

Understanding the Potential Reach of the Affordable Connectivity Program

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Broadband connectivity is vital for work, school, health care, and living in the 21st century, yet is out of reach for millions. The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), created by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, was signed into law in November 2021. The ACP is the nation's largest broadband affordability program. Households in the program can receive a discount of up to \$30 per month on residential or mobile internet service (or up to \$75 per month for households on Tribal lands), in addition to a one-time discount of up to \$100 for a computer or tablet.

In order to better understand the need for the Affordable Connectivity Program, we analyzed nationally representative data on broadband access¹ gathered in the American Community Survey (ACS), collected by the U.S. Census Bureau. The data pertain to 2015-2019, before the start of the pandemic. We use this data to provide an initial estimate of the size of the population eligible for the program and to describe the demographic characteristics of the population who currently lack broadband internet access.

Eligible households include those under 200% of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL) or those above that line but who receive any of a variety of public benefits.² **We find that across the country, an estimated 48.6 million households are eligible for the ACP, including 10.3 million households without high-speed internet and 11.3 million households without any internet or broadband.**

¹ Broadband is defined as “broadband (high speed) internet service such as cable, fiber optic, or DSL services installed in this household” in the American Community Survey data we use.

² Note again that we use a 5-year ACS file covering the years 2015-2019 to produce these estimates, and thus the data pertain to broadband access before the pandemic. Therefore, this data does not reflect the efforts the federal government, states, local governments, and community-based organizations have made since the beginning of the pandemic to expand broadband access. For example, the ACP replaced the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) created in May 2021. In addition, these estimates could overstate ACP eligibility. The ACS indicates if a family received a benefit at any point during the entire year (including short spells of benefit receipt). However, an individual who temporarily received SNAP at one point in the calendar year and counts as a SNAP recipient in the ACS data (and therefore as eligible for ACP in our estimates) would not be eligible if they were not receiving SNAP at the time they apply to the ACP. On the other hand, these estimates could underestimate the size of the eligible population, as benefit receipt is underreported in household surveys and there are other programs that can lead to eligibility that the ACS does not ask about, such as free or reduced-price lunch programs and Pell grants.

About Eligible Households

We provide additional information about access to internet services of Affordable Connectivity Program eligible households broken out by the level of poverty.

Table 1. Access to Internet Services of ACP Eligible Households by Poverty Level

<i>Federal Poverty Levels</i>	TOTAL # ELIGIBLE, in millions	Eligible households, no broadband			Eligible households, have broadband
		Have no internet	Have non-broadband internet	Total	
Under 100%	15.9	4.8	3.7	8.5	7.4
100 - 200%	20.6	5.1	4.4	9.5	11.1
200%+	12.2	1.4	2.3	3.7	8.6
Total	48.7	11.3	10.4	21.7	27.1

Note: Totals may not sum exactly due to rounding. Note: Eligible households include those under 200% of the Federal Poverty Line or those above that line but who receive any of a variety of public benefits.

- We find that an estimated 36.4 million households are eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program because their incomes are at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line, including 8 million households with no high-speed internet and 9.9 million households with access to neither internet nor broadband (table 1).
- This program may be especially vital for those with incomes under 100% of the FPL (15.9 million households), including 4.8 million eligible households who have no internet, and another 3.7 million who have internet but no broadband, as shown in Table 1.
- Households where at least one member of the household receives a means-tested government benefit are also eligible for the program (even if their income is above 200% of the FPL for the year). Table 1 shows that there are an estimated 12.2 million households in this category who received at least one of three benefits asked about in the American Community Survey (Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid, or SNAP) at some point during the year, including 2.3 million with no high-speed internet and 1.4 million with neither internet nor broadband.

Demographic Characteristics of the Population Lacking Broadband Internet

Understanding the demographic characteristics of the portion of the U.S. population who lack access to broadband can also aid policymakers in directing outreach to those who are potentially the most in need of assistance. Table 2 shows the demographic features of households who lack access to broadband and are eligible for the ACP, separated by the Federal Poverty Line. For example, of eligible households with no broadband and incomes at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Line, almost half have householders who are White (47.5%), about a quarter have householders who are Black (24.5%), and about 1 in 5 have householders who are Latino (20.9%).

