

# CLOSE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE! ENSURE INTERNET ACCESS FOR NEW YORKERS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

## Things You Need to Know

- In [March 2021](#), there were **54,667 people experiencing homelessness**, including **16,956 children**, sleeping each night in the NYC municipal shelter system. A **near record 20,790 single adults** slept in shelters.
- State regulations require certain services be provided to shelter residents. However, while not currently mandated by law, **NYC-funded shelters overwhelmingly lack in one essential service which could reduce the length of residents' stay and facilitate their exit into permanent housing - access to technology.**
- **75%** of homeless shelter residents [surveyed](#) by the City Bar Justice Center agreed that **internet access would help improve their circumstances**; 67% wanted but had no regular access to internet; **only 6% were able to access the internet through their homeless shelter.**
  - Most respondents' internet access comes through self-paid cellular plans (76% had one at some point) or free public Wi-Fi, (e.g., in public spaces, libraries, or restaurants like Starbucks). **This modest access is insufficient and impractical.** Self-paid cellular plans often include limits on minutes or data, and **access to public spaces have been significantly restricted since the COVID-19 pandemic began.**
- Survey respondents indicated they would use internet access while in shelter for: **finding permanent housing (70%)**, a job (60%), and medical care (63%); accessing benefits such as unemployment, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), food stamps or Medicaid (45%); access to email (67%); and social networking (74%).

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- **Accessing counseling, [telehealth](#) or any [other service](#) is extremely difficult since the start of the pandemic**, as many of these services have become reliant on Zoom or other internet-based platforms to allow patients and providers to safely meet with clients. Poor or no internet connectivity leaves many shelter resident clients unable to effectively participate in critical services needed for their well-being.
- More than **[111,000 New York City students](#)**—approximately **one in ten children** enrolled in district or charter schools—were **identified as homeless** during the 2019-20 school year, and more than 32,700 of these students were living in City shelters. These students will need the internet and technology during their shelter stay to learn and complete school assignments, yet [City agencies indicate](#) that most of these shelters do not have Wi-Fi available for residents. **Click [here](#) for education related talking points.**
- **Lack of internet access for New Yorkers experiencing homelessness is a racial justice issue.** New Yorkers of color are [disproportionately represented](#) among those experiencing homelessness and COVID-19. **86% of single adults experiencing homelessness and 93% of heads-of-household in family shelters identify as Black or Hispanic** – significantly higher than the 53% of NYC’s population overall who identify as Black or Hispanic.

*Click [here](#) for more information and to get involved with the [#Wifi4Homeless](#) campaign*