

## **BROADBAND & SENIOR CITIZENS: A DEMAND-SIDE ANALYSIS**<sup>1</sup>

### ***Availability of Broadband to Senior Citizens***

- According to the FCC, broadband is available to “most of us,”<sup>2</sup> including the majority of the 37 million people over the age of 65 currently living in the United States.<sup>3</sup>
  - The FCC has found that 100 percent of zip codes in the United States report at least one broadband service provider, while over 90 percent report four or more.<sup>4</sup>
- However, many rural and sparsely populated parts of the country remain unserved.<sup>5</sup>
  - Seniors are somewhat more likely than the average U.S. resident to live in a rural part of the country.<sup>6</sup> As such, forging targeted policies that seek to increase access to and adoption of broadband among the unserved is essential. Moreover, demand-side policies that raise awareness and stimulate demand for broadband among all seniors are essential to closing the gap between adopting and non-adopting seniors.

### ***Awareness of & Demand for Broadband Among Seniors***

- A number of factors contribute to a lack of demand for broadband among senior citizens. These include: a general lack of awareness of the technology; a skepticism regarding the value and utility of information technologies; wariness of using the Internet for fear of identity theft.
  - Senior citizens are particularly hindered by a lack of computer adoption. The Consumer Electronics Association has found that “[a]dults over the age of 65 are 21% less likely to own a home computer than those under the age of 30.”<sup>7</sup>
- However, programs that educate seniors on the benefits of broadband and that train them to effectively use this technology have been successful in spurring adoption among this segment of the population.

### ***Broadband Adoption among Senior Citizens***

- Currently, only 30% of adults over the age of 65 have adopted broadband at home.<sup>8</sup>
  - Younger seniors are more likely to adopt broadband than older seniors, creating a “gray gap”: 58% of people age 55-59 have home broadband; 48% of those between age 60-64, 42% of those age 65-69, and 31% of those age 70-75 have adopted broadband, while 16% of those over 76 have home broadband.<sup>9</sup>
- Price is a major factor for seniors since many live on fixed incomes. As a result, seniors either opt out of broadband or choose slower dial-up connections. Yet training programs that show seniors how to use a connection to better their lives and to save money (e.g., to order more affordable prescription drugs or groceries) have succeeded in spurring broadband adoption.

**\*\*Additional Resources are Available on the ACLP Website\*\***

[www.nyls.edu/centers/projects/advanced\\_communications\\_law\\_and\\_policy\\_institute](http://www.nyls.edu/centers/projects/advanced_communications_law_and_policy_institute)

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> These observations are drawn from a recent publication by the ACLP. See Charles M. Davidson & Michael J. Santorelli, *The Impact of Broadband on Senior Citizens* (Dec. 2008), available at [http://www.nyls.edu/user\\_files/1/3/4/30/83/BroadbandandSeniors.pdf](http://www.nyls.edu/user_files/1/3/4/30/83/BroadbandandSeniors.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> *In the Matter of a National Broadband Plan for Our Future, Notice of Inquiry*, FCC GN Docket No. 09-51, para. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *A Statistical Profile of Older Americans 65+*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging (June 2008), available at [http://www.aoa.gov/press/prodsmats/fact/pdf/ss\\_stat\\_profile.pdf](http://www.aoa.gov/press/prodsmats/fact/pdf/ss_stat_profile.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> *High-Speed Services for Internet Access: Status as of June 30, 2008*, FCC Wireline Competition Bureau Report (rel. July 2009), Chart 12 (“*FCC Broadband Data to June 30, 2008*”).

<sup>5</sup> The FCC has observed that “High population density has a positive association with reports that high-speed subscribers are present, and low population density has an inverse association. For example, high-speed subscribers were reported to be present in more than 99% of the most densely populated Zip Codes and in 90% of Zip Codes with the lowest population densities.” See *High-Speed Services for Internet Access: Status as of December 31, 2007*, FCC Wireline Competition Bureau Report (rel. Jan. 2009), at p 4. More recently, the FCC observed that “High population density and high median household income each have had a positive association with reports that high-speed subscribers are present.” *FCC Broadband Data to June 30, 2008* at p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (U.S.D.A.), some 15 percent of seniors live in rural areas, compared with just 12 percent of the general population. See U.S.D.A. Economic Research Service, *Briefing: Rural Population and Migration: Trend 6—Challenges From an Aging Population*, available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/Population/Challenges.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> *Broadband in America: Access, Use and Outlooks*, at p. 6, Consumer Electronics Association (July 2007), available at [http://www.ce.org/PDF/CEA\\_Broadband\\_America.pdf](http://www.ce.org/PDF/CEA_Broadband_America.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> John Horrigan, *Home Broadband Adoption 2009*, at p. 13, Pew Internet & American Life Project (June 2009), available at <http://www.pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2009/Home-Broadband-Adoption-2009.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Sydney Jones, *Generations Online in 2009*, Pew Internet & American Life Project at p.5 (January 2009), available at <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1093/generations-online>.

### **About the ACLP at New York Law School**

The ACLP is an interdisciplinary public policy program that identifies and analyzes key legal and regulatory issues in the advanced communications sector. The ACLP promotes solution-focused dialogues among state and federal policy makers, industry, academe, consumers, and the financial community regarding changes to the state and federal regulatory regimes governing the advanced communications sector. For more information, please contact:

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