

2015 Survey: Home Internet Adoption by Californians with Disabilities

Identifying the challenges and opportunities to help people with disabilities obtain affordable, accessible high-speed Internet at home

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Abstract

The World Institute on Disability (WID) is partnering with the California Emerging Technology Fund to annually survey Californians with disabilities to determine how high-speed Internet adoption rates compare to the overall state population and to identify the factors leading to low adoption rates. This marks the second year of a three-year survey built to more fully understand Internet adoption trends among this population and to develop public policy recommendations to help drive adoption higher among people with disabilities.

Results from the second year of the three-year survey showed that among a revised group of surveyed Californians with disabilities there has been a slight increase in those reporting having high-speed Internet access: from 62% of respondents in 2014 to 66% of respondents in 2015. However, this was lower than the 79% of the overall population reported by the Field Research Corporation and CETF. The price point at which many households without high-speed Internet say they would consider subscribing to a service is \$10 per month. Not including limited-time deals, residential high-speed Internet costs between \$50 and \$70 a month, and sometimes much higher, in California.

Key 2015 Findings

In 2015, we surveyed a second cohort of 100 people with disabilities and found that 66% had access to high-speed Internet, up 4% from a year ago, yet still trailing the larger population by 13 percentage points.

- More than one-third of Californians with Disabilities (34%) do not have high-speed Internet at home, compared to 21% of the overall population.
- A large percentage of non-Internet subscribers say that \$10 a month is what they can afford.
- Over half of all 2015 respondents say that their disability makes it difficult to use a device to go online.
- About one third (34%) of respondents use an assistive device or software to access the Internet, increasing the cost to get online at home.

Introduction

The Internet holds the power to increase the independence of people with disabilities, with connections to vital resources and through the accessibility of community interaction. Affordable Internet at home is essential for people with disabilities. It can dramatically improve quality of life through the provisions of access to online banking, information about health and governmental resources, employment information, news, and academic outlets. The Internet allows people with disabilities access to vital resources to promote and sustain independent living.

This report highlights the 2015 findings of a survey conducted by WID, in collaboration with the California Emerging Technology Fund. The purpose of the survey was to determine whether people with disabilities have high-speed Internet access at home. For those participants without high-speed Internet at home, respondents were asked to identify the primary factor inhibiting their access. The survey also captured whether a person's disability made using the Internet more difficult and what, if any, assistive technology they used.

Methodology

Using a modified proportionate stratified sampling technique, this survey specifically targeted people with disabilities by recruiting participants directly from disability serving organizations in California. Participants from the 2014 survey were targeted for the 2015 survey, but only 63 of the 109 respondents from 2014 could be reached, despite financial incentives and participants' promises to remain in the survey for 3 years. Among those who could not be reached for a second year of surveying: 8 phone numbers no longer belonged to past respondents, 7 phone numbers were disconnected, 6 past participants refused to retake the survey, and 25 past respondents failed to respond to repeated calls and voicemails. Among the 63 respondents in 2015 from the 2014 class, 89% or 56 of the 63 participants did have high-speed access. Of the remaining 11 participants, all highlighted the cost of high-speed access as their primary barrier to obtaining the service. All participants have various disabilities, with a large portion of respondents reporting more than one disability. The most common disabilities cited were difficulty walking, chronic pain, difficulty using hands, partially sighted/low vision, and hearing loss. The English language-only survey was conducted from June to December of 2015 and used multiple communication techniques, including telephone calls, online surveys, and email to accommodate people with various disabilities.

