



2026 Annual Subscriber Survey

Understanding the needs, challenges, and experiences of
Lifeline subscribers across America.

83,370

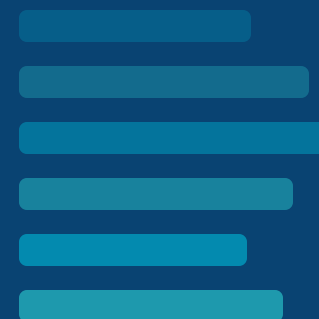
TOTAL RESPONSES

20

QUESTIONS ANALYZED

2026

SURVEY YEAR



KEY FINDINGS

Survey at a Glance

83,370 Lifeline subscribers responded to this annual survey across 20 questions covering service needs, financial access, demographics, and digital access.

72%

say all Lifeline services — talk, text, and data — are equally important

96%

cannot afford to pay any monthly fee for Lifeline service

43%

had no access to the internet before enrolling in Lifeline

91%

prefer mobile wireless with hotspot over fixed broadband

69%

actively ration their data to avoid running out each month

80%

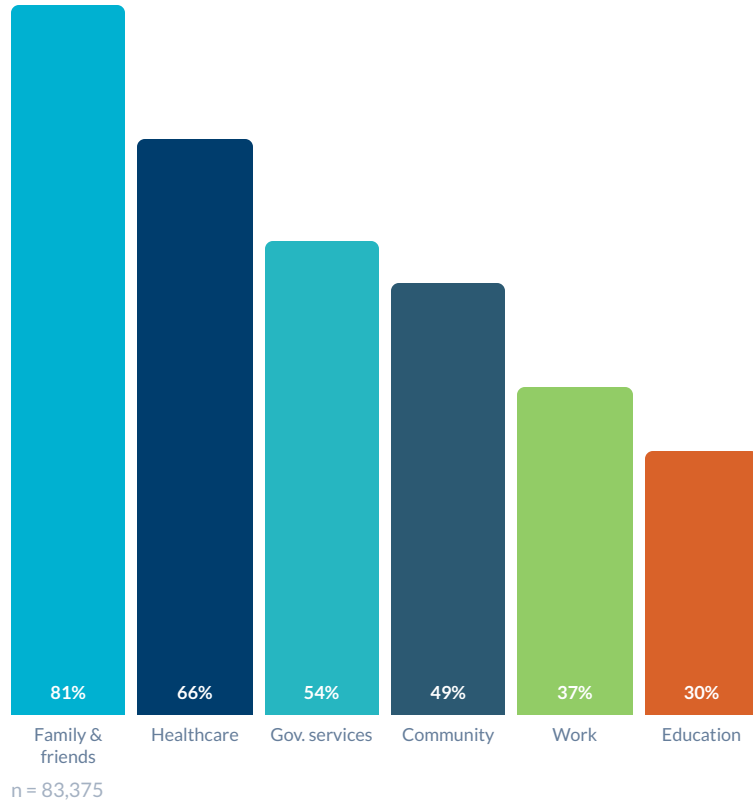
report making less than \$20,000 annually

Highlights for Policy Makers 1 of 2

Q4

In the past year, what have you used your Lifeline service for?

