

California's Digital Divide

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Broadband access has grown in recent years, but many still lack access.

- ▶ Access to fast and reliable home internet has continued to increase, but many still live without access. The American Community Survey (ACS) found that 85% of Californian households had high-speed internet at home in 2021—a slight improvement from 84% in 2019, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ▶ Since 2019, access to broadband at home has become more common for most demographic groups. But racial and ethnic gaps persist: 81% of Latino, 83% of Black, 87% of white, and 88% of Asian households report having broadband access at home in 2021.
- ▶ Households headed by adults 65 and older (83%), those with annual incomes below \$50,000 (76%), and those headed by individuals without a college degree (80%) are less likely to have broadband access at home.
- ▶ In 2021, 95% of California households had any type of internet access, including from a cell phone—a slight increase from 93% in 2019.

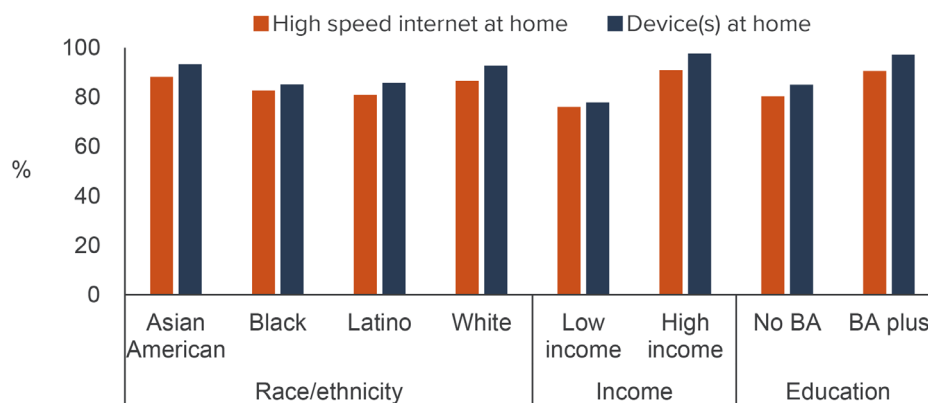
Gaps in device access have narrowed slightly.

- ▶ In 2021, slightly fewer California households (10%) did not have access to a desktop, laptop, or other computing device at home than in 2019, when 11% lacked access.
- ▶ Lacking access to a device is more common if the head of household is low-income (22%) or does not have a college degree (15%).
- ▶ Furthermore, 15% of Black and 14% of Latino households do not have access to a device at home, while it's less common for Asian and white households to lack access (7% in each case).

Not all California students can access the digital tools they need for school.

- ▶ Many students still struggle to access the internet for their homework, even when their district provides a device. For example, about [13,000 students](#) of Fresno Unified School District's 60,000 students remain unconnected to the internet outside of their school's network in the greater Fresno area.
- ▶ Nearly 1 in 20 households (4%) with school-age children do not have access to a device at home.

Low-income households were less likely to have access to broadband and devices in 2021



Source: American Community Survey, 2021.

Notes: Average California household size is three. Low-income households have an annual income below \$50,000; or roughly 225% of the federal poverty line for a three-person household in 2022 (\$51,818). High-income households have an annual income above \$100,000. Education level and race/ethnicity are for household head.

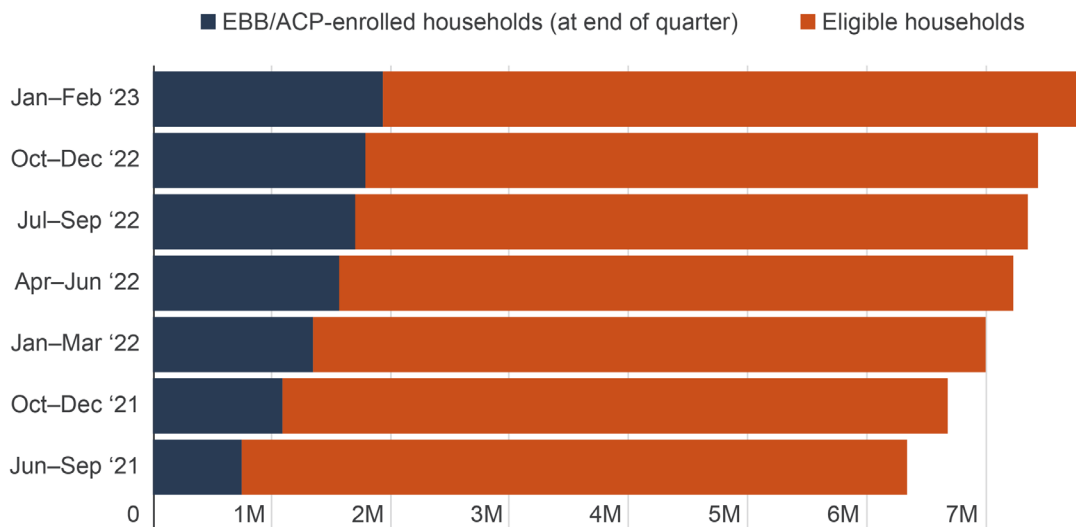
Working Californians rely on digital access, and most want a digital work option.

- ▶ The current work situation for 35% of employed Californians involves at least some work from home or remote work as of November 2022, similar to the 37% who had this situation in 2021.
- ▶ Most employed Californians would prefer the option to work from home or remotely at least some of the time: 29% would “work from home or remotely full-time” and 32% would “mix some days working remotely, some days at the workplace” if they were given the choice, according to the [November 2022 PPIC Statewide Survey](#).

Recent federal and state funding may help shrink the digital divide.

- ▶ California Senate Bill 156 (2021) provides over \$6 billion to expand broadband infrastructure and enhance internet access in unserved and underserved communities. The federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (2021) provides at least \$100 million to expand broadband infrastructure in California.
- ▶ Even with funding like SB 156 to defray the [infrastructure costs of building](#) out broadband, internet availability can differ greatly among neighbors due to individual financial constraints, a home’s elevation, signal obstacles, accessibility for work trucks, and the accuracy of previous attempts to estimate an area’s access.
- ▶ In May 2021, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) launched the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) program, a temporary pandemic intervention that subsidized household internet bills up to \$50 per month. At the end of 2021, the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) replaced EBB—offering long-term support for eligible households but at a reduced amount of \$30 per month.
- ▶ Most eligible households still haven’t received the ACP internet subsidy: only 36% of over 5.8 million eligible households had enrolled by April 2023, according to the California Department of Technology.
- ▶ The share of households enrolled in the program slowed from 46% in late 2021 to less than 9% each quarter since mid-2022, but ACP still served more than one in seven households in the state (about 16% or 2,027,080 households) as of April 2023.

Only a third of eligible CA households receive federally subsidized internet



Sources: Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) / Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) Enrollments and Claims Tracker, FCC, 2021–2022; California Department of Technology (CDT), “Affordable Connectivity Program enrollment tracker,” 2022–2023; Galperin, Hernan (2022). Notes: Final month of each quarterly or sub-quarterly window. Estimates of eligible households use California Department of Technology’s ACP enrollment tracker: Galperin, 2022.

Sources: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2019 and 2021, via “[IPUMS USA: Version 13.0](#)” [dataset]; FCC, 2021–2022; California Department of Technology (CDT), 2022–2023; Galperin, Hernan (2022). “[Estimating participation in the Affordable Connectivity Program: Policy Brief #2](#),” USC Annenberg Research Network on International Communication.