



ACORN Canada

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ACORN Canada – Closing the Digital Divide

Internet has transformed our world; yet 42% of people who make below \$30,000 don't have high speed home internet.

When this is compared to the 2% in the highest income quartile who don't have high speed internet at home the need for change becomes stark! This "digital divide" clearly excludes low-income individuals and families from what the United Nations now considers to be a human right, comparable with freedom of speech. This is why ACORN members from across Canada are fighting to ensure home high speed internet is affordable to low income families!

Competition as a means to drive down the price of home broadband access has failed! The market in Canada is controlled by a small group of firms and prices remain prohibitively high for many low income families. The "Big Three" -- Telus, Bell, and Rogers -- control 85-90% percent of the wireless spectrum in Canada.¹ Furthermore, roughly 5.5 million of the 12 million broadband internet subscribers belong to the Big Three.²

ACORN members across Canada are fighting for affordable home access to high speed internet for all residents of Canada! There is a clear need for government regulation to ensure affordable home high-speed internet for low income families. ACORN members have launched a campaign targeting the federal government and the CRTC to create a mechanism that ensures home broadband prices are affordable for low income families.



Specifically, ACORN members need:

- **\$10/month product for high speed (15 megabits/second or equivalent to high speed in area) internet.**
- **Who qualifies: all individuals and families who are below the Low Income Measure.**
- **Plus subsidized computers.**

¹ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/can-anyone-take-on-top-3-telecom-companies-1.1345295>

² <http://econjournals.wordpress.com/2014/04/14/a-cartel-in-my-country/> --

http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2013/02/15/high-speed-internet-canada-telecoms_n_2697847.html

At some point before March 2015 the CRTC will start a review about what should be included as Basic Telecommunications Services and eligible for subsidy. We need your support to lobby the CRTC to classify broadband internet as a *Basic Service Objective* (or Basic Telecommunications Services). Please keep in touch with the campaign at acorncanada.org!

By ACORN Canada

The Right to Google and the Digital Divide

It is uncontroverted that the vast majority of individuals born after the year 1980 first look to the virtual world for information, for education, for access to services, before they consider access to anachronistic services such as paper telephone directories and numbers posted on a wall. The computer generation considers the internet, the cell phone, the iPad, the Smartphone, essential partners in daily life. The average 19 year old looks to Google as a source point for much of the information necessary to carry on daily life. Google mapping, driving motor vehicles with the assistance of Google, access to restaurants, access to medical care, access to universities and educational information, access to lawyers, along with millions of other items of information are all contained on the metasource - Google.³

These are the words of Alberta Provincial Court Judge, the Honourable Heather Lamoureux, in a recent decision proclaiming that individuals who are detained by the police have the right to use the Internet to search for a lawyer.

The case involved a 19-year-old from Calgary, Christopher McKay. Christopher was arrested for suspected impaired driving, and was given a telephone and some phone books so that he could exercise his right to a lawyer. Christopher called a toll-free number for legal assistance, but found the call unhelpful.

At his trial, Christopher argued that his right to a lawyer had been violated because he had not been allowed to search online for a lawyer of his choice. He explained that he normally used Google, not a phone book, to search for any information or services that he needed.



In her ruling, Judge Lamoureux commented on the significance of the Internet as a source of information for young people. The average teenager is likely to look online for legal advice before checking any other source. Given the importance of the Internet as a resource for information, the judge ruled that every police station should have access to the Internet so that detained persons can use Google to exercise their right to a lawyer.

³ *R. v. McKay*, 2013 ABPC 13, <http://canlii.ca/t/fvz84>.

This decision underscores the importance of Internet access in 2014. For many Canadians, the Internet is the go-to source for information. The Internet is an essential tool for learning, particularly for children in school. Students can use the Internet to access tutoring and homework help, perform research for homework assignments, or discuss school projects with classmates. A client of the Minnesota-based organization PCs for People expressed gratitude that her children were able to get homework help online after they received discounted Internet service.⁴ A home Internet connection can also help parents participate in their child's education by communicating with the school over email. According to the organization EveryoneOn⁵ 80% of teachers assign homework that involves the Internet. And a PEW Research study found that 56% of teachers of low-income students say that the students' lack of access is a "major challenge" to incorporating more digital tools into their teaching.

Internet access in schools and public libraries is essential, but it is no substitute for a home connection. With home broadband, students can save their work on their own computers. They can work on evenings and holidays without having to worry about running up against time limits or waiting in a long line for a computer.

Having broadband Internet at home doesn't just benefit students academically. One study found that teenagers with access to home computers were 6 to 8% more likely to graduate from high school than those without.⁶ The reason appears to be partly due to the fact that computers provide a source of entertainment that gives teens something to do. Home Internet access can help keep kids out of trouble in addition to providing educational opportunities.

Industry Canada's recently announced Digital Canada 150 plan to provide high-speed Internet access to 98% of Canadians is a welcome initiative. However, ensuring equality of educational opportunities for all Canadian school children requires more than expansion of telecommunications infrastructure. It also requires all students to have access to an affordable broadband Internet connection at home. That is why ACORN's campaign for \$10 a month broadband for low-income families is so important. In 2014 it should be obvious that Internet access is a necessity. Just ask the court.

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⁴ <http://www.startribune.com/local/238389911.html>.

⁵ <http://everyoneon.org>.

⁶ <http://www.pcsforpeople.com/about-us/our-impact>.