

Connecting Communities: Introducing the Emergency Broadband Benefit

New program will help people in need afford essential internet services

Reliable and affordable access to the internet is essential for everything from ensuring home-bound people have access to services, to scheduling and accessing healthcare, to ensuring students have the ability to engage in remote learning. Unfortunately, people in the U.S. pay some of the [highest prices in the world to access the internet](#). Internet access has always been a widespread problem across the country, and COVID-19 has further worsened the issue of internet affordability.

At the start of 2021, Congress adopted a new program, the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB), to help make sure that more people can afford to stay connected to the internet during the pandemic. Because it is brand new, many people do not know this benefit exists yet. The program will not launch before the end of February and the rules are still being finalized. This document covers the basics of the benefit and includes resources for people interested in learning more. Once the program is up and running, we hope that you'll join the many groups coming together to raise awareness of this program among eligible people in your community. Here's what you need to know:

What is the Emergency Broadband Benefit program? The program will give eligible households a monthly discount of up to \$50 (\$75 on tribal lands) on the monthly bill that people receive from their internet company. In addition, consumers can buy a low-cost device for between \$10 and \$50 from their internet company, if their internet company chooses to participate in this part of the benefit program. The EBB program will be administered by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

Who is eligible for the EBB program? An eligible household must have a member who meets any of the following criteria:

1. Is **unemployed and/or experienced a substantial loss of income after February 29, 2020;**
 - a. People could qualify if they have a layoff or furlough notice, have **applied** (not necessarily approved) for unemployment insurance benefits, or have similar documentation.
2. Is a current **Pell Grant** recipient;
3. Is approved to receive benefits under the school **free and reduced price lunch program;**
4. Is eligible for the FCC's existing [Lifeline](#) low-income discount program; or

5. Is eligible for an **existing low-income internet plan** from their internet company.

When will the EBB program start and how long will it last? While the EBB program does not yet have an official start date, the program could take several months to go into effect according to the FCC. The FCC will issue its rules by February 26, 2021. The program will end when the \$3.2 billion allocated to the program runs out, or six months after the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services declares an end to the COVID-19 public health emergency, whichever comes first.

Can I get my discount with any internet company? Internet companies will decide whether to participate in the program, but you can choose from any company that participates. We currently expect that many major internet companies will participate in the EBB program.

I have an unpaid internet bill, am I still eligible? Yes. Households can still qualify for the EBB program if they have unpaid bills with internet plans as long as they still meet the eligibility requirements.

I want to know more. Are rules and regulations of the EBB program already finalized? Not yet. The FCC has until February 26, 2021 to establish program rules and processes. Local officials, community leaders and organizations have already submitted comments to the FCC regarding program promotion, eligibility and transparency. More information will be coming out soon.

Do I have any rights if I participate in the EBB program? Yes. Internet companies may not: 1) require consumers to pay an early termination fee if they sign a long-term contract or 2) subject consumers to a mandatory waiting period. Consumers must comply with the internet company's other terms and conditions. Companies cannot collect more money than the cost of the product.

Will I get a check for my subsidy? No. You will receive a discount and funds will go directly to the internet company.

[Want to know more?](#)

There are still many decisions being made about this program, and the information in this introduction is subject to change. If you would like to know more, please contact brandon@mediajustice.org.

Other Resources:

- [Creating \(Finally\) an Emergency Broadband Benefit](#)
- [NDIA Releases a COVID Relief Bill Overview](#)