



National
Capital
FreeNet

Libertel
de la Capitale
Nationale

Synapcity Sessions
June 15th, 2023

By:
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Overview

- NCF Mission + History
- Why Digital Equity Matters
- NCF's Digital Equity Work
 - Ensuring Affordable Internet
 - Digital Skills Support and Resources
 - Building Community Connectivity
 - Other Services
- Thanks

NCF's Mission

National Capital FreeNet (NCF) believes everyone in our region has the right to affordable, high quality internet that they understand how to use, while feeling safe online. Since 1992 we have connected more than 100,000 members and now serve more than 4500 members with a range of services.

As a not-for-profit social enterprise, we focus on people not profits while delivering the same quality services.

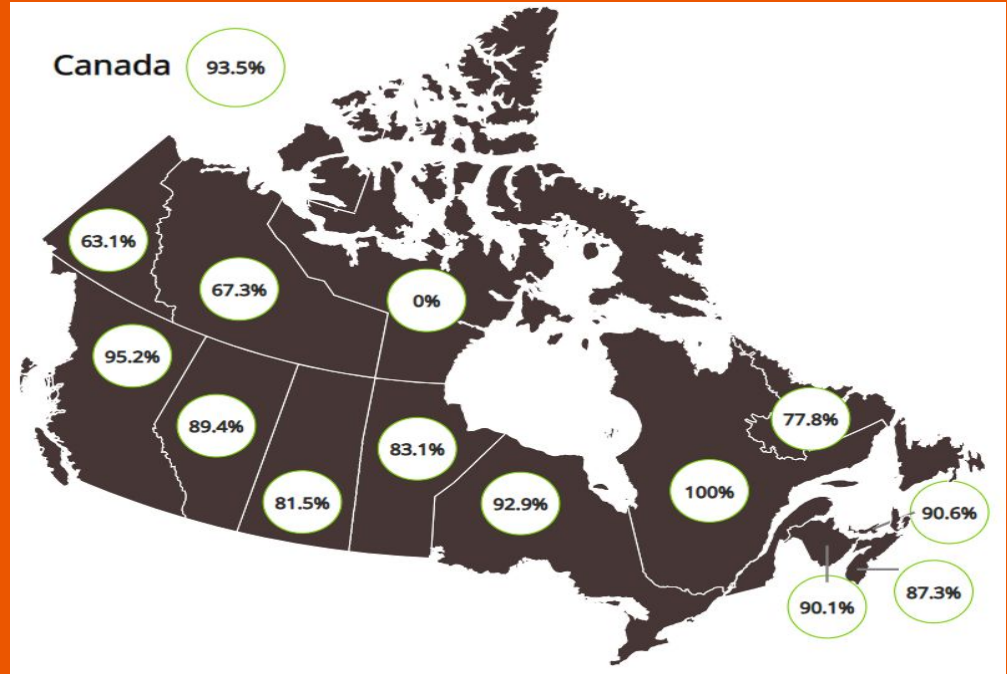
NCF didn't always see our work as advancing 'digital equity' – we started using this term around 2019 and then especially during the pandemic as the closure of libraries, coffee shops and other places with free WiFi drove home how many people didn't have reliable access to the internet, despite needing it more than ever.

Elements of Digital Equity:

- Affordable, high quality internet at home and the opportunity to use free secure WiFi around the community
 - Access to connected devices
 - The digital skills to access the internet and use connected devices to meaningfully participate in society: staying in touch with friends and family, accessing government and health services, school and job-related activities, entertainment and so much more
 - Online security and digital privacy standards that mean people can feel safe online
 - Freedom from online harassment
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Why Digital Equity Matters:

- According to government data, 93.5% of Canadian residents have high speed internet access.
- Meanwhile, an ACORN study found 33% of people surveyed sacrificed their food or medicine budgets to pay for internet access.

