



State of California—Health and Human Services Agency
California Department of Public Health

April 16, 2014



EDMUND G. BROWN JR.
Governor

VENDOR ALERT 2014 – 04

TO: WIC VENDORS

RE. ASSISTING WIC PARTICIPANTS WHO WANT TO SIGN UP FOR TELEPHONE ASSISTANCE UNDER THE “LIFELINE” PROGRAM

Purpose The California Department of Public Health (CDPH), Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Division is providing clarification to questions it has received regarding WIC vendors participating in the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) “Lifeline” program.

Background The Lifeline program allows individuals eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, WIC, Medicaid and other low-income support programs to sign up with telecommunications companies to receive free or reduced-price telephone service, which includes cell phones. Further information on the Lifeline program is available at:
<http://www.fcc.gov/guides/lifeline-and-link-affordable-telephone-service-income-eligible-consumers>, and
<http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/PUC/Telco/Public+Programs/lifelinedetails.htm>

The Lifeline program is not administered or regulated by the WIC Program. Participation in the Lifeline program is at the vendor’s discretion and subject to rules and eligibility guidelines established by the FCC and the CPUC. However, WIC vendors who elect to offer customers an opportunity to participate in the Lifeline program must comply with the following requirements to maintain their WIC vendor status.

Action for Vendors

These requirements include:

- **No Prohibited Incentives** – WIC vendors electing to participate in the FCC Lifeline program shall do so in a manner consistent with Title, 7 Code of Federal Regulations, Section 246.12(g)(3)(iv) regarding incentives. Please note that telecommunications services and other for profit goods or services offered by WIC vendors are not considered incentive items, provided these goods or services are available to WIC participants and the general public at a fair market value based on the comparable cost for these same goods or services at other business establishments.
- **Provide Same Service Level For All Prospective Lifeline Subscribers** – 7 C.F.R. §246.12(h)(3)(iii), requires vendors to offer WIC Program participants the same courtesies that are offered to non-WIC customers. WIC vendors participating in Lifeline must offer the same level of referral or other applicant assistance to all potential Lifeline subscribers, regardless of their WIC participation.



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- **Ensure Only Voluntary Disclosure of WIC Participant Information** – WIC vendors are prohibited from requiring WIC participants to disclose their personal information pursuant to Cal. Code Regs., tit. 22 40741(a)(15). Therefore, if a WIC participant wishes vendor assistance in participating in the FCC Lifeline program, it is incumbent on the vendor to clarify both verbally and in writing that the WIC participant understands that any disclosure of personal information in order to participate in the Lifeline program is done on a voluntary basis by the WIC participant and that the WIC vendor will not retain or use this information for any other purpose.
 - **Ensure Participant Confidentiality** – The Vendor Agreement requires vendors to maintain the confidentiality of participant information. The WIC vendor may only accept WIC participant information if: (1) the vendor has a written agreement with the telecommunication carrier participating in the FCC Lifeline program to serve as its agent to collect personal information from prospective Lifeline clients, (2) the WIC participant volunteers the information for purposes of determining FCC Lifeline eligibility, and (3) the WIC vendor does not collect, retain, or use this WIC participant information for any other purpose than to enable the FCC Lifeline program to determine that WIC participant's eligibility for the FCC Lifeline program.
 - **Ensure Program Integrity** - The WIC vendor must continue to ensure the highest levels of program integrity consistent with federal and state regulations to prevent fraud, waste and abuse. WIC vendors should report any suspected fraud to the appropriate entity. For suspected WIC fraud contact CDPH/WIC Division at (800) 852-5770 or via email at WICABUSE@cdph.ca.gov. For the Lifeline program contact the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) via the FCC Lifeline Fraud Tip Line at (855) 455-8477 or via email at LifelineTips@fcc.gov. For complaints or problems related to California Lifeline, please contact the CPUC's Consumer Affairs Branch at 1-800-649-7570. WIC vendors found to be in violation of federal or state requirements, including any of the requirements listed above, may be subject to penalties and disqualification of their WIC vendor status.
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Questions

If you have any questions, please contact your Vendor Consultant or call toll free (855) WIC-STOR or (855) 942-7867. You can also contact the WIC Vendor Management Branch by email: WICVENDORINFO@cdph.ca.gov.



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Vendor Management Branch
California WIC Program