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Washington's goal is ambitious: achieve Universal Broadband access for all residents by 2024. In service of this goal, the Washington State Broadband Office and state Public Works board invite residents into the conversation to share their experiences in a speed test in a statewide effort to better understand broadband access in the state.

Discussing the effort, Governor Jay Inslee says:

> *Our State Broadband Office is leading the nation with this first-of-its-kind survey to collect broadband access and speed data at this level of detail. We encourage everyone to take the test and share the link. The data will provide the foundation for achieving our long-term goal to provide quality, high-speed broadband access to every Washingtonian.*

Washington's data collection effort is premised on a recognition that the data available from the FCC are not enough for state and local policymakers to understand where to focus the scarce resources they have for broadband availability.
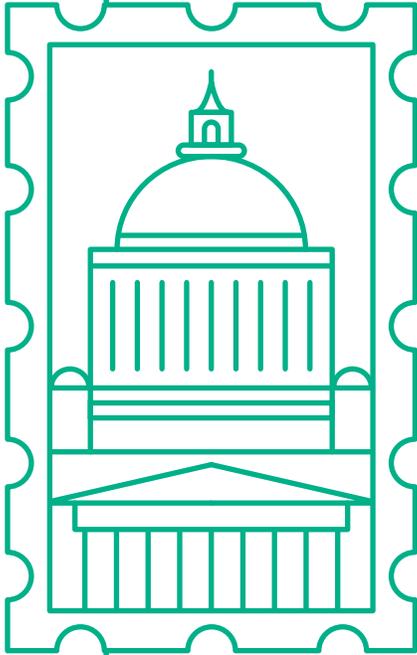
In 2020, the FCC evaluated 7.6 million Washington residents and found that 7.3 million (96.3%) had fixed broadband access at minimum speeds, a 1% decrease since its 2019 Broadband Deployment Report. Notably, the FCC's conclusions are far higher than other sources suggest. For example, BroadbandNow shows that while fast service is widely available in Washington, with around 94.6% of

the state having terrestrial broadband available, affordability remains a challenge as only around 15.4% of the state has access to service that costs less than $60 a month. High prices may contribute to the estimated 2.3 million people in Washington who Microsoft found do not use the Internet at broadband speeds.

Though these connections are vital, the listed speeds are not nearly enough to sustain an entire household, particularly into the next decade as applications like video conferencing become more data intensive.

Rural areas in Washington continue to lag behind urban areas in terms of broadband availability. The FCC evaluated 1.3 million rural Washingtonians and found that 1.1 million (83.6%) have fixed broadband access, a 5.3% decrease from its 2019 Broadband Deployment Report. In urban areas, the FCC found that 99% of 6.2 million residents evaluated had access to a fixed broadband connection at minimum speeds.

Washington's speed test initiative is part of a history of the state's work to better understand broadband availability. Between 2010 and 2014, the Washington State Broadband Office made broadband availability data public and produced static maps charting broadband access. The state makes the location of drive-in Wi-Fi hotspots available on a map and allows the public to add hotspot locations. Speed test results allow the state to better understand where broadband resources should

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be targeted and enable local leaders to bolster applications for funding, which are essential to expanding local connectivity.

In the words of State Broadband Office Director, Russ Elliott:

> *Solving broadband issues at the macro level is not an option—it requires micro-surgery. We are in a time where we need the most precise data in order to make intelligent decisions with the limited state funds available. We need everyone to participate in these surveys so we have the highest quality data to make the best decisions for providing future-proof infrastructure to solve these issues not just for today, but for the next generation.*

Additional Resources:

- How States Use Broadband Surveys to Fight for Better Funding
- Rural Washington residents working from home adapt to dearth of high-speed Internet connectivity