

# **Connect to California LifeLine and Save!**

**Discounted telephone service  
can help your family stay in touch**



A CONSUMER ACTION PUBLICATION

**California LifeLine provides discounts on basic residential wireline (home phone) or wireless telephone or broadband internet service to eligible low-income households. Consumers who qualify for California LifeLine pay a fraction of the regular cost for telephone connection or activation and monthly service.**

## **What benefits does California LifeLine offer?**

California LifeLine offers significant discounts on telephone service. The final monthly cost to you will depend on whether you choose wireline (home phone) or wireless (mobile phone) service and which service plan you select.

### **WIRELINE TELEPHONE SERVICE**

All California service providers providing traditional residential landline service offer the California LifeLine program.

Customers can qualify in one of two ways:

- By participating in an approved public assistance program
- By meeting the California LifeLine program's household income limits

Discounts for landline service under California LifeLine include:

- Service connection discount: You will be credited up to \$39 toward the cost of establishing new service once you are approved for California LifeLine.
- Service conversion discount: You will be credited up to \$39 toward the cost of converting your existing phone service to California LifeLine once you are approved for the program.
- Monthly service discount: California LifeLine provides a monthly service discount of up to \$17.90 on flat-rate local telephone service, which allows for unlimited local calling. (Rates vary by service provider, so compare plans if you have more than one option.)
- An extra California LifeLine connection: Qualify for a second California LifeLine line at the same discount if you or someone in your household needs a teletypewriter (TTY or TDD device) when using the telephone.
- As a California LifeLine customer, you are not assessed the following

surcharges on your telephone service: Federal Universal Service Fee, California LifeLine Telephone Service, California High Cost Fund-A, California High Cost Fund-B, California Advanced Services Fund, California Teleconnect Fund, California Relay Service and Communications Devices Fund, 911 Emergency System, State Regulatory Fee, and various state/local taxes. California LifeLine customers do not have to pay the monthly Federal Subscriber Line Charge, either.

When you enroll in California LifeLine, you will pay the regular rates for basic phone service and connection until your California LifeLine application is approved. (Ask for an interest-free payment plan to help pay any service connection charges and/or deposit for basic service.) Once approved, you will receive a bill credit with the California LifeLine discount retroactive to the date your service began or the date you applied for California LifeLine, whichever is later. Additionally, any deposit you paid for basic service will be refunded with a credit on your bill. If your bill has a net credit balance of \$10 or more, you may request a refund check from your California LifeLine service provider.

## **WIRELESS TELEPHONE SERVICE**

Wireless service is also eligible for discounts under the California LifeLine program.

Discounts for wireless service under the California LifeLine program include:

- **Service activation discount:** Customers establishing California LifeLine service for the first time or switching from another Lifeline service provider will be credited up to \$39 toward the cost of activating wireless service.
- **Monthly service discount:** California LifeLine provides a monthly service discount of up to \$17.90. (Many plans include unlimited talk and text, along with some gigabytes of data, but rates, data speeds and plan features vary by service provider, so compare available plans before choosing.)

Eligible households can receive a discount on, or reimbursement of, connection/activation charges for wireless service no more than twice per year. For any additional wireless connection/activation charges, which typically are incurred when switching carriers, the wireless provider either can waive the charge or they can charge you the full price for connection/activation.

California LifeLine does not offer a discount on wireless devices, but some carriers include a free handset with activation or contract renewal. (Participating carriers cannot require a contract that lasts longer than two years.) You cannot be charged a restocking fee if you return your Lifeline program device within three business days of activation.

You are entitled to free, unlimited access to customer service in the same language in which the California LifeLine service was originally sold or marketed.

