

# People in Low-Income Households Have Less Access to Internet Services

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Many human services agencies and health providers rely on virtual communication with clients to provide services. In particular, in response to the current COVID-19 pandemic, agencies and service providers in many states have closed their offices to prevent transmission of the virus. To continue serving clients, many are transitioning to remote casework and to providing medical care through telehealth services. While much of this can be done over the telephone, some may require access to the internet. In these situations, access to the internet may be a factor in accessing critical benefits to support families dealing with the economic consequences of the response to the pandemic. In addition, populations with worse internet access also tend to have higher rates of chronic conditions and worse health outcomes, suggesting that they may be particularly vulnerable to the consequences from lapses in care.

This factsheet presents estimates of access to internet services for low-income families, as well as differences by demographic characteristics and geography. The data that the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) used to calculate the numbers in this brief come from the Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey (ACS), the most recent national data available.<sup>1</sup>

**More than one in six people in poverty have no Internet access.** People with higher incomes are more likely to have internet access in their households. As shown in Figure 1, 18 percent of people below 100 percent poverty lack access to the internet.<sup>2</sup> For people at or above 400 percent poverty, only 3 percent lack internet access. Likewise, people below 100 percent poverty are 29 percentage points less likely to have access to broadband than people at or above 400 percent poverty (55 percent compared to 85 percent).

**People living in nonmetropolitan areas have less access to the internet than those in metropolitan areas.** People in low-income families living in nonmetropolitan areas are even less likely to have access to the internet than other people. As displayed

Figure 1. Fastest Household Internet Connection, Percent of People by Poverty Status, 2018

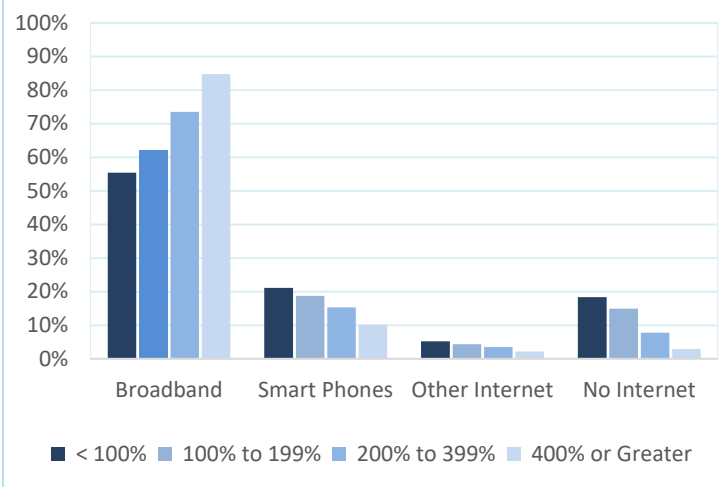
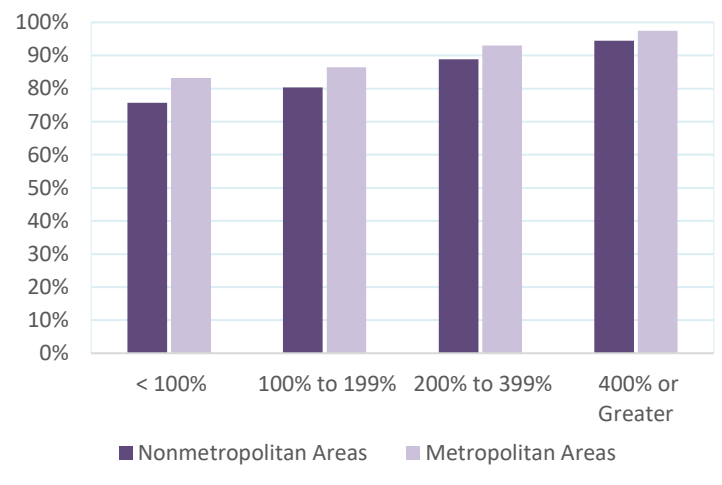


Figure 2. Household Internet Access, Percent of People by Geographical Location and Poverty Status, 2018

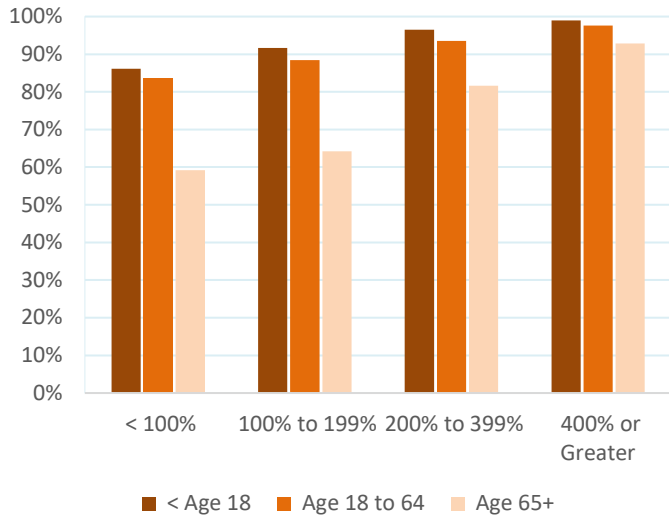


<sup>1</sup> Data were accessed via IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org).

<sup>2</sup> For this figure, broadband services are assumed to be the fastest internet connection, followed by smart phones, and then other internet services such as satellite and dial-up connections. People without internet access in their households may or may not have access outside of their households from libraries, businesses, homes of relatives, or other places.

in Figure 2, people below 100 percent of poverty are 8 percentage points less likely to have access to the internet than people in poverty living in metropolitan areas.

Figure 3. Household Internet Access, Percent of People by Age and Poverty Status, 2018



**Internet access is less common among older people in poverty.** People in poverty are much less likely to have the ability to connect with families, businesses, health care professionals, and social services online than other people, as shown in Figure 3. For example, 59 percent of people age 65 and older in poverty have access to the internet in their homes compared to 84 percent of other poor adults age 18 to 64 and 98 percent of other adults at or above 400 percent poverty.

**Access to the internet among people in poverty varies across states.** While access to the internet among people in poverty is lower across all states these percentages differ (Figure 4). For example, the percentage of people in poverty without access to the internet was 28 percent in New Mexico compared with 10 percent in Utah, a difference of 18 percentage points.

For detailed estimates from these tables, and more information on internet access in specific states see <https://aspe.hhs.gov/pdf-report/low-income-internet-access>.

Figure 4. Percentage of Low-Income People that Have No Internet Access in their Households, 2018

