



Noting how the lack of access to high-speed Internet continues to be a setback for kids, families, and businesses in Wisconsin, Governor Tony Evers declared 2021 as the “Year of Broadband Access.”

While broadband access in the state continues to lag behind many other states, the Public Service Commission (PSC) of Wisconsin is seeking to improve that through a [public call for broadband coverage data](#). During his 2021 state of the state speech, Governor Evers set broadband as a top priority, [saying](#):

This pandemic has underscored—and in some ways, exacerbated—the digital divide that exists across our state. This pandemic has shown us firsthand that lack of access to high-speed Internet continues to be a setback for kids, families, and businesses across our state. So, tonight, I’m excited to declare 2021 the Year of Broadband Access.

The PSC seeks to improve on the current national information available, which is provided by the Commission and collected through Form 477. Form 477 is well known to overstate broadband availability, showing areas where broadband could be provided and only measuring at the census block level, rather than charting the exact locations that actually subscribe to the service. The PSC requests data from providers, and also designates a member of its broadband mapping team to work with providers and ensure the coverage information is accurate, improving on the data provided by the FCC. The FCC evaluated 5.8 million Wisconsin residents statewide and found that 5.4 million (93.2%) had fixed broadband access at minimum 25/3 Mbps speeds.

Even before the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the PSC was receiving [more](#)

[grant requests](#) than they had dollars to award, and connectivity remains an acute problem for rural Wisconsin, where the FCC concluded that 1.4 of 1.8 million residents (78.2%) had access to a fixed connection at minimum speeds. In urban areas, the agency found that 99.8% of 4.1 million residents had fixed broadband access.

In November 2020, Forward Analytics [released a report](#) discussing the many challenges that rural parts of Wisconsin continue to face and shining light on some successful strategies for improving deployment. In particular, the report found that “Local governments can play a leadership role in solving the problem of adequate universal broadband.”

In April 2020, shortly after the onset of the pandemic, the [Wisconsin PSC](#) launched [a map of public Wi-Fi locations](#), network name and credentials, signal strength, and the best place for users to connect. The State Superintendent of Public Education, [Caroline Stanford Taylor](#), [said](#): “The digital divide is even more apparent during this health emergency.” While public Wi-Fi is by no means a substitute for reliable, affordable home broadband access, completing work and school assignments from parking lots has become the norm for many people who do not have a home broadband subscription.

Additional Resources:

- [Brown County: Launches broadband speed test initiative](#)
- [Wisconsin launches ‘emergency Internet’ Wi-Fi finder](#)
- [A big idea to improve Internet access in Wisconsin](#)