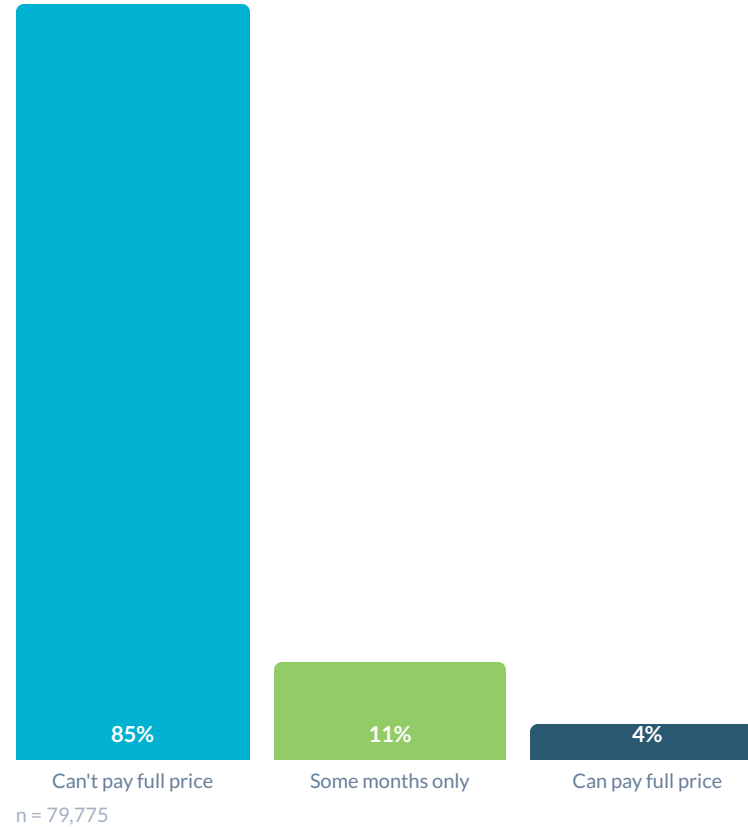
81% used Lifeline to connect with family and friends



Q6

If you did not have your Lifeline service, what would happen?

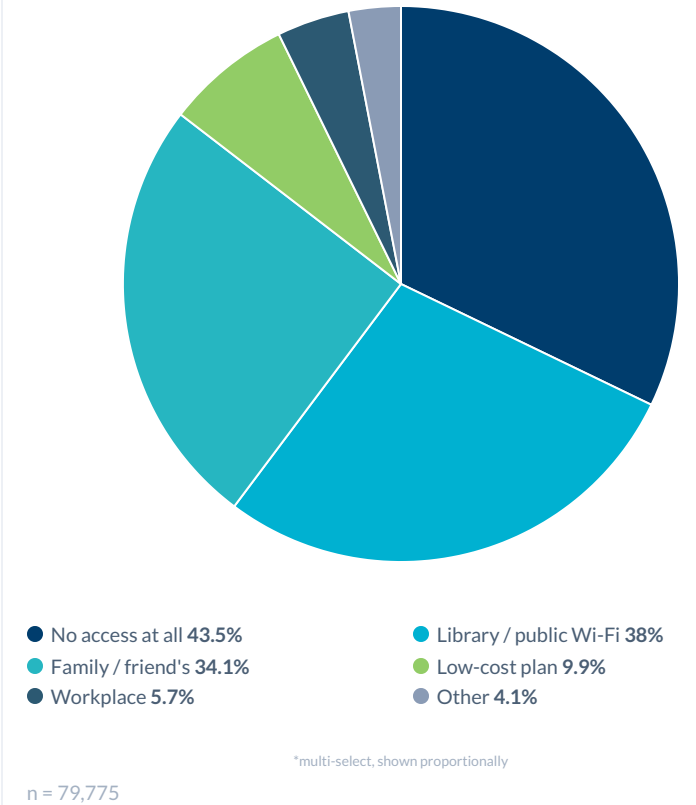
85% could not afford the full undiscounted price for service



Q7

How did you access the internet before enrolling in Lifeline?

43% had no access to the internet before enrolling in Lifeline

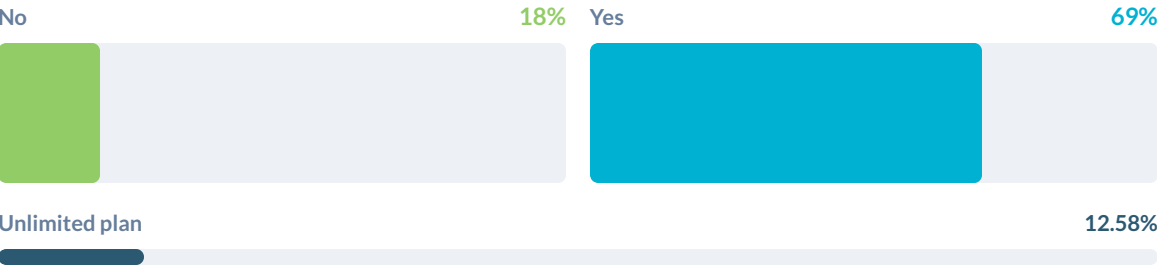


Highlights for Policy Makers 2 of 2

Q9

Do you limit your data use to make sure you don't run out?

