

The Internet and Public Policy: Computer and Internet Access in Minnesota

This is one of a series on public policy and the Internet, with special attention to the laws and public policies of the state of Minnesota.

This publication describes the degree to which computer and Internet access in Minnesota varies among different geographic areas, age groups, and racial and ethnic groups.

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About The Internet and Public Policy Series

The Internet is a worldwide communication web created through technology, hardware and software, and human use patterns, which are shaped by mores, customs, and occasionally laws. States have their own roles within the larger national and international network that is the Internet. The challenge for policymakers is that the Internet itself is malleable, and no static definition can capture its breadth and changing uses.

This series of information briefs isolates discreet policy issues and the ways in which specific Internet issues provide choices for the Minnesota marketplace and for lawmakers. See the list at the end of this document for other titles in this series.

Introduction

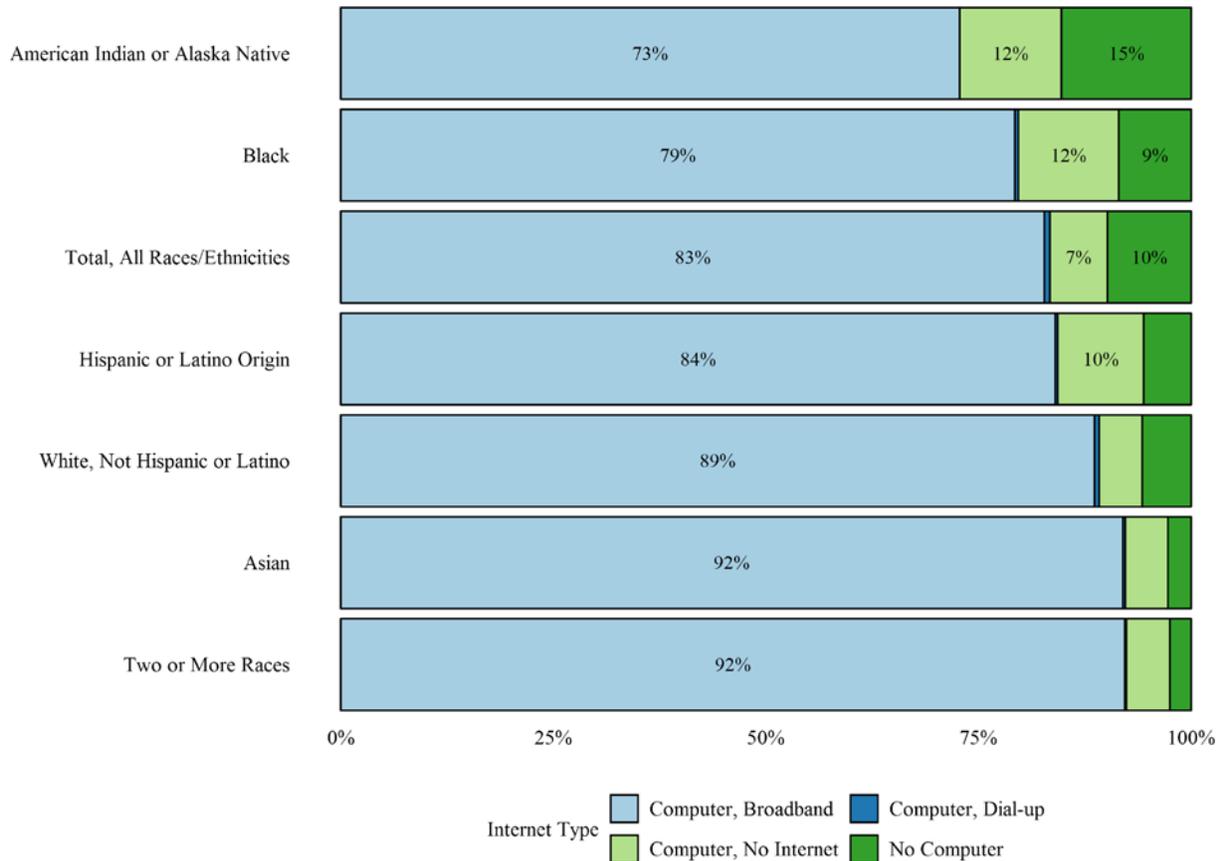
The overwhelming majority of Minnesotans have access to a computer in their home and to broadband Internet. Overall, about 81 percent of Minnesota households have a desktop or laptop, and that number grows to 90 percent when smartphones and tablets are included.¹ About 84 percent of households have a broadband connection—defined for the purposes of this publication as Internet provided by cable, DSL, fiber optic, cellular data plans, or satellite internet.²

