

Connectivity in the Commonwealth: The Good, the Bad, and What's Needed

Prepared by Dr. Christopher Ali for the [Keystone Internet Coalition \(KIC\)](#), April 2026

Federal investment will soon bring the internet to many Pennsylvanians that have been without service for decades. But the Commonwealth should not rely on federal investment alone to solve its core needs. We need leadership and investment from the state *itself* to ensure that hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvanians are not left behind in our increasingly digital world.

This brief will provide a background on the state of connectivity in Pennsylvania in 2026 and policy recommendations to address the issues keeping Pennsylvanians offline.

The State of Internet Connectivity in Pennsylvania

Access to Broadband Infrastructure

Overall Coverage	Urban Coverage	Rural Coverage
95.1%	99.4%	81.4%

<https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-24-27A1.pdf>

156k homes and businesses in rural Pennsylvania cannot access reliable internet service. The state will soon use \$711 million in federal Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) funds to connect them, but over 40k will receive service through technologies—satellite or wireless—that offer **questionable** speed and reliability (i.e. similar to the service they can access today). Due to their remoteness, these locations will likely not attract private investment and remain poorly connected unless the Commonwealth takes action.

Affordability of Internet Service

Affordability is the single largest **barrier** to broadband adoption in Pennsylvania. This issue was made worse in 2024, when the federal Affordable Connectivity Program ended and 763k low-income Pennsylvanians lost the support they relied on to buy internet service. **Surveys** show that nearly half of these Pennsylvanians—hundreds of thousands of households—are forced to choose between cancelling service, downgrading service, or cutting other expenses like food and medicine. Without reliable connectivity, these Pennsylvanians will struggle to find employment, use healthcare and government services, and participate in the modern economy.

Adoption of Connected Technologies

Internet access can be meaningless if the user does not have digital skills and a quality device. Unfortunately, the federal government recently terminated \$65m in grants for Pennsylvania to address these “broadband adoption” issues, leaving the state’s **plan** unfunded, partners without support, and Pennsylvania’s most vulnerable populations—rural, elderly, low-income, and veteran—struggling to safely and effectively use connected technology.

Policy Recommendations for Pennsylvania

Empower a Permanent State Broadband Office

The Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority (PBDA) was primarily created to distribute federal COVID-era funds. As such, it was given a sunset date in 2031. But the importance of broadband is ongoing: grants require oversight, networks must be monitored, and universal service should be pursued. Pennsylvania needs a permanent broadband office.

We recommend the state legislature and/or Governor act to:

- Establish a permanent broadband office and expand its mandate to include grantee oversight, research and impact assessments, and universal service goals related to broadband access, affordability, and adoption.
- Create a broadband leadership position in the governor's cabinet.
- With public input, develop a plan for spending Pennsylvania's \$450m federal BEAD non-deployment funds.

Invest State Funds in Broadband Access and Adoption

The federal government does not reliably fund broadband access or adoption. As such, Pennsylvania must address these issues itself. Neighboring states—New York, Maryland, West Virginia, Ohio—offer successful examples Pennsylvania would do well to consider.

We recommend the state legislature and/or Governor act to:

- Allocate state funds to support broadband adoption (e.g. digital navigators, device lending programs, telehealth and workforce development programs.). A comprehensive 2026 survey of Pennsylvania's broadband adoption organizations found the lack of funding to be, by far, the primary barrier to this important work.
- Allocate state funds towards broadband infrastructure and eliminate state-imposed [roadblocks](#) that prevent municipalities from providing broadband service.

Ensure Broadband is Affordable

Broadband is an essential service and, as such, it should be affordable for all Pennsylvanians. States across the country are finding innovative ways to address affordability. Pennsylvania should join them.

We recommend that the state legislature and/or Governor act to:

- Create a statewide broadband affordability program. [New York](#) and [Connecticut](#) have passed laws to require affordable service plans for low-income residents; [New Mexico](#) and [Oregon](#) have expanded state Lifeline programs to provide a consumer subsidy. Both models could substantially improve broadband affordability in Pennsylvania.