A program for cheaper internet for low-income Americans launches today

Starting today, eligible US residents can apply for help with their internet bills under the new Affordable Connectivity Program. The program launched today with $14.2 billion from the bipartisan infrastructure law passed in November.

Households can apply to take up to $30 a month off their internet service bill. For households on qualifying Tribal lands, the discount is up to $75 per month. The program could help to connect millions of people to the internet who haven’t had access to it at home, especially in communities that have historically faced more barriers to getting online.

Almost a third of people living on Tribal lands lacked high-speed internet at home in 2017, according to a report by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). That’s compared to just 1.5 percent of city-dwellers without high-speed internet access. On top of limited infrastructure, cost is often another barrier. The United States has the second-highest broadband costs out of 35 countries studied by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). And American Indian and Alaska Native people have the highest poverty rate of any race group in the US, according to the US Census Bureau.

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To even apply for the Affordable Connectivity Program, someone has to be able to get online. They’ll need to visit ACPBenefit.org to apply or print out a mail-in application.

Folks eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program can also qualify for a one-time $100 discount for a laptop, tablet, or desktop computer from participating providers (including T-Mobil, AT&T, and Verizon).

The Affordable Connectivity Program is basically a long-term replacement of the temporary Emergency Broadband Benefit Program started to help Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic. That program offered a higher discount of $50 a month for households *not* living on Tribal lands, and will continue until March 1, 2022.

While the payout will be lower for some households, the FCC expanded the criteria for who can apply. Being eligible for WIC (the food assistance program for women, infants, and children) now also makes a household eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program. And a household with an income that’s at or below 200 percent of federal poverty guidelines is also newly eligible.

There’s more funding on the way to close the digital divide in the US. The new $1 trillion infrastructure law includes $65 billion to boost broadband access. More than 30 million Americans live somewhere without adequate broadband infrastructure, according to a Biden administration fact sheet.

https://www.theverge.com/2021/12/31/22861200/application-now-open-discounted-internet-bills-fcc-affordable-connectivity-program