use the [Information Request Tip Sheet](#) to help you navigate Information Requests sent through RHC Connect.
- HCPs that receive HCF Program Information Requests through email should “Reply All” to the email message.

Changes to a Commitment After Funding Has Been Approved

When a Funding Commitment Letter (FCL) is received, it is the responsibility of the applicant to confirm that all information is accurate. Applicants must contact USAC to request changes to an HCP site or service for any of the circumstances listed:

- If the site address changes or the primary account holder no longer works for the HCP, an FCC Form 460 revision for HCF or a new FCC Form 465 for Telecom must be submitted within 30 days of the change. The 30-day requirement applies at all points during the funding lifecycle, including all post-commitment activities.
- If not all approved funds will be used, a request to decrease funding may be submitted by sending an email to RHC-Invoicing@usac.org. The HCP name and number, the affected FRN and the amount reduced in the commitment must be included. USAC will complete a partial de-commitment for the FRN in that amount.
 - In the Telecom Program, the approved FRN service dates can be revised prior to invoicing using the FCC Form 467.
 - If any additional changes are required after submitting the FCC Form 467, an FCC Form 467 can be resubmitted prior to invoicing.
- If funds within an FRN must be re-allocated, a site and service substitution must be submitted. Learn more about [site and service substitutions](#).
- If no funds will be used in the approved or disbursed funding commitment, the disbursed funds must be returned to USAC. Learn more about voluntary return of funds by visiting the [Returning Program Funding](#) webpage.

Certifications Requirements for National Supply Chain

As a reminder, when service providers log in to My Portal, two new supply chain certifications included in the FCC Form 463 and Telecom Program invoice will be displayed.

The first certification affirms compliance with the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Title 47, [Section 54.9](#), prohibition on USF support to purchase, obtain, maintain, improve, modify, operate, manage, or otherwise support equipment or services produced or provided by the covered companies deemed to pose a national security threat to the integrity of the communications network or communications supply chain. As of September 20, 2022, Huawei Technologies Company, ZTE Corporation, Hytera Communications Corporation, Hangzhou Hikvision Digital Technology Company, Dahua Technology Company, AO Kaspersky Lab, China Mobile International USA Inc., China Telecom (Americas) Corp, Pacific Network Corp and its wholly owned subsidiary ComNet(USA) LLC, China Unicom (Americas) Operations Limited and their affiliates and subsidiaries are the 10 companies that have been officially designated as such threats by the FCC and placed on the Covered List.

The second certification affirms compliance with CFR 47 [Section 54.10](#), which prohibits the use of any federal subsidies on any communications equipment and services on the [Covered List](#).

- **FY2022 and FY2023 program participants:** If you requested services or equipment provided or that contain components of products produced by any company on the [Covered List](#) or any of their parents, affiliates, or subsidiaries in FY2022 or FY2023, you cannot invoice for these funds. Instead, you should immediately request a service substitution prior to invoicing in order to ensure complete program compliance.
- **FY2024 program participants:** As you proceed with competitive bidding for FY2024, please ensure you are not requesting funding for services or equipment from any company on the [Covered List](#), or any of their parents, affiliates, or subsidiaries.

USAC updated the [Supply Chain](#) webpages to include three new subpages: [COVID-19 Broadband Programs](#), [Audits](#), and [FAQs](#).

Let's Plan a Virtual Site Visit or an In-Person Visit!

During the COVID-19 pandemic, RHC suspended travel to conferences and sites. In calendar year 2023, RHC has resumed travel to conferences and in-person site visits. We would like to continue to learn more about the people and communities who benefit from RHC program support. If we can't visit in person, we can schedule a virtual event. This is a great opportunity to introduce RHC staff to participating HCPs and to deepen the relationship between RHC staff and applicants.

If you are planning a trip to Washington, D.C. and you would like to meet RHC staff, please reach out so that we can plan accordingly. If you are interested in having your HCP or consortia featured in an upcoming virtual site visit or if you would like to plan a visit, please send a request to Blythe.Albert@usac.org.

Need Help? Contact Us!

For questions about the Rural Health Care program, contact RHC-Assist@usac.org or the Customer Service Center at (800) 453-1546 from 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. ET Monday through Friday for assistance. Use the [Customer Service Center Tip Sheet](#) to learn about what the RHC Customer Service Center can and cannot help you with.