



# Disconnected in Maryland: By the Numbers

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**The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the disadvantages of being without the internet. Hundreds of thousands of households in Maryland do not have a foundational tool for internet connectivity – a wireline high-speed internet subscription for their home. Such internet service plans have the speed and data allotments that allow people to log on for school, work from home, or have a telehealth session – all without worrying whether they will hit a monthly limit on the amount of data they can consume.**

**The report, *Disconnected in Maryland*, outlines the size of the digital gap and offers recommendations on how to solve it. Here are some highlights, based on analysis of the 2019 American Community Survey:**

- 520,000 Maryland households do not have a home wireline broadband subscription. That is nearly one in four (23%) homes.
- Two-thirds – or 342,000 – of disconnected Marylanders live in metro counties or Baltimore City.
- 206,000 African American households are without a wireline broadband connection in Maryland. This means 40% of disconnected Marylanders are African American.
- 178,000 households in rural Maryland do not have wireline broadband subscriptions at home.
- Some 108,000 Maryland households with children under the age of 18 do not have wireline internet service at home. These households suffering from the “homework gap” are disproportionately poor, African American, and Hispanic.

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**Internet access means very little without a computing device to log on, and there are substantial gaps in computer ownership in Maryland:**

- 391,000 Maryland homes do not have either a desktop or laptop computer, or nearly one in five (18%) homes.
- Nearly 290,000 Maryland households lack either a desktop, laptop, or tablet computer (or 13% of all homes).
- As with wireline broadband subscriptions, the weight of these gaps falls heavily in urban and metro areas and among African American households.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Statewide planning:** The state should embark on a statewide broadband planning process to address all dimensions of the problem (e.g., digital inclusion as well as network deployment).

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**Partnerships for digital inclusion:** Maryland should consider investments in digital inclusion, perhaps in partnership with philanthropic organizations. The state should also consider creating an Office of Digital Inclusion to manage initiatives throughout the state.

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**Increase public awareness of affordability programs:** Stakeholders should promote awareness of internet affordability programs and explore ways to make signing up for service easier (e.g., working with school districts or housing authorities).

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**Improve the pipeline of computing devices:** Affordability of computers is commonly cited as a reason people do not subscribe to home wireline service, but initiatives exist (nationally and in Maryland) to help get computers to low-income households. Stakeholders should explore ways to expand them to all parts of the state to meet growing demands that the pandemic has spurred.

To learn more, read the full report, *Disconnected in Maryland*, by John B. Horrigan, Ph.D., available at [abell.org](https://www.abell.org).

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