

New broadband survey notes progress in four years in Nebraska

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LINCOLN—Although elderly and low-income Nebraskans continue to lag behind other demographic groups in Internet access, they have made significant gains in the last four years, according to a new survey.

The survey, “Internet Connectivity and Use in Nebraska: A Follow-up Study,” tracks progress made since a 2010 survey that asked about Nebraskans’ current use of technology, their opinions about community technology resources and their technology training needs.

Tracking this information is key, said Chuck Schroeder, founding executive director of the Nebraska Rural Futures Institute.

“We know that Internet access, and the speed and reliability of broadband service, are critically important to the viability and resiliency of rural communities,” he said. “Entrepreneurial business opportunities, robust educational programming, quality healthcare and overall quality of life are significantly enhanced when current information technology is part of the community infrastructure. And rural people are at a significant disadvantage when it is not. While the disparity between rural and urban locales continues, we are pleased to see the progress shown in this report.”

Both surveys were conducted by the Nebraska Broadband Initiative, a partnership of state and University of Nebraska entities.

Overall, 86% of Nebraska households have Internet access, and 82% have broadband service, up from 81% and 76%, respectively, since 2010.

While older people, people with lower household income, people with lower education levels, households without children and households in nonmetropolitan areas continue to be less likely to have Internet access and, specifically broadband service, some of those groups increased Internet access considerably since 2010, noted Becky Vogt, survey research manager with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

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Persons aged 65 and older with Internet access at home increased from 56% to 69%. For broadband service, those numbers are 48% and 64% in 2010 and 2014, respectively.

The proportion of persons with the lowest household incomes with broadband service at home increased from 44% to 53%.

The survey also found that Nebraskans in the Lincoln and Omaha areas were more likely to have broadband service at home—90% and 87% respectively—compared to Central Nebraska's 73%. However, Central Nebraska has seen a significant increase, from 56% in 2010.

Other findings:

Sixty-five percent of non-Internet users don't have a computer; 36% said Internet access is too expensive; and 34% say they have no interest in the Internet.

Use of several Internet activities has increased in four years, including: social networking, up from 69% to 80%; watching videos, up from 72% to 79%; online banking or bill pay, up from 72% to 79%; VoIP, Skype, magicJack, or other video phoning technology, up from 19% to 37%; and two-way audio/video meetings, up from 15% to 27%.

Nebraska households are generally satisfied with the reliability, speed and support of their Internet service but less satisfied with its price.

Seventy-seven percent of Nebraska households have access to a local place, such as a library or school, where use of Internet-accessible computers is free.

Many Nebraskans are interested in information technology courses such as website development and basic computer networking. And most prefer traditional delivery methods for this training, such as CD or DVD, face-to-face workshops, online courses and videos.

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Frank Landis, chairman of the Nebraska Public Service Commission, said he was encouraged by the findings.

“Today’s survey report shows real progress in the deployment and utilization of high-speed Internet capability in Nebraska. It reveals that almost nine in 10 Nebraska households have Internet access at home,” he said. “However, a gap remains for consumers living in our rural areas, for low-income consumers, and for our aging population. For example, over a third of non-users cite affordability as the reason for not subscribing to Internet at home.”