

Reliable, Accessible and Affordable High-Speed Internet Access:

The key to remaining independent, informed, engaged, and connected.

Core Member Organizations

- Aging and Disability Professionals Association of Wisconsin (ADPAW)
- Alzheimer’s Association Wisconsin Chapter
- Wisconsin Adult Day Services Association (WADSA)
- Wisconsin Association of Area Agencies on Aging (W4A)
- Wisconsin Association of Benefit Specialists (WABS)
- Wisconsin Association of Nutrition Directors (WAND)
- Wisconsin Association of Senior Centers (WASC)
- Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging (WIHA)
- Wisconsin Senior Corps Association (WISCA)
- Wisconsin Tribal Aging Unit Association

The Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network is a collaborative group of individuals and associations working with and for Wisconsin’s older adults to shape public policy to improve their quality of life.

WAAN State Issue Brief
April 2021

WAAN’s Position: Provide reliable, accessible, affordable high-speed internet access to older adults and their families no matter where they live to ensure critical connectivity for older adults to meet health, education, social, and economic needs.

Connectivity Gap

The coronavirus pandemic has exposed a hidden crisis for the nation’s older adults: a lack of connectivity. Nationwide nearly 22 million, or roughly 42% of American seniors, do not have broadband access at home, 15% less than the 18-64 age group.¹ In Wisconsin, research indicates 70% of the over 65 population with computers have access to some form of internet service, 20% less than the 18-64 age group.² In reality the percentage of people of all ages in the gap — with no access to internet service — is probably larger, as unreliable and expensive service also limit access.

Impact of the Gap

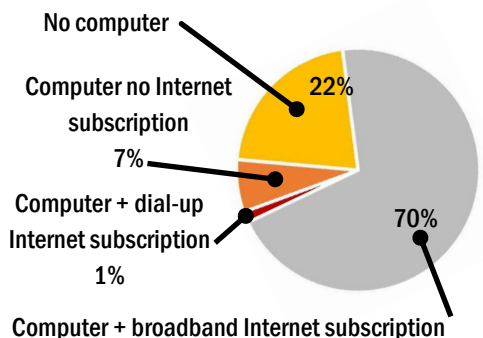
Older adults are one of the largest demographics without access to broadband service, and this has wide-ranging and significant implications for individuals, families, and communities. Research has found some disturbing correlations between the lack of broadband access and the current public health and social injustice crises.

In Wisconsin, an average of 87.3% of COVID deaths have been individuals over the age of 65, 7.3% higher than the national average.³ Research estimates 40% of those who died had no in-home internet service — they were offline. They lacked access to resources needed such as health information, telehealth service, communication, social support, and financial assistance.

Disparities

For older adults already challenged by low income, lack of education, poor health, racism, ageism, housing, and/or social and physical isolation,

Household Computer Connectivity: Wisconsinites 65 and Over



“If you want to be a full participant in our economy and society, you need to be online.”⁴

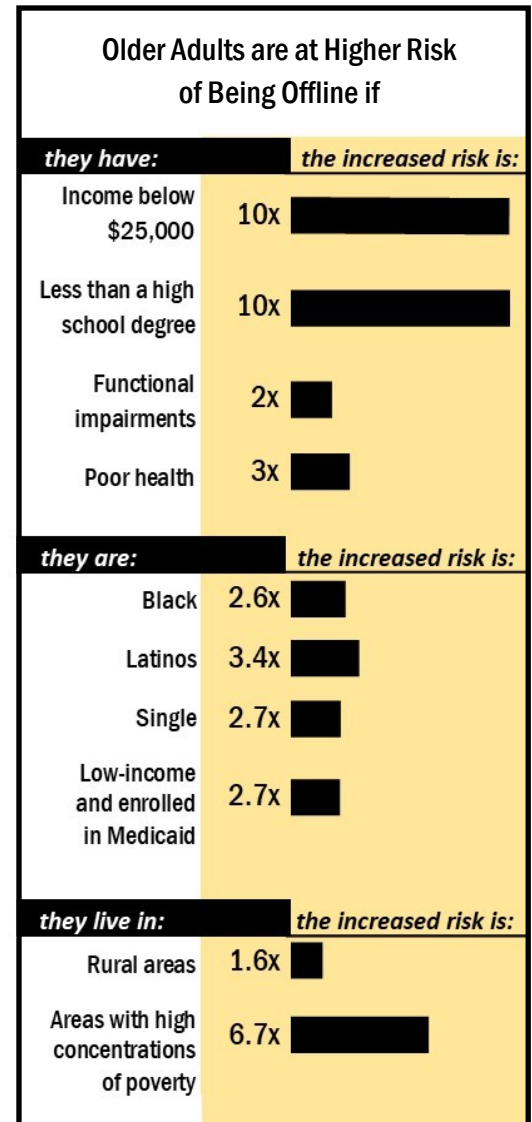
FCC Chairman Ajit Pai,
January 12, 2021

technology barriers further reduce longevity and quality of life. As indicated in the chart on the right, many factors increase the risk older adults will be offline. In addition, loved ones and caregivers find it difficult to effectively support offline seniors.

Getting older adults online has never been more urgent. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the nation’s systems for social support, communications, and health care, highlighting how home-based internet and digital skills are an essential lifeline for older adults during public health emergencies and everyday life.

What is needed to close the connectivity gap?

- Communities, municipalities and non-profit groups must work together with broadband providers and government agencies to ensure that services are extended into homes and residential care facilities.
- Provide adequate funding to address the lack of broadband access for all citizens, including older adults. Funding is needed to build an infrastructure for providing affordable, reliable internet service across the state and to provide the devices needed to use the service when available.
- Increase funding to expand the Lifeline telephone assistance program and provide additional support for broadband service to help overcome the cost barriers to broadband adoption.
- Educational materials and outreach efforts are needed to help older adults better understand the value of being connected. These efforts must address both low-cost and market-rate options to reach a diverse audience of offline seniors.
- Training programs are needed to assist older adults in learning how to use various technology devices and software so older adults can effectively utilize internet services. They will be able to access needed services, obtain essential resources, and maintain essential connections with family members and friends, services providers, and their communities.



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<https://gwaar.org/waan-issues-and-initiatives>

References

- ¹ AGING Connected: Closing the Connectivity Gap for Older Americans, pg.9. <https://oats.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Aging-Connected-Exposing-the-Hidden-Connectivity-Crisis-for-Older-Adults.pdf>
- ² US Census, 2015-19 ACS, Table 828005, Released: December 10, 2020.
- ³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, Provisional Death Counts for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Retrieved on April 14, 2021 from https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid_weekly/index.htm#SexAndAge
- ⁴ Remarks of FCC Chairman Ajit Pai to the Multicultural Media, Telecom & Internet Council and the National Grange, January 12, 2021. Retrieved on April 16, 2021 from <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-369186A1.pdf>
- ⁵ AGING Connected: Closing the Connectivity Gap for Older Americans, pg.11. <https://oats.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Aging-Connected-Exposing-the-Hidden-Connectivity-Crisis-for-Older-Adults.pdf>



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