

HIGH SPEED INTERNET

AND REDUCING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES



OVERVIEW

When underserved communities gain access to high speed Internet, all Americans benefit. Whether they reside in remote rural communities, low-income urban neighborhoods, or anywhere in between, it is in the nation's interest to make sure that these disconnected communities are not left in the slow lane.

High speed Internet access has become vital to the success of individuals and communities. Our nation's commitment to equal economic opportunity, educational advancement, and democratic participation can only thrive if everyone has equivalent access to these critical communications networks. As important as it is to our country to ensure access to what we think of as more traditional resources or services for all citizens, closing the digital divide in America strengthens the entire country economically and socially.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

The Pew Internet & American Life Project has found that poorer Americans and minorities are less likely than the affluent to have a high speed Internet connection. Although African-Americans and English-speaking Hispanics have begun to close the access gap with whites, Hispanics with limited English are less likely to use high speed Internet than either white or black Americans. The cost of computers, broadband access, and lack of digital skills serve as barriers to broadband adoption, even where the service is available. Sparsely populated rural areas often lack the financial incentive for Internet service providers to invest in costly high speed telecommunications infrastructure.

BENEFITS OF HIGH SPEED INTERNET

- **Education:** With the accessibility of high speed broadband,

students in the most impoverished inner-city neighborhoods and distant rural regions can take advantage of the same Internet resources as students in the most affluent suburbs. Living on a farm hours away from city libraries would no longer put students at an educational disadvantage.

- **Economic Development:** Broadband availability creates wealth and opportunity for underserved low-income areas by attracting businesses that want to locate near a high speed Internet network, such as IT and communications companies that cannot operate competitively without broadband. A study by the Brookings Institution shows that for every percentage point increase in broadband penetration, employment expands by almost 300,000 jobs.
- **Public Health:** With a broadband connection people can also access general information about healthcare to manage their health and gain understanding of their condition(s) and options for care. Telemedicine offers cost-effective health care solutions for urban and rural residents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Measures to increase broadband availability should focus on both lightly populated rural regions as well as densely populated underserved communities such as inner-city areas.
- Support efforts to make high speed internet access and computers more affordable for low income households.
- Encourage programs to teach digital literacy and computer training.
- Policy makers should focus on programs to support delivering one gigabyte of capacity to institutions that anchor our communities – libraries, schools and hospitals – so that all Americans will benefit from the build out of a high speed broadband infrastructure.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit alliancefordigitalequality.org, lulac.org, naacp.org, and speedmatters.org.

