



Effective Date: 11/13/2009	Version #: 2	Document #: SYS.19.3	Next Review: 11/13/2011	Page #: 1 of 9
-------------------------------	-----------------	-------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------

**SCOPE:** All PeaceHealth Patient Financial Services personnel.

**PURPOSE:** To establish a charity care policy that assists patients and supports PeaceHealth's financial health.

**POLICY:** In an effort to ensure that PeaceHealth provides health care services to the sick and afflicted regardless of ability to pay, we have adopted a standard charity care policy known as Bridge Assistance. The Bridge Assistance Policy is part of PeaceHealth's overall Financial Counseling Policy and training curriculum, which in part educates our staff to identify patients that can benefit from our Financial Counseling services and Bridge Assistance. The Financial Counseling and Bridge Assistance Policies assist PeaceHealth in promoting System financial health, which enables us to continue the healing Mission of Jesus Christ.

**REQUIREMENTS:**

**1. Bridge Assistance Overview.**

- 1.1. Bridge Assistance is secondary to all other financial resources available to the patient, including, but not limited to: insurance, third party liability payors, government programs, and outside agency programs.
- 1.2. Bridge Assistance is granted for medically necessary services only.
- 1.3. The Bridge Assistance determination and approval process is the same regardless of the amount of the patient's balance.
- 1.4. Patients may apply for Bridge Assistance before, during, or after treatment or at any time during the billing and collection process.
- 1.5. Signage and brochures have been developed to inform patients about PeaceHealth's Financial Counseling Programs and Bridge Assistance. These must be placed at all appropriate access areas, including registration areas.
- 1.6. A standard financial counseling curriculum developed by System PFS is used to train identified staff members.
- 1.7. System PFS evaluates the implementation and effectiveness of the Financial Counseling program in each region.

Bridge Assistance	Doc # SYS.19.3	V # 1
System-Wide PFS Policy	Page: 2 of 9	

- 1.8. The provision of necessary healthcare shall never be delayed by an assistance determination. Emergency care must never be delayed by requests for financial or other information regarding ability to pay.

## **2. Bridge Assistance Eligibility and Determination.**

### **2.1. Eligibility**

- 2.1.1. Bridge Assistance is not granted for elective cosmetic surgery or other special situations, such as that of an individual who is eligible for insurance or government programs but has refused to apply.
- 2.1.2. Patients who reside outside PeaceHealth's service area are not eligible for Bridge Assistance, except under the following circumstances:
  - 2.1.2.1. The medically-necessary service is not performed at a facility in the area where the patient resides;
  - 2.1.2.2. There is no facility that performs the service that is closer to the patient's residence than a PeaceHealth facility; and
  - 2.1.2.3. The patient requires emergent services while visiting in PeaceHealth's service area.
- 2.1.3. Anyone seeking Bridge Assistance may be given a preliminary screening according to System Standards as outlined in the Financial Counseling Training Manual.
- 2.1.4. Bridge Assistance screening requests may be proposed by sources other than the patient, such as the patient's physician, family members, community or religious groups, social services, or hospital personnel.
- 2.1.5. Pending final eligibility determination, PeaceHealth will not initiate collection efforts or requests for deposits provided that the responsible party is cooperative with PeaceHealth's efforts to get payment from other sources.
- 2.1.6. If initial screening does not disqualify someone for Bridge Assistance, they are given an application, which includes instructions on how to apply.

### **2.2. Application**

- 2.2.1. If an incomplete application is returned to PeaceHealth, a letter is sent to the responsible party explaining what is required. The incomplete Bridge Assistance Application is pended for 14 days awaiting receipt of requested additional information.

Bridge Assistance	Doc # SYS.19.3	V # 1
System-Wide PFS Policy	Page: 3 of 9	

- 2.2.2. If the responsible party does not return the application or requested information to PeaceHealth within a reasonable time (14 days from receipt of the letter from PeaceHealth requesting additional information or within such additional time as the patient's medical condition may reasonably require), PeaceHealth may initiate collection efforts.
- 2.2.3. A responsible party may be considered for Bridge Assistance without a completed Bridge Assistance Application if sufficient information can be obtained that allows for final determination. Presumptive eligibility based on patient's PARO score may be used to determine eligibility.
- 2.2.4. Consideration for Bridge Assistance will occur once a completed application has been submitted to PeaceHealth.
- 2.2.5. Bridge Assistance applications for collection accounts must be submitted with supporting documentation from the date of service.
- 2.2.6. PeaceHealth keeps all Bridge Assistance Applications and supporting documentation confidential. PeaceHealth may, at its own expense, request a credit report to further verify the information on the applications. Conflicting information between the credit report and the application may result in a denial or request for additional information.