## **BROADBAND INTERNET SERVICE**

Since 2020, Lifeline has allowed participants to use their discount to access broadband internet service instead of phone service. However, for many, if not most, consumers, it makes more sense to use the Lifeline discount for telephone service and apply for one of the discounted home broadband programs offered to eligible households by a handful of service providers. Learn more in Consumer Action's "Getting Up to Speed: Broadband internet for low-income households" brochure ([https://www.consumer-action.org/modules/articles/getting\\_up\\_to\\_speed](https://www.consumer-action.org/modules/articles/getting_up_to_speed)) and the accompanying "Low-income Broadband Plans" publication ([https://www.consumer-action.org/english/articles/low\\_income\\_broadband\\_plans](https://www.consumer-action.org/english/articles/low_income_broadband_plans)), which offers details about each plan to help you choose and apply.

**Note:** *Most Lifeline participants, as well as other low- and moderate-income households, are eligible to receive an internet service discount of up to \$30 per month (up to \$75 for residents of Tribal lands) under the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). The ACP replaced the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) program, which was a temporary service subsidy established to help consumers get and stay connected during the pandemic, on Dec. 31, 2021. While the ACP benefit of \$30 is lower than the \$50 the EBB provided, the ACP is a longer-term program. It also is available to more households.*

*Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer or tablet from participating providers if they contribute more than \$10 but less than \$50 toward the purchase price. A household is eligible if at least one member meets at least one of these criteria: qualifies for the Lifeline program; receives benefits through one of a number of government assistance programs; or has a total household income at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Learn more at the ACP website (<https://acpbenefit.org/do-i-qualify/>).*

*You can receive both Lifeline and Affordable Connectivity Program benefits*

at the same time. If you have Lifeline, you automatically qualify for the ACP, but enrollment isn't automatic—you need to contact a participating provider to sign up. You can apply your ACP benefit and your Lifeline benefit to the same or separate services. If you don't already have a service provider, or if your provider doesn't participate in the program, find a provider using the online search tool (<https://acpbenefit.org/companies-near-me/>).

## **Eligible for free toll blocking service**

Toll blocking prevents you or anyone else from making long distance or local toll calls from your landline telephone. You can still receive long distance calls and you can call toll-free numbers. You can place long distance calls using a prepaid telephone card.

## **Deposits for basic service waived**

As a California LifeLine customer, you do not have to pay a deposit for basic service. If you are initially charged a deposit when establishing service and applying for California LifeLine, the deposit will be credited back to you once you are approved for the program.

## **What does California LifeLine offer for people with hearing disabilities?**

If your household is eligible for the California LifeLine program and includes someone who is deaf or hard of hearing and needs a text telephone device (TTY/TDD) to use the phone, you may qualify for two telephone lines at California LifeLine rates. With two lines, a hearing-impaired person can communicate through a special relay service.

In order to qualify for two discounted telephone lines, you must meet the following requirements:

- **Your household is eligible for the first California LifeLine line.**
- **The disabled person in your household has and uses a text telephone device in the home.**

If your TTY/TDD is not issued by the Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program (DDTP), then you must submit a medical certificate showing that you or another household member needs a TTY/TDD to use the telephone. (Make copies to send with the application. Do not send your originals.)

It is also possible to use a wireless phone-compatible TTY with some wireless devices. In addition to being digital, the device also must have a 2.5mm audio or hands-free jack and a TTY mode/option in its menu. Not all digital cell phones are TTY-compatible. Ask the phone vendor or

service provider about capabilities, or look for the TTY symbol on the phone's packaging or in the user manual.

## **How do I start California LifeLine service?**

If you do not already have telephone service but believe you qualify for California LifeLine, contact either a service provider that provides local residential service for your area if you want a landline or a wireless service provider that participates in California LifeLine if you want a cell phone.

The CPUC offers a tool on its website ([www.californialifeline.com/en/provider\\_search](http://www.californialifeline.com/en/provider_search)) that enables consumers to search by ZIP code for California LifeLine service providers (wireline and wireless) that serve their area. For wireless service, it lists each provider's plan(s), minutes, text messages, data offered and the plan price, and offers the ability to compare plans side by side. Clicking the icon next to the provider's name displays a pop-up window with the company's telephone number and website, in case you have questions or are ready to sign up.

