Lifeline Support for Affordable Communications

Lifeline is an FCC program that helps make communications services more affordable for low-income consumers.

Lifeline provides subscribers a discount on qualifying monthly telephone service, broadband Internet service, or bundled voice-broadband packages purchased from participating wireline or wireless providers.

The discount helps ensure that low-income consumers can afford 21st century connectivity services and the access they provide to jobs, healthcare, and educational resources.

Safe Connections Act

Under the Safe Connections Act (SCA), survivors of domestic violence, human trafficking, and related crimes who are experiencing financial hardship will be able to qualify and receive emergency Lifeline support for up to six months beginning September 4, 2024.

Qualifying survivors can receive a discount of up to $9.25 on phone, internet, or bundled services. After six months, they may apply for the standard Lifeline benefit of up to $9.25 for qualifying internet or bundled services or $5.25 per month for voice-only service.

Survivors can participate in the Lifeline program if they pursue a line separation request and are experiencing financial hardship. Survivors can confirm their financial hardship by participating in the existing Lifeline program requirements or through the following methods:

- If their household income is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines
- Enrollment in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
- Enrollment in the Free and Reduced-Price School Lunch or Breakfast program, including enrollment at a Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) school or school district
- Received a Federal Pell Grant in the current award year

Temporary Waiver for Hurricane Victims

The FCC issued a temporarily waiver on the Lifeline program eligibility rules to ensure that consumers receiving federal disaster assistance can easily apply for and enroll in the Lifeline program to assist people impacted by hurricanes.

How Lifeline Works

Lifeline provides up to a $9.25 monthly discount on service for eligible low-income subscribers and up to $34.25 per month for eligible subscribers on Tribal lands. Subscribers may receive a Lifeline discount on either a wireline or a wireless service, but they may not receive a discount on both services at the same time. Lifeline also supports broadband Internet service and broadband-voice bundles. FCC rules prohibit more than one Lifeline service per household.

Lifeline is available to eligible low-income consumers in every state, commonwealth, territory, and on Tribal lands. The Lifeline program is administered by the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC). USAC is responsible for helping consumers apply for the program, understand eligibility requirements, and keep their benefit current through an annual recertification process. USAC's website provides additional information regarding the program, including program requirements.

To participate in the Lifeline program, consumers must either have an income that is at or below 135% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines or participate in certain federal assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, Federal Public Housing Assistance, Supplemental Security Income, the Veterans and Survivors Pension Benefit, or certain Tribal Programs. You can see if you are eligible by reviewing the information available at lifelinesupport.org.

National Verifier for Lifeline Eligibility

To apply for Lifeline, a consumer must generally use the National Verifier application system, which they can access through USAC or a phone or internet company participating in Lifeline. The National Verifier is a centralized system established by the FCC and operated by USAC that verifies Lifeline applicants' eligibility and recertifies subscriber eligibility annually. Consumers who would like assistance from a service provider when applying can use the "Companies Near Me" tool to locate a Lifeline program service provider in their area.

Please note that consumers in California (except broadband-only consumers), Texas, and Oregon will continue to apply for the federal Lifeline benefit through the state's existing application process as they do today. For broadband-only consumers in California, consumers will need to apply through the National Verifier application system and the National Verifier will check the consumer's eligibility. For specific directions on how to apply for Lifeline in all three states, visit the National Verifier and select the relevant state from the drop-down menu and press "Get Started."

If you have questions about your application, or would like an application mailed to you, contact Lifeline at (800) 234-9473 or LifelineSupport@usac.org.

Program Rules

Key rules include the following:

- Lifeline is available only to subscribers whose eligibility can be verified by checking a program eligibility database or by submitting documentation demonstrating 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 de-enroll from other Lifeline services immediately or be subject to penalties.
- Subscribers must recertify their eligibility every year and should respond to any requests from the National Verifier's or state's Lifeline administrator to recertify eligibility. Subscribers who fail to recertify their eligibility will be de-enrolled from the Lifeline program.
- Subscribers receiving free service from their service provider must actually use their service to continue to be enrolled in the Lifeline program.

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 of Tribal lands. You can find out more about which areas are eligible Tribal lands by visiting this site: https://www.lifelinesupport.org/tribal-benefit/.

Link Up, another federal benefit program, is a one-time benefit, per address, that reduces the initial installation or activation fees of certain Lifeline providers offering telephone service on Tribal lands.

What benefits are available through the Lifeline program's support for Tribal lands?

For low-income consumers living on Tribal lands, Lifeline provides a monthly discount of up to $34.25 off the cost of qualifying services (either wireline or wireless). This discount consists of up to $9.25 for qualifying broadband or bundled services or up to $5.25 for phone service (which is available to all eligible low-income subscribers across the United States) plus up to an additional $25 in enhanced support (which is available only to eligible low-income subscribers living on Tribal lands). Some states offer additional monthly discounts through their own Lifeline programs.

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 telephone service at their primary residence. For service initiation charges of up to $200, Link Up also provides a deferred, no-interest payment plan to the subscriber for up to one year. Subscribers can request Link Up once for each change of their primary residential

(home) address. 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. Consumers can check with their Lifeline provider to see if they offer Link Up.

What limitations are there on Lifeline and Link Up?