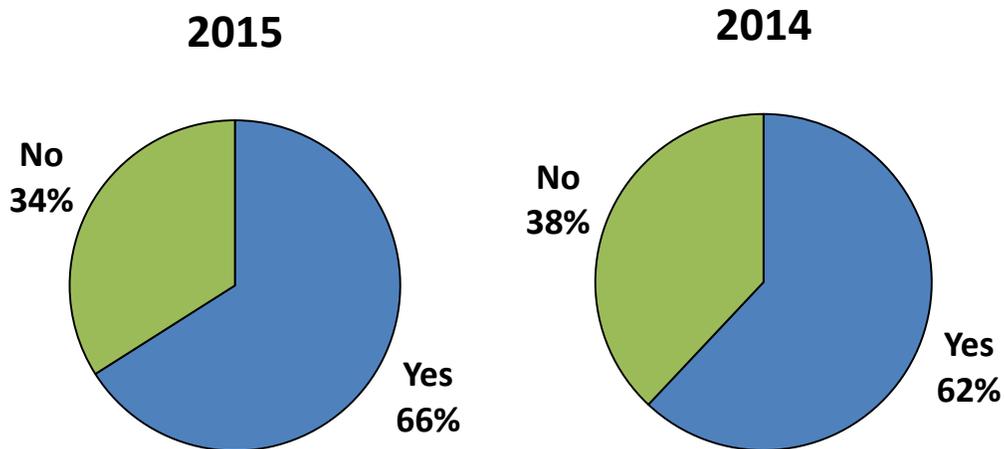
Analysis

We believe this extraordinary rate of disability high-speed access (California high-speed penetration overall is only 79%) is a direct result of outreach work by the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers (CFILC), who directly targeted a similar constituency in their "Digital Access Program." Further, this suggests that the CFILC work significantly narrowed the digital divide, particularly for individuals with disabilities connected to the California independent living movement.

Digital Divide Persists: People with Disabilities Are Much Less Likely to Have High-Speed Internet at Home

Given the paucity of response from 2014 participants in 2015, we surveyed a second cohort of 100 people with disabilities and found that 66% had access to high-speed Internet, up 4 percentage points from 2014's 62%. However, people with disabilities still trail their non-disabled peers by over 13 percentage points (79% for the overall population compared to 66%), according to a June 2015 survey conducted by the Field Research Corporation and supported by the California Emerging Technology Fund. These numbers include those who get online via computer or Smartphone only.

