



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE MARCH 12, 2019

Contact: Nadine Hugg, nadine.hugg@cetfund.org, (925) 528-9546

Broadband Survey: Digital Divide Persists in California but Schools Are Helping to Improve Access for Students

Eco-Friendly Solution: Most Californians Find Home Internet Access Reduces Their Vehicle Trips

Oakland and Los Angeles, CA – March 12, 2019 – A new statewide survey released today by the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) in partnership with the University of California, Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) finds 88% of the state’s households have high-speed Internet access at home through either a computing device or a smartphone, but 12% or one in eight homes still do not have access.

The findings show that home broadband adoption is increasing, but at a slow pace for several reasons: 87% of households reported home connectivity in 2017, the last time the Statewide Survey on Broadband Adoption was conducted. But in the last two years, the proportion of Californians connecting to the Internet through a home computing device—defined as a desktop, laptop or tablet computer—has increased from 69% to 78%. At the same time, households with only a smartphone to access the Internet have declined from 18% to 10%.

This is a positive development given that households with only smartphone access are considered “underconnected” because they are at a disadvantage in optimizing use of the technology for certain functions, such as doing schoolwork, applying for a job, or taking online classes to expand workforce skills.

Schools Provide Computers, but Residents Are Not Aware of Discount Internet Service

Another positive finding is that households with school-age children saw a significant increase in Internet access through computing devices since 2017. Half of those report that their child has been assigned a computing device at school. Still, the most commonly cited reason for not having home Internet access relates to the cost of the service or the lack of a device. What’s more, three in four unconnected households remain unaware that they may be eligible for discounted home Internet service for as low as \$10-\$15 a month. This finding underscores the need for Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to do more advertising to reach eligible households, especially by placing ads with community media. It also begs for schools and public agencies to distribute information about available affordable offers.

Home Internet Reduces Need for Vehicle Trips

The 2019 Statewide Survey also highlights why promoting home broadband is an effective strategy for California in taking a global leadership role to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Six in ten households report that using the Internet to shop or work from home, for example, reduces the number of their vehicle trips in a typical month. These findings support efforts by the California Transportation Commission, California Department of Transportation, and California Air Resources Board to incorporate broadband into their strategies to reduce traffic congestion and decrease impacts on the environment.

School, Government and Community Efforts Show Progress

“The 2019 Statewide Survey clearly shows that strategically-focused, proactive efforts by the State, schools, cities, counties and community organizations to promote Digital Inclusion are working,” said Sunne Wright McPeak, President and CEO of CETF. “However, too many low-income students still aren’t provided a computing device or allowed to take their school computers home nor are their parents provided digital literacy training—situations that must change if we are going to successfully close the Digital Divide in California.” She commended the California Department of Education and Former Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson for urging school districts to inform parents about affordable Internet offers. She added, “Policymakers should recognize how home Internet connectivity is critical for the State to achieve its environmental goals—broadband is a green strategy.”

The 2019 Statewide Survey of 1,625 Californians was administered in six languages and represents more than a decade of tracking to better understand gaps in broadband access and digital literacy training, with the goal of improving Digital Inclusion among California’s most socioeconomically disadvantaged and underserved residents. Additional findings include:

Households with children see an increase in Internet access through computing devices.

The increase in households accessing the Internet through home computing devices was most pronounced among those that include a child under age 18. In these households, 86% now report that they can access the Internet at home through a computing device. Statewide, that figure is up 9 percentage points (from 69% to 78%) since 2017.

Half of K-12 students have access to individually-assigned computing devices.

About half of those living in households with school-age children (52%) report that their child has been specifically assigned a computing device at school. But of those, only about half say their child is allowed to take the device home with them. Parents need help with digital literacy training: nearly half of unconnected or underconnected households say they are at a disadvantage when trying to help their children with homework, access the school’s website or email a teacher. Achieving greater Digital Inclusion requires schools to allow students to take home their school computers and to provide digital literacy training for their parents.

Home broadband is eco-friendly.

The survey for the first time asked Californians if home Internet use enabled them to make fewer vehicle trips in a typical month: a majority of Californians (62%) said yes. Their activities include shopping online (55%), working from home (21%), consulting with a doctor online (18%), and taking an online course (13%).

Income continues to be a key deterrent of Internet access at home.

The lack of high-speed Internet connectivity at home continues to be most directly linked to socioeconomic status. For example, nearly half of Californians living in households with annual incomes of less than \$20,000 or who have not graduated from high school are either not connected to the Internet or are underconnected. More than a third of Spanish-speaking Latinos, residents age 75 or older, and people with disabilities fall into this category.

Los Angeles County has the largest Digital Divide.

By geography, the largest percentage of households that are unconnected or underconnected are in Los Angeles County (16% unconnected, 10%, underconnected). In other areas, the survey found a persistent Digital Divide: Inland Empire (9% unconnected, 16% underconnected); Central Valley (9% unconnected, 13% underconnected); San Francisco Bay Area (12% unconnected, 7% underconnected); and Orange County/San Diego (7% unconnected, 7% underconnected).

Low awareness of discount Internet service inhibits broadband adoption.

Half (51%) of California households without an Internet connection cite cost of broadband service or lack of a device. Three in four (73%) without access to the Internet are not aware that they may be eligible for home Internet service for as low as \$10-\$15 a month. For more information about programs and eligibility, please visit the [Internet For All Now](#) website sponsored by CETF.

“We have a significant hurdle to overcome to get the lowest-income, least-advantaged Californians connected,” McPeak said. She called upon ISPs to significantly increase advertising with community-based media of affordable Internet service offers and to make public their progress in signing up low-income households. “There is a limited lifespan of these affordable Internet plans, so it’s urgent that the ISPs act now,” she said.

About the Statewide Survey on Broadband Adoption: You can review additional survey findings on the [CETF website](#) and read the [IGS press release](#). The survey took place between January 21 and February 20, 2019, and 85% of the interviews were completed by mobile phones and the remaining 15% by landline phones. The overall sample error is +/- 3 percentage points with a 95% confidence level.

About California Emerging Technology Fund

The mission of CETF is to close the Digital Divide in California. The overall goal is to reach 98% of all California residences in every region with broadband infrastructure and to achieve 90% home broadband adoption by 2023. CETF is technology neutral: "broadband" is a generic term for high-speed Internet access-wireline and wireless Internet service is faster than a dial-up connection. CETF strives to achieve these goals through public awareness, education, grantmaking to community organizations, and advancing public policy. For more information, please visit www.cetfund.org.