

## Attachment 1: Data & Research Related to the Digital Divide

### Key Data Findings

The heart of ConnectTO's work is mitigating the digital divide, and all the program's work is aimed at least in part at this as we know that this divide is real and persistent. Prior research – currently in the process of being updated in partnership with research staff at Toronto Metropolitan University – commissioned by ConnectTO have indicated an extensive need for affordable, reliable, high-speed connectivity among Torontonians. Certain segments of the population have been more deeply affected, but research finds that this need is present across the city. *Key relevant findings from the report<sup>1</sup> indicated that:*

- 34% of Toronto households worry about paying their internet bills—and this is highest among low-income, newcomer, single parent, Latin American, South Asian, Black and Southeast Asian residents.
- Half of Toronto households without internet service cite cost as the reason.
- 61% of Toronto households without internet service say it impacts their ability to access critical services and information.
- 42% of Toronto households without internet service use the public library for access.
- Toronto households with less than \$50,000 annual income have less than one computer per person.
- 52% of low-income households in Toronto report download speeds below the national target of 50 Mbps.
- Toronto residents 60 years of age or older have lower rates access to home internet services.

*Additionally, ConnectTO's partner group at TPL have previously conducted their own studies on the digital divide. These results confirm ConnectTO's data, showing for instance that:*

- 61% of respondents using library-provided technology indicating that they would not otherwise have access. This was significantly higher for respondents from low-income households (73%) and Indigenous patrons (76%).
- Of that 61%, 81% used internet access at the library that they would not otherwise have had. This was higher (86%) for youth patrons, Indigenous patrons and low-income households respectively.
- Patrons of TPL's public wi-fi and internet services utilize these offerings for:
  - Business growth
  - Career development
  - Accessing government services

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<sup>1</sup> "Mapping Toronto's Digital Divide." Andrey, Sam, M.J. Masoodi, Nisa Malli, and Selasi Dorkenoo. 2021. (<https://brookfieldinstitute.ca/mapping-torontos-digital-divide/>)

## ***Research Initiatives***

The City has partnered with Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) to update its 2021 Household Broadband Study. Staff are positioned to deploy this survey on a regular basis in order to track progress and change in this area, and with a deeper focus on the affordability issues facing low-income households. Updated annual data will allow staff to propose efficient, targeted and evidence informed policy direction.

Additionally, staff have engaged the University of Toronto to conduct a multi-variable neighbourhood analysis that will inform equity-driven free public Wi-Fi deployment. This will help prioritize limited resources to bring this service to locations with maximal impact on underserved communities and populations. Staff anticipate that these along with public consultation will inform the future, expanded public Wi-Fi program proposed in Recommendation 1.

The City also currently has a research proposal awaiting fulfilment through Civic Labs TO that will map the approximate locations of high-capacity internet infrastructure of ISPs operating in the City. The purpose of this research is to ascertain the neighbourhoods where high-capacity internet services are unavailable, and to provide guidance on where City resources may be most efficiently deployed to help resolve these deficits.

These research partnerships will continue to be of key value to the program's efforts. As a standing policy for data-sharing and transparency, ConnectTO staff intend to publish as much of the resulting data as is allowable under relevant law on the City's website in the interest of data-sharing and transparency. Staff intend to develop a Digital Equity Hub where these and other key city indicators are regularly updated and may be readily accessed. The broader community may then make use of these data, which serves in turn to invite the community to analyze and propose creative solutions.