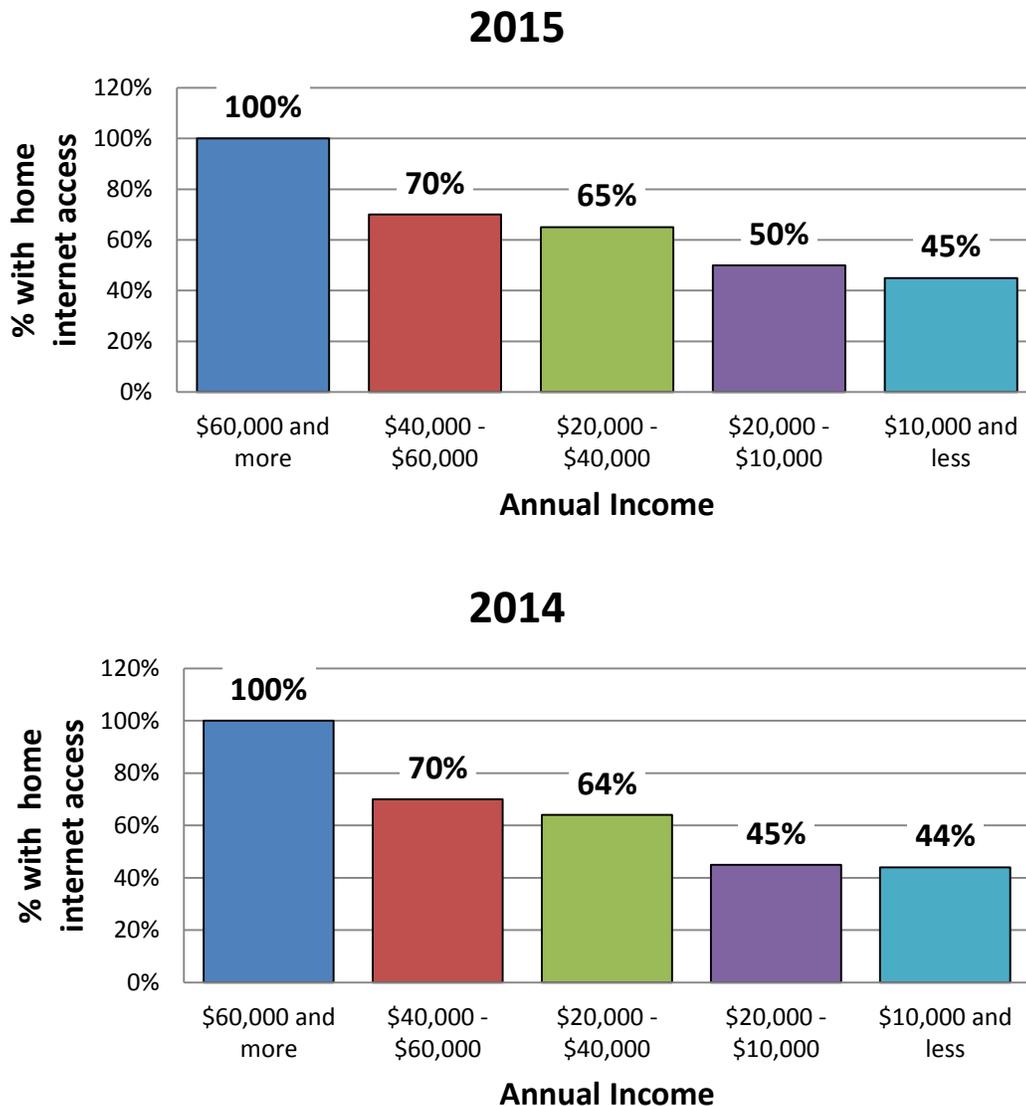
Figure 1: Home Internet Adoption



Income and Home Internet Adoption Rates

The 2015 WID survey found that among the 100 respondents, 66% reported having home Internet, compared to 62% in 2014. Among respondents earning more than \$60,000 per year, 100% reported having Internet access at home, compared to 100% in 2014. Those earning between \$40,000 