

Laura Garcia

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) helps older adults pursue their interests and stay connected.

Laura Garcia retired from the San Antonio Independent School District close to 10 years ago. She held a number of jobs, most recently in computer labs and assisting first graders in the parental aide program. Garcia, who has three grown sons, loves computers and technology but she lives on a fixed income and did not own a computer or smartphone of her own.



That changed in April 2022 when Garcia was recruited into a University of Texas San Antonio program designed to improve both the health and technological literacy of older adults. The program was launched in partnership with San Antonio's Department of Human Services and Senior Planet from AARP, a program of Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) from AARP.

Participants were given free iPads and one year of free internet access. They participated in five-week technology training classes in the use of their new iPads, followed by an online 15-week nutrition course.

Garcia first heard about the ACP during the Senior Planet iPad Essentials class. After her year of free internet service ended in April, she applied for the ACP. Faced with the loss of service, Garcia was greatly relieved when she began receiving the benefit in May 2023, giving her ongoing connectivity to her friends and family — including three granddaughters — and allowing her to communicate online with her doctors and other healthcare providers.

After the free service through the UTSA program ended, Garcia had decided that she didn't want to be disconnected anymore and considered cutting expenses to pay for service. With no-cost service provided through the ACP, she doesn't have to do that. She uses that money to pursue her passion for crafts, including fabrics and maintenance for her sewing machine.

"I don't feel isolated at all," Garcia said. "The ACP is important to me, and I recommend it to the people I know."