ConnectHome

Baseline Internet Access Among **ConnectHome** Communities: Results From the National Evaluation of **ConnectHome**

High-speed Internet access at home has become increasingly important to ensuring educational opportunity for all children regardless of their economic status. According to the Pew Research Center, low-income households with school-age children are four times more likely to be without high-speed Internet access than their middle- or upper-income counterparts.[1] Without Internet access, many low-income students face a "homework gap," and their families are at a disadvantage for finding jobs, getting health information, or accessing other key information.[2]

The **ConnectHome** initiative is a collaboration between communities, the private sector, and the federal government to expand high-speed Internet access to more families across the country. The initiative is bringing affordable broadband access, digital literacy programs, and web-enabled computer devices to thousands of low-income households living in HUD-assisted housing. ConnectHome has launched in 28 communities across the United States, including metropolitan areas, cities, counties, and a tribal nation.[3]

As a first step in assessing the success of ConnectHome in bringing high-speed Internet to Americans across the country, HUD administered a Baseline Internet Access Survey. The purpose of the survey was to obtain baseline measures of in-home high-speed Internet access in public housing communities targeted for ConnectHome services before implementation of the initiative. The baseline survey, administered to 22 of the 28 communities, measured how

ConnectHome is bringing high-speed home Internet access to thousands of school-age children.

many households had Internet access in the home, types of devices used to connect to the Internet, and reasons for lack of Internet access among households not connected.[4] This brief provides a summary of the results of the survey.

What are the baseline levels of Internet access across ConnectHome communities?

Slightly more than two-thirds (69 percent) of public housing households with children in ConnectHome communities have some form of home Internet connection, but approximately half of those households are underconnected (see figure 1):
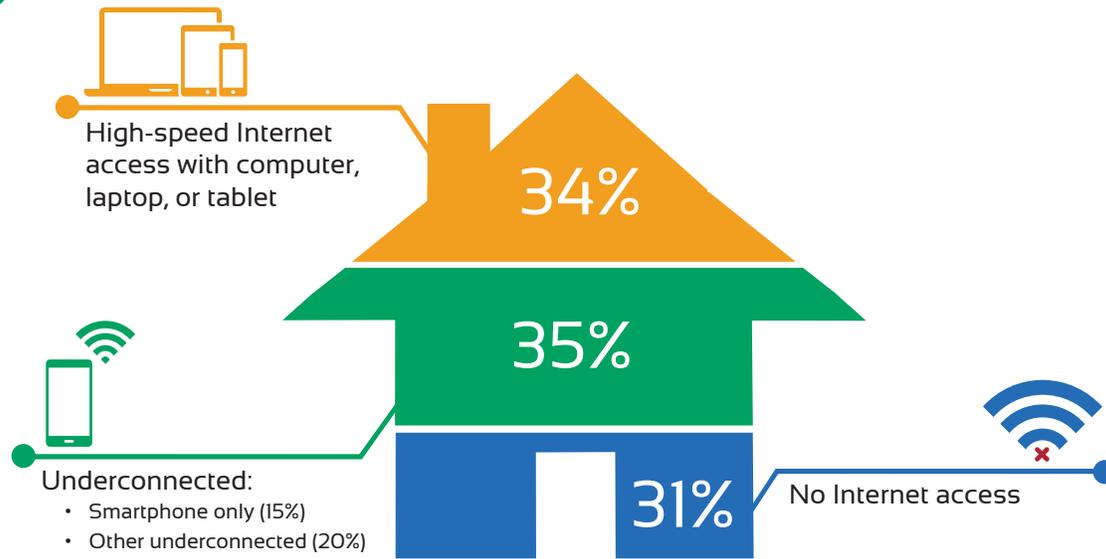
🏠 Only one-third (34 percent) of all households have high-speed Internet access, defined as having a high-speed Internet connection in addition to a computer, laptop, or tablet.

ConnectHome Launched In 28 Communities Across the U.S.

Figure 1. ConnectHome Baseline Internet Access

High-speed Internet access with computer, laptop, or tablet

34%

35%

Underconnected:
- Smartphone only (15%)
- Other underconnected (20%)

31%

No Internet access

Source: ConnectHome Baseline Internet Access Survey; conducted November 2015–June 2016.

Another one-third (35 percent) of all households are "underconnected," or without high-speed access. Those households may have smartphone-only access—defined as having access to the Internet only by smartphone and its accompanying data plan—or another combination of devices and connection types, such as a tablet with a data plan only or a high-speed Internet connection but only a smartphone device.

The final one-third (31 percent) of all households have no Internet access at home.

Households targeted to receive ConnectHome services are those that are underconnected and those with no Internet access at home.

What devices do public housing households use to connect to the Internet?

About three-fourths of connected households use smartphones to access the Internet at home (see figure 2).

Approximately one-third use a laptop or tablet to access the Internet at home, and about one-third use a desktop computer.