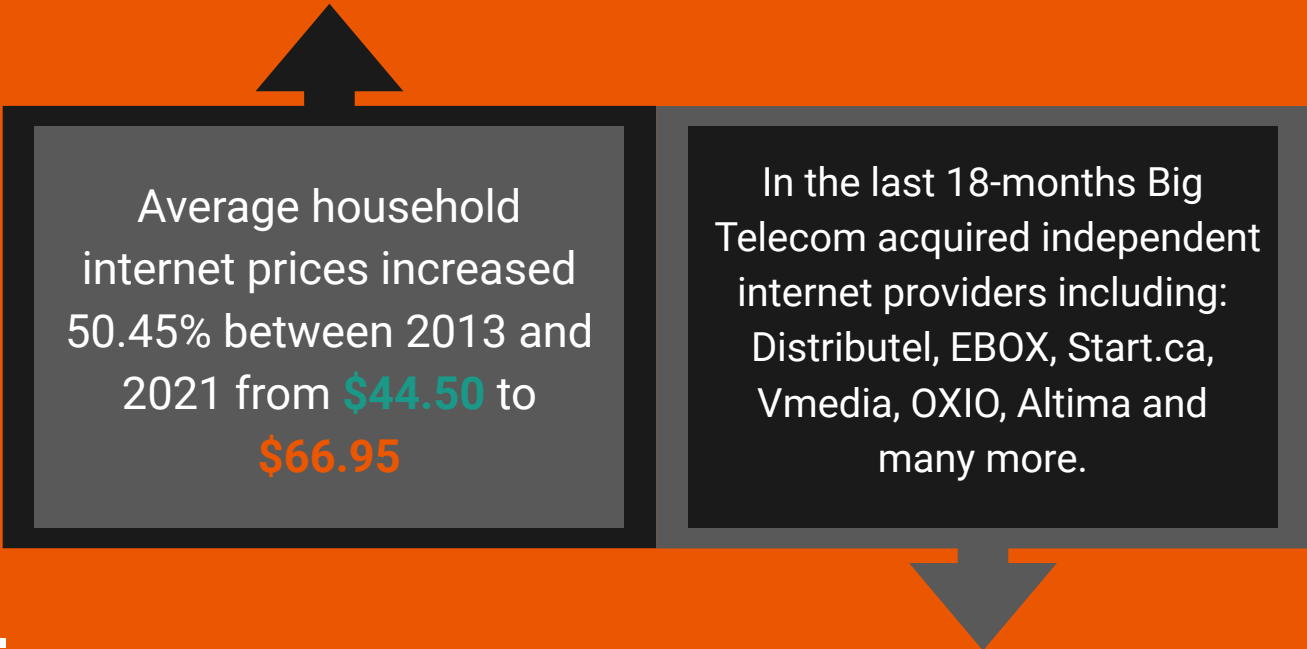


Source: [ISED HighSpeed Internet Access Dashboard](#)

Service Availability \neq Access

- Internet prices are high in Canada and keep going up
- Rural, remote and Indigenous communities are being left behind in terms of access but once connected, will they be able to afford service?
- Canada's telecom system is dominated by a handful of huge commercial players
- There is a lack of choice, especially since many brands look independent but are actually owned by big telecom
- There aren't enough community alternatives to big telecom, especially not-for-profits, co-operatives, and providers owned by Indigenous communities and municipalities
- Unlike the US, Canada doesn't have a universal internet subsidy to help low income people

Why Digital Equity Matters?



Average household internet prices increased 50.45% between 2013 and 2021 from **\$44.50** to **\$66.95**

In the last 18-months Big Telecom acquired independent internet providers including: Distributel, EBOX, Start.ca, Vmedia, OXIO, Altima and many more.

Source on average prices: [Communications Market Reports - Open Data | CRTC](#)

Source on competition: ['The industry is in crisis:' Another small internet provider sells to big telecom](#)

NCF's Digital Equity Work

1a. Ensuring Affordable Internet: as a provider

- We sell internet with speeds from 5 Mbps to 1 Gbps, all with unlimited usage
- We keep our prices as low as we can while remaining sustainable, changing prices only eight times since 2006 – including twice dropping our rates!
- Our Community Access Fund plan offers a lower-cost 6Mbps plan for Ottawa Community Housing tenants
- Our award-winning HelpDesk includes staff and volunteers committed to troubleshooting a range of questions rather than upselling

1b. Ensuring Affordable Internet: as an advocate

- Engaging with the CRTC and the government to keep prices low: there is currently an important hearing going on about this, comments due June 22, search CRTC 2023-56: we encourage everyone to participate
- Co-founded Digital Access Day in 2018: 200+ people in City Hall
- Co-founded Digital Equity Ottawa in 2020: three reports, OCH survey and plans for free Community WiFi
- Participated in Affordable Internet Day of Action in 2021
- Celebrated our 30th anniversary by sharing video perspectives on digital equity with a range of internet and public access champions:
www.ncf.ca/timecapsule

2. Digital Skills Support and Resources

- Informal digital skills support through our HelpDesk
- **Past Digital Skills workshop series include:**
 - Helping people apply online for the Ontario Electricity Support Program and Canada Learning Bond
 - How to use online services to save money while still protecting your privacy
 - Computer and internet basics for seniors, with a focus on security and peer-learning
 - Copyright, Social Media, Identifying Spam, Email services etc.
- **New workshops starting later this year**
- Online Resources and social media campaigns
- **We have a summer project to create updated 'snackable' versions of our key digital skills content**

