

Connectivity for All

All People, Documented or Not, Should Have Affordable Internet Access

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BEFORE YOU READ: How does internet access make a difference in your life?

A Government Program Designed to Make the Internet More Affordable

For millions of Americans who are undocumented immigrants, the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) provides access to affordable broadband service. Unfortunately, undocumented individuals sometimes shy away from government programs like the ACP and have challenges accessing these vital services. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) should make sure that undocumented immigrants feel safe accessing ACP benefits, which could improve their quality of life.

How Does It Work?

The FCC set up the ACP program to help close the “digital divide.” The digital divide refers to the gap in technology access between those who have more income and those in poverty. This gap can affect individuals’ ability to find jobs, learn new skills, complete school assignments, and connect with family members. A household is eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program if the household income is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (see chart on next page) or if it is receiving assistance from another government program. The benefit provides a discount on internet service and a discount on purchasing a device. The ACP program helps families afford the broadband service necessary for work, school, and healthcare opportunities, which is critical in today’s society.



Some May Feel Reluctant

Although the ACP is designed to help everyone, undocumented immigrants might feel nervous about using it. This reluctance is not surprising when you consider what some lawmakers say. For example, Nathan Simington, a member of the Federal Communications Commission, wrote that he was concerned about undocumented immigrants participating in the ACP. He said that their inclusion would be “another avenue for waste, fraud, and abuse.” He demanded that people using the ACP give their Social Security number to enroll, thus disqualifying undocumented individuals from receiving services.

In addition, Simington makes accusations without evidence that undocumented families will not pay their bills and will leave service providers on the hook. Such hostile words about undocumented people could make it hard for many families to seek the assistance they need.

Make the Program More Accessible

For this reason, we must take steps to ensure undocumented immigrants feel safe accessing the ACP and similar benefits. Local officials should increase community outreach to educate immigrant families about public programs. They should employ trusted community leaders to provide workshops that explain how families can apply for services. Also, local leaders should make materials available in multiple languages and hire translators to communicate information to non-English speakers. There should be social media campaigns and ads in public places that help explain the resources available. These efforts could give undocumented immigrants more access to life-changing resources.

Participation Without Fear

Ultimately, if the goal is to break the cycle of poverty, undocumented immigrants must have equal access. The ACP is a step in the right direction for our society. It is a vital step towards universal and equitable internet connectivity, but we can do more. We can make sure that undocumented immigrants feel safer about participating in programs that will improve their lives. Participation in the ACP and similar services can begin to break the cycle of poverty that low-income families face, and it improve the quality of life for everyone in our society. To promote connectivity for all, we should lead with empathy and compassion instead of fear.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the author, who should have affordable internet access? Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. Visit <https://www.fcc.gov/acp> to find out more about the Affordable Connectivity Program. Consider applying. Tell others about the ACP.
3. Make a flyer or a presentation about how to apply to the ACP and share it with others in your program.

Federal Poverty Level

In 2023, the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is as follows:

| Family Size | Annual Income | 200% |
|-----------------|---------------|------|
| 1 | \$14,580 | |
| 2 | \$19,720 | |
| 3 | \$24,860 | |
| 4 | \$30,000 | |
| Each additional | \$5,140 | |

Source: <https://povertylevelcalculator.com/>. Calculate 200% of the FPL and add it to the chart above.

How is the Federal Poverty Level determined? It is based on a formula that government officials created back in the 1960s. Is it a good way to measure poverty? Research it to find out more. <https://prospect.org/day-one-agenda/rethinking-the-poverty-measure/>

Sources:

FCC Commissioner Targets Undocumented Immigrants
<https://progresschamber.org/fcc-commissioner-targets-undocumented-immigrants/>

STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER NATHAN SIMINGTON APPROVING IN PART, CONCURRING IN PART
<http://progresschamber.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Statement-of-FCC-Commissioner-Simington-on-ACP.pdf>

How Federal and State Leaders Can Reach Immigrants and Build Their Trust in the Safety Net
<https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/how-federal-and-state-leaders-can-reach-immigrants-and-build-their-trust-safety-net>

Affordable Connectivity Program
<https://www.fcc.gov/acp>

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