Almost one-half of connected households (46 percent) have only one type of device to connect to the Internet.
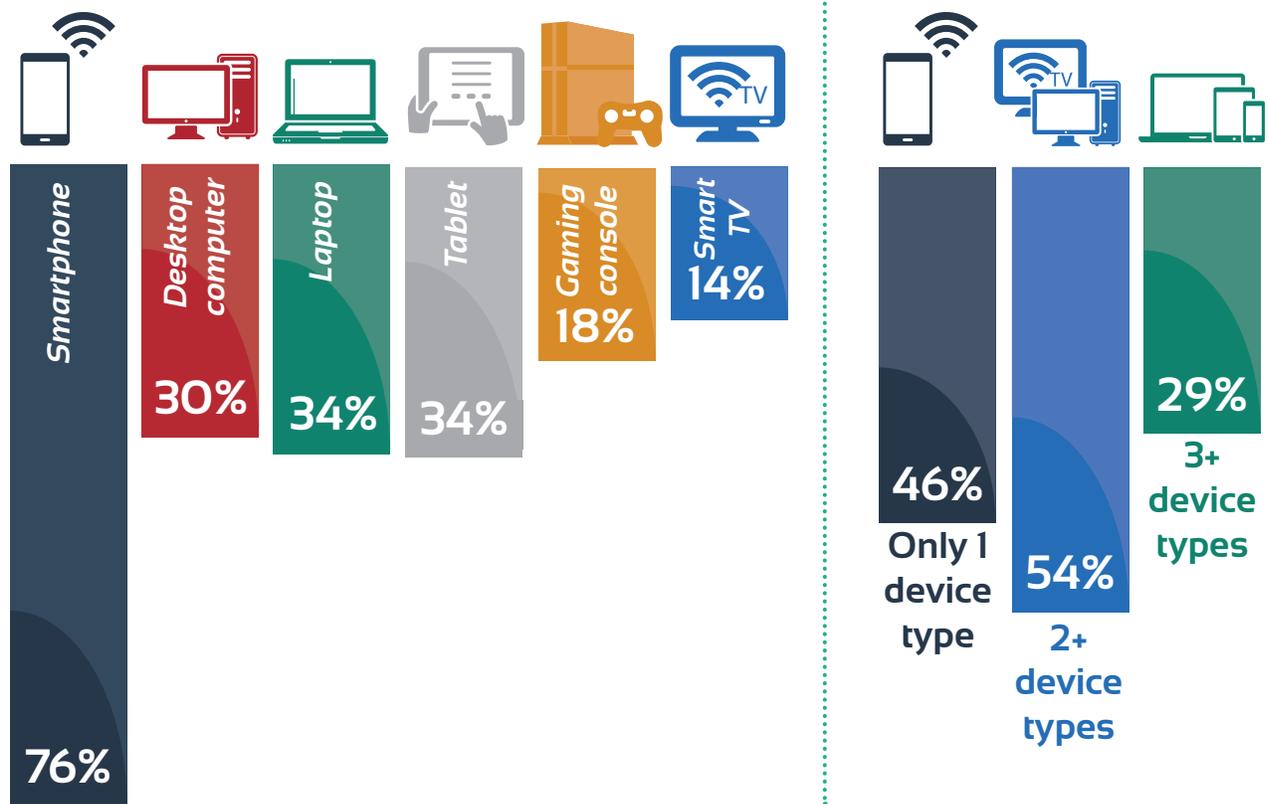
Why are public housing households NOT connected to the Internet?

Cost is the major reason households are not connected to the Internet at home. Among households without home Internet access, 80 percent cite the cost of access and 37 percent cite the cost of devices as a reason for not having in-home Internet access.

Of the unconnected households, 10 percent access the Internet outside the home, 8 percent are not interested in using the Internet, and 7 percent are uncomfortable using computers or the Internet (see figure 3). Slightly more than one-third (35 percent) of households without Internet access at home have had such access in the past, however.

Figure 2. Devices Used to Access the Internet, Among Connected Households

Device	Percentage
Smartphone	76%
Desktop computer	30%
Laptop	34%
Tablet	34%
Gaming console	18%
Smart TV	14%

Number of device types	Percentage
Only 1 device type	46%
2+ device types	54%
3+ device types	29%

