



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, 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 broadband and the access it provides to jobs, healthcare, and educational resources.

Lifeline During Coronavirus Pandemic

To help keep Americans connected during the coronavirus pandemic, the FCC has temporarily waived usage requirements, recertification and reverification de-enrollment procedures, and general de-enrollment procedures, and has extended those waivers until November 30, 2020. Five FCC orders released on [March 17](#), [March 30](#), [April 29](#), [June 1](#), and [Aug. 17](#) will help ensure that no current Lifeline subscribers are involuntarily removed from the Lifeline program during this time of national crisis. The orders also direct the [Lifeline program administrator](#) to pause any involuntary de-enrollment of existing subscribers until that date.

The FCC has also made it easier for individuals who have lost their employment during the coronavirus pandemic and who qualify for Lifeline benefits to enroll in the Lifeline program. On April 29, 2020, the FCC temporarily waived the requirement that consumers seeking to qualify for the program based on their income must provide at least three consecutive months of income documentation. On June 1, the FCC streamlined Lifeline service enrollment for consumers living in rural Tribal areas. These changes will also stay in effect through November 30, 2020.

How Lifeline Works

Lifeline provides up to a \$9.25 monthly discount on service for eligible low-income subscribers. 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 data collection and maintenance, support calculation, disbursements, and assisting consumers with Lifeline eligibility and enrollment for the program. USAC's website (<https://www.usac.org/lifeline/>) 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 (<https://aspe.hhs.gov/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 (click "Do I Qualify?").

National Verifier for Lifeline Eligibility

To apply for Lifeline, a consumer must use the [National Verifier application system](#). 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.



As of June 2020, the National Verifier has fully launched in all states and territories, except California, Oregon, and Texas. For consumers in those states, or if you would like a service provider to assist you when you apply, please use the "[Companies Near Me](#)" tool to locate a Lifeline program service provider in your area.

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.
- Only low-income subscribers who have been found to be eligible are qualified to enroll.
- Subscribers must recertify their eligibility every year and should respond to any requests from the National Verifier's or state Lifeline administrator to recertify eligibility. Subscribers who fail to recertify their eligibility will be de-enrolled from the Lifeline program. Please note that, pursuant to a waiver approved by the FCC, recertification requirements and involuntary de-enrollment has been suspended until November 30, 2020.

Enhanced Lifeline Benefits for Tribal lands

Under a waiver approved by the FCC in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, until November 30, 2020, a Lifeline carrier may choose to immediately begin providing Lifeline service to a consumer living in a rural Tribal area who applies for Lifeline but is unable to provide the necessary documentation to resolve a failed automated check at the time of application. The consumer will have 45 days from the time of application to submit the documentation. A Lifeline carrier that chooses to provide service under this waiver may claim that subscriber for reimbursement from the Universal Service Fund after the subscriber has submitted the necessary documentation and received a positive eligibility determination. The carrier may claim Lifeline support for up to 45 days of service provided prior to the eligibility determination. This approach will help eligible consumers in rural Tribal areas enroll in Lifeline while avoiding in-person contacts at the time of application and quickly get connected to vital broadband and phone services during COVID-19.

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/additional-support-for-tribal-lands/>.

Link Up, another federal benefit program, 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 telephone service, broadband Internet service, or bundled services (either wireline or wireless). This discount consists of up to \$9.25 (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). This discount may also vary from state to state. Some states offer additional monthly discounts 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 monthly telephone service - wireline or wireless - or broadband or bundled service.

What is the enhanced benefit amount for Tribal Lands?

Up to \$25 in enhanced support, in addition to up to \$9.25 for traditional Lifeline service, 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 under "Do I Qualify?"

How do I apply?

There are several options to apply for Lifeline. You may apply directly through the Lifeline programs National Verifier online portal (<https://nationalverifier.servicenow.com/lifeline>) or by mailing a paper application form (available at the National Verifier online portal after entering your state). Please note that the application process is different in California, Oregon, and Texas. Consumers in these states generally must use the state's application process, or they may contact a service provider.

To find out more about how to apply on your own through the National Verifier, visit lifelinesupport.org (click "How to Use It" under "National Verifier").



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://data.usac.org/publicreports/CompaniesNearMe/Download/Report>.

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 their eligibility cannot be confirmed automatically 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.usac.org/lifeline/eligibility/national-verifier/acceptable-documentation-for-the-national-verifier/>.

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. More detailed information regarding acceptable documentation can be found at: <https://www.usac.org/lifeline/eligibility/national-verifier/acceptable-documentation-for-the-national-verifier/>.

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

Please note that, due to the pandemic, the FCC temporarily waived through November 30, 2020 the requirement that consumers seeking to qualify for the program based on their income must provide at least three consecutive months of income documentation. Additionally, the FCC streamlined Lifeline service enrollment for consumers living in rural Tribal areas.

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 you must contact the other provider to de-enroll from their program. 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 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 <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/> (select “Do I Qualify?”) 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 also have to re-verify your eligibility when the National Verifier is deployed in your state.

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.

Please note that, due to the pandemic, the FCC has temporarily waived reverification de-enrollment procedures and general de-enrollment procedures and has extended those waivers until November 30, 2020.

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 www.lifelinesupport.org or call 800-243-9473.

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.

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.

Lifeline Across America Consumer Outreach

Lifeline Across America is a federal-state working group established in 2005 to review outreach efforts on the Lifeline program and provide state, local, and Tribal entities with information and resources to help ensure that low-income consumers are aware of the program and understand the requirements for participation. Its members include the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC), and the National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates (NASUCA). The Lifeline Across America Working Group (LAAWG) initiated a study and [compiled a report in 2006](#) where it



presented its observations and conclusions concerning best practices for outreach on the Lifeline program. The LAAWG has since undertaken several projects to improve outreach, including National Telephone Discount Lifeline Awareness Week (Lifeline Awareness Week), which takes place yearly during the first full week after Labor Day.

To help raise awareness about the Lifeline Across America initiative and to assist in the collection of input and distribution of outreach materials, the LAAWG maintains this dedicated Lifeline website, hosted on the FCC's website and linked to the websites of [NARUC](#) and [NASUCA](#). This website provides information and resources to consumers, consumer advocacy groups, industry, and government stakeholders in a user-friendly format to help with Lifeline outreach and serve as a resource to help educate low-income consumers about the Lifeline program rules.

Lifeline Across America Media Contacts

NARUC: Regina Davis, rdavis@naruc.org

NASUCA: Barrett C. Sheridan, (717) 783-5048, bsheridan@paoca.org

Consumer Help Center

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

Alternate formats

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