

THE IMPACT OF BROADBAND ON SENIOR CITIZENS¹

Only 30 percent of adults over the age of 65 currently have a broadband connection at home.² Increasing this adoption rate among seniors is critical because broadband has the ability to:

- Stimulate brain functions and sharpen mental acuity. With over 60 percent of seniors worrying about “staying sharp” as they age, a number of broadband-enabled tools and games have been developed to stimulate new brain functions and sharpen mental acuity.³
- Facilitate more meaningful communication with family and friends. Studies have found that seniors who master computer skills appear to have fewer depressive symptoms than those who remain technologically unconnected⁴ and that increased integration through social support services can protect against some mortality risks and lead to better mental health.⁵
- Enable a number of employment opportunities. According to AARP, 69 percent of baby boomers and seniors are willing and able to work past retirement.⁶ Broadband-enabled employment opportunities like telecommuting provide seniors with a number of options for continuing or returning to work.
- Provide a number of cost-savings. Broadband allows for easy comparison shopping from home on a wide array of goods, including prescription drugs and groceries, which are often cheaper online.⁷ These savings alone could offset the monthly subscription price for broadband, which is critical for the many senior citizens who live on a fixed income.
- Allow seniors to age at home for longer. Seniors use broadband connections to look up health information and to enable a growing range of in-home telemedicine services. These include in-home monitoring systems that provide real-time tracking of vital signs and other key metrics. By 2012 it is expected that over 3 million seniors will be using these types of systems.⁸ The cost-savings flowing from these types of services have the potential to be enormous.

The senior population is expected to double by 2050.⁹ Currently, over 60 percent of healthcare spending is spent on seniors.¹⁰ By one estimate, among people turning 65 today, 69 percent will need some form of long-term care.¹¹ These trends, along with the coming wave of baby boomer retirees, support the need for a new senior care model, one that empowers older adults to live more independently. Broadband is a critical tool in helping to shift this paradigm since it has proven to improve the overall quality of life for older adults. As such, it is essential that efforts focus on spurring broadband adoption among this segment of the population. Adoption – not availability – is the key issue facing policymakers.

****Additional Resources are Available on the ACLP Website****

www.nyls.edu/centers/projects/advanced_communications_law_and_policy_institute

NOTES

¹ These observations are drawn from a recent publication by the ACLP. See Charles M. Davidson & Michael J. Santorelli, *The Impact of Broadband on Senior Citizens* (Dec. 2008), available at http://www.nyls.edu/user_files/1/3/4/30/83/BroadbandandSeniors.pdf.

² John Horrigan, *Home Broadband Adoption 2009*, at p. 9, Pew Internet & American Life Project (June 2009).

³ *Senior Citizens Most Concerned about Health; Get News from Doctor, Internet*, June 8, 2006, SENIOR JOURNAL, available at <http://seniorjournal.com/NEWS/SeniorStats/6-08-23-SeniorCitizensMost.htm>.

⁴ *Senior Citizens who Master Computers Have Less Depression*, Aug. 18, 2005, SENIOR JOURNAL, available at <http://seniorjournal.com/NEWS/Aging/5-08-18MasterComputers.htm>.

⁵ T.E. Seeman, *Social Ties and Health: The Benefits of Social Integration*, 6 *Annals of Epidemiology* 442-451 (1996).

⁶ AARP Policy Book, Ch. 10, Utilities: Telecommunications, Energy and Other Services, at p. 10-40, available at http://assets.aarp.org/www.aarp.org/articles/legpolicy/10_utili07.pdf.

⁷ In 2004 *Checkbook* magazine found vast price differences among prescription drugs within the same metropolitan areas and concluded that online retailers often offered lower prices for certain drugs. See *Prescription Drugs: Smart Shopping Yields Big Savings*, CONSUMER CHECKBOOK.ORG, available at <http://www.checkbook.org/cgi-bin/free/drug.pdf>.

⁸ *Senior Citizens to See High Tech Sensors in Homes, on Bodies to Monitor Health*, Dec. 6, 2007, SENIOR JOURNAL, available at <http://www.seniorjournal.com/NEWS/Features/2007/7-12-06-SenCit2See.htm>.

⁹ Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, *U.S. Population Projections: 2005-2050*, at p. 20, Pew Research Center (Feb. 2008), available at <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/85.pdf>.

¹⁰ Majd Alwan, Devon Wiley & Jeffrey Noble, *State of Technology in Aging Services*, at p. 1, Center for Aging Services Technology (Nov. 2007), available at http://www.agingtech.org/documents/bscf_state_technology_phase1.pdf.

¹¹ *Aging Services: The Facts, General Facts*, American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging, available at http://www.aahsa.org/aging_services/default.asp.

About the ACLP at New York Law School

The ACLP is an interdisciplinary public policy program that identifies and analyzes key legal and regulatory issues in the advanced communications sector. The ACLP promotes solution-focused dialogues among state and federal policy makers, industry, academe, consumers, and the financial community regarding changes to the state and federal regulatory regimes governing the advanced communications sector. For more information, please contact:

41 Worth Street, Room 116
New York, NY 10013
(212) 431-2163 (o)
(212) 431-0297 (f)

Charles M. Davidson, Director
charles.davidson@nyls.edu

Michael J. Santorelli, Director
michael.santorelli@nyls.edu