

Closing the 'digital divide': Most Canadians support CRTC action to provide broadband to all households

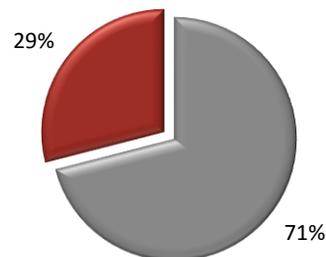
Seven-in-ten say access to broadband internet is an essential service

June 10, 2016 – Most Canadians believe high-speed internet is an “essential” service, and see ensuring universal access to it as a priority.

These are some of the findings of a new survey of Canadian public opinion on broadband internet access self-commissioned by the Angus Reid Institute.

The poll of more than 1,500 Canadian adults finds strong support for efforts to close the 'digital divide' between high- and low-income – and urban and rural – households in Canada. More than seven-in-ten Canadians support policies aimed at improving affordability for low-income earners, and roughly the same number favour a requirement that internet service providers build the necessary infrastructure to reach remote communities.

Canadian views on mandating the availability of broadband internet access:



- The CRTC SHOULD require internet service providers to make broadband service available to every Canadian household
- The CRTC SHOULD NOT require internet service providers to make broadband service available to every Canadian household

METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from May 10 – 13, 2016, among a representative randomized sample of 1517 Canadian adults who are members of the [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

Key Findings:

- Two-in-three (68%) Canadians say broadband internet is an essential service for all Canadians
- Seven-in-ten (71%) say the CRTC should require service providers to build the infrastructure necessary to ensure that every Canadian household has a broadband internet connection
- Rural Canadians report lower levels internet service quality, and less value for their money overall when purchasing services

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An essential service, and a very important issue

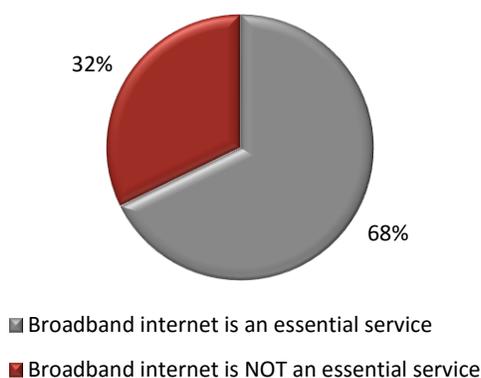
From Whitehorse, to St. John's, to Iqaluit, internet service providers have extensive ground to cover in offering high-speed internet to Canadians across the Great White North. The large land areas and small population centres make providing broadband access to every Canadian household a difficult economic proposition for telecommunications companies.

As a result, many rural Canadians – both north and south of the 60th parallel – report their ongoing struggle to secure reliable internet service. Despite Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) targets for broadband speed and increased coverage, the sentiment in a number of Canadian communities is one of frustration.

This has led some, including the Yukon territorial government, to request that the CRTC deem internet a basic service objective, requiring it to be provided to all Canadians, similar to the mandate in place for telephone services.

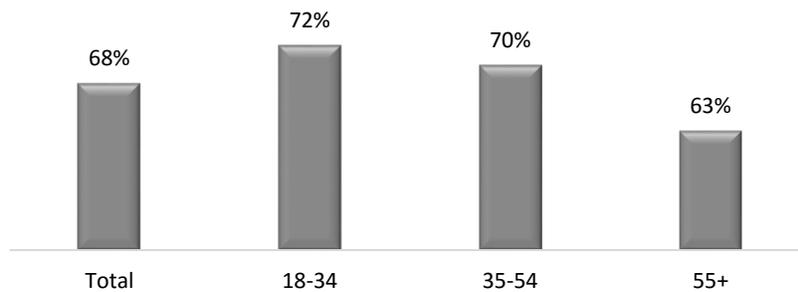
The CRTC recently concluded hearings on broadband internet access, but has so far not chosen to classify it as such, and Canadians appear to be at odds with the regulator's current position. When asked whether or not broadband internet is an essential service, fully two-thirds (68%) say it is:

There has been some discussion recently about broadband internet service and whether this is an essential service that all households should have access to. Which of the following statements is closest to your opinion about this?