### **WIRELINE TELEPHONE SERVICE**

New landline customers establishing service and applying for California LifeLine will pay regular rates until approved. You will be required to pay the regular price for the service connection and any deposit for basic service, but interest-free payment plans are available to help pay for these upfront costs. Once approved, you will receive a bill credit with the California LifeLine discount retroactive to the date service began or the date you applied for California LifeLine, whichever is later. You will also be credited up to \$39 toward the service provider's regular connection charge. And you will receive a credit for any deposit paid for basic service.

If you already have regular landline telephone service, call your current provider at the number printed on your monthly telephone bill and ask to apply for California LifeLine. Once you are approved, you will be credited up to \$39 toward the cost of converting your account from regular service to California LifeLine. A credit for program discounts will be applied to your account retroactive to the date you applied for California LifeLine.

### **WIRELESS TELEPHONE SERVICE**

New wireless customers establishing service and applying for California LifeLine may have the option of getting approved for LifeLine before establishing service. Check with the participating wireless providers to

find out if you have to first establish regular service, or if you have to get approved for the program before establishing service, as processes vary by service provider.

If you have to establish regular service and pay regular rates first, once you are approved, your account will be credited retroactively to the date service began or the date you applied for California LifeLine, whichever is later. If you get approved for California LifeLine first, then your discounts start immediately upon establishing service.

If you already have regular wireless service from a participating California LifeLine wireless provider, contact your service provider to see what service plans are eligible for California LifeLine. You must be on an eligible plan to receive the California LifeLine discount. Once approved for California LifeLine, discounts will be provided upon your approval date.

There is an enrollment request freeze of 30 days for wireless service applicants. Consumers who request to enroll in California LifeLine with a wireless service carrier cannot request to enroll with a different carrier for 30 days, giving the program administrator time to process the application and provide a final eligibility decision. The service provider must notify consumers of the policies regarding the enrollment request freeze.

### **ONLY ONE LIFELINE ACCOUNT PER HOUSEHOLD**

A household must choose to get the Lifeline discount *either* on a home phone *or* on a cell phone, but not on both. Only households that are eligible for California LifeLine and include someone who needs a text telephone device (TTY/TDD) to use the phone may qualify for two lines at Lifeline rates. The discounts can only be for the primary residence. Households cannot get the discount from multiple phone companies. Discounts are non-transferable from one person to another.

Households that do not follow the California LifeLine “one discounted service per household” rule will lose their discounts and may face prosecution. Individuals can also be punished for giving false information to get the discounts.

### **APPLICATION PROCESS FOR CALIFORNIA LIFELINE**

The California LifeLine service provider will notify the California LifeLine Administrator for the CPUC. The Administrator will approve or deny your application based on your stated eligibility. The Administrator will send

you a California LifeLine application form, which is mailed in a pink envelope. You must either complete the form online using the personal identification number (PIN) that came with the application or mail your completed form to the address provided so that it is received by the due date printed on the form (approximately 44 days). Do not send the application form to your service provider.

You may elect to qualify for California LifeLine based on assistance program enrollment (“program-based”) or on your household income (“income-based”). You need to use just one of these two methods to determine your eligibility—not both. (See guidelines in the next section.)

You will receive a letter from the California LifeLine Administrator notifying you whether you have been approved or denied for California LifeLine. If your application is denied, you will remain on full-priced regular service (if you established service prior to applying for the program).

## **Am I eligible for California LifeLine service?**

Customers must qualify for California LifeLine under either program-based or income-based eligibility requirements:

### **OPTION 1: PROGRAM-BASED CERTIFICATION**

Complete the section of the application form titled “Program-based” if you qualify for California LifeLine based on receipt of benefits under any of the listed public assistance programs. Just fill in the circle next to the appropriate public assistance program for your household. You will need to provide proof of participation in the program along with your application form. Acceptable forms of proof include a copy of the current or prior year’s statement of benefits, a notice or letter of participation, a program ID card, or another official program document that shows you or your family member’s enrollment.

