

A Lifeline that Breaks Down Barriers to Affordable Communication

The federal Lifeline program, created in 1985, helps Montana’s low-income population afford voice, wireless, and broadband internet service. Nationally, nearly 13 million eligible older Americans, veterans, families with children, and other consumers in every state and territory have access to affordable voice and broadband service to keep them connected with employers, schools, and healthcare providers. With a focus on education and awareness, Lifeline could reach many more eligible low-income families. Nationally, just [1/3 of Lifeline eligible households](#) are currently enrolled.

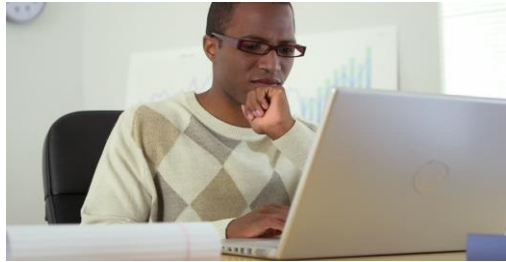
Lifeline Eligible Households in Montana	139,000
Montana Lifeline Subscriber Households	6,019
Statewide Participation Rate 4%	

- **Affordable communications help to reduce unemployment.** With access to affordable broadband and voice services, jobless Montanans can conduct employment searches, connect with employers, and complete online career development courses. Once employed, Lifeline subscribers can receive real-time updates from their employers.
- **Broadband access contributes to the continuing success of the American economy.** [Tomorrow’s jobs are in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and medicine](#)—career paths where computer literacy is essential. Connecting Lifeline eligible households with children to affordable broadband services is an investment in their future and in the future of the American labor force.
- **Access to telemedicine saves taxpayer dollars.** Affordable broadband opens up opportunities for low-income patients to access telemedicine programs that have been shown to reduce health care costs and increase outcomes for low-income [veterans](#) and [elders in nursing homes](#).

Lifeline Eligible Veterans in Montana	19,000
Montana Lifeline Eligible Households with Children	32,000

But the FCC is proposing changes that would devastate the Lifeline program. In addition to imposing harmful caps, the FCC plans to boot popular wireless carriers that do not own or operate their own infrastructure (e.g. SafeLink, iWireless). These companies, known as resellers, service nearly 2/3 of Lifeline customers nationwide.

Lifeline is a life-saving program for victims of domestic violence. An affordable wireless phone service provides a lifeline for victims who [often suffer from social isolation](#) at the hands of their abuser. A cell phone can make them feel less alone by connecting them with emergency and support services or a friend or family member they can call for help. The National Network to End Domestic Violence reports that domestic violence hotlines nationwide [typically receive over 20,200 calls a day](#), and callers need access to a phone.



Changes to the Lifeline program would disproportionately harm people of color. [While roughly ¼ of white households are eligible for the Lifeline program, ½ of black and Latino families qualify.](#) If allowed to function as intended, the Lifeline program can help close the gap in access to affordable communications for households of color.

Nationally, nearly 12 million households with children are eligible for the Lifeline program. Lifeline can help close the homework gap, the barrier to success students face when working on homework assignments without a reliable internet source at home. More than [5 million households with school-age children](#) do not have access to high-speed internet service at home while [70% of teachers](#) assign homework requiring it. The Lifeline program helps students find part-time employment, keeps parents connected to teachers and support staff, and helps make higher education a reality for students by connecting them to scholarships and financial aid programs.



Nationwide, more than 4 million veterans are eligible for Lifeline program benefits. [An estimated 10%-13% of current Lifeline beneficiaries are veterans](#) of U.S. military service, according to the FCC. Lifeline provides an essential service to veterans, active-duty servicemembers, and their families. The Lifeline program increases access to veteran employment services, opens up access to telemedicine options to manage chronic health conditions at home, and connects veterans to the support systems that help them adapt to civilian life.

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, increase access to part-time employment opportunities, and stay connected to loved ones and care providers.



Rationing Lifeline benefits and limiting service providers will increase costs and limit coverage options for thousands of Montana households. The FCC must keep the Lifeline program's focus on people and maintain affordable voice and broadband service for all.