



CONNECTHOME & CONNECTHOMEUSA: NARROWING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN HUD-ASSISTED COMMUNITIES

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is uniquely positioned to reduce the digital divide that hinders a household's ability to take full advantage of the life-changing opportunities that online access provides. Low-income households are at a greater risk of being affected by the digital divide due to limited budgets and lack of digital literacy skills. Today, access to information technology is essential to educational and professional advancement.

To tackle this problem, HUD launched the ConnectHome pilot in 2015. Originally, the goal of the pilot program was to focus on educational attainment by helping to close what is known as the *homework gap*. The homework gap refers to the inability of school-age children, generally in low-income households, to access the Internet and necessary resources at home during after-school hours. Children fall behind when they do not have access to a computer or broadband Internet at home, in stark contrast with their peers who have these technologies available at home. This gap can have a cumulative negative effect on young students, leading to significant achievement gaps and missed high-value opportunities.

What was the challenge?

A baseline survey, conducted across ConnectHome communities, revealed that while one third of the households (34%) had high-speed Internet access, the other two thirds were either under-connected with a smartphone or limited data plan (35%), or had no Internet access at all (31%).¹ Under-connectivity and lack of connectivity issues are reflected in other data sets. The 2018 American Community Survey (ACS) data demonstrates a pronounced correlation between the lack of Internet access at home and other household characteristics, such as household income. For example, 58% of surveyed households making less than \$25,000 had a broadband Internet subscription, but the number increased to 96% for households making \$150,000 or more.²

What was the solution?

With support from the White House, HUD and its non-profit partners EveryoneOn and US Ignite launched ConnectHome. This pilot program reached 27 communities and one tribal nation across the United States to help narrow the digital divide for K-12 families in public housing. The program enabled families to access low-cost Internet options, devices, and related training. This was made possible through local partnerships between the ConnectHome communities and their municipal leadership, the private sector, and non-profit organizations focused on improving the educational and economic outcomes of students living in these communities.

Capitalizing on the pilot program's success, HUD, in partnership with EveryoneOn, drove the design, implementation, and expansion with a new program, ConnectHomeUSA. Launched in 2017, ConnectHomeUSA continues to promote digital inclusion in public housing and tribal communities. Using a

¹ The "Baseline Internet Access Among ConnectHome Communities: Results from the National Evaluation of ConnectHome" was conducted from November 2015 through June 2016 after the launch of the pilot. The document is available at <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/ConnectHome-Brief.pdf>.

² The "Presence and Types of Internet Subscriptions in Household" data, collected in the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, is available at <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=b28&hidePreview=true&tid=ACSDT1Y2018.B28002&vintage=2018>.



collective impact model, a lead organization—usually the housing authority—works hand-in-hand with municipal leadership, local community organizations, for-profit, and non-profit entities to solve the digital divide. Both the pilot program and ConnectHomeUSA have created the platform to provide digital literacy programs, access to devices, and affordable connectivity solutions.

What was the result?

ConnectHomeUSA encourages its participating communities to provide digital resources to HUD-assisted residents of all ages. The programs have helped connect HUD-assisted residents to job opportunities, children and their caregivers to better online resources that improve educational outcomes, and elderly residents and residents with disabilities to critically needed social connections. In its most recent annual report for ConnectHomeUSA, EveryoneOn recounted the following achievements, estimated at approximately \$3.3 million in value in 2019 alone:

- Deployed more than 7,000 devices to families in need (approximately \$1 million in value).
- Connected more than 20,000 people to Internet services in their homes (approximately \$2.3 million in value).
- Delivered more than 200 digital literacy trainings ranging from basic computer readiness to coding.³

To date, the initiative has accepted 100 cities across the country into the program, most recently onboarding 13 new communities, and thereby reaching the initiative's goal of expanding to 100 cities by 2020.

ConnectHomeUSA communities are working to increase the number of connected residents by at least 15% each year.⁴

Future Steps

HUD will continue to refine the ConnectHomeUSA model with the goal of sharing best practices and developing new technical assistance resources so that more communities can implement successful digital inclusion programs. Plans are underway to issue a series of replicable connectivity case studies and to publish a new iteration of the ConnectHomeUSA Playbook in fiscal year 2021. The ConnectHomeUSA Playbook is a step-by-step guide that helps PHAs and stakeholders plan a comprehensive digital inclusion program which addresses a community's need for high-speed Internet, low-cost devices, and digital literacy trainings.⁵

Through its continued support of this initiative, the Department is helping to ensure that HUD-assisted residents can improve their quality of life through access to 21st century tools and training and opening the doors to economic and educational opportunity.

³ The ConnectHomeUSA Annual Report: 2019 Year in Review is available at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/590bfab229687fec92f55513/t/5e9f190c3c6f856083b4b6d4/1587484945446/2020.03.17+ConnectHomeUSA+Annual+Report+2019+Year+in+Review.pdf>.

⁴ More information on ConnectHomeUSA is available at <https://connecthomeusa.org/>.

⁵ The 2016 ConnectHome Playbook is available at <https://connecthome.hud.gov/sites/images/uploads/2016/11/ConnectHome-Playbook-Web.pdf>.