### **OPTION 2: INCOME-BASED CERTIFICATION**

If you are not enrolled in any of the qualifying public assistance programs, you must apply for California LifeLine based on your household income. Complete the section of the application form titled “Income-based.” You must provide proof that your total household income is at or below the California LifeLine maximum. Acceptable forms of proof include a copy of the front page of your prior year’s tax return, income statements or pay stubs for three consecutive months within the last year, the statement of benefits from programs such as



Social Security, VA, unemployment, workers' compensation, etc., or other documents that prove your household's annual income.

Send copies of all forms of proof; do not send originals.

You also must provide your housing status (temporary or permanent), your date of birth and the last four digits of your Social Security number or Tribal ID number. The household in which you are applying for California LifeLine must be your primary residence and you cannot currently receive Lifeline discounts. You cannot be a dependent on someone else's income tax return.

Qualified participants with a household member using a TTY device may be eligible for two phone lines with the California LifeLine discount.

## **PROGRAM-BASED GUIDELINES**

You qualify for California LifeLine if you or another person in your household is enrolled in any of the following public-assistance programs:

- **Medicaid/Medi-Cal**
- **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)**
- **CalFresh, Food Stamps or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**
- **Tribal TANF**
- **Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC)**
- **Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)**
- **Federal Public Housing Assistance or Section 8**
- **National School Lunch Program (NSLP) (free, not reduced, lunch program)**
- **Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance**
- **Head Start Income Eligible (Tribal Only)**
- **Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)**
- **Federal Veterans and Survivors Pension Benefit Program**
- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF):**
  - ❖ **California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKS)**
  - ❖ **Stanislaus Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (StanWORKS)**
  - ❖ **Welfare-to-Work (WTW)**
  - ❖ **Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN)**

## INCOME-BASED GUIDELINES

You qualify for California LifeLine if your total before-tax household income does not exceed these limits:

Household size	Yearly income *
1-2 members	\$32,500
3 members	\$37,700
4 members	\$45,900
Each additional member (over 4)	Add \$8,200 per person to \$45,900

\* Valid 6/1/23 through 5/31/24. Income limits are adjusted annually.

Income-eligible Lifeline applicants must provide supporting documentation such as tax returns and/or paycheck stubs in order to qualify. Send copies of all forms of proof; do not send originals.

Household income includes all taxable and non-taxable income received by everyone in your household. This includes, but is not limited to:

- **Wages and salaries**
- **Interest and dividends**
- **Spousal support (alimony) and child support**
- **Grants, gifts, allowances and stipends**
- **Social Security and pensions**
- **Public-assistance payments**
- **Rental income**
- **All cash and non-cash employment income (including self-employment)**

A "household" is any individual or group of individuals who are living together at the same address as one economic unit. A household may include related and unrelated persons. An "economic unit" consists of all adult individuals (18 and older) contributing to and sharing in the income and expenses of a household. If an adult has no or minimal income, and lives with someone who provides financial support to him/her, both people shall be considered as part of the same household. Children under the age of 18 living with their parents or

guardians are considered to be part of the same household as their parents or guardians.

## **PROOF OF INCOME**

Acceptable proof of income includes one or more of the following:

- **The first page of last year's state, federal or tribal tax return**
- **Current income statement from an employer or paycheck stubs for three consecutive months within the last 12 months**
- **Child support documents**
- **Statement of benefits from Social Security, Veterans Administration, retirement/pension, unemployment compensation or workers' compensation**
- **A divorce decree**
- **Other official documents that prove your income**

## **Residents of Tribal lands**

If you are living on federally recognized Tribal lands, deeper discounts apply on service plans, and they may be available for as low as \$0 per month. Contact your wireline or participating wireless provider for specific rate information.