and \$60,000 were at 70% in both 2015 and 2014. Those earning between \$20,000 and \$40,000 were at 65% as opposed to 64% in 2014. Those earning between \$10,000 and \$20,000 were at 50% as opposed to 45% in 2014, and respondents who reported earning less than \$10,000 were at 45% as opposed to 44% in 2014.

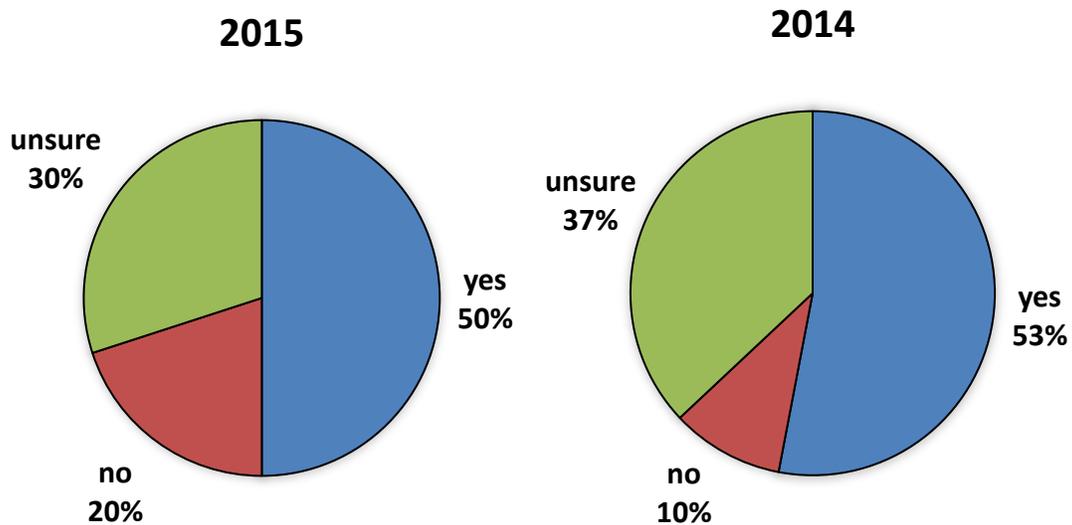
Figure 2: Home Internet Adoption by Income



