



Lifeline Support for Affordable Communications

Lifeline is the FCC's program to help make communications services more affordable for low-income consumers. Lifeline provides subscribers a discount on monthly telephone service purchased from participating providers in the marketplace. Subscribers can also purchase discounted broadband from participating providers. The discounts, which can be applied to stand-alone broadband, bundled voice-broadband packages - either fixed or mobile - and stand-alone voice service - will help ensure that low-income consumers can afford 21st-century broadband and the access it provides to jobs, education and opportunities.

How Lifeline works

Lifeline provides a discount on monthly service of \$9.25 per month for eligible low-income subscribers. Subscribers may receive a Lifeline discount on either a wireline or a wireless service, but may not receive a discount on both services at the same time. Lifeline also supports broadband and broadband-voice bundles. FCC rules prohibit more than one Lifeline service per household.

Lifeline is available to eligible low-income subscribers in every state, territory, commonwealth, and on Tribal lands.

To participate in the program, subscribers must either have an income that is at or below 135% of the federal Poverty Guidelines (<http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/index.shtml>) or participate in certain assistance programs. You can see if you are eligible with the Lifeline Eligibility Pre-Screening Tool on the Universal Service Administrative website at www.lifelinesupport.org.

Following is a list of assistance programs that qualify a participant for Lifeline:

- Medicaid (www.medicaid.gov/Medicaid-CHIP-Program-Information/Medicaid-and-CHIP-Program-Information.html)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Food Stamps or SNAP) (www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap)
- Supplemental Security Income (www.ssa.gov/ssi/)
- Federal Public Housing Assistance (Section 8) (http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/topics/housing_choice_voucher_program_section_8)

Following is a list of Tribal assistance programs that qualify a participant for Lifeline:

- Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance (www.bia.gov/WhoWeAre/BIA/OIS/HumanServices/index.htm)
- Tribally-Administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/programs/tribal/tribal-tanf)
- Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/fdpir/)
- Head Start (if income eligibility criteria are met) (www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs)
- State assistance programs (if applicable) (www.usac.org/ls/companies/companies.aspx)

How to find a Lifeline provider near you

If you have determined that you are eligible, use the resources on this web page <https://data.usac.org/publicreports/CompaniesNearMe/Download/Report> to locate a Lifeline Program service provider near you.



Program Rules

Key rules include the following:

- Lifeline is available only to subscribers who can document their eligibility.
- Only one Lifeline benefit is permitted per household. Federal rules prohibit subscribers from receiving more than one Lifeline service. If a subscriber or his or her household currently has more than one Lifeline discounted service, they must select a single provider immediately or be subject to penalties.
- Only low-income subscribers with proof of eligibility are qualified to enroll.
- Subscribers have an obligation to recertify their eligibility every year and should respond to their Lifeline Provider's attempts to recertify eligibility. Subscribers must verify that they remain eligible to participate in the Lifeline program once each calendar year. Subscribers who fail to recertify their eligibility will be de-enrolled from the Lifeline Program.

Subscribers will be required to make certain certifications upon signing up for Lifeline and each year after that, including:

- The subscriber or a member of the subscriber's household participates in a qualifying federal program or meets the income qualifications for Lifeline.
- The subscriber's household receives only one Lifeline supported service.
- The subscriber provided proof of eligibility, if required to do so.
- The number of individuals in the subscriber's household, if applying for Lifeline based on income.
- The information contained in the Lifeline application is true and correct to the best of the subscriber's knowledge and that providing false or fraudulent information to receive Lifeline benefits is punishable by law.
- That the subscriber resides on Federally-recognized Tribal lands, if applying for Enhanced Lifeline support.
- The subscriber must acknowledge that he or she may be required to recertify continued eligibility for Lifeline, and the subscriber will lose his or her Lifeline benefit if he or she fails to recertify.

The subscriber will also be required to provide certain information to the phone company or a state agency (depending how subscribers in their state sign up for Lifeline), including:

- Name and address information. Consumers who do not have a permanent residential address must provide a temporary address, which cannot be a P.O. Box. If a consumer resides at a temporary address, the telephone service provider or state agency may require confirmation of the address.
- Date of birth and the last 4 digits of the consumer's Social Security Number.
- Consumers participating in the Lifeline program must notify the telephone service provider within 30 days if the consumer moves.
- Consumers participating in the Lifeline program must notify the telephone service provider within 30 days if the consumer is no longer eligible for Lifeline.

