

# HIGH SPEED INTERNET

## AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



### OVERVIEW

High speed Internet empowers people with disabilities to become more independent. An Internet connection with enough speed to allow two-way voice, data and video transfer can remove barriers that keep people with disabilities from participating in everyday activities such as employment, education, civic responsibilities and social connection.

There are 54 million Americans who have some form of disability. According to the 2008 U.S. Census, 50 million Americans have some kind of disability. Not only does this substantial segment of our population stand to benefit greatly from universally accessible broadband, but we all benefit from the increased participation when more people are broadband users.

### CURRENT CHALLENGES

Expert studies find that Americans with disabilities use the internet approximately half as much as those without disabilities and less than 24 percent of homes of people with disabilities have adopted broadband internet compared with 63 percent of all homes. This is true for people with disabilities in both urban and rural environments. With 60 percent of working-age persons with disabilities unemployed or underemployed, affordable, universal access to broadband at home is crucial. Those without high speed Internet access at home who must use public computers contend with transportation challenges and inaccessible locations.

### BENEFITS OF HIGH SPEED INTERNET

- Live streaming video and instant text communication liberate people who are deaf, or hard of hearing, and those

with speech disabilities, from dependency on the phone.

- High speed Internet makes new services available to people with physical disabilities, such as attending classes remotely, online medical consultations with faraway specialists, or applying for and securing jobs, eliminating the need for unnecessary or difficult commutes or trips.
- Programs that read text and describe visual contents aloud in a synthetic voice or a Braille display enable people who are blind or visually impaired to search the Internet, understand videos, and communicate online.
- For persons with certain mental conditions or learning disabilities, slow download speeds discourage Internet use.
- Video relay services (VRS), which require high speed Internet to run, allow people who are deaf to have phone conversations in their native sign language by means of an online interpreter.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Initiatives to expand high speed Internet should include, as a principle, provisions to ensure not only affordability, but also accessibility and usability, for people with disabilities.
- Measures undertaken to increase employment through deploying more high speed Internet availability should include the employment needs of people with disabilities.
- Research on high speed Internet access should look at the economic benefits of assimilating marginalized segments of society as a means of integration.

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