



RURAL BROADBAND: ACCESSIBILITY, AFFORDABILITY AND ADOPTION

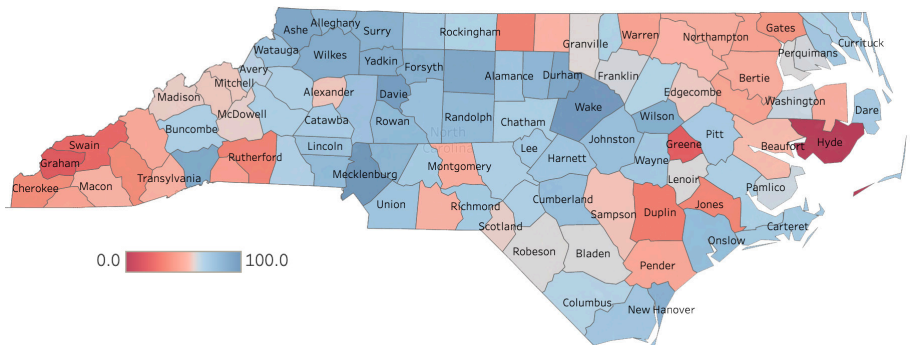


The COVID-19 pandemic put a bright light on the existing economic and technological disparities felt by rural communities across North Carolina. Broadband connectivity is essential for a well-equipped workforce, thriving small businesses, a level playing field for student achievement, and access to healthcare providers regardless of one's zip code. Every North Carolinian from the mountains to the coast, in rural and urban communities alike, must have affordable access to broadband. The pandemic underscores what our rural communities have always known: broadband is a necessity, not a luxury.

BROADBAND AVAILABILITY AND QUALITY INDEX

BROADBAND NOW ESTIMATES THAT HOMES WITH **ONE TO TWO** INTERNET USERS NEED A MINIMUM OF 25MBPS DOWNLOAD SPEEDS

Source: BROADBANDNOW



Average Scores Based on Rural Center Classification:

91 URBAN

77 REGIONAL CITY AND SUBURBAN

60 RURAL

Source: The North Carolina Department of Information Technology, Broadband Infrastructure Office. Available at: <https://www.ncbroadband.gov/indices/>.

WHILE NORTH CAROLINA HAS

173 INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS (ISPs) STATEWIDE

816,000 PEOPLE HAVE ACCESS TO ONLY ONE PROVIDER.

THIS MAKES IT NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR A CUSTOMER TO SWITCH PROVIDERS IF THEY'RE UNSATISFIED WITH SERVICE QUALITY OR AFFORDABILITY.

Source: <https://broadbandnow.com/North-Carolina>



THERE ARE AN ESTIMATED

269,810 YOUTH [UNDER 18] WITHOUT ACCESS TO BROADBAND

79,773
URBAN

51,248
REGIONAL CITY
AND SUBURBAN

138,789
RURAL

Source: U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, 2019

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Provide between \$50-\$100 million of increased funding for implementation and administration of the broadband grant program, Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT), to greatly expand eligibility, accessibility, and adoption.
- Establish a revised broadband definition that creates a minimum service threshold of 25/5 that can be used for grant funding.
- Encourage public-private partnerships by clarifying the ability of local governments to raise and spend funds for broadband infrastructure and to lease existing assets to private and nonprofit partners to help expand broadband to the last mile.
- Address broadband adoption rates by establishing an incentive-based program to provide low-cost options in underserved areas, fund technology access and digital literacy programs, and explore a subsidy program for low-income households.

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