

More Than 3 Million Californians Can't Afford Or Access The Internet

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Internet access remains an issue for many Californians.

(Photo by LifeSupercharger via Flickr)

While 91% of California households have internet service, an estimated 3.5 million people remain disconnected, according to new findings released Thursday.

Cost is the main barrier to internet service, according to researchers who gave a briefing on Thursday. Residents spend an average of \$83.60 per month on broadband, though people who live in rural areas pay about \$5 more. Low-income households on average pay \$69.40 per month, likely due to discounted service programs and lower speed/lower cost service plans.

The 2023 Statewide Digital Equity Survey from USC and the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) provides the most up-to-date picture of broadband adoption across the state and helps inform policy decisions at the local and state levels.

Nearly 1 in 3 respondents say home broadband services are either not available or not adequate where they live. Residents can look up their address on the state's [interactive broadband map](#) to review and report internet speeds and available service. The Federal Communications Commission just published an updated [national version](#), though it's been criticized in the past for relying on incomplete data from internet companies.

In terms of service reliability, L.A. County customers rank Verizon and Frontier higher, while AT&T and T-Mobile receive lower ratings.

Meanwhile, ratings for customer service are generally low across all providers, but are “particularly low” for Frontier and Comcast, according to the survey.

“There are a lot of areas that have very limited competition for high-speed broadband,” said lead USC researcher Hernan Galperin. “Without competition, we know that prices will not go down as they should because there's just no incentive.”

Galperin explored concerns about whether internet companies were “[cherry-picking](#)” areas for upgrades to fast broadband services in a 2019 study. He found that between 2014 and 2017, the whiter, wealthier communities in Glendale went from about 50% of areas with at least two options to 100% choice. About 60% of Glendale was upgraded to fiber, which is about 20 times faster than regular cable internet.

Meanwhile, the same data showed predominantly Black and Latino communities in South LA, Watts and Compton saw no increase in competition and remained a “fiber desert” throughout the 2014-17 period.