Source: ConnectHome Baseline Internet Access Survey; conducted November 2015–June 2016.
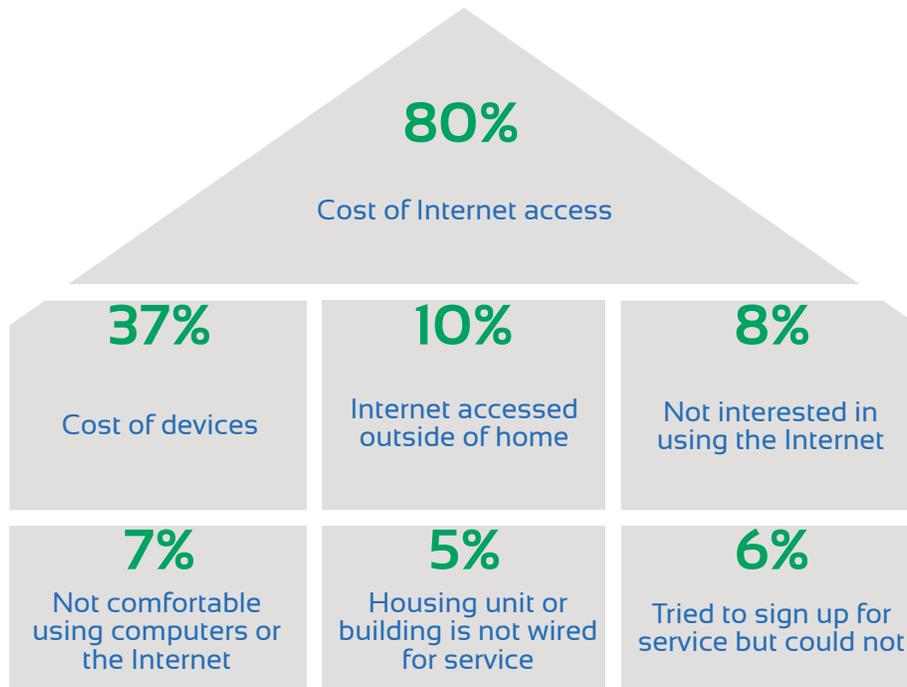*Note:* Respondents could check more than one category.

Moving forward

The ConnectHome initiative will help bridge the digital divide: It will increase Internet access for unconnected households and improve access for underconnected households. During the first year of the initiative, ConnectHome communities have made progress toward developing plans and partnerships for establishing high-speed connections for low-income families with children. Many communities have begun implementing the initiative, distributing devices, establishing Internet connections, and providing digital literacy training.

Future evaluation efforts will assess how the ConnectHome initiative has expanded high-speed Internet access and narrowed the digital divide in these communities. In the coming months, the evaluation team will conduct a phone survey and focus groups with households newly connected through the initiative to better understand how ConnectHome has affected their lives, particularly in terms of creating education, employment, health, and other opportunities that did not exist without home Internet access. The focus groups will also include households who remain unconnected. Among these households, we want to better understand the nature and scope of barriers to Internet adoption.

Figure 3. Reasons For Lack of Internet Access in the Home, Among Households Not Connected

80%

Cost of Internet access

37%

Cost of devices

10%

Internet accessed outside of home

8%

Not interested in using the Internet

7%

Not comfortable using computers or the Internet

5%

Housing unit or building is not wired for service

6%

Tried to sign up for service but could not

Source: ConnectHome Baseline Internet Access Survey; conducted November 2015–June 2016
Note: Respondents could check more than one category.

Footnotes

[1] Pew Research Center. 2015a. "The Numbers Behind the Broadband 'Homework Gap.'" *http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/04/20/the-numbers-behind-the-broadband-homework-gap/*.

[2] Pew Research Center. 2015b. "Broadband adoption." *http://www.pewinternet.org/files/2015/12/Broadband-adoption-full.pdf*.

[3] White House. 2015. "ConnectHome: Coming Together To Ensure Digital Opportunity for All Americans." Press Release. *https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/07/15/fact-sheet-connecthome-coming-together-ensure-digital-opportunity-all*.

[4] The remaining six ConnectHome communities did not participate because they administered their own surveys separately from the national survey or because they were not targeting public housing households for the first year of ConnectHome implementation.

Study Methods

The Baseline Internet Access Survey instrument was developed by HUD, with input from Insight Policy Research (Insight). Insight selected a random sample of households in each ConnectHome target community for participation in the survey; a census was drawn in communities with smaller ConnectHome target populations (i.e. all households in the target populations were selected). Twenty-two of the 28 communities participated in the survey: Albany, Baltimore, Baton Rouge, Boston, Camden, Choctaw Nation, Cleveland, the District of Columbia, Denver, Durham, Fresno, Kansas City, Little Rock, Macon, Memphis, Nashville, New Orleans, Newark, Rockford (IL), San Antonio, Seattle, and Tampa. The other six ConnectHome communities that did not participate in the survey were: Los Angeles, Meriden (CT), Atlanta, Springfield (MA), New York City, and Philadelphia. Data were collected between November 2015 and June 2016. The survey was administered by mail from HUD, with in-person or telephone follow-up to nonrespondents by local public housing agencies. Completed surveys were returned in pre-paid envelopes directly to Insight. Insight entered the data, constructed analytic weights, cleaned and processed the data, and tabulated the results. The analysis includes 3,857 completed surveys. For more information on Insight, please visit our website: http://www.insightpolicyresearch.com/