

Hold onto your “Lifeline!” Changes are coming!

The Federal Communications Commission has enhanced the Lifeline Assistance Program (Lifeline), connecting low-income consumers to voice services and, now, broadband. These changes will continue the mission of assisting all Americans to get and stay connected in today's technological world, while at the same time, relieving some of the burden on the carriers providing these services.

When do the changes take effect?

On Friday, December 2, 2016, Lifeline service providers will be prepared to comply with the rules from the Federal Communications Commission's 2016 Lifeline Modernization Order.

Has the Eligibility Criteria Changed?

Yes. Participants can no longer use Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or the National School Lunch Program to qualify. The Lifeline Program has been streamlined to limit the eligibility criteria to:

- SNAP
- Medicaid
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Federal Public Housing Assistance
- Income-based eligibility, and, additionally,
- The Veteran's Pension or Survivor's Pension benefit

There are no changes to the eligibility criteria for Tribal programs. Discounts are available for one telephone line per eligible household. A household is everyone (including children and people who are not related to you) who lives in your home and shares income and household expenses.

For income-based eligibility, an income level at or below 135 percent of the federal poverty guidelines is required.

If I want Lifeline for broadband, can I keep my Lifeline benefit on my voice service?

Customers may choose to use their Lifeline benefit on either fixed/mobile broadband or voice service (still only one benefit per household).

Are there Minimum Service Standards I should expect for Lifeline?

Yes. Lifeline-supported voice services must provide at least 500 minutes per month; mobile broadband must be a speed of at least 3G with a usage allowance of at least 500 MB; fixed broadband must be a speed of at least 10/1 Mbps with a usage allowance of at least 150 GB.

It's important to note that with prior notification to the FCC, some companies will not be required to meet service standards nor provide any broadband service. Contact your carrier to confirm Lifeline service offerings.

Can I change my provider whenever I choose?

Customers are required to remain with their service provider for a minimum of 60 days (voice) or 12 months (fixed/mobile broadband) before they can switch their benefit to a different provider.

Do I still have to be recertified each year?

Yes. Service providers must annually verify each customer's continued eligibility by the customer's service initiation anniversary date.

Has the Usage Criteria Changed?

Currently, Lifeline subscribers receiving service for which they are not billed (for example, prepaid wireless service) must use their service at least once in a 60 consecutive day period. Beginning December 2, 2016, the non-usage period has been shortened to 30 days. If a subscriber fails to use their service within the 30 day timeframe, the service provider is required to notify the subscriber of their pending de-enrollment. Subscribers subject to de-enrollment for non-usage will then have 15 days to use their service before they are de-enrolled from the Lifeline Program. Texts count as usage.

Who to Call for More Information?

- Call your current Lifeline provider for more information on broadband offerings.
- For program questions or complaints, call the Florida Public Service Commission's toll-free number: 1-800-342-3552, or send an e-mail via contact@psc.state.fl.us.
- For questions on income eligibility, call the Florida Office of Public Counsel toll free at 1-800-540-7039 or go to www.floridaopc.gov.
- Visit www.usac.org. The Lifeline Program is administered by the Universal Service Administrative Company, an independent, not-for-profit corporation designated by the Federal Communications Commission.