

### Background

The Lifeline program provides discounts on monthly telephone charges, and Link Up provides a discount on the cost of commencing telephone service for qualifying low-income households. Lifeline and Link Up are supported by the federal Universal Service Fund (USF). The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), with the help of the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC), administers the USF. Here are some frequently asked questions about the Lifeline and Link Up programs.

### What Benefits are Available Under the Lifeline and Link Up Programs?

- **Lifeline** provides discounts on one basic monthly telephone service (wireline or wireless) for qualified subscribers. These discounts can be up to \$10.00 per month, depending on your state. Federal rules prohibit qualifying low-income consumers from receiving more than ONE Lifeline service at the same time. That is, qualifying low-income consumers may receive a Lifeline discount on either a home telephone or wireless telephone service, but may not receive a Lifeline discount on both services at the same time. 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 qualified subscribers with a one-time discount (up to a maximum of \$30) off of the initial installation fee for one traditional, wireline telephone service at the primary residence or the activation fee for one wireless telephone. It also allows subscribers to pay the remaining amount they owe on a deferred schedule, interest-free. Federal rules prohibit qualifying low-income consumers from receiving more than ONE Link Up discount at a primary residence. That is, qualifying low-income consumers may receive a

Link Up discount on installation or activation charges associated with either a home telephone or wireless telephone service. Qualifying consumers may be eligible for Link Up again only after moving to a new primary residence.

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; or within an Alaska Native region established by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. See our consumer guide ([www.fcc.gov/guides/promoting-telephone-subscribership-indian-country](http://www.fcc.gov/guides/promoting-telephone-subscribership-indian-country)) on Promoting Telephone Subscribership on Tribal Lands for more information on these enhanced Lifeline and Link Up programs.

### How Do I Qualify for Lifeline and Link Up Discounts?

The Lifeline and Link Up programs are available to qualifying consumers in every state, territory, commonwealth, and on Tribal lands. Eligibility criteria vary by state. For states that rely solely on the federal Lifeline and Link Up program eligibility criteria, subscribers 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:

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## How Do I Qualify for Lifeline and Link Up Discounts? (Con't.)

- Medicaid,
- Food Stamps,
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI),
- Federal Public Housing Assistance (Section 8),
- Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP),
- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), or
- The National School Lunch Program's Free Lunch Program.

For more information on Lifeline and Link Up, including eligibility requirements, visit the USAC website ([www.usac.org/li/low-income](http://www.usac.org/li/low-income)) or call 1-888-641-8722. You may also contact your local telephone company, state public service commission (PSC) or the FCC at 1-888-CALL-FCC. For your state's PSC contact information, visit the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners website ([naruc.org](http://naruc.org)), or look in your local telephone directory's blue pages or government section.

## Who Pays for the Lifeline and Link Up Programs?

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, paging service companies and certain Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) providers.

These charges usually appear as a percentage of a consumer's telephone bill. Companies that choose to collect Universal Service fees from their customers cannot collect an amount that exceeds their contribution to the USF. They

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also cannot collect from a Lifeline program participant USF fees on any services supported by universal service.

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. U.S. Government rules prohibit qualifying low-income consumers from receiving more than ONE Lifeline discount at the same time. If you are receiving more than one monthly Lifeline service, you should contact the telephone company that you do not want as your Lifeline provider to de-enroll from the program so you are left with a single Lifeline provider. Consumers found to be violating this rule may also be subject to criminal and/or civil penalties.

## For More Information

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

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