



**For Immediate Release**

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## **California Emerging Technology Fund Calls on FCC to Take Action on Affordable Broadband for America's Neediest**

***Poll Shows Wide Differences in Broadband Connectivity in Nation's Largest State; Cost of Internet Service Cited as Major Reason***

**San Francisco and Los Angeles, CA – June 16, 2015** – The California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) in partnership with The Field Poll (<http://www.field.com/fieldpollonline/subscribers/RIs2509.pdf>) released results today of a new survey examining who does not have broadband service at home in California. The survey found 79% percent of California households have a broadband connection at home, while 21 percent do not. Of the one in five households that do not, 77% cited the cost of Internet service or not having a computer or smart phone at home as the reason why. The new findings are particularly relevant as the Federal Communications Commission is preparing to vote this Thursday on a proposal to modernize Lifeline to include broadband for the nation's neediest households.

“The poll details how the lowest-income, least-educated Californians are living without an essential tool to access the educational, employment, healthcare and civic engagement opportunities that lead to self-sufficiency and a better quality of life,” said Sunne Wright McPeak, President and CEO of the California Emerging Technology Fund. “We call on the FCC to enact meaningful reforms to Lifeline now that will enable the neediest among us to connect to broadband from home, and not just from a smart phone. We also continue to urge the FCC to hold companies under merger review accountable for delivering a real, measurable public benefit in the form of affordable broadband at home and digital literacy programs.”

In California, the statewide goal is to achieve 80% home adoption by 2017, with no single demographic group or region below 70%. According to the Field Poll, several California demographic groups have home broadband adoption rates that fall more than 10 percentage points below the overall adoption\* rate of 79%. They include:

**Household income of less than \$20,000 (65%)**

**Adults 65 or older (57%)**

**Spanish-speaking Latinos (63%)**

**Not a high school graduate (52%)**

**Adults who identify having a disability (59%)**

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\*This percentage includes adults accessing the Internet at home with a smartphone or through DSL, cable, satellite or fiber optic connections to a home desktop, laptop or tablet computer.

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## **Poverty and Broadband Adoption**

While progress has been made since initial polling data showed California at 55% home broadband adoption in 2008, the stakes have grown much higher. It is nearly impossible, without at having at least basic digital skills, to find employment or have a pathway out of poverty to economic self-sufficiency. For the first time, the survey asked about broadband access outside the home. Adults with broadband connectivity at home are twice as likely as those without it to report also having broadband access to the Internet through a computer outside their home. Overall, 57% of adults have broadband connectivity at home and through a computer outside the home. More than half of those (36%) say they access the Internet through a computer at work.

By contrast, just 29% of adults without broadband connectivity at home have access to the Internet through a computer outside their home, with their most common broadband connection being through a computer at the library (11%). Libraries often must limit computer use to a block of 30-minute or less in order to meet patron demand.

## **Older Californians and Broadband Adoption**

Older Californians are among the least-connected, according to the survey, which raises critical quality-of-life issues for this group. With the advance in telemedicine and the delivery of government services moving online, it is essential older adults have access to affordable broadband, digital literacy training and computing devices.

## **Smart Phones vs Computing Devices**

With the rapid adoption of smart phones, the survey examined who among demographic groups are only connecting to the Internet by a smart phone. Among all California adults, 8% use a smart phone only to connect to the Internet. Earlier surveys have found “smart phone only users” were much less likely to visit government or community websites, bank online or transfer funds to family members, get health or medical information or communicate with their doctor or take a class online. All these are important activities linked to moving out of poverty. The subgroups most likely to only have broadband connectivity through a smart phone are:

**Spanish-speaking Latinos (21%)**

**Unmarried parent of children under 18(19%)**

**Adults who have not graduated from high school (18%)**

**Household income of less than \$20,000 (16%)**

**Parents of children under age 18 (13%)**

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## **Education and Broadband Adoption**

“While smart phones are useful devices, they are not enough to help close the education Achievement Gap,” McPeak said. For example, California public school students are now required to take assessment tests on a computing device and those without daily experience at home using a desktop, laptop or tablet will be at a disadvantage.

Noting how important broadband has become, FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler has proposed potentially giving households a choice of phone service, Internet service or a mix of both.

“As technology is integrated in the classroom, students who only have smart phone access at home will be at a large disadvantage. We call on the FCC to ensure that the Lifeline for broadband program enables eligible households to obtain an affordable (\$10-\$15 a month) high-speed home connection to a computing device , otherwise when these students go home they will fall farther behind and we all will be worse off for it,” McPeak said.

## **How to Subscribe to Affordable Broadband at Home**

CETF partners with the Stride Contact Center, an independent, non-profit entity that provides free telephone consultations on how to find broadband service as low as \$10 per month where you live. For more information, call 1-888-491-5982.

## **About the California Emerging Technology Fund**

*The mission of CETF is to close the Digital Divide. The goal is to reach 98% of all California residences with broadband infrastructure and to achieve 80% home adoption by 2017. This statewide goal can only be accomplished if the following specific hard-to-reach target communities achieve at least a 70% adoption rate: low-income populations, Latino households, rural communities, and people with disabilities. For more information, please visit [www.cetfund.org](http://www.cetfund.org).*