



Call For New Federal Partnership On Broadband Access In California

Access to high-performance broadband is a civil rights issue according to [Broadband for America Now](https://www.benton.org/sites/default/files/BroadbandAmericaNow_final.pdf) [https://www.benton.org/sites/default/files/BroadbandAmericaNow_final.pdf], a report from the [Benton Institute for Broadband & Society](https://www.benton.org/) [https://www.benton.org/]. An initial 2019 report, *Broadband for America's Future: A Vision for the 2020s*, was scheduled to be updated this month to reflect new developments but changed direction as the COVID-19 pandemic made access to broadband essential as work, education and even healthcare moved online, leaving behind low-income and underserved populations.

Jonathan Sallet, the report's author was featured at "[Post-Election Briefing: New Federal Partnership on Broadband](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXmDkhoZj24)" [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXmDkhoZj24], a webinar presented by California Forward (CA FWD) and the [California Emerging Technology Fund](https://www.cetfund.org/) [https://www.cetfund.org/] (CETF).

"We know that within this crisis, there's been what we might think about as a 'broadband breakthrough,'" said Sallet. "People are using broadband as never before if and when they have access to it. And the fact that so many people don't, creates not just a digital divide, but a digital chasm."

He was joined by CA FWD CEO Micah Weinberg, CETF President and CEO Sunne Wright McPeak and [Corporation for Network Initiatives in California](https://cenic.org/) [https://cenic.org/] (CENIC) President and CEO Louis Fox as well as guest responders John Windhausen from the [SHLB Coalition](https://www.shlb.org/) [https://www.shlb.org/], Julie Meier Wright from [the Council on Competitiveness](https://www.compete.org/) [https://www.compete.org/] and Amy Tong from the [California Department of Technology](https://cdt.ca.gov/) [https://cdt.ca.gov/] and the California Broadband Council.

Sallet answered questions from California broadband leaders and webinar co-sponsors Trish Kelly from [Valley Vision](https://www.valleyvision.org/) [https://www.valleyvision.org/] and Capital Area and Broadband Regional Consortium; Eduardo Gonzalez from California State University Fresno and the San Joaquin Valley Partnership-SJV Broadband Regional Consortium; Martha Van Rooijen from the Inland Empire Regional Broadband Consortium; and, Jason Schwenkler from California State University Chico.

Sallet spoke about why policy makers, including the new administration, Congress, those at the state, tribal and local level need to devote their time and attention to this issue while they tackle many other large societal issues (COVID-19, income inequality and social justice).

"Broadband, a general-purpose technology can supply a critical part of the solution to each one of these problems and more," Sallet explained. "We've woken up this year, I believe, to the importance that broadband is a tool in helping our society be more equitable and inclusive."

He added, "Although physical gaps appear in rural broadband networks, there are almost three times as many people without broadband in urban and metro areas than in rural areas and lack of adoption of broadband is greater among black, Hispanic and lower income households."

The report outlines four areas of emphasis that will achieve the goal:

Digital Equity

Making affordable High-Performance Broadband available to low-income, unserved, and underserved populations (Black, Latino, and rural)—accompanied by training in digital skills that empowers users to make the most of their connections—will contribute to a more equitable society.

Deployment

In a world in which the talents of all people matter, broadband infrastructure investment is a necessary economic strategy. There is no reason to saddle any rural and urban area with second-rate broadband.

Competition

Americans should not have to pay more (in dollars, in sacrificed quality, or in delayed innovation) merely because public policy has failed to promote competition effectively.

Community Anchor Institutions

Using broadband to fulfill their missions, these institutions should be able to reach users wherever they are—from dining room tables to spare bedrooms to parking lots—and serve as launching pads for community wide access.

Tong discussed Governor Gavin Newsom's broadband executive order issued earlier this year directing State agencies and partners work toward closing the digital divide. She said there is a two pronged approach "to work together to really bring forward not only the work that's necessary to improve connectivity to close the digital divide throughout California, but honing in on what are the problems, the barriers that have been holding us back all these years and look for opportunities and creative ideas and innovative approaches to overcome those barriers."

Ensuring broadband access for all will be one of the topics discussed at this year's [California Economic Summit](https://cafwd.org/summit) [<https://cafwd.org/summit>] , which will be held virtually December 3-4 and will include a working session headed by Kelly and Schwenkler.
