

Lifeline: Promoting Telephone Subscribership on Tribal Lands

Background

Lifeline is a government benefit program that provides discounts on monthly telephone service for eligible low-income consumers to help ensure they have the opportunities and security that telephone service affords, including being able to connect to jobs, family, and 911 services. Lifeline is supported by the federal Universal Service Fund (USF; for more information visit www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/universal-service-fund). 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. 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 averages \$9.25 (which is available to all eligible low-income consumers across the United States) plus up to an additional \$25 (which is available only to eligible low-income consumers 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 consumers 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.

Important Limitation 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 consumers 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 consumers 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.

How Do I Qualify for Lifeline Discounts?

The Lifeline program is available to eligible low-income consumers in every state, territory, commonwealth, and on Tribal lands. You must be eligible to enroll. To participate in the program, consumers must either have an

income that is at or below 135% of the federal Poverty Guidelines (aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/index.shtml) or participate in one of the following assistance programs:

- 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 Security Income (SSI): www.ssa.gov/ssi;
- Federal Public Housing Assistance (Section 8): portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/topics/housing_choice_voucher_program_section_8;
- Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP): www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/liheap;
- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF): www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/dts;
- National School Lunch Program's Free Lunch Program: www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/lunch;
- Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance: www.bia.gov/WhoWeAre/BIA/OIS/HumanServices/index.htm;
- Tribally-Administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TTANF): www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/dts;
- Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR): www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/fdpi/default.htm;
- Head Start (if income eligibility criteria are met): transition.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs; or
- State assistance programs (if applicable).

Can I get more than one discounted service?

No. Federal rules prohibit eligible low-income consumers from receiving more than ONE Lifeline discount per household. An eligible consumer may receive a discount on either a wireline or wireless service, but not both. If you or any other 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. Key provisions of the Lifeline rules include the following:

- Lifeline is a government benefit program;
- Only eligible consumers may enroll in the program;
- The program is limited to one benefit per household;
- Lifeline service is a non-transferable benefit. Consumers may not transfer their service (or give their Lifeline-supported phone) to any other individual, including another eligible consumer;
- In most cases, consumers will be required to provide documentation to prove the subscriber, one or more of the subscriber's dependents or the subscriber's household is eligible to receive Lifeline.

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

- The subscriber or a member of the subscriber's household, including dependants, participates in a qualifying federal program or meets the income qualifications for Lifeline;
- The subscriber provided proof of eligibility, if required to do so;
- The consumer's household receives only single Lifeline service;
- If applying for Lifeline based on income, the number of individuals in the consumer's household;
- The information contained in the Lifeline application is true and correct to the best of the consumer's knowledge and that providing false or fraudulent information to receive Lifeline benefits is punishable by law;
- If applying for Tribal Lands Lifeline support, that the consumer resides on Federally-recognized Tribal lands;
- The consumer must acknowledge that he or she may be required to re-certify continued eligibility for Lifeline and, if the consumer fails to do so, could lose the Lifeline service.

The subscriber will also be required to provide certain information to the phone company or a state agency (depending how consumers 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.

Some Questions and Answers About the Lifeline Program

Am I eligible? To see if you are eligible, use the Lifeline Eligibility Pre-Screening tool on the Universal Service Administrative (USAC) website at www.lifelinesupport.org.

How do I enroll? Apply for Lifeline through your local telephone company or designated state agency. To locate a Lifeline provider in your state go to www.lifelinesupport.org.

How Do I Verify My Eligibility? Consumers may be required to certify and provide documentation to prove that the subscriber, or a member of the subscriber's household, including dependants, participates in a qualifying program OR meets the income qualifications for Lifeline eligibility. For program eligibility verification, acceptable documentation 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. For income eligibility verification, acceptable documentation 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 consumer 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.

Do I Need To Reconfirm My Eligibility Every Year? Yes every year. Once you are enrolled in Lifeline, you must verify your continued eligibility on an annual basis. You will be contacted by your service provider to reconfirm that you remain eligible. If you don't reconfirm your eligibility, you may lose your Lifeline benefit. 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.

How Is "Household" Defined For Purposes Of The Lifeline Program? A "household" is defined as any individual or group of individuals who live together at the same address and share income and expenses. Lifeline provides one discount per household. 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 If I Am Receiving More Than One Lifeline Service? Households with duplicate Lifeline services (wireless and/or wireline) must select a single provider and de-enroll from other Lifeline programs. Consumers violating the one per household rule may be subject to criminal and/or civil penalties.

Does The Phone Service Have To Be In The Name Of The Person Receiving The Program Benefit? The phone service does not need to be in the name of the person receiving the benefit; however the person who qualifies for Lifeline must be a member of the same household as the subscriber.

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.

For More Information

To find more information about eligibility and how to apply for Lifeline and Link Up benefits, visit the Universal Service Administrative Company's website (www.usac.org/li/), call USAC's toll-free number (1-888-641-8722),



call the FCC's toll-free customer service number (1-888-CALL-FCC), or contact your local telephone company.

For information about other telecommunications issues, visit the FCC's Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau website (www.fcc.gov/consumer-governmental-affairs-bureau), or contact the FCC's Consumer Center by calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY; faxing 1-866-418-0232; or writing to:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

###

For this or any other consumer publication in an accessible format (electronic ASCII text, Braille, large print or audio), please write or call us at the address or phone number below, or send an email to FCC504@fcc.gov.

This document is for consumer education purposes only and is not intended to affect any proceedings or cases involving this subject matter or related issues.

Last Reviewed 08/15/12

