

LC5

P&S201

500 Word Report

Addressing Internet Connectivity Disparities in Cincinnati

Access to technology and an appropriate level of technological literacy is increasingly important for building social connections and accessing adequate health information and healthcare. Our social determinant of health is social and community context. Having access to mobile data services can help improve individual's use of social resources, including expediting individuals' pursuit of education, employment, and increasing access to medical care through telehealth visits. Increased access to mobile data would support improving social and community context to transform health outcomes.

According to our surveys from our mobile community resource guide, 50% of St. Francis Seraph Ministries clients are very confident or confident in their ability to access internet, but these results did not include access to mobile data. While trying to disseminate our mobile resource guide, we noticed many clients were hesitant to access the resource guide as they had limited cellular data or were unaware of how to use data or scan QR codes. Therefore, although these resources may be in place, their utility is likely not maximized. This may be due to an inability to gain and utilize information, especially among Cincinnati's unhoused population. It is important to consider that lacking consistent shelter makes this population unable to benefit from government-subsidized broadband programs like the Ohio Broadband Strategy. This policy is mostly focused on in-home Wi-Fi access, but does not address Wi-Fi for people experiencing homelessness, nor mobile data. This lack of access necessitates programs for subsidizing cellular data to improve community connectivity and utilization of health-improving public programs.

There is a plethora of data for the importance of internet connectivity and technological literacy, especially in unhoused and low-income populations. With the end of the Affordable Connectivity Program, many Americans have lost access to affordable internet. The existing federal Lifeline Support for Affordable Communications Program has attempted to bridge the gap in access for broadband internet and qualifying monthly telephone service. However, the Lifeline subsidy does not fully cover the cost of these services for low-income or unhoused individuals. Because of the necessity of internet connectivity and the deficit in coverage available via current federal subsidies, we propose a subsidy for mobile connectivity at the municipal level. A monthly subsidy of \$10-15 per individual, combined with the Lifeline subsidy, would enable access to most Lifeline approved mobile data plans at no additional cost. Furthermore, another barrier of access to mobile data plans is that some require the consumer to pay for multiple months of service upfront – an obstacle to low-income individuals. Our proposed municipal subsidy would also implement a flexible disbursement schedule to accommodate individuals with higher upfront payments.

The downstream effects of this initiative are broad and multifaceted. Not only would this expand access to telemedicine, but it would also act as a catalyst to pursuing educational and career

advancement. Many individuals experiencing housing and/or food insecurity lack social support. We strongly believe that expanding access to affordable mobile services would enable individuals to bolster their social support, which would improve quality of life.