



The State of Tech: Expanding Access

Expanding the use of technology is promising to many people with developmental disabilities, but barriers continue to exist. Access to inexpensive, high-speed internet is often a problem, especially in rural areas of Ohio. And the ability to afford technology devices, such as smart devices and assistive technology, is a problem for many. However, nonprofit organizations and government departments are devoting resources to bridge the digital divide caused by systemic issues and gaps in access to technology.



Adequate access to broadband

Approximately

2.4 MILLION

Ohio households are without adequate access to broadband, especially in rural settings.

Source: Connected Nation Ohio

Expanding Broadband Access to Technology

Increased access to reliable and affordable high-speed internet, also called “broadband access,” is not just about having access to entertainment on the internet. More importantly, increased broadband access helps people to find better healthcare, work and educational opportunities. In Ohio, efforts are being made to increase the accessibility of technology for individuals with developmental disabilities, but barriers still persist.

“We still have some broadband issues within the state that create some challenges for people to gain information or to get the support that they need,” said Jan Rogers, the program director of ATAEM Center at the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence. “I think even having access to places where you can purchase technology can be challenging in some areas of our state.”

According to Connected Nation Ohio, approximately 2.4 million Ohio households are without adequate access to broadband, especially in rural settings. And this group overwhelmingly includes people with disabilities. The Pew Research Center survey, done in 2010, reported that just over half of American households with a person with a disability use the internet, compared to 81% of households without a disability.

“We need to know where there is digital disparity – where families, businesses, agricultural sectors and whole communities are being left unserved and underserved,” said Sandy Oxley, executive director in a press release from Connected Nation Ohio. “It’s both a social and economic issue for the Buckeye State. Having broadband means accessing government, healthcare, and educational resources and it means a positive impact that measures not just in the millions but in billions of dollars.”

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Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council



A Digital Series about the Impact of Technology on Ohioans with Developmental Disabilities



The cost of internet access

fluctuates drastically throughout Ohio, with people in rural areas paying much more than those living in urban areas.

On April 29, 2019, Gov. Mike DeWine established the Innovate Ohio Platform, which is run by Lt. Gov. Jon Husted. The new office's general mandate is to modernize government technological services. However, the office could potentially address broadband internet access in underserved communities.

"Ohio leaders have long recognized the importance of connecting every Ohioan and have been committed to tech planning throughout the state," said Tom Ferree, Chairman & CEO, Connected Nation. "We are proud to be a part of that history of hard work and are excited about this next phase. It is clear that Gov. Mike DeWine, Lt. Gov. John Husted, and Ohio legislators are taking action and have committed to work together for a common and important goal – ensuring all Ohio families and businesses have access to the opportunities and resources broadband can provide."

Expanding Financial Access to Broadband and Technology

The cost of internet access fluctuates drastically throughout Ohio, with people in rural areas paying much more than those living in urban areas. Comcast, a telecommunications company, recently announced the expansion of its "Internet Essentials" program to allow all low-income individuals, including those with disabilities, to get broadband for \$10 a month. Comcast, in an article from CNET, stated that the company realizes that advances in technology benefit people with disabilities in many ways, but "while much potential exists in these connected devices, there's an underlying necessity: an affordable home broadband connection." Read the entire article here:

[Comcast's Internet Essentials delivers low-cost broadband to people with disabilities](#)

The Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) modified its waiver programs with rule [OAC 5123-9-12](#) effective Jan. 1, 2019. The change to the administrative code covers assistive technologies under DODD's Individual Option (IO), SELF, and Level One waivers. The rule established requirements for evaluating needs, purchasing devices and training and support once the devices are received. The rule includes covering the cost for internet access when a person is receiving remote supports and the remote support vendor indicates internet service is required for other components of the equipment used for remote support to function.



Take Action!

Contact [InnovateOhio](#) and [Connected Nation Ohio](#) to provide input on the issues you have with internet (broadband) access where you live. They want to hear from all Ohioans!

Government agencies are open to working with outside organizations and exploring the possibilities of technology for the developmental disability community.

Another barrier to technology access is being able to afford a technology device. As mentioned before, DODD's new rule has broadened the types of technology that you may be eligible to purchase through a waiver. Some county boards of developmental disabilities and other organizations also offer grants to alleviate some of the financial burden. Last year, the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities conducted a mini-grant pilot project, offering grants of up to \$200 toward the purchase of off-the-shelf technologies. Waivers and grants, however, don't always cover the whole cost of a piece of technology.

"If you do make that decision that you're going to try and purchase technology and use up part of that waiver for the purchase of the device, you really want to invest the time to make sure that it's the right device," said Bill Darling, the director of Assistive Technology of Ohio (AT Ohio) which is Ohio's federally designated Tech Act program. "It can be life changing technology, but only if it's the right fit for that person."

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– Tom Ferree, Chairman & CEO, Connected Nation

Darling added that he has seen positive developments since the state was designated as a Technology First state last year. He says that government agencies are now more open to working with outside organizations and exploring the possibilities of technology for the developmental disability community.

"It's an ongoing struggle because it's such a changing field, and we need to do a better job," said Darling. "And part of what we're trying to do is a better job of training the decision makers and the disability professionals as best we can so that they're up to date. We think that if they know what's out there and how it changes people's lives ultimately that will lead to good decisions by the government policymakers."

Take Action!

Here at the Ohio DD Council, we would like to know about your experiences with funding to get the technology you need. Please send us an email with your feedback.

About This Article

"The State of Tech: Expanding Access" is the third in a four-part series that aims to educate and inform people about the impact of technology advances and the digital divide for Ohioans with developmental disabilities. This article was published in September 2019.

Clay Voytek of O'Neill Communications wrote the articles for this series. O'Neill Communications is the Ohio DD Council's Public Awareness grantee. The articles in this series were funded by the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act.

For more information about the series, including links to all articles, go to The State of Tech.



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