



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 access service, or voice-broadband bundled service purchased from participating providers.

How Lifeline Works

Lifeline typically 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 access 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 or Medicaid. You can see if you are eligible by reviewing the information available at lifelinesupport.org (see "Do I Qualify?").

National Verifier for Lifeline Eligibility

To apply for Lifeline, a consumer must use the National Verifier application system at: <https://www.checklifeline.org/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.

There are some states that may not use the National Verifier yet. You can check whether your state is already active here: <https://www.usac.org/lifeline/eligibility/national-verifier/>. If you are in a state that does not use the National Verifier or if you would like a service provider to assist you when you apply, you can use the "Companies Near Me" tool at <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 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.

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/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 access 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, depending on whether the state has its own Lifeline program.

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. 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 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 enroll?

If you live in a state that uses the National Verifier (refer to <https://www.checklifeline.org/lifeline> to confirm), you can apply through the National Verifier at <https://www.checklifeline.org/lifeline> or you can work with a service provider to complete the application. You can also submit a paper application. Once the National Verifier has confirmed your eligibility to receive Lifeline service, you may then select a service provider.

If you live in a state that does not use the National Verifier, you can apply for Lifeline through a Lifeline program provider in your state or state agency. To locate a Lifeline provider in your state go to <https://data.usac.org/publicreports/CompaniesNearMe/Download/Report> or contact USAC's Lifeline Support Center at lifelinesupport@usac.org or 1-800-234-9473.

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

If the National Verifier is available in your state, and you submit an application using the National Verifier, the system will first attempt to verify your eligibility automatically through any available connections to databases for qualifying assistance programs. If the National Verifier is unable to confirm your eligibility, identity, or address through automated sources, you will be asked to submit documentation to complete your application.

For the National Verifier, you can find information regarding acceptable documentation for resolving eligibility errors at: <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/national-verifier/error-messages-relating-to-your-eligibility/>.

If the National Verifier is not available in your state, and you apply directly through a Lifeline provider or state agency, you may also be asked to provide documentation to demonstrate your eligibility. Additional information regarding what documentation you may need to provide can be found at: <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/how-to-get-lifeline/>. The type of documentation you will need to provide may be different depending on whether you are eligible based on participation in a qualifying program or based on income eligibility.

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.

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 annually. 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.

What if I have free Lifeline?

If you receive Lifeline service for free, you must 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.

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.

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.

Last reviewed 12/02/19