COVID 19: Internet Access & the Impact on New Mexico Tribal Communities

Following New Mexico’s public health and stay-at-home orders in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many New Mexicans have found themselves working and learning from home. The need and demand for internet access has become increasingly apparent as many New Mexicans have relied on high-speed internet to not only work and learn from home, but to access healthcare services via telehealth, and stay connected to loved ones.

Native Americans have the LOWEST Access to High-Speed Internet

According to Census estimates, approximately 26% of New Mexico’s population lacks broadband connections.

Nearly 10% of the state’s population cannot purchase a high-speed internet connection due to a lack of broadband capacity where they live.

Native Americans have the LOWEST Access to High-Speed Internet

In 2020, the US Government Accountability Office reported that 1.5 million people on tribal lands are WITHOUT essential services.

Nationally, 68% of ALL tribal communities on reservations lack access to broadband services (FCC).

According to the FCC, 50% of Indian Health Service (IHS) Clinics rely on outdated service connections.

The Widespread Impact of Limited Broadband Connectivity

Census 2020: Everyone HAS to Count

In a 2019 statewide survey, only 71% of Native Americans reported having internet access at home or at work that would allow them to submit their Census information online compared to nearly 90% of all other New Mexicans.

For tribes, a mere 1% UNDERCOUNT could equal a loss of over $2 MILLION A YEAR in federal funding.

That equals nearly $21.5 MILLION LOST for critical community programs across 10 years for tribes in New Mexico.

Health Disparities are Exacerbated

The American Hospital Association reports that 76% of U.S. hospitals connect with patients through telehealth services. Yet, HALF of IHS Clinics lack adequate service connections.

Educational & Economic Impact

Lack of access to high speed internet for home-schooling WILL INCREASE existing inequalities in education outcomes for Native American students.

From February 2020 to April 2020, the state unemployment rate increased from 4.8% to 11.3%.¹ Native Americans have the highest unemployment rate in New Mexico, making this rise in unemployment and access to benefits even more challenging for tribes.

¹Information obtained from Bureau of Labor Statistics (https://www.bls.gov/bls/laq.rml.html)