

## ACCESS TO BROADBAND

Congress has passed several rounds of financial assistance and relief in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including most recently the *American Rescue Plan*. The *American Rescue Plan* includes the following assistance for broadband connectivity.

### \*\*\* WHAT IS NEW IN THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN \*\*\*

The *American Rescue Plan* provides \$7.2 billion in new funding for public and private schools and public libraries to purchase Internet access and connected devices. Details are below.

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### E-Rate Support

- The *American Rescue Plan* provides \$7.2 in additional funding through the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) universal service schools and libraries program (also known as the E-Rate).
- This funding can be distributed to public and private schools and public libraries to purchase Internet access and connected devices (including hotspots, routers, modems and computers) for students, educators and library patrons who lack home Internet access, a connected device, or both. Schools and libraries would be eligible to purchase eligible services and equipment for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic plus at least one year.
- Schools and libraries would be reimbursed through the program for 100% of the costs associated with the eligible services and equipment.
- The FCC will likely issue rules regarding this additional funding in May 2021.

You may also be eligible for relief provided by the *Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021* (COVID relief law) that Congress passed in December 2020.

### Emergency Broadband Connections

- The COVID relief law provided \$3.5 billion to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to establish a program to help low-income Americans, including those economically-challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic, get connected or remain connected to broadband.
- The program will supply a \$50 per month subsidy to qualifying households to help them afford broadband service and an internet connected device.
- The subsidy increases to \$75 per month for those living on tribal lands.
- Qualifying households will include households with at least one individual who is eligible for the [Lifeline Program](#), or the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#) (SNAP), or a [Pell Grant](#), or who has experienced a substantial loss of income since February 29, 2020. Other households may qualify depending on rules established by the FCC.
- In March 2021, the FCC announced rules for providers to participate in the program. It is expected individuals will be able to enroll in this program with their provider in April 2021. Please check with your provider then to find out if you are eligible.

### Connecting Minority Communities

- The COVID relief law also established an Office of Minority Broadband Initiatives at the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA).
- The office will appropriate \$285 million to support Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal colleges and universities, and minority serving education institutions.

**Tribal Broadband Connectivity Grant Program**

- The COVID relief law also created a \$1 billion grant program at the NTIA to support broadband deployment and infrastructure, telehealth, broadband mapping and affordability, distance learning, and digital inclusion for Native American communities.
- A minimum of \$30 million is designated for the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands to support Native Hawaiian communities.

**Broadband Expansion for Unserved Americans**

- The COVID relief law established a \$300 million broadband deployment grant program at NTIA to support broadband infrastructure deployment to areas lacking broadband, with a focus on rural areas.
- The grants will be prioritized to qualifying partnerships between state and local governments and fixed broadband providers.

**Improving Broadband Mapping**

- The COVID relief law directed \$65 million to the FCC to develop more accurate and granular availability maps as directed by Congress in the Broadband DATA Act. This is in addition to the \$33 million appropriated by Congress to improve mapping

**Remove and Replace Insecure Communications Equipment**

- The COVID relief law provided \$1.9 billion to the FCC's reimbursement program to remove insecure communications equipment from the nation's communications networks.

**Broadband Loans and Grants for Rural Areas**

- The COVID relief law provided \$767 million to the Department of Agriculture to provide and expand grants under the Community Connect, Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program, and ReConnect Pilot Program.

**Resources from ISPs**

- Depending on your provider, you may have access to new free or low-cost internet resources during the COVID-19 crisis. Please check each company's website (linked below) as plans and updates may change for current and new customers.
  - [AT&T](#)
  - [CenturyLink](#)
  - [Charter Spectrum](#)
  - [Comcast/Xfinity](#)
  - [Hawaiian Telecom](#)
  - [T-Mobile/ Sprint & Boost Mobile](#)
  - [Verizon](#)