Federal rules prohibit qualifying low-income consumers from receiving more than one Lifeline service at the same time. For instance, low-income subscribers who qualify may receive a Lifeline discount on either a home telephone or a wireless telephone service, but they may not receive a Lifeline discount on both services at the same time.

Additionally, only one 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 Link Up discount at a primary residence.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the current benefit under the Lifeline program?

The Lifeline discount for eligible subscribers is up to $9.25 per month for qualifying monthly broadband or bundled services that meet the broadband minimum service standards. The discount for eligible subscribers is up to $5.25 for monthly service that only qualifies for the voice minimum service standards. The discount may be applied to either wireline or wireless services.

What is the enhanced benefit amount for Tribal Lands?

Up to $25 in enhanced support, in addition to the standard benefit, is available to eligible low-income subscribers living on Tribal lands.

How can I determine if I am eligible?

You can see if you are eligible for Lifeline service by reviewing the information available at lifelinesupport.org.

How do I apply?

There are several options to apply for Lifeline. You may apply directly through the Lifeline programs National Verifier online portal (lifelinesupport.org), or by mailing a paper application form (available at the National Verifier online portal after entering your state).

You may also apply for the program by working with a Lifeline service provider either in-person at a store location or online via the service provider's website, if they support that option. To locate a Lifeline provider in your state, go to https://cnm.universalservice.org/.

For any questions regarding the Lifeline application process, call USAC's toll-free number for the Lifeline Support Center at 1 (800) 234-9473, or email LifelineSupport@usac.org.

What documentation do I need to provide when I apply for Lifeline service?

Consumers may need to provide documentation if the National Verifier cannot automatically confirm their eligibility by checking a program eligibility database (for example, SNAP, Medicaid, etc.).

Acceptable documentation to verify eligibility based on participation in a qualifying program includes a recent (dated within the past 12 months):

- 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.

More detailed information regarding acceptable documentation can be found at: https://www.lifelinesupport.org/documents-needed/.

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;
- 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. More detailed information regarding acceptable documentation can be found at: https://www.lifelinesupport.org/documents-needed/.

If your eligibility cannot be confirmed automatically or through any documentation you provide you will be unable to enroll or may be de-enrolled from the Lifeline program.

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 voice 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 be de-enrolled from Lifeline service from the other provider. You may also contact USAC's Lifeline Support Center for assistance at 1-800-234-9473 or lifelinesupport@usac.org. Please do not share any sensitive personal information via email. Subscribers found to be violating the one-discount-per-household 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 be asked to complete a one-per-household worksheet, which asks questions about your household to determine if there is more than one household at your address.

The Lifeline Eligibility Pre-Screening tool available at https://www.lifelinesupport.org can help you determine who is a member of your household.

How often do I need to verify my eligibility?

Once when you first enroll, and once every year that you have Lifeline-supported service.

You may become ineligible for Lifeline if your income has increased, you no longer participate in a qualifying federal benefit program, or someone else in your household gets Lifeline service. If you become ineligible, you must contact your provider immediately to de-enroll from the program. Otherwise, you may be subject to penalties. You may also contact USAC's Lifeline Support Center for assistance at 1-800-234-9473

or by email at lifelinesupport@usac.org. Please do not share any sensitive personal information via email.

What if I have free Lifeline?

If you receive Lifeline service for free, the Lifeline program rules require you to use your service every 30 days to keep your benefit, in addition to complying with all other rules for the Lifeline program.

Who can I contact if I have an issue with a mobile phone or other hardware provided by my Lifeline service provider?

The FCC does not subsidize any hardware associated with the Lifeline program, which includes mobile phones provided by a service provider to a Lifeline customer. If you are having issues with your mobile phone or other hardware associated with your Lifeline service, please contact your service provider directly.

Who do I contact if I have a disability and want help applying for Lifeline?

If you are a person with a disability and need assistance with your Lifeline application, contact the Lifeline Support Center at lifelinesupport.org or call 800-234-9473.

If you have a question about whether your Lifeline service and equipment is accessible, contact the FCC's Disability Rights office at 202-418-2517 for a voice phone call, at 844-432-2275 by videophone, or by email at DRO@fcc.gov.

To view an ASL video about Lifeline, visit: https://youtu.be/wwkjVrd5xHc.

Report Fraud

The FCC's Enforcement Bureau maintains a dedicated Lifeline Fraud Tip Line – 1-855-4LL-TIPS (or 1-855-455-8477) – and an email address – Lifelinetips@fcc.gov – to facilitate reporting of possible fraud in the program.

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.

Digital Connectivity and Lifeline Awareness Week

The Federal Communications Commission, National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC), and National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates (NASUCA) have worked together since 2005 to promote outreach on the Lifeline. This occurs the week that follows Labor Day week. The purpose of Digital Connectivity and Lifeline Awareness Week is to provide state, local, and Tribal entities

with information and resources to help ensure that low-income consumers are aware of the programs and understand the requirements for participation.

Digital Connectivity and Lifeline Awareness Consumer Outreach Media Contacts

- NARUC: Regina Davis, rdavis@naruc.org
- NASUCA: Barrett C. Sheridan, (717) 783-5048, bsheridan@paoca.org
- FCC: Mike Snyder, michael.snyder@fcc.gov

Consumer Help Center

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

Alternate formats

To request this article in an alternate 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. To view an ASL video about Lifeline, visit: https://youtu.be/wwkjVrd5xHc.

Last reviewed November 01, 2024