



ACP Funding Drought: What You Need to Know and Alternative Options

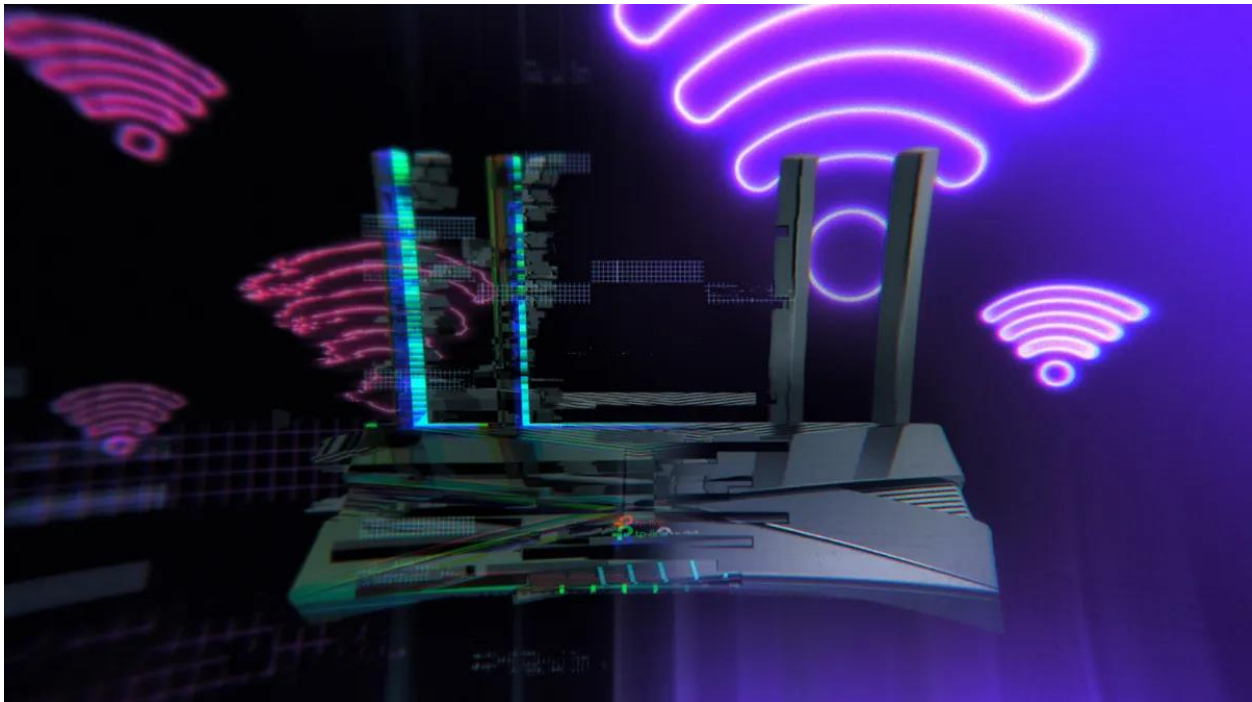
The Affordable Connectivity Program is almost broke, and most recipients will receive only partial payments this month.



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4 min read



Thanks to the ACP, more than 23 million households have been collectively saving almost \$700 million per month.

James Martin/CNET

We're approaching the end of one of the largest investments in US history when it comes to closing the digital divide. Starting this month, recipients of benefits from the Affordable Connectivity Program will see their home internet bills increase by \$30 to \$75 per month.

In a little over two years, the program enrolled more than 23 million low-income households. Nearly half of ACP subscribers have been military families, according to

a [White House fact sheet](#). Seniors, African Americans and Latinos have also relied on the ACP at higher rates.

"It's been the difference between choosing to have a roof over my head, whether to eat or whether to pay for the internet, which has things like virtual appointments with my psychiatrist," Kenneth Sigler, a small-business owner from Hernando, Mississippi, who uses the ACP, told CNET. "It basically helps me to keep from having to choose what bills I'm going to pay."

There is some hope that the program will be extended eventually -- President Joe Biden in April [called on lawmakers](#) to extend the program, and [several senators have continued to advocate for an extension](#) -- but for now, ACP subscribers will have to prepare for a world without the subsidy.

There's no one resource that can replace the \$14.2 billion ACP, but there are a variety of local and state subsidies, nonprofits and discounted plans from providers that can help ease the transition.

Lifeline

Lifeline is a federal subsidy that provides \$9.25 per month to low-income households for home internet or cellphone plans. Its eligibility requirements are a little stricter than those of the ACP. Your income must be 135% or less than the Federal Poverty Guidelines, or \$40,500 for a family of four.