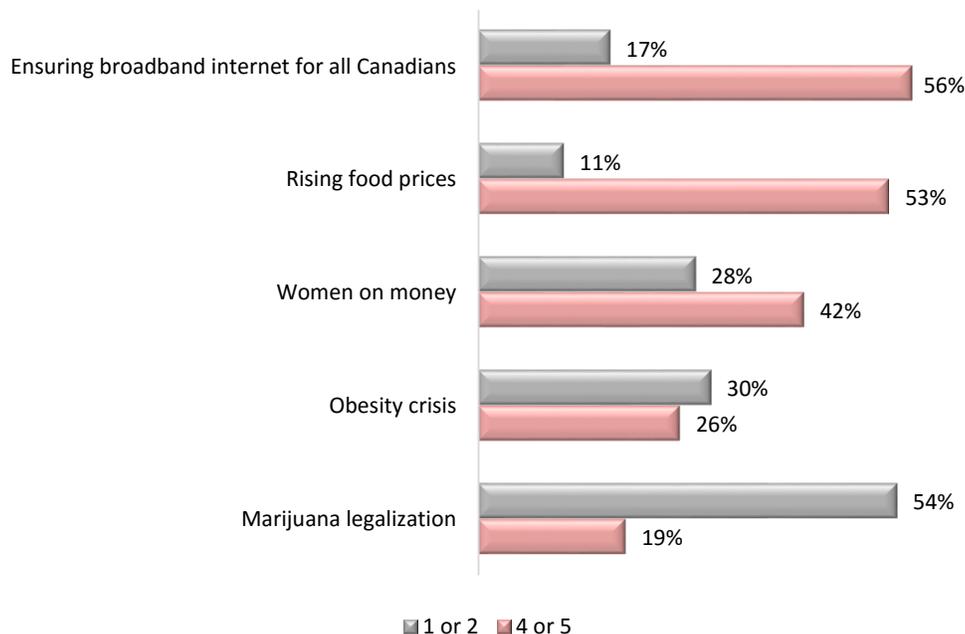
Age appears to be one of the key driving factors of opinion on this issue. Canadians ages 18 to 34, many of whom have never known a world without the internet, are most likely to say that broadband is essential – nearly three-quarters (72%) say so. Older Canadians also perceive value in this service, though at a lower rate, as seen in the graph that follows:

Percentage saying "Broadband internet is an essential service" by age:



Canadians show a high level of concern regarding their compatriots' potential inability to enjoy the fruits of cyberspace. When asked to rank "ensuring broadband internet access for all Canadians" on an importance scale from one to five, 56 per cent choose a four or a five. This total is higher than any other issue ARI has asked about in 2016:

**How important do you personally consider this issue:
1 = not important at all, 5 = very important**

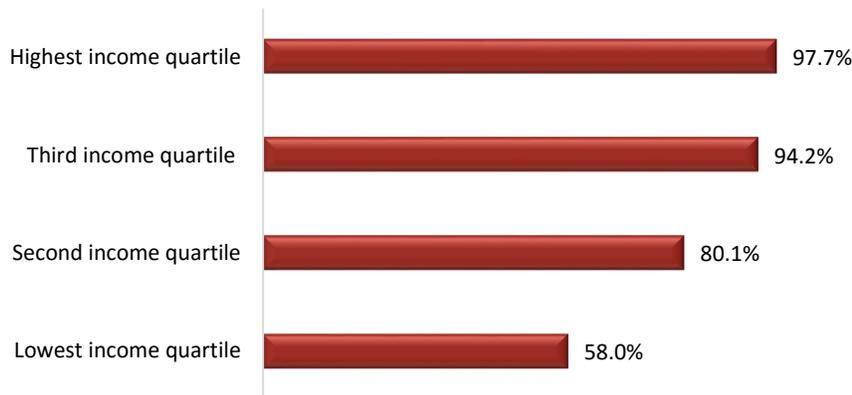


Majority support policies for low-income households

The educational and economic benefits of high-speed internet access have been well-established, and those without access may suffer a competitive disadvantage, lacking some of the tools their peers enjoy.

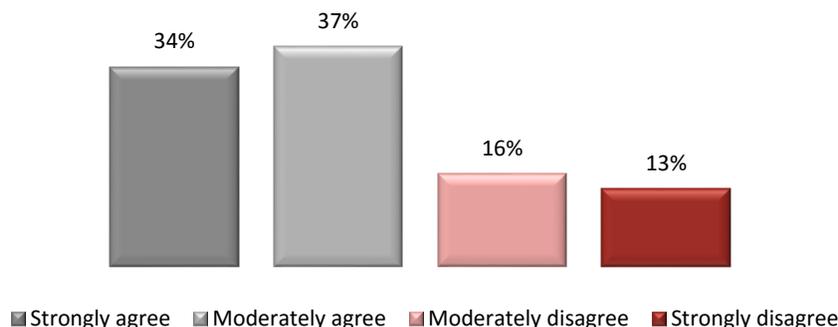
Data from Statistics Canada shows that low-income Canadians are significantly less likely to enjoy internet access at home:

Percentage of Canadian reporting internet access at home
(Source: StatsCan)