Enhanced Lifeline benefits for Tribal lands

Because telephone subscribership levels on Tribal lands are the lowest in the country, enhanced Lifeline benefits are available to low-income residents who live on Tribal lands, which includes those who live:

- On a federally recognized Indian Tribe's reservation, pueblo, or colony
- On a former reservation in Oklahoma (see Oklahoma enhanced Lifeline support maps: www.fcc.gov/general/oklahoma-enhanced-lifeline-support-maps)
- Within an Indian allotment
- Within an Alaska Native region established by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act
- On Hawaiian Homelands held in trust pursuant to the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920



Link Up, another federal benefit program, reduces the initial installation or activation fees of certain telephone providers offering service on Tribal lands.

What benefits are available under the Tribal Lands Lifeline Program?

Tribal Lands Lifeline provides a monthly discount of up to \$34.25 off of the cost of telephone service, either wireline or wireless. This discount is currently \$9.25 (which is available to all eligible low-income subscribers across the United States) plus up to an additional \$25 (which is available only to eligible low-income subscribers living on Tribal lands.) This discount may vary somewhat from state to state, depending on whether the state has its own Lifeline program. In some cases, Lifeline also includes Toll Limitation Service, which enables a telephone subscriber to limit the amount of long distance calls that can be made from a telephone.

Tribal Lands Link Up provides qualified subscribers living on Tribal lands with a one-time discount of up to \$100 on the initial installation or activation of a wireline or wireless telephone for the primary residence. Tribal Lands Link Up also enables subscribers to pay the remaining amount that they owe on a deferred schedule, interest-free. Qualifying subscribers may be eligible for Link Up again only after moving to a new primary residence. Tribal Link Up support is only offered to carriers who are building out infrastructure on Tribal lands, so not all carriers may be discounting their activation fee.

What limitations are there on Tribal Lands Lifeline and Link Up?

Federal rules prohibit qualifying low-income consumers from receiving more than one Tribal Lands Lifeline service at the same time. Low-income subscribers who qualify may receive a Tribal Lands Lifeline discount on either a home telephone or a wireless telephone service, but may not receive a Lifeline discount on both services at the same time. Additionally, only one Tribal Lands Lifeline service may be obtained per household. "Household" is defined as any individual or group of individuals who live together at the same address as one economic unit. An "economic unit" is defined as "all adult individuals contributing to and sharing in the income and expenses of a household." Lifeline support is available to eligible low-income subscribers living in group living facilities. Lifeline applicants may demonstrate when initially enrolling in the program that any other Lifeline recipients residing at their residential address are part of a separate household.

Similarly, Federal rules prohibit qualifying low-income consumers from receiving more than one Tribal Lands Link Up discount at a primary residence. Low-income consumers who qualify may receive a Tribal Lands Link Up discount on installation or activation charges associated with either wireline or wireless telephone service, but may not receive a Link Up discount on both services at the same time.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the current benefit under the Lifeline Program?

The Lifeline discount for eligible subscribers is currently \$9.25 per month for monthly telephone service - wireline or wireless - or broadband or bundled service.

How can I determine if I am eligible?

Use the Lifeline Eligibility Pre-Screening Tool on the Universal Service Administrative website at www.lifelinesupport.org to find out if you are eligible.

How do I enroll?

Apply for Lifeline through a Lifeline Program provider in your state or designated state agency. To locate a Lifeline provider in your state go to www.lifelinesupport.org or call USAC's toll-free number (1-888-641-8722).



What documentation do I need to provide at enrollment?

Acceptable documentation for Lifeline program eligibility verification includes: Current or prior year's statement of benefits from a qualifying program; notice letter of participation in qualifying program; program participation documents (or copy); or another official document of a qualifying program.

Acceptable documentation for income eligibility verification includes: The prior year's state, federal or Tribal tax return; current income statement from an employer or paycheck stub; Social Security statement of benefits; Veterans Administration statement of benefits; retirement or pension statement of benefits; Unemployment or Workers' Compensation statement of benefits; federal or Tribal notice letter of participation in General Assistance; or divorce decree, child support award, or other official document containing income information. The subscriber must present the same type of documentation covering 3 consecutive months within the previous 12 months, if the documentation does not cover a full year of income.

Can I get more than one discounted service?

No. Federal rules prohibit eligible low-income subscribers from receiving more than one Lifeline discount per household. An eligible subscriber may receive a discount on either a wireline or wireless service (but not both), or on broadband or bundled service. If you, or any person in your household, are currently receiving more than one monthly Lifeline service, you must select one provider to provide your Lifeline service and you must contact the other provider to de-enroll from their program. Subscribers found to be violating this rule may also be subject to criminal and/or civil penalties.

How is "household" defined for purposes of the Lifeline Program?

"Household" is defined as any individual or group of individuals who live together at the same address as one economic unit. An "economic unit" is defined as "all adult individuals contributing to and sharing in the income and expenses of a household." However, Lifeline support is available to eligible low-income subscribers living in group living facilities. Lifeline applicants may demonstrate when initially enrolling in the program that any other Lifeline recipients residing at their residential address are part of a separate household by completing the one-per-household worksheet. The Lifeline Eligibility Pre-Screening tool available at www.lifelinesupport.org can help you determine who is considered to be a member of your household.

