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<https://www.crainsnewyork.com/technology/pandemic-intensifying-digital-divide-black-new-yorkers-study-finds>

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Pandemic intensifying digital divide for Black New Yorkers, study finds RYAN DEFFENBAUGH

The pandemic has exacerbated a digital divide

<https://www.crainsnewyork.com/technology/mayor-expand-internet-600k-underserved-new-yorkers> between white and Black New Yorkers, with disparities in access to speedy internet <https://www.crainsnewyork.com/technology/mayor-expand-internet-600k-underserved-new-yorkers> that hurt both families and small businesses, according to a report released Monday.

About 58% of Black New Yorkers have access to home broadband, compared with 82% of white New Yorkers, data published by the New York Urban League found. Nearly a quarter of Black New Yorkers can access the internet only through their smartphone, making it difficult to attend classes or work remotely. Meanwhile, Black workers hold only 7% of jobs in fast-growing technology industries.

The findings were published in State of Black New York

<https://www.nyul.org/state-black-ny-1>, a 58-page report with a focus on economics, health care, education and civic engagement. The report dedicates a section to the digital divide and the need for the city to take action on closing gaps in computer and broadband access in response to the pandemic.

“What we already knew as the digital divide has become a chasm,” said Arva Rice, president and CEO of the New York Urban League.

She said the city must prioritize broadband expansion and work to make devices available to families with schoolchildren. Some households are trying to help their children through remote schooling with only one computer, Rice said. That creates an impossible balancing act for households with multiple children plus, potentially, parents working from home.

Access to broadband is a long-running problem. Mayor Bill de Blasio has pledged since he entered office in 2014 to hold companies accountable

<https://www.crainsnewyork.com/article/20150713/BLOGS04/150719982/de-blasio-administration-goes-after-verizon-for-failing-to-deliver-fios> for internet service disparities. Still, a report last year by Comptroller Scott Stringer found that 917,239 households, about 29% of the city, lacked broadband access. The mayor has blamed Optimum, Spectrum, Verizon and other telecommunications companies for their failure to expand, while the companies have pushed for the city to make more public infrastructure available for broadband equipment.

In an Internet Master Plan released at the start of this year <https://www.crainsnewyork.com/infrastructure/citys-broadband-master-plan-promises-internet-service-equality>, the de Blasio administration pledged to open up public spaces for broadband equipment and let companies compete for access. The full cost of the project—through public and private funds—is estimated to be \$2.1 billion, and it is likely to play out over years, not months. The mayor pledged in July to accelerate part of the process, spending \$157 million to bring internet access to 600,00 underserved city residents by the end of next year.

Rice called for greater urgency in addressing the crisis.

“This needs to be the No. 1 priority,” she said. “There are just too many communities where access to high-speed broadband is pathetic.”

A lack of internet access hurts job-seekers, who often must apply and interview online. Many small businesses, Rice added, need strong connections as they attempt to move their operations online for the first time in response to pandemic restrictions.

Rice said the city should consider flooding areas without broadband with hot spots that follow social-distancing guidelines.

Laura Feyer, spokeswoman for the mayor’s office, said the city will announce partnerships to deploy reduced-cost broadband to New York City Housing Authority residents before the end of the year. John Paul Farmer, the mayor’s chief technology officer, said at a City Council hearing last month that the city would soon release a request for proposals for a partner company to coordinate the universal broadband access plan.