69% actively ration their data every single month

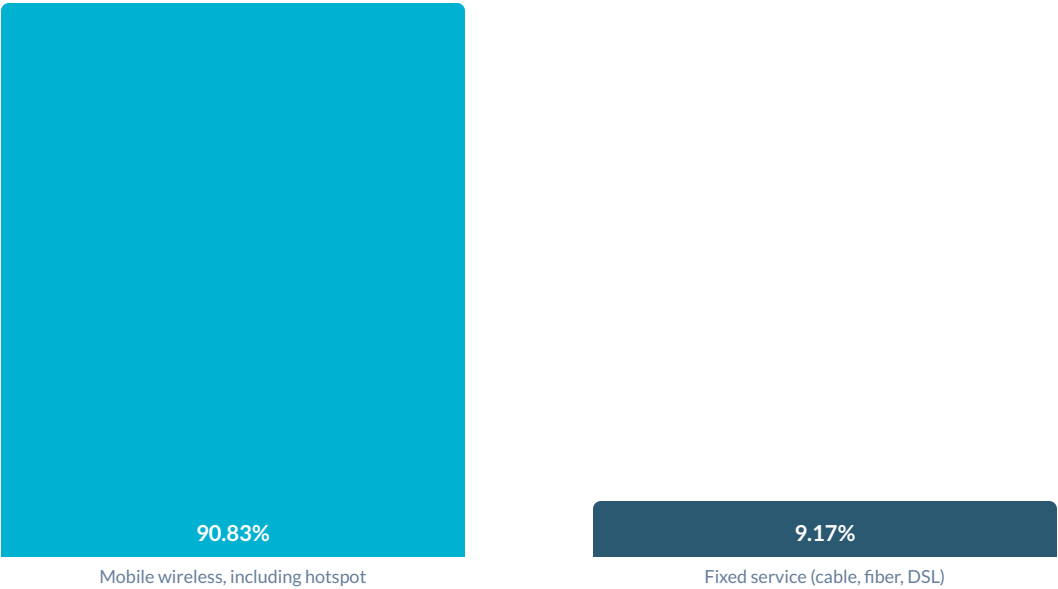


n = 79,775

Q2

Which type of Lifeline service best meets the broadband, internet access, and data needs of your household?

91% say mobile best meets the broadband, internet access, and data needs of their household



n = 83,374

Key Takeaways for Policy Makers

01



Lifeline is a lifeline — literally

96% of subscribers cannot afford any monthly fee, and 85% would lose service entirely without the discount. For most enrollees, there is no alternative.

02



Digital exclusion was the default before enrollment

43% had zero internet access before Lifeline. The program is the primary — and often only — on-ramp to connectivity for nearly half of all subscribers.

03



Current benefit levels leave subscribers in scarcity

69% actively ration data every single month to avoid running out. Subscribers are managing a benefit shortage and not accessing the internet freely.

04



Mobile access allows for enhanced connectivity

91% say mobile best meets the broadband, internet access, and data needs of their household.

05



Lifeline provides connectivity needed to improve outcomes

66% use their Lifeline service for healthcare, 37% used the service for employment, 30% for educational purposes, and 81% use it to stay connected to family and friends.

Conclusions

1 

Lifeline functions as essential broadband infrastructure

With 96% unable to afford any monthly fee and 85% who would lose service entirely without the discount, Lifeline is the foundational layer of digital access — not optional assistance.

2 

The digital divide is structural, not incidental

43% had zero internet access before Lifeline and 60% are unemployed or disabled. Lifeline is the primary policy instrument bridging that gap.

3 

Benefit levels fall short of real-world data demands

69% ration data monthly and 37% don't know how much they need. The current benefit level enables incremental access, but not the sustained connectivity required for healthcare, work, and education.

4 

Mobile solutions meet consumer preferences and are a necessity

90% prefer mobile wireless with hotspot over fixed broadband. For a population that is disproportionately homeless or transient, being mobile is a necessity, and policy must reflect that reality.