Ask your California LifeLine service provider about Enhanced Lifeline or Tribal Lands Lifeline when you apply for California LifeLine service. Your service provider may require additional information from you, such as the name of the Tribal lands you live on. The process of enrolling in Enhanced Lifeline or Tribal Lands Lifeline varies by service provider. Some providers allow for a one-step process in which you apply for Enhanced Lifeline through the California LifeLine Administrator. Others require a two-step process in which you must get approved for California LifeLine first. Once you are approved, your California LifeLine service provider will ask you to complete and return a Tribal Lands request form in order to receive the deeper discount.

## **How do I continue to qualify for California LifeLine?**

All California LifeLine participants must verify each year that they still are eligible for the program. However, you don't need to send proof of income or public assistance program participation when you are verifying your eligibility.

The California LifeLine Administrator will mail you an annual renewal form 105 days before your enrollment anniversary date. The renewal

form will be mailed in a pink envelope. To remain in the program, you complete either the “Program-based” or “Income-based” section of the renewal form every 12 months. You can complete the form online or mail it in, but it must be received by the California LifeLine Administrator by the due date printed on the form.

If you are currently enrolled in any of the qualifying public assistance programs, you should complete the program-based section of the renewal form.

If you don’t receive benefits from any of the covered assistance programs, you must complete the income-based section of the renewal form.

If you or someone else in the household has a hearing disability and you have two California LifeLine lines, you must also complete the appropriate section of the form to keep both discounted lines.

It is very important that the California LifeLine Administrator receive your completed form by the due date on the form. (Complete it online or mail it in advance of the due date so that it arrives by the deadline.) Forms that arrive late will not be processed.

If you fail to verify your continued eligibility by the due date, your service provider will:

- **remove you from the California LifeLine program;**
- **change your service to full-priced service; and**
- **may require a deposit from you.**

Notify your California LifeLine service provider if you no longer qualify for California LifeLine discounts or a second California LifeLine connection, or you might have to repay the difference between discounts you received and the full price for regular service.

## **Deaf or hearing-impaired**

If you are requesting a second California LifeLine connection for a deaf or hearing-impaired household member, you must complete the appropriate section of either form and determine, according to the instructions, whether you will need to attach a medical certificate that verifies the person’s need for a teletypewriter, or TTY.

The documents you send will not be returned, so send copies, not original documents.

## **Which service plan should I choose?**

When choosing landline service, consider long distance and local toll call rates if you plan on making these types of calls. Also compare the cost of optional features, such as caller ID, call waiting and voicemail, if you would like to have those services.

When choosing wireless service, use the CPUC's online comparison tool ([www.californialifeline.com/en/provider\\_search](http://www.californialifeline.com/en/provider_search)) to do a side-by-side comparison of the wireless plans available to you. The tool compares numerous plan features, including minutes, text messages, amount and speed of data, the cost of additional data, and price. Access the tool by entering your ZIP code in the box under "Cell Phone Service" and then click the "Compare" button at the right side of the page for each of the plans you want to compare (up to three at a time).

## **Annual California LifeLine eligibility renewal**

Each year, you will be sent a form that you must fill out to renew your California LifeLine eligibility. You must "self-certify" your continuing eligibility by completing the brief form (print or online) and submitting it so it's received by the due date. The CPUC does not require that you submit proof of income or public assistance program participation when you renew.

## **What services are not included with the California LifeLine program?**

### **WIRELINE TELEPHONE SERVICE**

For residential landline service, long distance calls are not included in the California LifeLine program. Long distance charges are higher than local calls and can add up fast. As a California LifeLine customer, you can make long distance calls but you won't receive a discount on them.

If you qualify for California LifeLine, you are eligible for free "toll blocking," which prevents you or anyone else from making long distance or local toll calls from your wireline home telephone. You can still receive long distance calls and you can call toll-free numbers. You can place long distance calls using a prepaid telephone card.

