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UCP's new Remote Support Tech Program helps people with disabilities access independent living, while addressing caregiver shortages in Massachusetts



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The Technical Support team at UCP of Western MA uses remote support HIPAA compliant technology to monitor adult daily living tasks and safety.

The world changed in 2019 when the coronavirus forced people to use and connect with new technology in more ways than ever before. UCP's service delivery model changed with it.

"Our new license as a remote support technology provider, through funding from the MA Department of Developmental Services (DDS), allows us to deliver services to monitor caregiving and health coordination remotely," Sal Garozzo, Executive Director of UCP of Western MA explains. "What was initially created in response to the pandemic turns out to be the way of the future that enables us to meet the growing demand to help more people with disabilities live safely and more independently in their own homes and apartments."

Reaching and supporting people with disabilities and the growing number of people who need assistance in our state, is more important now than ever for these compelling reasons. The number of people with disabilities is sharply on the rise and the rapid growth of our aging population is driving healthcare costs up at the same time the caregiver shortage is at an all-time crisis level.

Consider how these statistics impact our state.

- 24% or nearly 1 in 4 adults have a disability in MA ([CDC](#))
- Starting in 2030, when all boomers will be older than 65, older Americans will make up 21 percent of the population, up from 15 percent today. ([Census.gov](#))
- 72% of Massachusetts human service providers report that it has become increasingly more challenging to fill job openings over the past three years. ([ARC of MA](#))

Individualized, remote support monitoring technology is a practical and economical solution for reaching and serving more people who

want to live independently, at home, through a technology service. This helps supplement the direct care needed throughout the Commonwealth and allows caregivers to reallocate care to those who need it most.

Remote supports are valuable communication tools. [The Council on Quality and Leadership](#) notes the safety measures they can address, including "communicating when someone is in danger, needs support, or has veered from a typical routine. The hardware requires human input and a human response. Sensors and communication devices produce an alert that can be responded to by a neighbor or staff member who is either nearby or in a remote call center. Devices are typically integrated through a central hub, and individualized plans developed ahead of time define the parameters."

While many people with disabilities prefer living independently in their own apartments, [20,000 families in MA care for a family member with an intellectual or developmental disability at home](#), according to ADDP. "UCP's new program offers both the individual and their family a new choice, which provides peace of mind and increased independence," Garozzo added.

UCP's Tech Support Program can be delivered from anywhere, due to the remote nature of services.

It's convenient to access and set up is simple. The program begins with a formal evaluation by licensed, experienced Assistive Technology specialists from UCP's multidisciplinary Clinical and Tech Support Teams. These AT professionals offer education and ongoing technical supports throughout the program. The team then makes recommendations to improve independent living and safety, utilizing the right AT tools and monitoring technology to meet an individual's

specific needs for residential living. Recommendations are followed by training and installation, by our tech support team, to maximize the right for people with disabilities to live a more fulfilling and inclusive life.

Key features of UCP's Remote Support Tech Program include: real-time video assessments, home safety monitoring, fall alerts, medication management, instant vitals alerts and task lists for home, school or work. It also documents and stores HIPAA sensitive data.

The program's caregivers are on call to assist with care, but a significant advantage to this program is that it reduces the amount of time caregivers have to spend on-site, since the technology does a share of the work. Caregivers can prioritize their services to address the most critical care and what needs to be done hands-on to increase each individual's quality of life.

Remote monitoring technology redefines staffing capacity to help the disability industry cope with staffing shortages in the state. To that end, UCP is also assisting other agencies around the state with their Direct Support Professional (DSP) staff shortages.

Changing lives through individualized support

People who use assistive technology and remote monitoring systems often report experiencing benefits such as improved daily living skills and activities, increased socialization, better medical monitoring to improve healthcare outcomes, reduced caregiver error and more communication with family and caregivers.

To create the highest quality outcomes, UCP takes a personalized approach to this program. They plan and define parameters to address specific needs, customized based on how individuals want to be supported. This helps each per-

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— SAL GAROZZO, Executive Director, UCP of Western MA

son reach their goals, whether it's higher functionality, employability, safety or increased community involvement with family and friends.

The agency takes this holistic and individualized approach in all of its programs to support children, students, adults and seniors. The network of services helps people to find jobs, boost performance in school, access housing and their communities, at all ages and stages of life.

UCP's full range of Assistive Technology (AT) services is offered across all of their programs from infants to seniors. Alongside the new Remote Tech Program, the agency offers AT evaluations, continuous education, training and tech support.

Additionally, UCP offers free device loans through MassMATCH Assistive Technology Regional Center (ATRC Pittsfield). Managed by the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), MassMATCH is the Commonwealth's federally funded statewide Assistive Technology (AT) Act Program. MassMATCH promotes the use of AT products and services to enhance the independence of people with disabilities, enabling equal participation in all of life's activities.

Elano Dallmeyer, Manager of the ATRC and Technical Support Center at UCP, explains the new mobile program. "We launched the AT Roadshow in 2021. Our vans and trucks bring assistive technology into the community. We travel to senior centers, schools, hospitals, workplaces, nursing homes and health fairs, where we provide hands-on demos about how the latest, innovative technology can improve independence and be customized to fit many needs."

Program eligibility

People with disabilities over the age of 22 must be referred to UCP of Western MA by the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). The program is suited for people who want 24/7-based technology solutions and a minimal amount of direct support from caregivers. Programming is offered throughout Berkshire County as well as Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden Counties (Pioneer Valley). Remote Technology Services can be delivered state-wide. If you or a loved one is interested in disability support, please contact Sal Garozzo, UCP's Executive Director at 413.442.1562 x102 or sgarozzo@ucpwma.org. Visit ucpwma.org for more information.

To learn more about this new Remote Support Technology Program, visit the link below to listen to WTBR's Morning Drive Radio show with Bill Sturgeon. His guest host for the January 12, 2022 episode was Sal Garozzo, UCP's Executive Director, who talks extensively about the new Remote Support Technology Program at UCP and how it works:

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