### 2.3. Verification of Income

- 2.3.1. Acceptable verification of income includes the following proof of all income for the past 90 days (including payroll stubs, Social Security or unemployment benefits, brokerage account statements) and most recent year's tax return.
- 2.3.2. An Income Statement for self-employed applicants is required.
- 2.3.3. In the absence of income, a Letter of Support and/or a Declaration of No Income will be accepted.
- 2.3.4. The Letter of Support is accepted from individuals providing for the patient's and/or responsible party's living needs; and the Declaration of No Income must include an explanation of how expenses are being met.

### 2.4. Determination

- 2.4.1. Subject to the considerations set forth in sections 2.4.2. through 2.4.6. below, Bridge Assistance is granted in accordance with the following table:

Bridge Assistance Grid (02/2006)	
Percentage of Federal Poverty Level	Percentage of Bridge Assistance Provided
0 - 200	100%
201 - 225	90%
226 - 250	75%
251 - 300	50%
301 - 375	25%
376 - 400	10%

2.4.2. Except as otherwise stated in this section, consideration for Bridge Assistance includes a review of:

- Responsible party's annual household income;
- Number of people in the home;
- Securable assets excluding primary residence;
- Family's primary mode of transportation, and retirement accounts;
- Special medical costs;
- Reasonable living expenses;
- Credit history;
- Existing debt; and
- Other indicators of the party's ability to pay.

**Note:** These are guidelines. Each individual situation is reviewed independently. Allowances are made for extenuating circumstances.

2.4.3. If minor children are not covered by private or guarantor's employer medical insurance, then an application for State Medical Assistance Program may be required.

2.4.4. Assets and reasonable living expenses will not be considered for Bridge Assistance applicants whose AGI falls at or below 100% of the current Federal Poverty Levels ("FPL").

2.4.5. Assets and reasonable living expenses may be considered when determining eligibility for Bridge Assistance applicants whose AGI falls above 100% of FPL but at or below the 400% of FPL.

2.4.6. A \$3000 asset exemption is given for households with 1 to 4 members, and an additional \$500 is given for each additional household member.

2.4.7. Once the asset exemption has been taken, the Bridge Assistance portion extended may consider 50% of the remaining equity.

Bridge Assistance	Doc # SYS.19.3	V # 1
System-Wide PFS Policy	Page: 5 of 9	

2.4.8. PeaceHealth will return to the responsible party written notice of its assistance determinations within 14 calendar days of receiving a completed Bridge Assistance Application.

2.4.8.1. This notification includes the level of reduction and reasonable payment arrangements consistent with the responsible party's ability to pay.

2.4.8.2. Denials include the reason for denial and instructions for appeal or reconsideration.

### 2.5. Accounts in Collections

2.5.1. Accounts in collection will be eligible for Bridge Assistance if an applicant's AGI falls at or below 200% of the current Federal Poverty Levels.

2.5.2. Accounts in collection where the applicants AGI is above 200% of the FPL will not be eligible for Bridge Assistance.

## 3. Appeals.

3.1. The responsible party may appeal the determination of eligibility for Bridge Assistance by submitting in writing additional information, such as income verification or an explanation of extenuating circumstances, to the Patient Financial Services Director within 30 days of the denial notification.

3.2. The Vice President of Patient Financial Services and/or System Director of Patient Financial Services reviews all appeals and makes a final determination.

3.3. If this determination affirms the previous denial of Bridge Assistance, written notification is sent to the responsible party and for PeaceHealth facilities in Washington State, the Washington State Department of Health. Collection follow-up on accounts is pended for the first 15 days during the appeal process.

## 4. Other Providers.

4.1. PeaceHealth's decision to provide Bridge Assistance in no way affects the responsible party's financial obligations to physicians or other health care providers, unless such physicians or other health care providers are providing care to patients pursuant to a contract with PeaceHealth.

4.2. If such contract exists, the physician or other health care provider must comply with this Bridge Assistance policy and bill for or be compensated by PeaceHealth or the patient in accordance with Bridge Assistance eligibility determinations.

Bridge Assistance	Doc # SYS.19.3	V # 1
System-Wide PFS Policy	Page: 6 of 9	

## 5. Bridge Assistance Operating Policy.

### 5.1. Short Form Application

- 5.1.1. May be used when the balance is under \$200 for clinics and \$850 for hospitals.
- 5.1.2. May be completed by the Financial Counselor and mailed to the responsible party for signature.
- 5.1.3. Once granted, Bridge Assistance is a one-time offer for the balance submitted on the application.
- 5.1.4. Outstanding balances only.
- 5.1.5. If Bridge Assistance is not offered based on the information provided by the Short Form, the applicant may appeal that decision by completing and submitting the Long Form.
- 5.1.6. If Bridge Assistance has been granted based on a Short Form Application, subsequent requests must be submitted with a Long Form Application.

### 5.2. Long Form Application

- 5.2.1. Use for balances over \$200 for clinics and \$850 for hospitals.
- 5.2.2. Use if responsible party's Short Form Application was denied and they elect to submit additional information.
- 5.2.3. Once granted, Bridge Assistance covers all household members for up to 1 year beginning the date the completed Long Form Application was received by PeaceHealth.

