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From the Sacramento Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/sacramento/news/2020/06/05/digital-divide-inclusion.html>

## Reports: Digital divide is modern incarnation of historic lack of inclusion

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The pandemic and then the past week's protests show in real terms that many parts of the community are not equal. That is also reflected in a digital divide in the Sacramento region and statewide, a pair of recent reports show.

Digital access may seem like a trivial concern compared to other current issues. But proponents of wider access to broadband say it represents an underlying difference in potential employment and achievement.

"We are experiencing what it looks like when people have been left out," said Amanda Blackwood, CEO of the Sacramento Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce. "We are experiencing the frustration of communities that have been pushed to the side."

Last week, the Metro Chamber, Valley Vision, the Greater Sacramento Economic Council and the Sacramento Area Council of Governments released a study that found that leaving some communities behind from the economic growth of the past decade has hampered the overall growth of the local economy.

Anger over economic disparities has been highlighted in the past week's protests over the death of George Floyd, a black man, in an encounter with Minneapolis police.

Those disparities may get worse, as the Covid-19 pandemic disproportionately affects people of color and minority-owned businesses.

"As we are seeing, Covid-19 revealed a tremendous difference in access," said Trish Kelly, managing director of Valley Vision.

"Everyone should be connected. Everyone should have devices," she said. "The structure of jobs is changing. A lot of jobs require familiarity with technology."

The pandemic and then the recent unrest have "laid bare all the gaps we have," she said.

"Broadband gaps are a reflection of the societal gaps," Kelly said. Without access to broadband, underserved communities fall behind in K-12 education and are more prone to get "low-wage, low-skill and low-education jobs. Digital access is a huge part of the divide."

The local report, "Our Path Forward: a Prosperity Strategy," calls for more digital access, more technology training and more inclusive policies.

The Prosperity Strategy says that raising the abilities of the least advantaged residents will benefit the entire region.



HEMERA TECHNOLOGIES

A pair of recent reports highlight the lack of access to broadband in underserved neighborhoods.

Closing the digital divide may be difficult, however, because internet access is mostly provided by private industry for profit, Kelly said.

The Oakland-based Greenlining Institute this week released a report, "On the Wrong Side of the Digital Divide," which posits that historically underserved neighborhoods are currently also underserved by internet access.

It found that "redlining" of maps of Oakland from the 1930s tends to mirror the neighborhoods where households currently have poor access to fast internet speeds.

Redlining was a practice of lenders limiting or denying mortgages to neighborhoods believed highly likely to default, most often because of race and poverty. Several federal laws banned redlining, based on race, notably the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977.

The institute's report found that about 22% of Californians are not connected or are under-connected to the internet, and that is most often because it costs too much. The study cites 2019 research by the California Emerging Technology Fund at the UC Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies that shows the affordability barrier affects low-income families and communities of color the most.

The research found that 89% of white Californians sampled were connected via a computer to the internet, compared to 68% of Latinos, 73% of Asian Americans and 81% of African Americans. Of Latinos who primarily speak Spanish, connectivity was just 57%.

"There are lots of people out there who can only access the internet with a smartphone," said Bruce Mirken, spokesman with The Greenlining Institute.

"Smartphones are great for some things, but not for many things," like taking classes or downloading lessons, he said.

Because of the Covid-19 crisis, many schools and governments have provided free laptops for students and deployed Wi-Fi hotspots to neighborhoods. Sacramento sent hotspot busses into underserved communities this spring as schools went to online learning after they were ordered closed.

In most cases, those are temporary fixes to deal with the pandemic, Mirken said.

"The question is how do we solve this problem permanently?" he said.

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