

Lifeline: Putting Older Consumers on the Right Side of the Digital Divide

Lifeline is a federal program created in 1985 to help low-income consumers afford telephone service. The program now includes wireless service and broadband internet, and helps low-income older Americans in every state and territory afford voice and broadband service. But the FCC may devastate the program by drastically reducing the number of eligible service providers and limiting the reach of Lifeline. The FCC's proposals would increase costs and boot nearly 70% of Lifeline households from their current carrier.

The Lifeline program helps keep older consumers healthy and connected. Loneliness and isolation are major factors in the health and wellbeing of the [more than 11 million elders who live alone](#). Being able to call a friend or loved one can brighten an elder's day and it has even been shown to [slow cognitive decline](#).



Lifeline helps older consumers manage their health care needs. From scheduling appointments to keeping in touch with care providers, affordable telephone and broadband services help older Americans access 21st century medical solutions. Disabled elders and those with limited mobility benefit from access to telemedicine solutions that allow them to check vital signs and review and reorder medications from the comfort of their own home. Access to affordable communications services enables older Americans to stay on top of their health care needs—often improving their overall outcome.



Lifeline increases access to part-time employment opportunities.

Affordable broadband internet opens the door to employment opportunities for the [more than 9 million elders](#) still in the workforce past age 65. [74% of Lifeline subscribers](#) enjoy broadband access on their smartphone or computer – allowing seniors to access online job boards and other online resources to help them find and keep a job to make ends meet. The unfortunate reality of today's workplace often demands that employees of all ages and means have wireless phone access to receive "[just-in-time](#)" schedule changes and other updates.

Lifeline allows elders to get the help they need. Most older Americans can't get by on their own—often relying on help from loved ones or from state and federal programs. Without affordable phone service, seniors can't stay connected to the folks that can help them meet their basic needs, such as home health care and visiting nurses, and they can't pick up the phone to call for help.

Affordable broadband is critical for older consumers. Affordable broadband for low-income elders keeps them connected with their community and essential life-supporting programs. According to [the Alliance for Retired Americans](#), the proposed changes to the Lifeline program would affordable communications further out of reach for low-income elders.

Rationing Lifeline benefits and limiting service providers will increase costs and disrupt access for older consumers. The FCC must keep the Lifeline program's focus on people, and maintain affordable voice and broadband service for all.