## DEFINITIONS:

1. The term "*Bridge Assistance*" refers to a PeaceHealth program through which medically necessary and preventative services are provided at PeaceHealth facilities at a reduced cost or without charge when it has been determined that payment for those services cannot be obtained through insurance, outside agencies, or private means.
2. The term "*Financial Counseling*" is a process of working together with our patients in a compassionate and caring manner to identify options for resolving their PeaceHealth financial obligations.

Bridge Assistance	Doc # SYS.19.3	V # 1
System-Wide PFS Policy	Page: 7 of 9	

3. The term “*Guarantor*” refers to a person age 18 or over, regardless of marital status, who has legal financial responsibility for services provided to him/her and/or his/her legal minor children.
  
4. The term “*Household*” includes the following people living in the same home:
  - Guarantor
  - Guarantor’s spouse
  - Guarantor’s children/minor dependents and step-children (i.e. children living with grandparents that are legal guardians)
  - Guarantor’s unmarried partner, if they have a child(ren) in common. If they have a child(ren) in common, the unmarried partner’s child(ren) from previous relationships also qualify if living in the home
  - 4.1. A household does not include any of the following people:
    - Roommates
    - Extended family members, such as aunts, uncles, cousins, parents, etc.
    - The Guarantor’s unmarried partner, if they don’t have a child together, nor the unmarried partner’s other child(ren) from a previous relationship
  
5. The term “*Monthly Reasonable Living Expenses*” refers to the greater of either 75% of monthly Household income or 75% of the 150% of FPL for the appropriate number of people in the Household.
  
6. The term “*Adjusted Gross Income for Federal Poverty Level (AGI for FPL)*” refers to Annual Income - Annual Special Medical Costs (prescriptions, rented durable medical supplies, and health insurance premiums) = AGI for FPL.
  
7. The term “*Medical Necessity*” refers to care that, in the opinion of the treating physician/clinician, is reasonably needed:
  - 7.1. To prevent the onset or worsening of an illness, condition, or disability;
  - 7.2. To establish a diagnosis;
  - 7.3. To provide palliative, curative or restorative treatment for physical, behavioral and/or mental health conditions; and/or
  - 7.4. To assist the individual to achieve or maintain functional capacity in performing daily activities, taking into account both the functional capacity of the individual and those functional capacities that are appropriate for individuals of the same age.

Each service must be performed in accordance with national standards of medical practice generally accepted at the time the services are rendered. Each service must be sufficient in amount, duration, and scope to reasonably achieve its purpose.

Bridge Assistance	Doc # SYS.19.3	V # 1
System-Wide PFS Policy	Page: 8 of 9	

8. The term, “*Service Area*”, refers to the county in which the PeaceHealth facility is located.

## REFERENCES:

### Forms & Letter Templates:

- [Bridge Assistance Long Application](#) and [Instructions](#)
- [Bridge Assistance Short Application](#) and [Instructions](#)
- [Bridge Assistance Approval Letter](#)  
*(click OK in the first box and then Cancel twice in the second box to access letter)*
- [Bridge Assistance Denial Letter](#)  
*(click OK in the first box and then Cancel twice in the second box to access letter)*
- [Bridge Assistance Clarification Letter](#)  
*(click OK in the first box and then Cancel twice in the second box to access letter)*
- [Response to an Appeal – 100%](#)
- [Response to an Appeal – Partial](#)
- 

### Job Aids & Tools:

- [Department of Health & Human Services Poverty Guidelines](#)
- [Financial Counseling Training Manual \(scroll down to Training\)](#)

**Keywords:** CP.PFS.2, CP.PFS.002

### Policy Documents:

- [Policy #SYS.19.5 Financial Counseling](#)

**HELP:** For questions or assistance with this policy, please contact your Patient Financial Services department.

## **End of Policy**

*The last page of this policy document contains approval, review and revision information only.*

Bridge Assistance	Doc # SYS.19.3	V # 1
System-Wide PFS Policy	Page: 9 of 9	

**CREATION (Original):**

<b>Author:</b>			
<b>Responsible Party:</b>	Kevin McAndrews; VP Patient Financial Services		
<b>Reviewed By:</b>			
<b>Approved By:</b>	John Hayward; CEO	<b>Date:</b>	3/1/2002

**REVIEW:**

<b>Reviewer:</b>		<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Reviewer:</b>		<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Reviewer:</b>		<b>Date:</b>	

**REVISIONS:**

<b>Responsible Party:</b>	Kevin McAndrews; VP Patient Financial Services		
<b>Revised By:</b>			
<b>Approved By:</b>	Alan Yordy; President and CMO	<b>Date:</b>	11/13/09
<b>Reason/Summary of Changes:</b>	Revised REQUIREMENTS to include service area and to reflect regulatory compliant processes.		

**RETIRED:**

<b>Requested By:</b>			
<b>Approved By:</b>		<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Reason for Retirement:</b>			