While computer and broadband access is widespread, rates of access vary among Minnesotans of different ages, racial and ethnic groups, and geographic regions. Access to broadband Internet is particularly low among Minnesotans older than 65, American Indian Minnesotans, Black Minnesotans, and Minnesotans who reside in rural regions of the state. These differences likely reflect variation in socioeconomic status, familiarity with computers, and the physical infrastructure needed to access broadband Internet.

Variation in Internet and Computer Use by Race and Ethnicity

Computer and Internet access is lower for American Indians and Black Minnesotans than for the average of all people in Minnesota. Fewer than 80 percent of American Indian and Black Minnesotans had broadband Internet at home, the only racial and ethnic groups in the state below that threshold. Minnesotans identifying as White, Asian, or Hispanic or Latino, and those identifying as two or more races, were more likely than the state average to have a computer and access to broadband Internet. American Indians and Alaskan Natives have the lowest level of access to computers and all forms of Internet connections.³

Figure 1: Minnesota Households with Computer/Internet Access by Race/Ethnicity, 2016

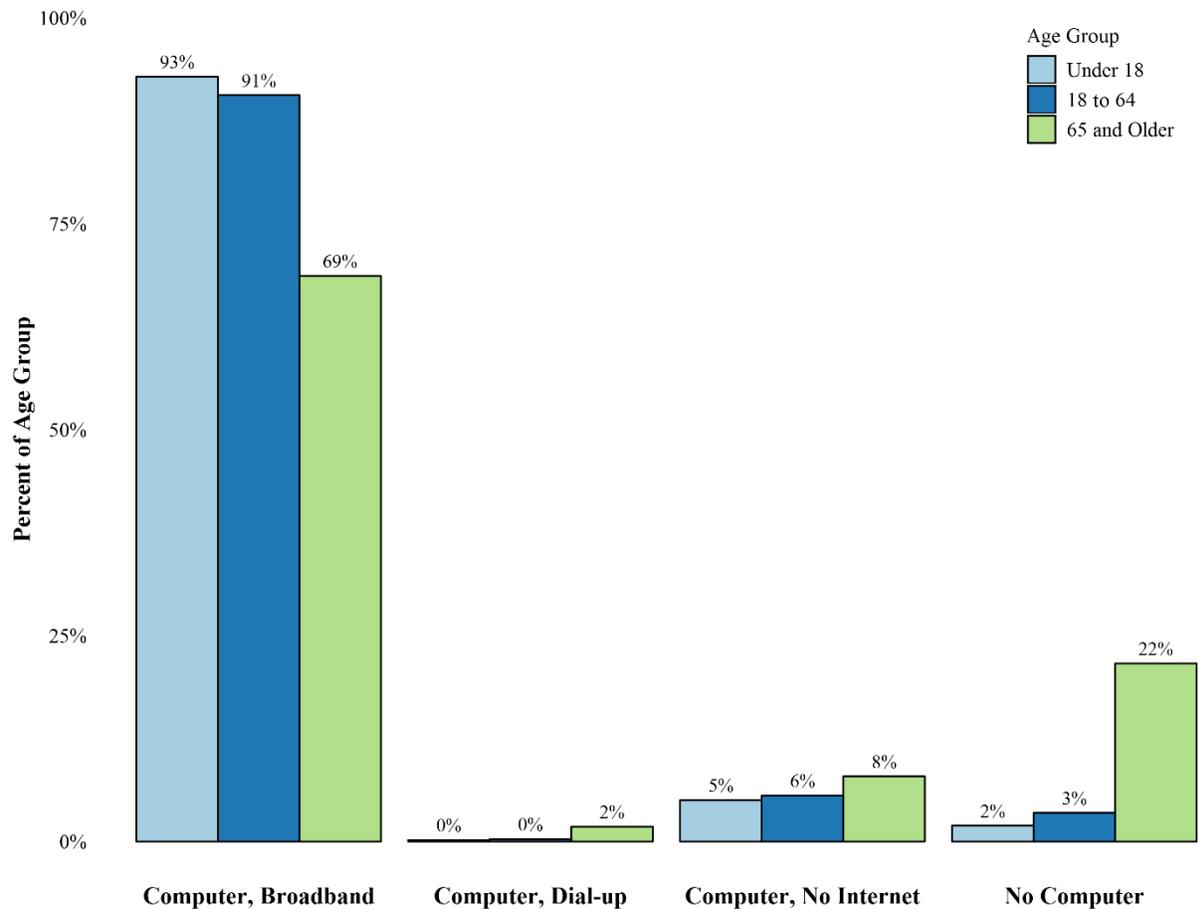


Source: Minnesota House Research Department.
 Individual racial/ethnic groups represent individuals identifying as one race only.
 Racial groupings other than white include individuals identifying as Hispanic or Latino.
 2016 American Community Survey 1-year Estimates. IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota.

Variation in Internet and Computer Use by Age

Internet and computer access also varies greatly by age, with particularly large differences between older Minnesotans and other age groups. About 30 percent of Minnesotans over the age of 65 live without the Internet at home, including 22 percent who do not own a computer. Only about 69 percent of Minnesotans over 65 have broadband at home and about 22 percent of Minnesotans in that age group do not have a computer.

Figure 2: Internet and Broadband Access in Minnesota by Age, 2016



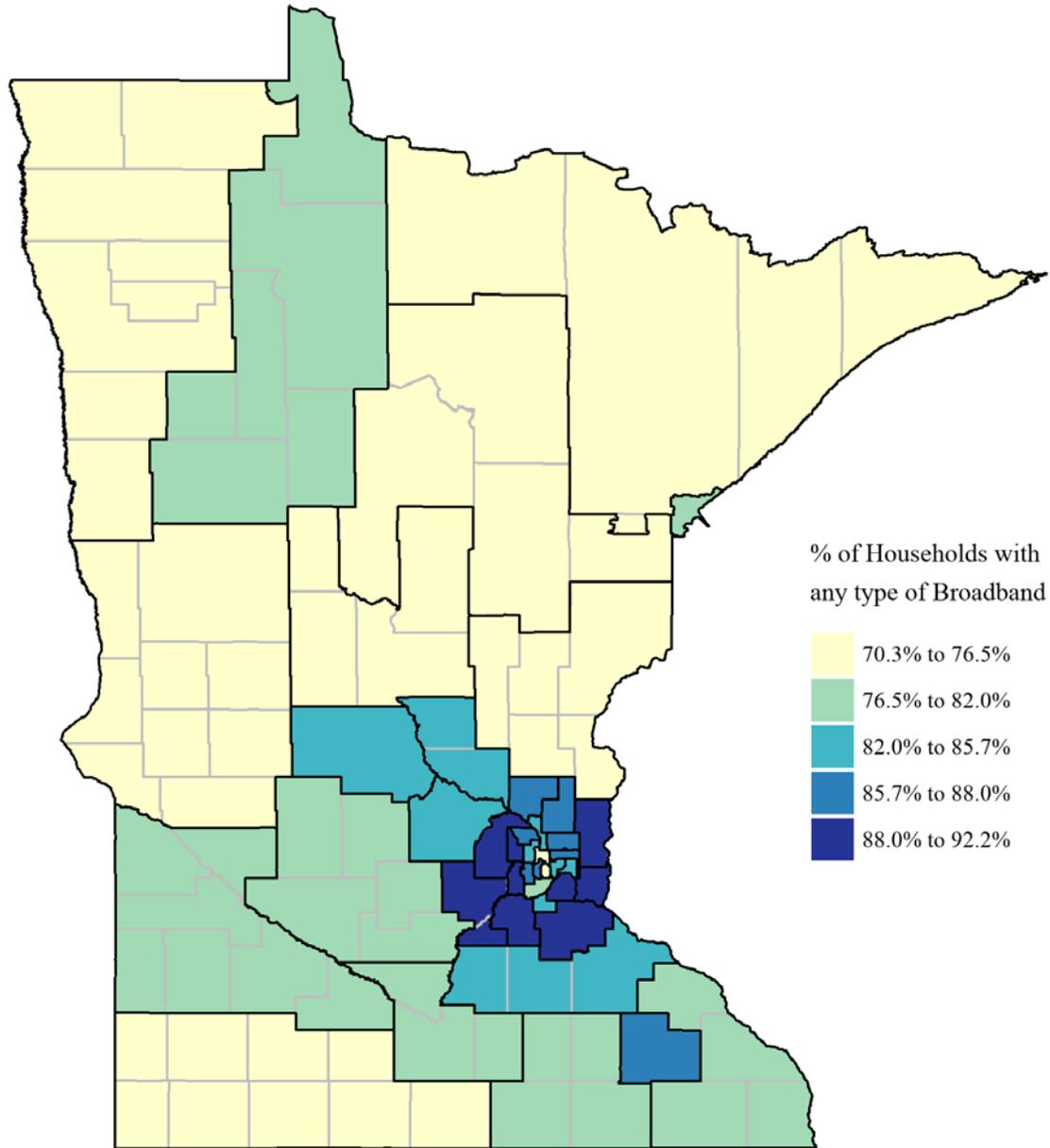
Source: MN House Research. 2016 American Community Survey 1-year Estimates. American Factfinder.

