

**DATE:** December 12, 2016

**TITLE:** National Broadband Strategy

**WHEREAS:** Broadband is recognized as an essential utility by communities and jurisdictions throughout the world; and

**WHEREAS:** Many rural, remote, and northern communities in Canada continue to be unserved or underserved by internet providers; and

**WHEREAS:** Internet service in rural, remote and northern communities is slower, has less bandwidth and is more expensive than services in urban centres; and

**WHEREAS:** Many jurisdictions are implementing programs and initiatives that leverage network-based technologies to strategically improve services to residents, enable businesses to become globally competitive, incubate a knowledge workforce and enhance social capacity; and

**WHEREAS:** The success of these communities is reliant upon the availability of high speed, high capacity bandwidth internet connectivity.

**NOW  
THEREFORE BE  
IT RESOLVED:** The Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties request that the Provincial and Federal Governments declare broadband an essential service;

**AND FURTHER  
BE IT RESOLVED:** The Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties request that the Provincial and Federal Governments provide direct funding and support to rural, remote and northern communities to ensure affordable access to, or the development of, high speed (100 Mbps and faster) community network infrastructure;

**AND FURTHER  
BE IT RESOLVED:** The Federal Government develop a National Broadband Strategy;

**AND FURTHER  
BE IT RESOLVED:** Rural municipalities, internet service providers, education and health professionals, public safety organizations, research and economic development authorities be actively involved in preparing the Strategic Plan.

**BACKGROUND:** Despite different provincial and federal programs, many rural, remote and northern communities (RRNC) remain unserved or underserved in terms of access to high-speed internet. With vast geographical expanses and low population densities, Internet Service Providers (ISPs) do not have a business case to invest in these communities. Residents and businesses in RRNC with internet service often contend with slower speeds and pay higher costs for service than their urban counterparts.

Access to high-speed, high capacity internet service at an affordable price is vital to facilitate local economic development and for the provision of cost-efficient and effective public services. It is crucial that RRNC have the mobile networks, broadband connections and open data platforms that allow stakeholders to advance their individual needs and for the betterment of the community at large. Increased broadband speed with high capacity will help existing local businesses grow and become participants in the digital economy. Unfortunately, policy discussions on broadband have been focused on increasing access, not investing in and leveraging broadband for economic, social and community development.

High-speed, high capacity broadband also enables all levels of government to deliver public services in the most financially responsible manner. Governments need higher bandwidth to serve evolving video, image, data and voice requirements to provide the numerous services residents expect.

The 2016 federal budget announced a new \$500M program for rural and remote community broadband funding over the next five years with an uninspiring and unambitious target of 5 Mbps down/1 Mbps up. With the rapid advancements in information and communications technology (ICT), changing patterns in internet consumption such as video streaming and increased utilization and movement of data packets, the identified targets will leave Canada in a compromised position globally. With broadband consumption growing at annual rates up to 50%, and a failure to invest in and support a robust broadband network, we will continue being internet viewers rather than broadband contributors and innovators in the digital economy.

A recent study from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) states "Canada has amongst one of the world's slowest Internet speeds (ranking 33rd) and highest costs around the world" (August 15, 2013). Further, from 2002 to 2012, Canada fell from 2nd to 13th for wired broadband connections. Without a deliberate and focused broadband strategy, people without 21st century broadband will be left behind; it will come at a significant cost. The digital divide and the inequity between RRNC and their urban counterparts' access to internet will create the new disenfranchised underclass.



Many jurisdiction's have made substantial invests in broadband recognizing the enormous benefits that will be derived. While many of these have high population densities, looking at Australia with a population density of 3.1 people/square kilometer and their commitment to broadband and comparing it to Canada which has a population density of 3.6 people/square kilometer illustrates the lack of commitment made in this country.

In 2009, Australia announced a commitment to build the National Broadband Network (NBN) - (US \$44.1 billion) extending high-speed optical fiber directly into the homes, schools, and workplaces of 93 percent of Australians. A 2013 report concluded that the NBN would provide job opportunities, time savings, and other benefits worth, on average, AU \$3800 (US \$3600) per household per year by 2020. The cost was approximately AU \$1900 per household. Although polls showed that the majority of voters supported the project, after the 2013 election the initiative was scaled back but still brings fibre optics to all new developments.