**MAT Program Offers Assistive Telephones to Fit Your Needs**

Communicating via the telephone is an important part of living an independent life. That’s why the Maryland Accessible Telecommunications (MAT) program provides the opportunity for individuals to apply for free assistive telephone equipment.

The MAT program is available to any Maryland resident who:

* is 5 years of age or older;
* receives one or more state or federal financial benefits or has limited income; and
* is unable to effectively use the telephone due to hearing or speaking difficulties, or due to low vision, low mobility or cognitive factors.

If you meet the above criteria, you qualify to apply for free equipment through the MAT program. Once your application is approved, you will receive a letter in the mail containing instructions for scheduling a free evaluation. If you do not qualify for free equipment and wish to purchase equipment privately, you may still receive a free evaluation through the MAT program.

Through her experience in working with MAT applicants, Sabrina Fields, Assistive Technology Lead Administrator for the MAT program, knows that many people consider their ability to use the telephone to be priceless. “There have been many occasions when, after receiving their new equipment, customers have told me in tears that this is the first time in years they’ve been able to use the telephone to talk to family and friends,” she says. “Not being able to use the telephone can be very isolating and upsetting, and it’s always a great feeling to hear the joyful reactions from these individuals when they realize they have that ability again.”

Seven MAT Evaluation Centers are located throughout the state. Evaluations are free and are designed to identify the type of equipment that fits your individual needs. During the evaluation, you will have the opportunity to practice dialing, answering, and talking on several different phones or devices until you and the evaluator find the one that works for you.

The MAT program offers a wide variety of equipment to choose from, including:

* Amplified phones
* Captioned telephones
* Ring signalers
* Phones with large and/or high contrast buttons
* Phones that talk when dialed
* Picture phones
* Phones that amplify speech
* Text telephones (TTYs)
* Braille TTYs for people who are Deaf-Blind
* Hearing Carry-Over (HCO) phones
* Voice Carry-Over (VCO) phones
* Hands-free phones

Once the equipment that works for you has been identified, the evaluator will place an order and it will be shipped to you within 2-4 weeks. Each device comes with personalized instructions for setup and use, and you may always contact your local MAT Evaluation Center for additional training.

To learn more, or to apply for the MAT program, please visit mdrelay.org or call Maryland Relay at 1-800-552-7724 (Voice/TTY) or 443-453-5970 (VP).