Table 2: Characteristics of Households Lacking Broadband Access in the United States

Race/ethnicity of household head						
	Latino	Black	Asian	Native American	White	Other/Multiracial
Under 100% of FPL	20.9%	24.5%	3.1%	1.5%	47.5%	2.1%
100 - 200%	19.5%	17.9%	2.5%	1.0%	57.5%	1.6%
200%+	20.1%	18.4%	3.5%	1.2%	55.0%	1.8%
Education level of household head				Students present		
	No HS degree	HS Degree	Some College	BA+	K12 student	AA/BA student
Under 100% of FPL	28.4%	44.7%	19.2%	7.8%	25.2%	5.2%
100 - 200%	22.8%	47.8%	20.4%	9.1%	21.0%	8.5%
200%+	16.9%	45.7%	22.5%	14.9%	27.5%	5.1%
Other factors						
	Have Smartphone	English as a Second Language	Above 65 years of age	Reside in non-metro area		
Under 100% of FPL	56.5%	11.0%	27.1%	11.9%		
100 - 200%	55.8%	8.8%	42.0%	12.7%		
200%+	70.2%	7.6%	34.0%	10.9%		

All demographics pertain to the “householder,” who is the reference person for the household in the ACS. This is typically the person holding the lease or mortgage of the housing unit. The two exceptions are the columns labeled “K12 student” and “AA/BA student.” In these cases, the statistics presented reference the percent of households lacking broadband where there is a K-12 student present in the household and where there is someone attending an undergraduate institution, respectively.

The Affordable Connectivity Program works to ensure that all Americans have access to reliable, affordable, high-speed internet to learn, work, and participate in the 21st century economy. Almost 49 million households could receive discounted service through the program, including 21.7 million households currently who do not have broadband or lack internet access entirely.

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Appendix A1: Broadband and Internet Access Among Eligible Households, by State

State	Number of eligible households	Among eligible households		
		Have Broadband	Have Internet, No Broadband	No Internet
Alabama	860,000	43.6%	26.1%	30.3%
Alaska	89,000	54.4%	25.0%	20.6%
Arizona	1,075,000	56.3%	22.8%	20.8%
Arkansas	581,000	40.9%	29.3%	29.8%
California	5,565,000	62.4%	19.8%	17.7%
Colorado	758,000	63.3%	19.9%	16.8%
Connecticut	490,000	62.7%	16.7%	20.6%
Delaware	136,000	62.9%	18.2%	19.0%
District of Columbia	102,000	52.5%	17.8%	29.7%
Florida	3,283,000	58.8%	19.7%	21.5%
Georgia	1,571,000	53.2%	21.5%	25.2%
Hawaii	163,000	63.1%	16.9%	20.0%
Idaho	260,000	53.5%	26.2%	20.4%
Illinois	1,853,000	54.6%	22.2%	23.2%
Indiana	1,019,000	52.4%	22.6%	25.1%
Iowa	482,000	52.8%	23.5%	23.7%
Kansas	412,000	53.6%	22.1%	24.3%
Kentucky	813,000	51.0%	22.3%	26.8%
Louisiana	869,000	45.9%	23.2%	30.9%
Maine	221,000	58.4%	18.1%	23.5%
Maryland	727,000	61.0%	19.3%	19.7%
Massachusetts	982,000	65.2%	15.2%	19.6%
Michigan	1,605,000	53.9%	23.2%	23.0%
Minnesota	733,000	57.9%	21.5%	20.5%
Mississippi	572,000	35.7%	30.0%	34.2%
Missouri	956,000	49.0%	25.4%	25.6%
Montana	176,000	55.1%	20.4%	24.4%

State	Number of eligible households	Among eligible households		
		Have Broadband	Have Internet, No Broadband	No Internet
Nebraska	267,000	55.7%	21.9%	22.3%
Nevada	448,000	58.5%	19.7%	21.8%
New Hampshire	163,000	65.8%	16.3%	17.8%
New Jersey	1,080,000	63.2%	15.4%	21.4%
New Mexico	397,000	46.5%	23.6%	29.9%
New York	3,099,000	60.6%	16.7%	22.7%
North Carolina	1,654,000	53.4%	20.4%	26.2%
North Dakota	104,000	54.8%	20.7%	24.5%
Ohio	1,883,000	55.6%	20.5%	23.9%
Oklahoma	662,000	44.7%	28.9%	26.5%
Oregon	671,000	61.7%	21.5%	16.8%
Pennsylvania	1,957,000	57.4%	17.4%	25.2%
Rhode Island	164,000	58.8%	18.0%	23.2%
South Carolina	827,000	48.3%	22.9%	28.8%
South Dakota	123,000	55.1%	18.9%	25.9%
Tennessee	1,131,000	48.7%	23.0%	28.3%
Texas	3,927,000	49.2%	25.7%	25.1%
Utah	320,000	61.4%	24.0%	14.5%
Vermont	109,000	62.4%	17.4%	20.2%
Virginia	1,006,000	53.2%	22.0%	24.8%
Washington	1,046,000	65.8%	19.2%	14.9%
West Virginia	356,000	52.3%	18.8%	28.9%
Wisconsin	849,000	54.7%	21.3%	24.0%
Wyoming	79,000	56.4%	22.9%	20.8%