Lifeline income requirements

Household size	48 contiguous states, DC and territories	Alaska	Hawaii
1	\$19,683	\$24,584	\$22,640
2	\$26,622	\$33,264	\$30,618
3	\$33,561	\$41,945	\$38,597
4	\$40,500	\$50,625	\$46,575
5	\$47,439	\$59,306	\$54,554

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You can also get Lifeline if you (or someone who lives with you) participates in any of the following programs:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as Food Stamps)
- Medicaid
- Supplemental Security Income, or SSI
- Federal Public Housing Assistance, or FPHA
- Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefit

If you live in California, Oregon or Texas, you must check with your internet provider or visit your state's website to apply for the program.

Read more: The FCC Votes to Restore Net Neutrality. Here's What It Could Mean for You

State and local resources

Some states and cities across the country offer their own local versions of the ACP to help low-income households pay for internet. California, for example, has a website that allows you to search affordable options in your ZIP code based on various eligibility criteria, and Oregon provides an enhanced Lifeline benefit of \$19.25 monthly.

Cities like Chicago offer free internet to families in Chicago public schools and eligible city colleges through its Chicago Connected program. The best way for you to find these resources is by going to Google and searching for "[location] internet resources."

You can also check to see how your state is using the \$2.75 billion allocated in the Digital Equity Act to help close the digital divide.

Low-income programs from internet providers

Many internet providers have their own discounted plans available for low-income households, including AT&T, Spectrum and Xfinity. Requirements vary, but they're usually similar to the ACP: one must meet certain income requirements or participate in a federal program like SNAP or the National School Lunch Program.

Internet provider discounts

Program	Monthly price	Maximum speed
<u>Access from AT&T</u>	\$30	100Mbps
<u>Astound Internet First</u>	\$10	50Mbps
<u>Cox Connect2Compete</u> (for families)	\$10	100Mbps
<u>Cox ConnectAssist</u> (for individuals)	\$30	100Mbps
<u>Mediacom Connect2Compete</u> (for families)	\$10	25Mbps
<u>Optimum Advantage</u>	\$15	50Mbps
<u>Spectrum Internet Assist</u>	\$25	50Mbps
<u>Verizon Forward</u>	\$20-\$81	50-2,000Mbps
<u>WOW! Internet Select 50</u> (for families)	\$10	50Mbps
<u>Xfinity Internet Essentials</u>	\$10	50Mbps

To determine which providers are available in your area, enter your address on the Federal Communication Commission's broadband map.

Nonprofit organizations

There are a number of nonprofits around the country with the goal of closing the digital divide. Some help with monthly internet costs, while others provide devices that connect you to the internet. These organizations all received nonprofit status from the IRS and were vetted by watchdogs like Charity Navigator and Guidestar.org:

- **Connect All:** Part of the InterConnection nonprofit, Connect All provides refurbished computers to low-income users. Eligibility requirements are similar to those of the ACP: Participation in federal programs like SNAP or SSI will automatically qualify you for devices.
- **EveryoneOn:** EveryoneOn is one of the most wide-ranging internet nonprofits out there. You can use its locator tool to find low-cost plans and computers in your area, enroll in digital skills courses and find local events that distribute devices.

- **Human-I-T:** This nonprofit accepts donations from corporations, refurbishes the devices and sells them at a discount to veterans, low-income households, seniors and other groups that qualify. It also offers low-cost internet through its mobile hotspot devices for less than \$30 per month.
- **Internet for All Now:** This is an initiative of the nonprofit California Emerging Technology Fund that helps Californians find low-cost plans in their area. People in California can call and speak with a trained expert, but the website has resources that anyone in the country can use.
- **National Digital Inclusion Alliance:** The NDIA is a well-known hub for research and policy aiming to close the digital divide, and while it doesn't offer low-cost internet itself, it's a helpful resource for navigating what's out there. You can also use this map of NDIA affiliates providing broadband adoption services to see what's available in your area.

Explore other internet plans in your area

If your bill's going up dramatically with the end of the ACP, another option is to search for other internet providers in your area. Most ISPs offer plans under \$50 monthly, and you can often find additional discounts for things like bundling with a cellphone plan or signing an annual contract.

Purchasing your own equipment can also save you some extra money each month. It usually costs around \$15 to rent a modem and router from your internet provider, while you can buy your own for as little as \$100, especially if you go with refurbished equipment. That said, you'll need to ensure your modem is compatible with your provider before you purchase.