



Overcoming the Digital Divide

Contributing authors on behalf of Team Best Practices:*

L. Austin Fredrickson, MD, Northeast Ohio Medical University

Seuli Brill, MD, The Ohio State University

Mary Jo Roach, PhD, Case Western Reserve University

Anne Gaglioti, MD, MS, Case Western Reserve University

Adam Perzynski, PhD, Case Western Reserve University

Broadband internet has been described as a “super social determinant of health” in that it serves as a gateway to other important social resources. Employment, education, banking, food assistance, and many other basic social and economic opportunities now depend on having internet access. For people with chronic conditions, having no internet makes it more difficult to schedule appointments, message a provider, receive lab results, and renew prescriptions.¹



Ohio is among the most digitally disconnected states in the United States based on data from the National Digital Inclusion Alliance, the **Pew Internet and American Life Project**, and the American Community Survey.²⁻³ For example, in rural Southeast Ohio, 75% of residents lack access to the internet in their homes or on a cellular phone. In the urban areas of Cleveland, 45% of families have no internet access of any kind in their homes.

Following are public programs designed to help people in Ohio and elsewhere connect to the internet, access devices, and receive digital skills training.

For more information, visit Cardi-OH’s podcast on the **digital divide in healthcare** and expanded resource on strategies to **maximize patient communications** with digitally excluded patients.

Home Internet

Most internet service companies offer deeply discounted monthly internet plans to lower-income households, and many communities offer resources to assist with internet access. Among the largest resources serving Ohio is the Emergency Broadband Benefit, providing a monthly discount for internet service to eligible households. By 2021, more than 400,000 Ohio households had enrolled in the program. In 2022, this program transitioned to become the Affordable Connectivity Program. The program is open to families with income at or below 200% of the federal poverty level, or with a household member who participates in certain government assistance programs (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid, WIC). The Affordable Connectivity Program can be combined with Lifeline, a federal program that lowers the monthly cost of phone or internet service for income-eligible customers. Visit lifelinesupport.org for more information.

There are three ways to apply for the Affordable Connectivity Program:

- Fill out an online application.
- Print an application (instructions available in English and Spanish) and submit by mail.
- Call the local internet company and ask for help with the company's application process.

Visit acpbenefit.org/how-to-apply for eligibility information and detailed application instructions.

Public Hotspots

Many local programs provide free networks of Wi-Fi hot spots available via schools and public libraries. For example, [InnovateOhio](https://innovateohio.org) and [BroadbandOhio](https://broadbandohio.org) maintain a list of locations to rent hotspots or access public hotspots in areas where Ohioans may not otherwise have access to home internet.



Digital Skills Training and Device Access

Devices and connectivity alone cannot address digital skill gaps. Patients in most areas of Ohio can receive free digital skills training sessions at their local public library. In addition, many parts of the state have local organizations that provide free or low-cost devices. A comprehensive resource for helping patients get connected, find training, and access devices is EveryoneOn. Patients can search for resources by zip code on the organization's website, EveryoneOn.org, or receive personalized assistance by telephone at (301) 539-9192.

References

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Partners



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