Non-Subscribers Say \$10 Per Month Is What They Can Afford

Of the 34% currently without high-speed Internet at home, 50% reported they plan to subscribe in the next year if they can afford it, compared to 53% in 2014; 30% reported they are unsure compared to 37% in 2014, and 20% reported they have no plans to subscribe compared to 10% in 2014. In both 2014 and 2015, non-subscribers reported \$10 per month is what they can afford. Most affordable offers focus on low-income families with students, and therefore, most people with disabilities are ineligible because national studies show nearly 80% of people with disabilities do not have school age children. Market-rate Internet plans, excluding limited time offers, typically range from \$50 to \$70 per month.

Figure 3: Plan to Subscribe to Home Internet



Access Away from Home: Mobile Phones, Work, and the Library

As seen in Figure 4a, of those who responded to the question in 2015, 75% have access to high-speed Internet outside the home, compared to 2014 data that showed 73% of respondents had high-speed Internet outside the home. In both 2014 and 2015, the most common method that people used to get online away from home was through their mobile devices (60% of respondents in 2015, 55% of respondents in 2014). Others cited the library (40% in both) and at work (32% in 2015, 28% in 2014).

Figure 4a: Have Access to High-Speed Internet Outside the Home

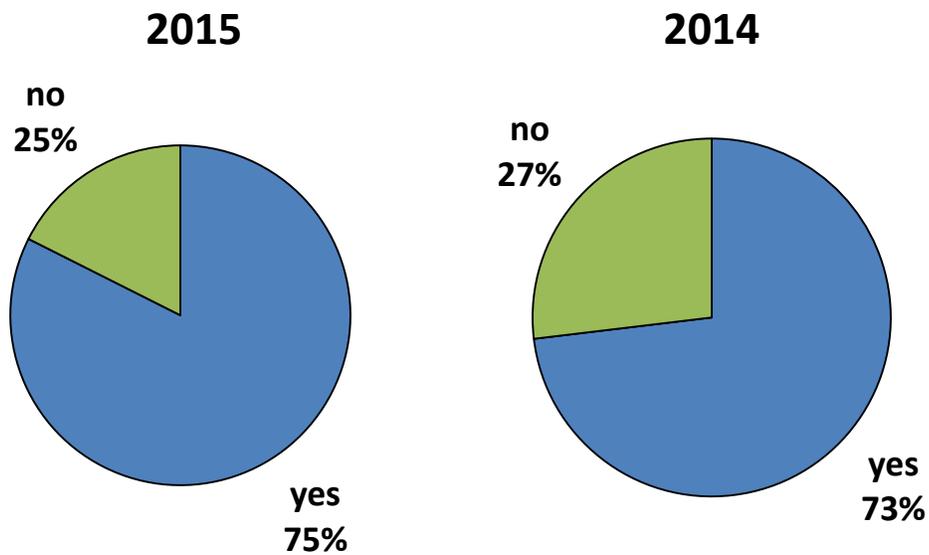
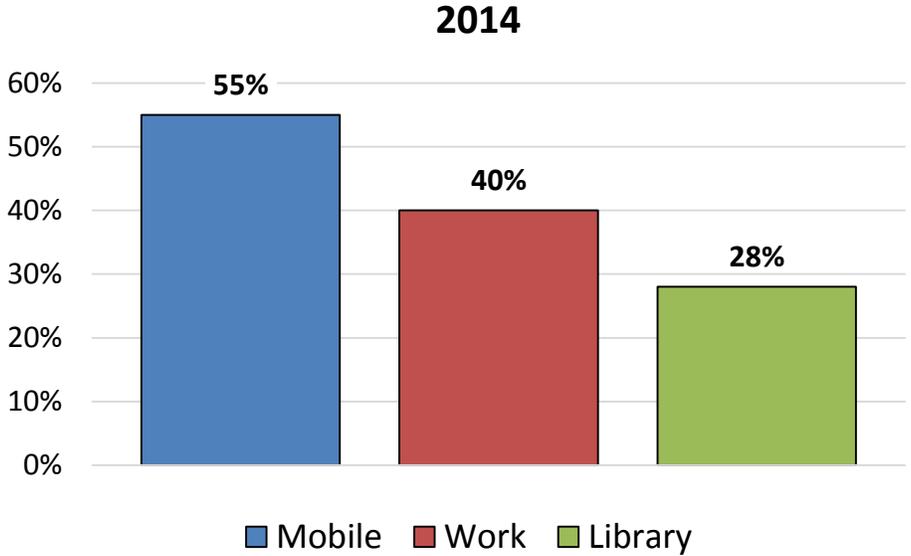
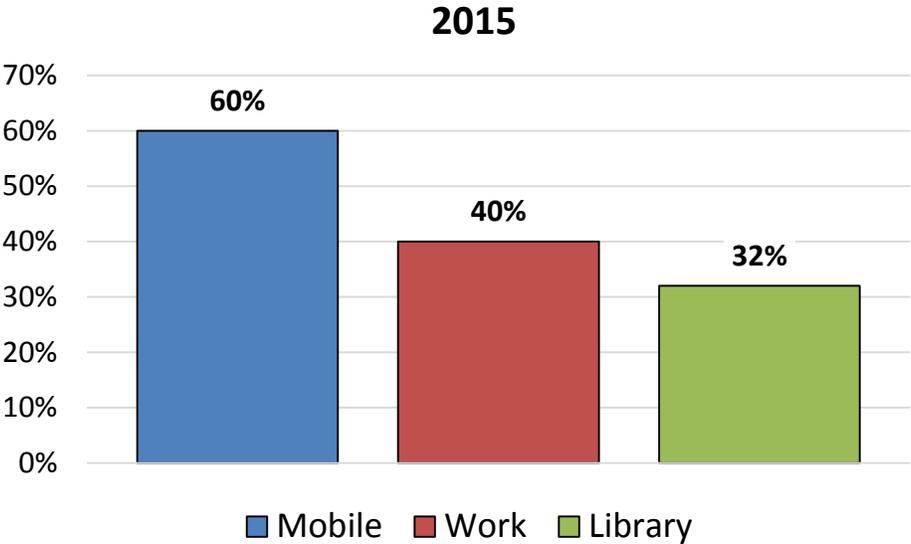


