

## Households with high-speed Internet increase in Vermont, but digital divide remains

**Date: for public release on March 30, 2009**

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The proportion of Vermont households with high-speed or broadband Internet connections has increased from 9% in 2001 to slightly more than 66% in 2009, according to the statewide *Vermont Poll* conducted by the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont. Of households that did not have Internet or broadband, nearly 46% said that they knew broadband was available to them, while 17% were not sure.

Despite the overall increase in household broadband, there is still evidence of a digital divide. According to this year's poll, 44% of responding households making less than \$25,000/year have computers, compared to 83% of all households and 91% of households making more than \$25,000.

"Citizens can't be connected unless they have a computer," says Center for Rural Studies Co-Director, Jane Kolodinsky. "While progress is being made with regard to access to personal computers and the Internet, we can't 'level the playing field' for Vermont students and adults in terms of access to the information highway until the digital divide issues are solved."

A majority of all Vermont households that have Internet have a high-speed connection, but lower income households in that group are slightly less likely to have broadband than others. According to the poll, 76% of households with Internet making less than \$50,000 have broadband versus 85% of households making more.

Traditionally there has also been a rural divide in high-speed Internet. According to the poll, 76% of rural households with Internet connections have broadband versus urban (88%) or suburban (93%) households. It should be noted, however, that urban households are less likely to have Internet overall (69% versus 84-85% for rural and suburban). This may be due to the fact that a higher proportion of urban households in Vermont are in lower income groups. Overall suburban households in Vermont are more likely to have Internet *and* broadband.

Overall nearly 82% of polled households have an Internet connection. Of connected households, 18% had dial-up, 24% had a cable modem, 42% had DSL, nearly 7% had satellite Internet, 6% had a wireless Internet service, and 3% had fiber-optic or some other service. Generally anything faster than dial-up is considered to be broadband, although speeds may vary.

Between those that have broadband and those that answered about the availability of high-speed Internet, at least 79% of households in this poll have broadband available to them. The State of Vermont has made 2010 a target for 100% broadband availability in the state. In the past, polled households have expressed varying support for State and community efforts to expand broadband service. The 2007 *Vermont Poll* found a majority (58%) of respondents in support of the allocation of State funds toward universal broadband. However only a minority (36%) was in favor of the use of municipal funds for the development of broadband infrastructure.

Last year, the *Vermont Poll* asked more focused questions about the favorability of respondents toward the use of local resources to work “alone or in partnership with other municipalities to develop high-speed Internet infrastructure, such as data lines or wireless transmitters, so that companies may use them to sell high-speed Internet connections to local residents and businesses.” The understanding was that any municipal investment eventually would be paid back through fees charged for the use of the new infrastructure. A vast majority of respondents (77%) were in favor of having their city or town involved in such an effort. When the question was focused to ask if respondents were in favor of an effort exclusively in fiber-optic infrastructure, much faster than typical broadband, a majority (73%) said yes once again.

For a detailed report on the information technology questions from the 2009 *Vermont Poll*, please go to <http://crs.uvm.edu/vtrpoll/2009>.

The *Vermont Poll* is a statistically representative, statewide telephone poll conducted annually by the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont. Responses are limited to Vermont households with telephones, not including cell phones<sup>1</sup>. Households are selected randomly using a list of telephone numbers generated from Vermont telephone directories. The 2009 *Vermont Poll* was conducted February 18-27 and includes responses to questions on a wide range of topics from 615 Vermont households.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the most recent estimates, 5.1 percent of Vermont households have at least one wireless cellular phone, but no landline telephone. As a state, Vermont has the lowest level of “wireless-only” households in the country. Blumberg et al. (2009). *Wireless Substitution: State-level Estimates from the National Health Interview Survey, January – December 2007. National Health Statistics Report, 14.*