

# **Affordable broadband Internet access for all Canadians**

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Committee on Industry, Science and Technology.

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**Canadian Association  
of Research Libraries**

**Association des bibliothèques  
de recherche du Canada**

## ***Who we are***

The Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) represents the country's twenty-nine largest university libraries. Enhancing research and higher education are at the heart of our mission. CARL promotes effective and sustainable scholarly communication, and public policy that enables broad access to scholarly information.

## ***Broadband access and higher education***

The Internet multiplies possibilities for higher education. It allows access to hitherto inaccessible information and eases worldwide knowledge sharing. This phenomenon led to an explosion of online open access resources.

An increasing number of scholarly journals are adopting Open Access policies that allow free online access to their contents. The popularization of Massive Open Online Courses, which grants free online access to some university courses, makes academic content available to anyone interested. Finally, Open Data brings greater transparency to government and pools information for easy use by researchers. In a world of limited time and resources, pooling information allows greater research efficiency.

This reality transforms the way research libraries do business. In addition to sharing data and texts, research libraries now give their patrons access to images, recordings and videos. All of these resources require large amounts of bandwidth to be of any real use for faculty and students.

All of these resources require access to affordable high speed Internet services. Such access allows research libraries to share content with university students no matter where they are in the country and allows universities to pursue their mission off-campus.

## ***Quality national coverage***

Access to broadband Internet presents Canadians with the widest range of opportunities to communicate, learn, innovate and conduct business in the international digital marketplace. The Internet allows governments, educational institutions and private companies to provide direct services to the population no matter where they are in Canada, thus eliminating geographical barriers.

Ensuring national access to fixed broadband networks is a challenge in a country as vast as Canada. After years of effort by various levels of government as well as the private sector, basic broadband Internet services are now available to 98% of the population (CRTC, 2012).

With this nearly complete national coverage comes access to quality high speed networks. The CRTC's goal is for access for all Canadians to broadband speeds of 5 Megabytes per second (Mbps) by the end of 2015 (CRTC 2011-291). The latest CRTC report shows that 87% of Canadians have access to networks with a rate of 5 Mbps per second or more (2012). We strongly encourage more incentives to ensure national access to quality broadband Internet services from coast to coast to coast. As a comparison, Australia aims to have 93% of homes and business connected to networks with speeds of up to 1 Gbps by 2015, with access to speeds of up to 25 Mbps for the remaining 7% (Government of Australia, 2011).

The OECD uncovered a strong correlation between increased network infrastructure and the growth in local content (2013). By increasing affordable access, we will ensure that Canadians contribute more to national and international innovation.

### ***Affordable access for all Canadians***

While Canada is closing the geographical coverage gap, we cannot allow a new divide over the affordability of broadband Internet services. While highly developed markets usually lead to lower user fees, that has not been the case in Canada (OECD, 2013).

Of particular relevance to CARL members are the high fees as experienced by university students. Pursuing higher education already comes with a high price tag in Canada and students should be able to access vital tools without significantly adding to their financial burden.

High Internet service prices are a burden for all Canadians, regardless of income. They are a financial drain for small businesses and students, engines of today's and tomorrow's economy. The OECD noted that the benefits of broadband access include economic growth and improved labour production (2013). As such, ensuring affordable access ultimately benefits Canada's economy.

### ***Some solutions***

Canada compares favourably in the world in terms of quality Internet coverage, but much work remains to be done to ensure affordable access for all Canadians. Canada ranks near the bottom (22nd) of OECD members for fibre broadband subscriptions (OECD, 2012). Canada also has the 9th highest average monthly prices for broadband subscriptions in the 2.5 to 15 Mbps range, and the 8th highest average monthly prices in the 15 to 30 Mbps range (OECD, 2011).

The Government of Canada must develop a comprehensive digital economy strategy in conjuncture with all the appropriate stakeholders. The digital economy consultation process was unveiled in the summer of 2010, while the government has taken several positive steps, such as its federal open data portal. Building on these consultations, a comprehensive digital economy strategy is overdue and clearly needed.

A number of solutions exist, including steps already taken to increase competition, alternatives to fixed wired service and larger infrastructure projects through public-private partnerships. The upcoming 700 MHz wireless spectrum auction should increase competition and lower prices in urban areas. However, the government must ensure that rural and remote Canadians will also benefit. The income generated from the upcoming Spectrum auctions could be put aside to finance these projects.

Government expenditures on strengthening Canada's digital economy are an investment in this country's future. By providing businesses, researchers and students with the necessary infrastructure, the government contributes to making Canada a leading edge and innovative economy.

## **Sources**

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