



## Lifeline: Affordable Telephone Service for Income-Eligible Consumers

### 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 on the USF, visit [www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/universal-service-fund](http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/universal-service-fund).

### What Benefits are Available Under the Lifeline Program?

**Lifeline** provides discounts on monthly telephone service (wireline or wireless) for eligible consumers. These discounts average \$9.25 per month, and may be more depending on the state. Federal rules prohibit eligible low-income consumers from receiving more than ONE Lifeline service per household. That is, eligible low-income consumers may receive a Lifeline discount on either a wireline or a wireless service, but 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 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.

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.

**Link Up** provides eligible low-income consumers 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 allows consumers to pay the remaining amount that they owe on a deferred schedule, interest-free. Federal rules prohibit eligible low-income consumers from receiving more than ONE Link Up discount at a primary residence. Eligible consumers may be eligible for Link Up again only after moving to a new primary residence. Link Up support is only offered to carriers who are building out infrastructure on Tribal lands so not all carriers may discount their activation fee.

Enhanced benefits are provided to low-income consumers who live on a federally recognized Indian Tribe's reservation, pueblo, or colony; on a former reservation in Oklahoma; within an Indian allotment; within an Alaska Native region established by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act; or Hawaiian Homelands held in trust pursuant to the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920. See our consumer guide on Promoting Telephone Subscribership on Tribal Lands ([www.fcc.gov/guides/promoting-telephone-subscribership-tribal-lands-0](http://www.fcc.gov/guides/promoting-telephone-subscribership-tribal-lands-0)) for more information.

### 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](http://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](http://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](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap);



- Supplemental Security Income (SSI): [www.ssa.gov/ssi](http://www.ssa.gov/ssi);
- Federal Public Housing Assistance (Section 8): [portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/topics/housing\\_choice\\_voucher\\_program\\_section\\_8](http://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](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/liheap);
- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF): [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/dts](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/dts);
- National School Lunch Program's Free Lunch Program: [www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/lunch](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/lunch);
- Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance: [www.bia.gov/WhoWeAre/BIA/OIS/HumanServices/index.htm](http://www.bia.gov/WhoWeAre/BIA/OIS/HumanServices/index.htm);
- Tribally-Administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TTANF): [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/dts](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/dts);
- Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR): [www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/fdpi/default.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/fdpi/default.htm);
- Head Start (if income eligibility criteria are met): [transition.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs](http://transition.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs); or
- State assistance programs (if applicable).

### Who Pays for the Lifeline Program?

All telecommunications service providers and certain other providers of telecommunications must contribute to the federal USF based on a percentage of their end-user telecommunications revenues. These companies include wireline telephone companies, wireless telephone companies, and certain Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) providers.

Some consumers may notice a "Universal Service" line item on their telephone bills. This line item appears when a company chooses to recover its USF contributions directly from its customers by billing them this charge. The FCC does not require this charge to be passed on to customers. Each company makes a business decision about whether and how to assess charges to recover its Universal Service costs.

### 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](http://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](http://www.lifelinesupport.org).

**What documentation do I need to provide at enrollment?** 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. 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.

**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.

**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.

**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. Consumers violating the one per household rule may be subject to criminal and/or civil penalties.

**Do I need to verify my eligibility?** Yes, every year. Once you are enrolled in Lifeline, you must verify 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.



## 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/](http://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](http://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](mailto: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