Geographic Variation in Broadband Access

The share of households with broadband Internet access varies greatly in different geographic regions of Minnesota. In general, households in rural parts of the state are less likely to have broadband Internet, particularly “traditional broadband” such as DSL, cable, or fiber Internet.

Figure 3 displays the share of households with access to any type of broadband Internet, including fiber, cable, DSL, cellular data plans, or satellite Internet.⁴ Broadband access is generally greatest in the outer ring Twin Cities suburbs, and the metro region more broadly. Northern Minnesota generally has the lowest rates of broadband access, excluding the area surrounding the city of Duluth. While broadband access in the metro area is generally greater than in rural parts of the state, parts of the city of Minneapolis also have relatively low rates of broadband adoption.

Figure 3: Share of Households with any type of Broadband at Home, 2016
Regions represent Census Bureau Public Use Microdata (PUMA) Areas

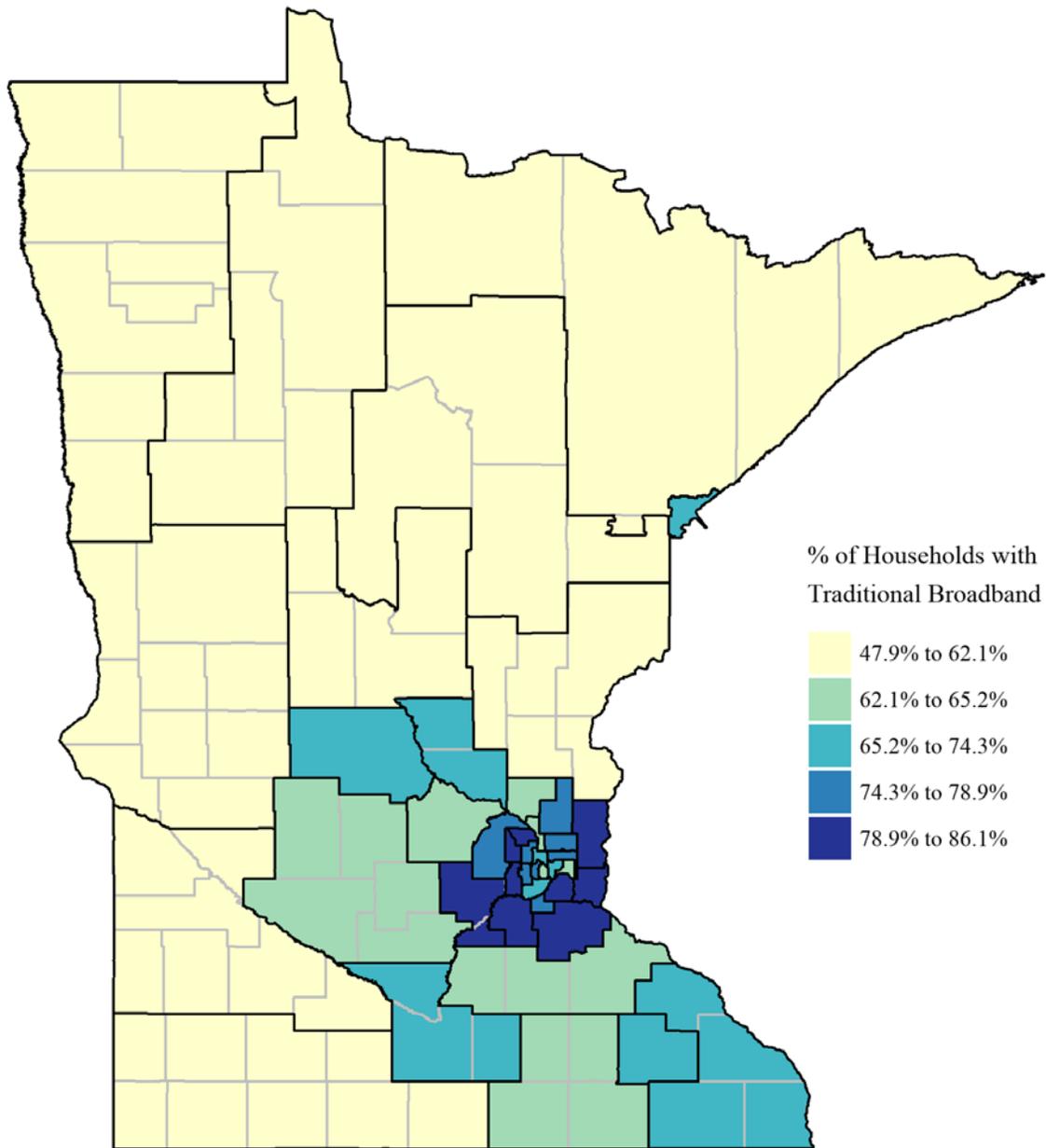


County lines added for reference only. Excludes individuals living in group quarters.
Source: Minnesota House Research Department.
2016 American Community Survey 1-year Estimates. IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota.

Figure 4 shows that urban/rural variation in access to broadband is even greater when the analysis is limited to “traditional broadband”—excluding satellite Internet and mobile data access. Western and Northern Minnesota have the lowest rates of DSL, cable, or fiber access in the state. In the region of northeast Minnesota containing most of the “arrowhead,” only about

47.9 percent of households have access to DSL, cable, or fiber Internet. This pattern likely reflects the fact that many households in rural parts of the state do not have a traditional broadband internet service provider, due to the high cost of connecting rural homes.

Figure 4: Share of Households with Traditional Broadband at Home, 2016
Regions represent Census Bureau Public Use Microdata (PUMA) Areas