What do I do if I am receiving more than one Lifeline service?

Households with duplicate Lifeline services must select a single provider and de-enroll from other Lifeline programs. Subscribers violating the one per household rule may be subject to criminal and/or civil penalties.

How often do I need to verify my eligibility?

Once when you first enroll, and once every year that you have Lifeline supported service. Once you are enrolled in Lifeline, you must recertify your continued eligibility on an annual basis. If you become ineligible for the benefit, either because your income has increased, you no longer qualify for a federal benefit program, or someone else in your household gets a Lifeline service, you must contact your provider immediately to de-enroll from the program, otherwise you may be subject to penalties.

What if I have free Lifeline?

If you receive Lifeline for free, you must use your service every 60 days in order to maintain the benefit.



Lifeline Policy

Modernizing Lifeline

On March 31, 2016, the FCC adopted an Order to modernize the FCC's Lifeline program (www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-modernizes-lifeline-program-low-income-consumers) to efficiently and effectively meet a critical 21st Century need: making broadband more affordable for low-income consumers.

Congress directed the FCC to ensure that all Americans have access to advanced telecommunications and information services. With affordability still the largest single barrier to broadband adoption in low-income households, the Order will reboot Lifeline to enable all Americans to share in the opportunities broadband connectivity provides, while building on recent reforms to the program. The Order, for the first time, allows low income consumers to apply Lifeline's \$9.25 per month discount to stand-alone broadband service as well as bundled voice and data service packages. The Order frees up the Lifeline marketplace to encourage wide participation in the program by broadband providers, giving consumers competitive service options. Minimum service standards will ensure that supported services meet modern needs. Building substantially on the Commission's landmark 2012 reforms of the program, the Order establishes a National Eligibility Verifier to further deter waste, fraud and abuse, while reducing provider burden. In addition, a budget mechanism limits Lifeline's cost to ratepayers.

The Lifeline program will focus on qualifying applicants only through other federal assistance programs that best support the FCC's objectives for the National Verifier: those that support electronic validation, are accountable, and best identify people needing support (SNAP, SSI, Medicaid, Veterans Pension, and Tribal-specific programs.)

These and other reforms add substantially to the FCC's 2012 reforms. Those 2012 reforms include the following fully implemented measures:

- Subscribers must provide documented proof of their eligibility.
- Carriers must recertify subscriber eligibility annually.
- Clarification that that Lifeline subscriptions are limited to one per household.
- Establishment of the National Lifeline Accountability Database to eliminate and prevent duplicate subscriptions.
- Independent audits of Lifeline providers every two years.
- Tighter standards for certifying new Lifeline providers.

For detailed information on the Lifeline program history and administration, visit the FCC's Telecommunications Access Policy Division's Lifeline web page (www.fcc.gov/lifeline).

Lifeline Program Administration

The Lifeline program is administered by the Universal Service Administrative Company. USAC is responsible for data collection and maintenance, support calculation, and disbursement for the program. USAC's website (www.usac.org/li) provides information regarding administrative aspects of the program, as well as program requirements.

Lifeline is supported by the federal Universal Service Fund (www.fcc.gov/general/universal-service-fund).

History

The FCC established the Lifeline program in 1985 to ensure that qualifying low-income consumers could afford phone service and the opportunities and security it provides. Congress supported and strengthened Lifeline in the Telecommunications Act of 1996, requiring that affordable service and advanced communications be available to low-income consumers across the country. In March of 2016, the FCC modernized Lifeline for advanced services by beginning a transition toward support of broadband service. Learn more about Lifeline modernization from this press release: www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-modernizes-lifeline-program-digital-age



Report Fraud

The FCC's Enforcement Bureau maintains a dedicated Lifeline Fraud Tip Line. Call 1-855-4LL-TIPS (or 1-855-455-8477) or email Lifelinetips@fcc.gov if you suspect Lifeline fraud. Please provide as much detail as possible, including the name and contact information of the individuals involved and the companies they are using to receive Lifeline-supported phone service.

Largely as a result of 2012 reforms, annual Lifeline disbursements have decreased by over 30%, from approximately \$2.2 billion in 2012 to \$1.5 billion in 2015.

Consumer Help Center

For more information on consumer issues, visit the FCC's Consumer Help Center at www.fcc.gov/consumers.

Accessible formats

To request this article in an accessible format - braille, large print, Word or text document or audio - write or call us at the address or phone number at the bottom of the page, or send an email to fcc504@fcc.gov.

Last reviewed 8/25/17

