

FCC Consumer Tip Sheet

New Changes to the Lifeline Program

Background

The federal Universal Service Fund (USF) supports the **Lifeline program**, which has helped low-income consumers afford phone service since 1984. The Federal Communications Commission with the help of the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) administers the USF.

What has changed?

To help ensure that Lifeline can reach as many low-income consumers as possible, the FCC has determined that eligible consumers can only receive one Lifeline-subsidized phone service per household. In addition, all new subscribers must demonstrate their eligibility at sign up and must re-certify their eligibility on an annual basis.

What Do I Do If I Have More Than One Lifeline Phone Service?

If you know that you are receiving more than one Lifeline benefit per household, you should immediately contact one of the providers to de-enroll from one of the Lifeline programs. Under FCC rules, you may only be enrolled in a single Lifeline program per household.

USAC—the group that administers the Lifeline program for the government—may notify you that you are enrolled in two programs and the letter will explain that you are permitted to have one Lifeline-subsidized phone service per household. The letter will explain that:

- You will have at least 30 days to choose which subsidized phone service to keep.
- The company or companies not chosen by you must de-enroll you from Lifeline within five days after being notified of your choice by USAC.
- However, to make sure the company you do not choose does not charge you higher rates that you are not expecting, you must call the phone company you do not want as your Lifeline provider to either disconnect service entirely or to discuss an appropriate non-Lifeline rate plan with the company.
- At the end of the process, you will have no more than one Lifeline-subsidized phone service.

How Do I Qualify for Lifeline Discounts?

The Lifeline program is available to qualifying consumers in every state, territory, and commonwealth. To qualify for Lifeline, subscribers must either have an income that is at or below 135% of the federal Poverty Guidelines, or participate in one of the following assistance programs:

- [Medicaid](#);
- [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#) (Food Stamps or SNAP);
- [Supplemental Security Income](#) (SSI);
- [Federal Public Housing Assistance](#) (Section 8);
- [Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program](#) (LIHEAP);
- [Temporary Assistance to Needy Families](#) (TANF);
- The [National School Lunch Program's](#) Free Lunch Program;
- [Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance](#);
- [Tribally-Administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families](#) (TTANF);
- [Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations](#) (FDPIR);
- [Head Start](#) (if income eligibility criteria are met); or
- State assistance programs (if applicable).

How Do I Prove that I am Eligible?

All new subscribers must demonstrate that they are eligible. In some states, a subscriber's eligibility may be able to be confirmed through a database. Where a database is not available, subscribers must show proof of eligibility by demonstrating that they meet the income qualifications or participate in a qualifying program listed above.

What Does One Per Household Mean?

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. A Lifeline Household Worksheet used for determining whether there are multiple households at one address is available on USAC's website at <http://www.usac.org/li/>.

For More Information

For information about other telecommunications issues, visit the FCC's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau Web site at <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 & Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, SW Washington, D.C. 20554

You can also view fact sheets on other FCC Universal Service programs on the FCC Web site.

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