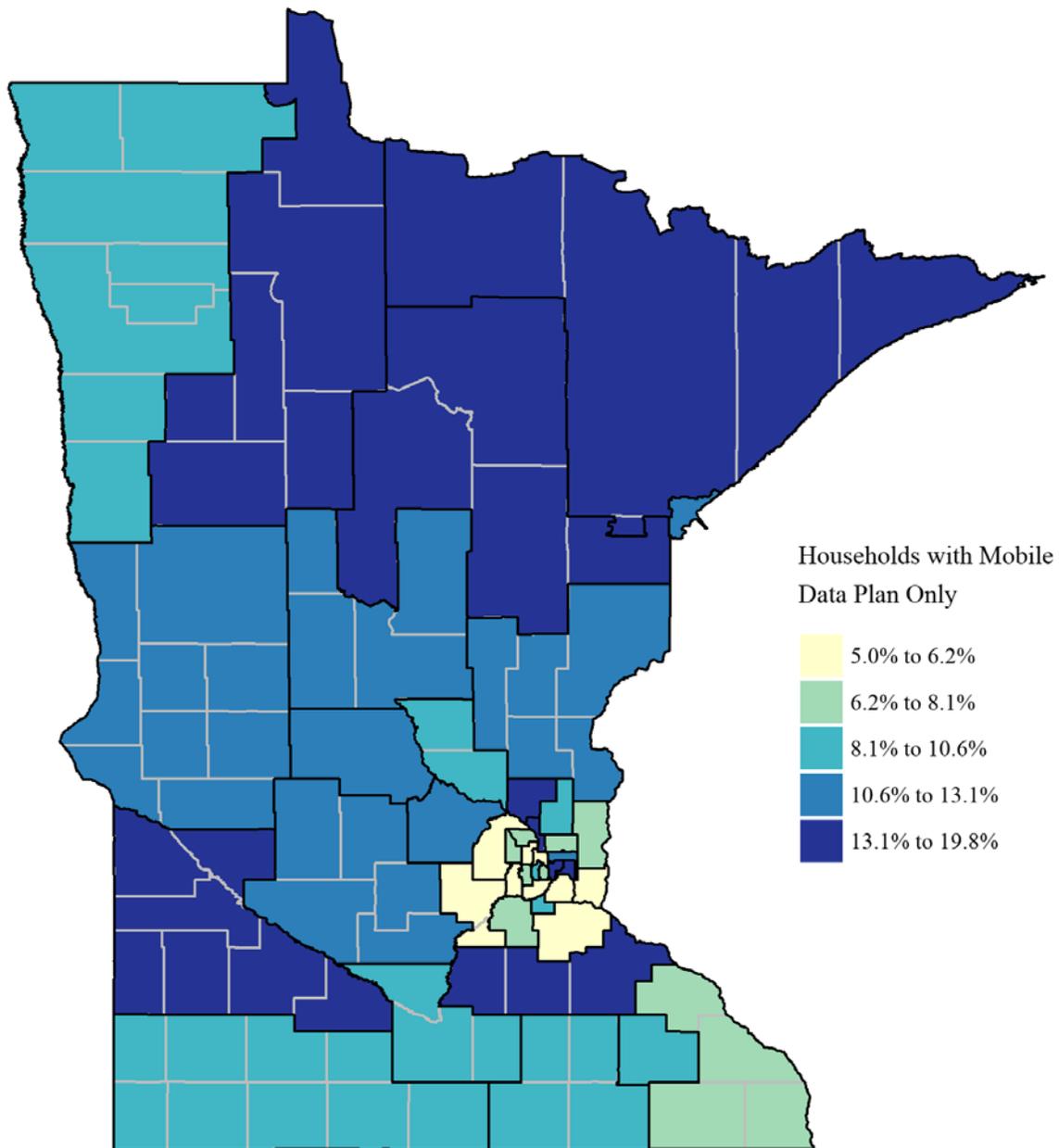
County lines added for reference only. Excludes individuals living in group quarters.

Source: Minnesota House Research Department.

2016 American Community Survey 1-year Estimates. IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota.

While fewer rural households have access to “traditional” broadband Internet, they may have broadband access using a mobile data plan. Figure 5 shows the share of households who do not have an Internet connection at home other than a mobile data plan. In parts of western and northern Minnesota, well over 10 percent of households connect to the internet using a mobile data plan only. While that situation was less common in the Twin Cities metro area (particularly in the outer ring suburbs), significant numbers of households in Ramsey County—particularly in St. Paul—connect to the Internet through cell phones only.

Figure 5: Share of Households with Mobile Data Plans Only, 2016
Regions represent Census Bureau Public Use Microdata (PUMA) Areas



County lines added for reference only. Excludes individuals living in group quarters.

Source: Minnesota House Research Department.

2016 American Community Survey 1-year Estimates. IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota.

In summary, the differences in access to computers and the Internet in Minnesota reflect the variation in socioeconomic status, familiarity with computers, and the physical infrastructure needed to access broadband Internet.

Other Works in the Series

This series of information briefs isolates discreet policy issues and the ways in which specific Internet issues provide choices for the Minnesota marketplace and for lawmakers. The following publications are part of the Internet and Public Policy series:

- Challenges and policy consideration for state regulation
- Privacy and consumer protection
- Cybertorts and property rights online
- Criminal activity on the Internet
- Federal Internet laws
- Jurisdiction and procedures in Internet law cases
- State and federal accessibility laws

There may be more topics added, as needed. A special attempt will be made to keep all of these pieces up to date, but the pace of change may prove challenging.

ENDNOTES

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey 1-year estimates. American Factfinder.

² Id.

³ National statistics on American Indians access to computers and Internet services is limited due to the small sample size. Id., see also Thom File, “Computer and Internet Use in the United States,” U.S. Census Bureau (May 2013).

⁴ The regions displayed in the maps are Census Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs). PUMAs are Census Bureau geographic areas with between 100,000 and 200,000 people. The Census first asked questions about Internet access in 2013; because the question is new, data is unavailable for smaller geographic regions in the state due to privacy concerns. Data at the county level will be available when the 2017 ACS 5-year estimates are released. See “Why We Ask Questions About Computer and Internet Use,” U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/about/why-we-ask-each-question/computer/>