

Fact Sheet: The FCC and Lifeline

What is the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)?

The FCC is the federal agency in charge of regulating all telecommunications in the United States. In addition to telephones, they also set regulations for communications platforms like radio, TV, and the Internet.

What is the FCC proposing to do around Lifeline?

Recently, the FCC announced its intention to modernize the program to add broadband Internet as an eligible Lifeline service. That means that low-income families who meet the Lifeline income requirement or participate in certain other government programs could soon afford to have Internet access at home.

How should the FCC modernize Lifeline?

The FCC should modernize the Lifeline program by updating it to include broadband. However, millions of people still depend on the program to afford a telephone connection. As the FCC upgrades the program, it should ensure that families in need a telephone connection are still able to maintain service under the new modernized Lifeline.

What kind of internet access should people get?

The FCC must ensure that Lifeline subscribers get access to a quality, reliable Internet connection that meets the needs of these families. Lifeline Broadband should adopt standards for: high quality service and connections, speeds that support rich Internet applications, consumer protection, and affordability.

What should the FCC consider around eligibility?

Low-income Americans already participate in other federal low-income programs. Families who already participate in SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), Medicaid and SSI should be eligible for Lifeline. The FCC should do this in a way that does not compromise their privacy. A unique Universal Service PIN will provide stronger security and greater protection from identity theft than social security numbers.

What else should the FCC do to expand Lifeline?

Some states design their own Lifeline programs and many, like California, have already exceeded federal minimum requirements. The FCC or Congress should enact regulations that encourage states to contribute their own subsidies to Lifeline customers.