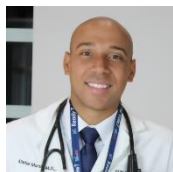


## Leveraging Healthcare Settings to Link Patients with the Affordable Connectivity Program



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The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recently [reported](#) an astonishing 12.9 million American households have signed up for the [Affordable Connectivity Program](#) (ACP), a national program that facilitates internet access by alleviating the cost of internet service plans for qualifying households. This means there are still 38 million eligible American households missing out on free money to pay their internet bills – and they need to sign up sooner rather than later for the program. *(It's predicted to expire [in mid 2024](#)).*

**The ACP program provides a subsidy of up to \$30/month for lower-income households (\$75/month for households on tribal lands) on any internet service plan offered by a participating provider. It also provides a one-time \$100 subsidy for a desktop, laptop, or tablet computer.**

**Healthcare may be the missing piece that can help link vulnerable patients to affordable internet.**

As healthcare professionals, we know internet access is more than a fundamental utility; it's a basic human right and is considered a [social determinant of health \(SDOH\)](#).

Consider these statistics:

- Almost 1 in 4 Americans [do not have a reliable home internet connection](#).
- Nearly 40% of adults above the age of 65 [do not have a smartphone](#).
- Only 58% of Black and 57% of Hispanic Americans [own a computer](#) compared to 82% of White Americans.

Increasing enrollment in the ACP could have a potentially substantial impact on closing the digital divide and help vulnerable patient populations access telehealth and digital health information at large.

**Link Health can help you and your hospital or clinic get set up with free resources to start signing up patients for ACP.**

Launched at Massachusetts General Hospital in November 2022, [Link Health](#), leverages the health sector to enroll low-income patients into the ACP program – and their free tools and resources are already being leveraged by other healthcare organizations across the country in partnership with community health centers.

- **In-person sign-up events.** South End Community Health Center in Boston partnered with Link Health in November 2022 to run in-person sign-ups and was able to successfully enroll dozens of families into the program.
- **Free posters and handouts for waiting areas.** [Massachusetts General Hospital](#) invites patients to enroll themselves in the ACP while they wait in healthcare settings.
- **ACP enrollment information included in discharge paperwork.** [Medicaid patients automatically qualify](#) for the ACP and yet, only 13% are currently enrolled. Health sites could also consider institutionalizing active ACP enrollment into the discharge process itself. For example, hospital or clinic staff – especially those working as digital health navigators – could (with proper patient consent) input patient data such as name, address, date of birth, etc. that they already have collected into the [FCC Form 5645](#) to automatically enroll eligible patients in the ACP upon discharge.

With less than 25% of all eligible households signed up for the ACP, it's evident that we have work to do to connect the dots.

**[Get in touch today.](#) Together, we can help close the digital divide *one patient at a time.***

*[A Healthier Democracy](#) is a 501(c)3 platform launched at Harvard Medical School for collaboration and organizing at the intersection of health and civic engagement to maximize collective impact on pressing health equity challenges.*

## **About the Authors**

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*Dr. Alister Martin is an ER physician and an Assistant Professor at Harvard Medical School and Harvard Kennedy School. He was a former Biden Administration appointee serving as an advisor in the Office of the Vice President under Kamala Harris as an appointed White House Fellow. He currently serves as CEO of A Healthier Democracy, a nonprofit healthcare organizing incubator that leverages healthcare workers and healthcare settings as a place to build programs and movements that serve the needs of vulnerable patients.*

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