4. Updating Canada's Broadband Policy to Guarantee Reliable Connectivity

Canadian Chamber of Commerce Position: Abstain

Sponsor: Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce

Background

What is the issue and who is it impacting?

Broadband internet has long posed a challenge for Canadians in rural, remote and Indigenous communities to participate competitively in the economy. The connectivity needed for day-to-day modern life and doing business has heightened the rural and urban digital divide, highlighting challenges faced by Canadians without reliable internet.

In 2024, the most recent year for which data is available, the Government of Canada claimed that 97.4% of Canadians had access to minimum broadband speeds of 50 Megabits per second (Mbps) download and 10 Mbps upload, with these numbers skewing heavily toward 99.8% of urban Canadians being served as compared to 87.4% of rural Canadians.[25]

A March 2023 report by the Association of First Nations stated that 446 Indigenous communities, or 68%, did not have access to minimum 50/10 broadband speeds.[26] This means 68% of Indigenous communities and 18% of rural Canadians do not have access to the basic tools needed to participate adequately in the economy, putting business owners and potential entrepreneurs at a distinct disadvantage as compared to their counterparts in urban environments, in some cases only kilometres away.

Rural, remote and Indigenous communities are important contributors to Canada's economy, representing key industries — from agriculture and natural resources to manufacturing and tourism. As we bring national broadband deployment frameworks into the modern era, it is imperative that Canada address connectivity gaps and network resilience in these communities.

Fast, reliable broadband access is a minimum requirement for business. Whether for precision decision-making for farmers, accessing video conferencing, quickly accessing data stored on the cloud or implementing AI, rural, remote and Indigenous businesses require basic connectivity needs be met in order to provide employment and keep their communities thriving.

The Government of Canada is aiming for 100% of Canadians to have access to minimum 50/10 broadband speeds by 2030. However, in 2026 these minimums, established in 2019, are already out of date, meaning that even our best effort will fall short.

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[25] Government of Canada, "Progress toward universal access to high-speed Internet," last updated on May 28, 2026, accessed on June 26, 2026, https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/high-speed-internet-canada/en/progress-toward-universal-access-high-speed-internet.

[26] Assembly of First Nations, et al., "Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030: A Collaborative and Comprehensive Cost Estimate Identifying the Infrastructure Investment Needs of First Nations in Canada," *Indigenous Services Canada*, November 2023, accessed on June 26, 2026, https://afn.bynder.com/m/367574a3a5cb5abe/original/1-AFN-Closing-the-Infrastructure-Gap-by-2030-National-Cost-Estimate-English-report-1.pdf, [appendix 8, 9].

In 2024, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission increased broadband minimum speed from 25/5to 100/20 Mbps.[27] Italy's "Italia a 1 Giga" plan sets a minimum broadband target of 1000 Mpbs (1 Gbps) upload and 200 Mbps download.[28] This gap between Canada and these new targets set by G7 partners puts Canadians with access to only 50/10 speeds at a disadvantage even if the connectivity goal is met. Regular reviews of these standards, as well as standards of delivery, are necessary to ensure that Canada does not fall behind.

What needs to be done? Why and how?

The CRTC and ISED provide a map of areas in Canada where broadband coverage is available. It is clear that private telecom companies have difficulty making a business case for providing the necessary infrastructure and service quality to some underserved areas with many of these regions having populations numbering in double or single digits.[29]

Federal funding is necessary for this infrastructure investment. Presently, the federal government raises significant revenues from spectrum auctions and fees which flow into general revenues. Rural and remote connectivity could be supported by redirecting these spectrum revenues from Consolidated Revenue into a dedicated Broadband Reinvestment Fund. The 2026 Spectrum Auction alone generated $415,565,262 in revenue.[30] Where this funding is provided to telecom companies to make infrastructure investments, Canada must set minimum service standards as opposed to the current "available only" standard.

Since the 2019 decision to have 100% of Canadians able to access high speed broadband internet by 2030, available technologies have changed. By using a combination of satellite, fixed wireless and fibre, connectivity can be expanded to high-cost and underserved regions where even with government funding, major infrastructure investment may simply not be economically feasible.

Where low-earth orbit satellite services are incorporated into broadband deployment strategies, Canada should establish safeguards to ensure resiliency, continuity of access and public-interest oversight in the event of commercial disputes, market dominance or unilateral service interruptions[31], with preference given to Canadian providers.

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[27] Federal Communications Commission, "FCC Increases Broadband Speed Benchmark," March 14, 2024, accessed on June 26, 2026, https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-401205A1.pdf.
[28] European Commission, "Digital connectivity in Italy," *European Union*, last updated on March 5, 2026, accessed on June 26, 2026, https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-connectivity-italy.
[29] Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, "Broadband Internet Coverage Map," accessed June 26, 2026, https://crtc.gc.ca/cartovista/internetcanada-en/.
[30] Government of Canada, "Residual auction: 2300, 3500 and 3800 MHz, and 2 GHz," last updated on May 21, 2026, accessed on June 26, 2026, https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/spectrum-management-telecommunications/en/spectrum-allocation/spectrum-auctions/spectrum-auction-publications/2026-auction-residual-spectrum-licences.
[31] Joey Roulette, Cassell Bryan-Low, and Tom Balmford, "Musk ordered shutdown of Starlink satellite service as Ukraine retook territory from Russia," *Reuters*, last updated on July 27, 2025, accessed on June 26, 2025, https://www.reuters.com/investigations/musk-ordered-shutdown-starlink-satellite-service-ukraine-retook-territory-russia-2025-07-25/.

Recommendations

That the Government of Canada:

1. Update national broadband service standards to align with leading G7 benchmarks by establishing internationally competitive minimum speed targets and minimum performance requirements for reliability, uptime, latency and service continuity for all federally funded deployments.

2. Commit to a mandatory review cycle of no longer than five years for national broadband service standards, to ensure federal policy and deployment criteria remain aligned with evolving performance demands across strategic sectors.

3. Strengthen the national broadband deployment framework by prioritizing federally funded projects that demonstrate adherence to defined service quality benchmarks, replacing the current availability-only standard as the measure of program success.

4. Require that the modernized national broadband deployment frameworks, to explicitly address connectivity gaps in rural, remote and Indigenous communities, including network resilience and redundancy requirements, as conditions of future federal infrastructure investment, using technology-neutral deployment criteria that support interoperability across infrastructure types, including satellite, fixed wireless and fibre, to expand connectivity options in high-cost and underserved regions.

5. Establish a dedicated Broadband Reinvestment Fund drawing on spectrum auction revenues and telecommunications administrative monetary penalties to support expansion, resiliency and modernization in underserved regions.

Signatories

- Burlington Chamber of Commerce
- Clarence-Rockland Chamber of Commerce
- Fort Nelson and District Chamber of Commerce
- Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce
- Huron Chamber of Commerce
- Lincoln Chamber of Commerce
- Okotoks and District Chamber of Commerce
- Prince Albert and District Chamber of Commerce
- Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce
- St Andrews Chamber of Commerce
- Timmins Chamber of Commerce
- Yarmouth and Area Chamber of Commerce
- Yorkton Chamber of Commerce