Figure 4b: Percent w/ access to Internet outside the home, by type/location



Accessibility Is a Barrier: Respondents Cite Difficulty Using Computers and Expense of Assistive Technology

According to the 2015 WID survey, 60% of respondents said their disability or chronic medical condition makes it difficult to use a computer compared to the 2014 WID survey that reported 55% of respondents said their disability or chronic medical condition makes it difficult to use a computer. About 34% of both 2015 and 2014 respondents reported using an assistive device or software to access the Internet. The most common types of assistive technology cited were voice screen readers and voice recognition software, which can cost hundreds of dollars.

Figure 5a: Difficulty Using a Computer

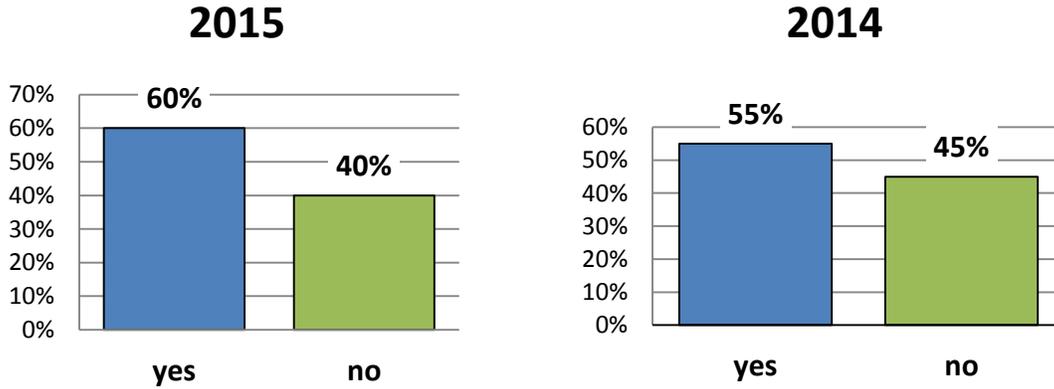
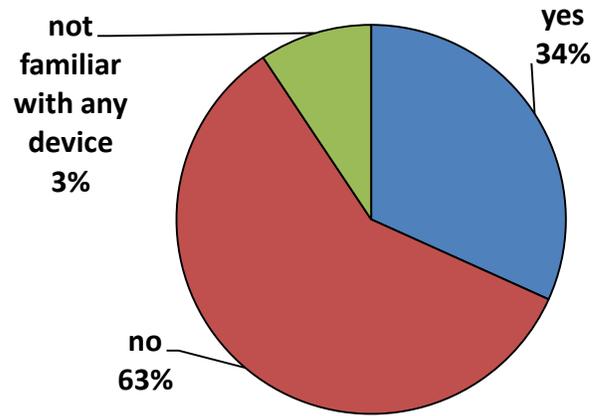
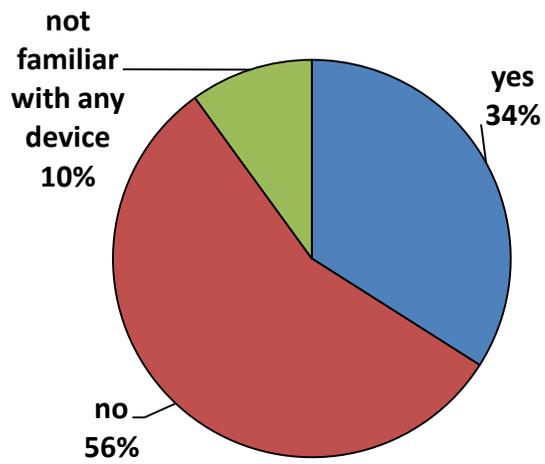


Figure 5b: Assistive Technology Use

2015



2014



Conclusions and Recommendations

People with disabilities still trail in access to high-speed Internet at home. Cost appears to be the primary obstacle. More than half surveyed also cited physical access issues.

The importance of high-speed Internet at home cannot be emphasized enough. Some observers point to other studies, illustrating increased mobile access for people with disabilities, but the mobile experience may limit certain educational and transactional experiences, thus limiting opportunities for people with disabilities. Therefore, it is critical to continue to educate people with disabilities and low-income people about how to obtain discounted high-speed Internet. In addition, many discount programs limit eligibility to families who are part of the free or reduced lunch programs in schools. While such programs undoubtedly reach a portion of the population, national studies show nearly 80% of disabled households do not have school age children and therefore, are not eligible for a discount. We urge providers, regulators, and other champions of equality to:

- Expand discount high-speed Internet service to all low-income households (especially people with disabilities, seniors, and returning vets).
- Set performance standards (reach 45% of eligible households in 2 years).
- Capitalize an independent fund to support experienced community organizations, including disabled persons organizations, to help reach the 45% goal.
- Encourage service providers to offer stand-alone Internet service.

About the World Institute on Disability

An internationally recognized public policy center founded in 1983 by leaders of the Independent Living Movement, WID focuses on issues and problems that directly affect people's ability to live full and independent lives. The mission of WID in communities and nations worldwide is to eliminate barriers to full social integration and to increase employment, economic security, and health care for persons with disabilities. WID creates innovative programs and tools; conducts research, training, public education, and advocacy campaigns; and provides technical assistance. For more information, please visit www.wid.org.

About the California Emerging Technology Fund

The mission of CETF is to close the Digital Divide in California by helping low-income Californians, including people with disabilities, to obtain affordable high-speed Internet at home, low-cost computing devices, and digital literacy training. The goal is to reach 98% of all residences with broadband infrastructure and to achieve 80% home adoption by 2017. For more information, please visit www.cetfund.org.