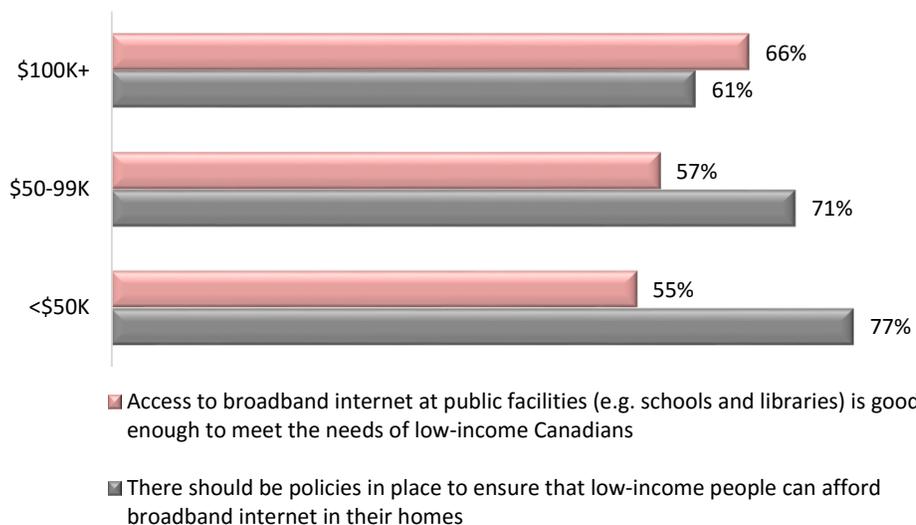
With this in mind, ARI asked Canadians whether proposals to ensure low-income Canadians can afford broadband in their homes merit attention. Nearly three-quarters (71%) of respondents say there should be policies in place to ensure access for low income earners. Canadians are equally as likely to say they strongly support (34%) or moderately support (37%) such an effort:

There should be policies in place to ensure that low-income people can afford broadband internet in their homes:



Lower income Canadians are more likely to support programs or subsidies for poorer families. And when asked whether or not access to these services at a public library or a school is “good enough” to meet the needs of low income earners, they’re less likely to agree (55%) than Canadians in the highest income bracket (66%), as the following graph shows:

Percentage of Canadians who agree with the following statements:



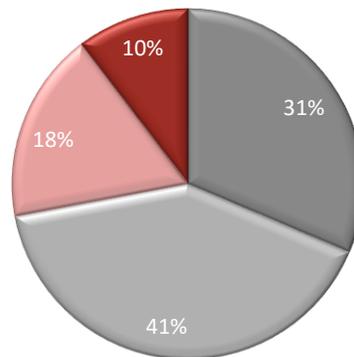
Notably, the percentage of respondents who “strongly disagree” that internet access at public facilities is sufficient for those who can’t afford their own home service is nearly two times higher among those with household incomes below \$50,000 (21%) than it is among those earning more than \$100,000 (12%).

Ensuring access for children is important

When it comes to ensuring internet access for Canadians, kids are key. Access to the web can help [increase their ability](#) to communicate, expand their worldview, and help to improve many other creative and academic skillsets.

Perhaps because of an awareness of these benefits, most Canadians see ensuring broadband internet access at home for children as a worthwhile investment. Seven-in-ten (72%) agree with this statement, as seen in the graph that follows:

Ensuring all Canadian children have broadband internet access at home is a worthwhile investment:



■ Strongly agree ■ Moderately agree ■ Moderately disagree ■ Strongly disagree

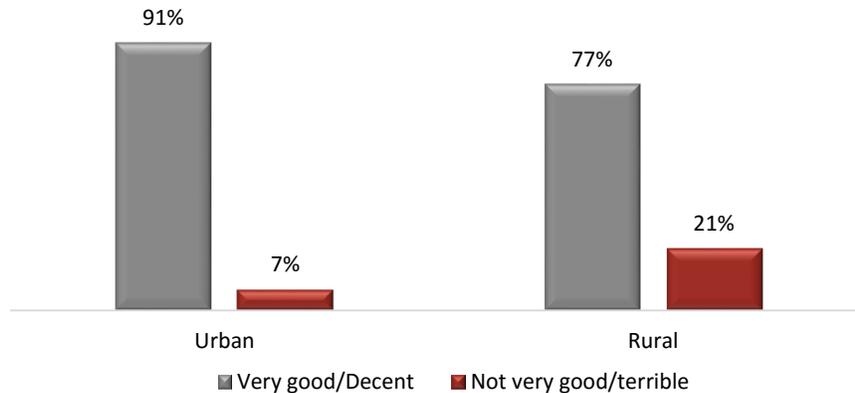
Support for government regulation on infrastructure

While broadband internet access is considered a formality in Canadian cities in 2016, such prevalence is certainly not a guarantee in more remote communities. An estimated 15 per cent of rural Canadian households do not have the proper infrastructure in place to access high-speed internet. This problem is worst in Nunavut, where just 27 per cent of communities are able to connect.

