Promoting Broadband Deployment and Adoption

Broadband is an essential component of modern life, and is used for work, education, civil engagement, and entertainment. Broadband adoption is a measure of the number of households that subscribe to broadband service, own the devices necessary for its use, and possess the digital literacy skills needed to meaningfully engage in a broad range of online activities. Although broadband is critical, our nation has a large digital divide, leaving those on the wrong side of it struggling to connect. Currently, more than 42 million Americans don’t have the ability to purchase broadband, and almost half of the country can’t access the internet at broadband speeds (currently defined as 25/3 Mbps). According to the FCC’s 2019 Broadband Deployment Report, in 2017, 26% of those in rural areas lacked access to fixed broadband. Fewer than half of the households on rural tribal lands have access to fixed broadband. Moreover, only 66% of African Americans and 61% of Hispanics report having broadband at home. Many of these same households also lack a computer through which to access the internet.

Broadband Is Unaffordable for Many Americans

Even if broadband is available it is not always affordable and, consequently, it is not adopted.

- The price American consumers pay for broadband is among the most expensive in the world.
- A recent survey of American households found the cost of broadband to be among the top reasons for not subscribing to broadband services.
- Studies show that $10 per month is the most that low-income Americans can afford to pay for broadband. However, a recent study shows that only six internet plans (of the 290 studied) meet this $10 benchmark at any speed.
- In addition, ancillary fees (like modem rental fees) can add an additional 75% to the cost of monthly internet service.

Digital Equity is Essential for Broadband Adoption

Even if broadband is available and affordable, individuals and families can’t connect without equipment and digital literacy.

- Twenty-one percent of non-broadband users cite the cost of a computer as one of the reasons they do not have broadband at home.
- Many American workers lack digital skills they need to successfully navigate digital devices.
- The Digital Equity Act would provide funding to states to implement digital equity plans, and to other stakeholders to support digital equity projects.

Policymakers should address all barriers to broadband adoption, which include affordability, availability, and quality of service as well as digital literacy.