Digital Equity in Connecticut

THE PROBLEM, CAUSES & RESOURCES

URBANALLIANCE

What is Digital Equity?

The State of Connecticut defines "**digital equity**" as "a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for participation in society, democracy, and the economy of the state" (CGS § 289).

The **"digital divide"** is the socioeconomic gap created between communities, cultures, or individuals with different levels of access to digital tools. Those with access to broadband Internet and computers have advantages over those who lack adequate Internet connectivity, which can lead to far-reaching negative consequences.

In CT, the digital divide is most likely to affect lower-income households, households of color (African American and Latino), veterans, residents with a language barrier, seniors, incarcerated individual, rural communities, and disabled individuals.

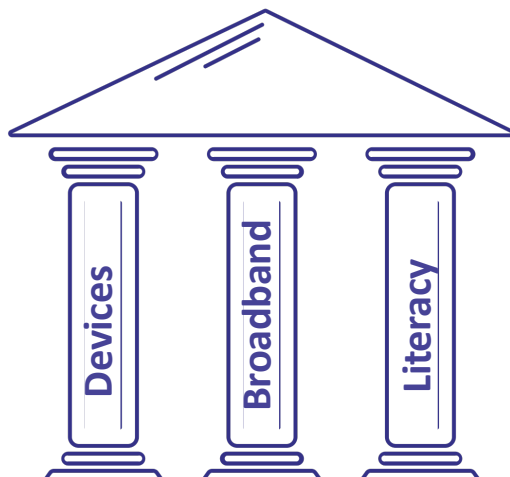| 73%	50%	58%
of all CT households meet the digital connection benchmark	of CT residents with a disability, language barrier, or low-income meet the digital connection benchmark	of middle schools and 71% of high schools provide a device to each student

* Households with a computer, smartphone and a wired internet connection meet the CT digital connection benchmark.

Three Pillars of Digital Equity

Devices · Broadband · Literacy

- **Device Access:** Having access to a functioning device and relevant software (i.e. laptop, smartphone, tablet).

- **Internet Access:** Internet access is essential to realize the true value of a computer or other smart device.

- **Digital Literacy:** Having the skills and support needed to live, learn, and work in a society where communication and access to information is increasingly through digital technologies like internet platforms, social media, and mobile devices.

When families have equitable access to the pillars of digital equity, opportunities and services that support health, education, and economic mobility are unlocked. But when families lack the essentials for digital equity, they face barriers; some insurmountable to accessing these essential opportunities

Digital Inequities Create Barriers to Opportunities

Healthcare

Digital inequities affect residents' ability to fully engage in healthcare services such as online scheduling, virtual care, remote monitoring devices, smart wearables, and tools for data exchange and sharing.

Education

Lacking technological resources results in lower academic performances, less access to the information needed to further studies and challenges applying to colleges, grants and participating in virtual learning. Students without reliable Internet access are significantly less likely to graduate.

Economic Security

Technology is becoming more and more important to the way that the world makes money. Research shows that over 80 percent of middle-skill jobs require technological skills and proficiency. The digital divide disproportionately impacts certain groups of people, limiting their earning potential and prolonging economic inequality.

Connecting to Resources: Housing, Employment, Benefits

Technology plays an important role in securing low-income housing and other public benefits such as Medicaid, SNAP, and SSI. Ironically, populations that most rely on these supports have the least access to digital devices and broadband access.

CT residents with a disability were three times as likely to report having no internet overall.

Important Resources

✓ **Internet Essentials**

Offers low-cost broadband, low-cost laptops and free online digital literacy classes on a variety of important topics. (www.xfinity.com/learn/internet-service/internet-essentials). Other providers include:
- Cox Communications Connect2Compete: (www.cox.com/residential/internet/connect2compete.html)
- Frontier Lifeline Program: (frontier.com/discount-programs/lifeline-program)

✓ **Lifeline**

Federal program expanded in recent years to provide cost offsets for devices and broadband service to qualifying applicants. (www.lifelinesupport.org)

✓ **Affordable Connectivity Program**

Federal program that provides a credit up to $30 per month off Internet service for eligible residents — includes registration wizard, toll-free phone support, and multi-lingual outreach materials to share with residents. (www.AffordableConnectivity.gov)

✓ **Public Libraries:**

Book time on a PC and use the learning resources at a local library.

✓ **American Job Centers**

American Job Centers help residents find jobs for free. They help residents learn which jobs and careers are right for them, write great cover letters, create resumes, prepare for interviews, and conduct effective job searches. (portal.ct.gov/ajc)