Convenience features are not included in the California LifeLine program. As a California LifeLine customer, you can order optional services such as call waiting or caller ID, but you can't get a discount on these services. Before ordering any optional services, consider whether you will use them enough to make the cost worthwhile.

Installation of new telephone jacks (outlets) is not included in the California LifeLine program. California LifeLine gives you a discount on connection charges to start your telephone service. However, if you do not have a telephone jack in your home already, you will have to pay a separate installation charge to the company that puts in your outlet.

**Note:** *Under California law, landlords must provide one working jack for each rental unit.*

## **WIRELESS TELEPHONE SERVICE**

Wireless service offerings typically include nationwide calling, domestic text messaging, caller ID and voicemail. Check with participating wireless providers to find out exactly what each carrier's plans include, or use the CPUC's online plan comparison tool (available after you enter your ZIP code at [https://www.californialifeline.com/en/provider\\_search](https://www.californialifeline.com/en/provider_search); choose which plans to compare from search results). Discounts on handsets are not included in California LifeLine.

## **For more information**

**The California Public Utilities Commission**, the state's utility regulator, oversees the Lifeline program. If you have a complaint that you cannot resolve with your telephone company or the California LifeLine Administrator, contact the CPUC's Consumer Affairs Branch, 505 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco, CA 94102. Telephone: 800-649-7570 or 415-703-1170. Fax: 415-703-1158. E-mail: [consumer-affairs@cpuc.ca.gov](mailto:consumer-affairs@cpuc.ca.gov).

### **The California LifeLine Administrator's website**

([www.CaliforniaLifeLine.com](http://www.CaliforniaLifeLine.com)) provides general California LifeLine program information, sample forms and instructions, answers to frequently asked questions, telephone carrier listings and links to CPUC online information. For new service, call the California LifeLine Call Center at 866-272-0349 (English), 866-272-0350 (Spanish) or 866-272-0356 (Chinese). To check the status of an existing application, call the California LifeLine Administrator at 877-858-7463 (English/Spanish), 888-765-1566 (Chinese) or 888-858-7889 (TTY). For renewals, submit your form via the administrator's website ([www.CaliforniaLifeLine.com](http://www.CaliforniaLifeLine.com)) or call 866-272-0357 Monday-Friday, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

**The California Telephone Access Program** distributes telecommunications equipment and services to individuals with hearing, vision, mobility or speech limitations. English: 800-806-1191 (voice) and 800-806-4474 (TTY). Spanish: 800-949-5650 (voice) and

844-867-1135 (TTY).

**Consumer Action** provides consumer advice, guides consumers to complaint-handling agencies and distributes free consumer education publications. Chinese, English and Spanish are spoken. Telephone: 415-777-9635. Webmail: <https://complaints.consumer-action.org/forms/english-form>.

**Call your local service provider** for more information or to apply for California LifeLine discounts on your wireline (home) telephone service. If you already have service, the number should be on your telephone bill. For new service, use the CPUC's online Provider Search tool ([https://www.californialifeline.com/en/provider\\_search](https://www.californialifeline.com/en/provider_search)) to find carriers that serve your area; enter your ZIP code in the field under "Home Phone Service" or "Cell Phone Service." (Visit [https://www.californialifeline.com/es/provider\\_search](https://www.californialifeline.com/es/provider_search) for Spanish and [https://www.californialifeline.com/ch/provider\\_search](https://www.californialifeline.com/ch/provider_search) for Chinese.) If you do not have internet access, contact the California LifeLine Call Center at: 866-272-0349 (English), 866-272-0350 (Spanish) or 866-272-0356 (Chinese).

# Consumer Action

[www.consumer-action.org](http://www.consumer-action.org)

Through multilingual consumer education materials, community outreach and issue-focused advocacy, Consumer Action empowers underrepresented consumers nationwide to assert their rights and financially prosper.

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