Further, rural communities that *do* have internet access are much more likely to have slower or spottier service. A 2016 report suggests that rural users experience, on average, connections 25 per cent slower than those of their urban web-surfing counterparts.

This Angus Reid Institute survey appears to confirm this finding. When asked how they would rate their current home internet service in terms of speed and reliability, urban Canadians are significantly more likely to report their service is either decent or very good (91%) compared with rural respondents (77%). Conversely, rural users say their service is “terrible” or “not very good” at triple the rate of urban users (21% to 7% respectively):

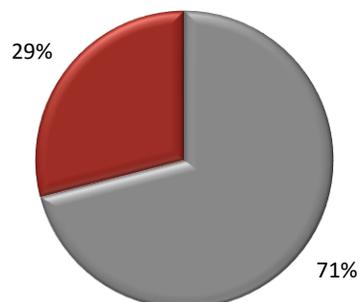
How would you rate the overall quality of your home internet service (speed, reliability, etc.)



In many cases, the only way to address this gap is to expand existing high-speed internet infrastructure – a process that would be costly, and may provide minimal financial rewards to the companies building the infrastructure.

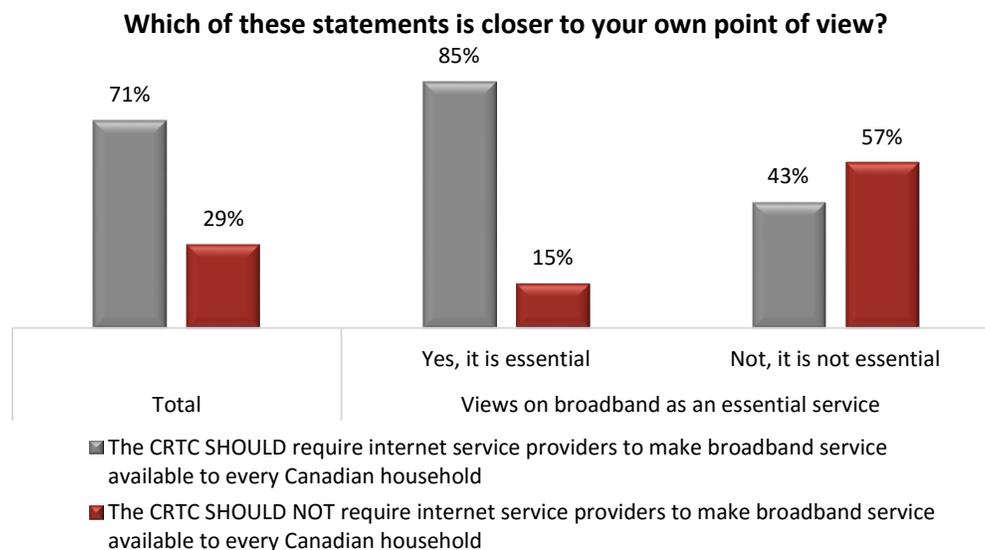
That said, most Canadians support government creating a regulatory climate in which such infrastructure would have to be built. Asked whether the CRTC should require internet service providers to build the necessary infrastructure to ensure that every Canadian household – including those in remote areas – has a broadband internet connection available to it, seven-in-ten (71%) say this is the right step to take.

Which of these statements is closer to your own point of view?



- The CRTC SHOULD require internet service providers to make broadband service available to every Canadian household
- The CRTC SHOULD NOT require internet service providers to make broadband service available to every Canadian household

As might be expected, views on this question vary significantly by one's opinion on whether high-speed internet is an essential service. More than eight-in-ten (85%) of those who say it is essential, also say service providers should be required to make broadband available to all households. By contrast, fewer than half (43%) of those who say internet is *not* an essential service contend that this type of regulation is necessary:



*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research organization established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

Summary tables follow. For detailed results by region, age, gender, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

Should the CRTC regulate internet service providers to build the infrastructure necessary to ensure that every Canadian household – including those in remote areas – has a broadband internet connection available to it?			
	Total (1517)	Yes, internet is an essential service (1028)	No, internet is not an essential service (489)
The CRTC SHOULD require internet service providers to make broadband service available to every Canadian household	71%	85%	43%
The CRTC SHOULD NOT require internet service providers to make broadband service available to every Canadian household	29%	15%	57%