3. Community Connectivity

Community
Wireless
Network

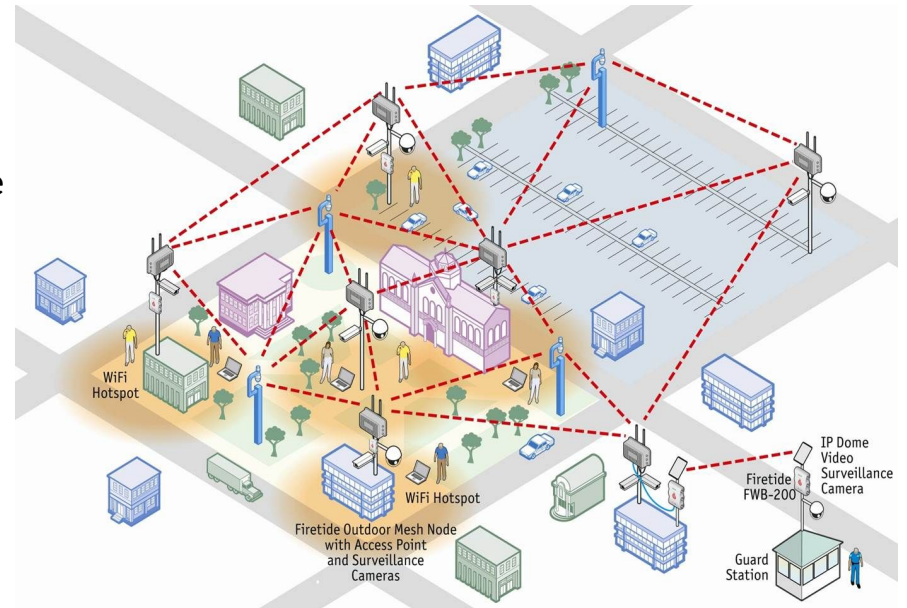


Connected
Community
Hubs

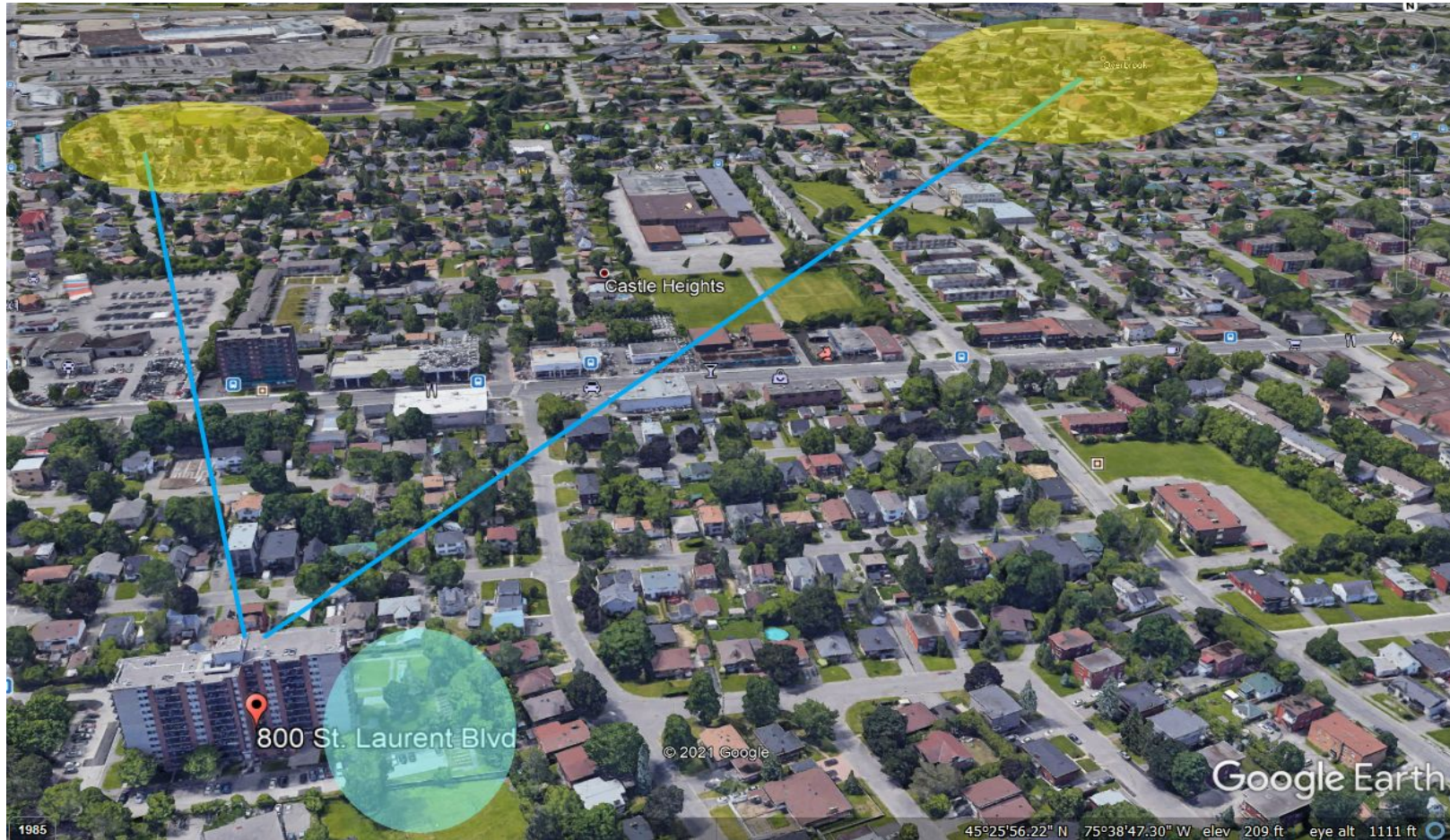
Community Wireless Network

Provide free Community WiFi in common spaces like lounges and gardens. Distribute internet from a fibre connection in the identified neighbourhoods to nearby community centres, local businesses and any homes that may need it.

- Each target community will have a multigigabit connection based on usage.
- A supernode (cluster of antennas) will be installed on OCH high-rise buildings.
- Any combination of nodes can have dedicated internet access (PtMP)
- Range: < 5 km*
- Pilots Explored:
 - 800 St Laurent Blvd
 - 380 Murray Ave



Community Wireless Network Pilot: 800 St Laurent Blvd



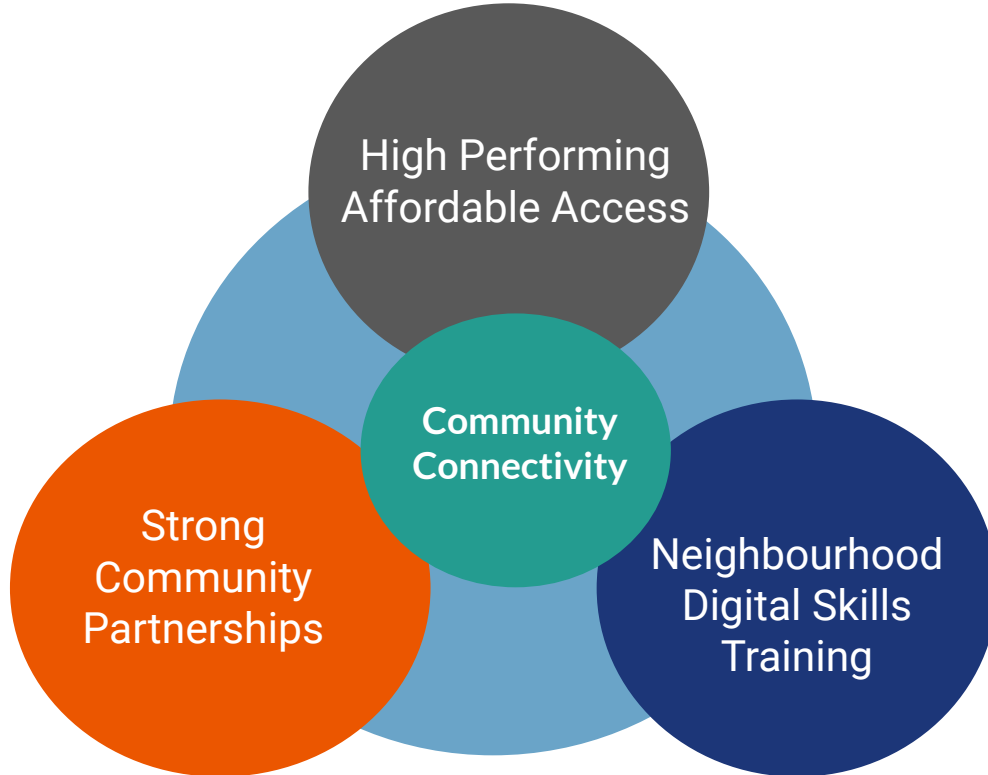
Connected Community Hubs

- Bringing high performance gigabit(1 to 10 Gbps) networks to community hubs and community partners across Ottawa.
- Providing competitive managed solutions with secure, isolated WiFi networks for staff, clients and visitors.
- Working with community partners to determine what best meets the needs of community members.



Rideau Community Hub

Community Connectivity Model



Our past is our future: Community Connectivity

- Current CRTC hearing could mean access to FTTH services
- Hiring a full-time Digital Equity and Volunteer Coordinator soon, supported by Ontario Trillium Foundation
- Plans to build out free Community WiFi pilot
- Working on a national community networking conference
- Expanding our Community Access Fund eligibility beyond Ottawa Community Housing
- Working with SPCO to build out Digital Equity Ottawa as a coalition to move change forward
- And more, as determined by community members, our Board of Directors, staff and volunteers

Thank You



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