

Internet Access in West Virginia

West Virginia Social Survey Report

WVSS-20-03

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Background

In 2019, about 56% of the world's population had access to the internet with North America having one of the highest rates of access globally (94%).

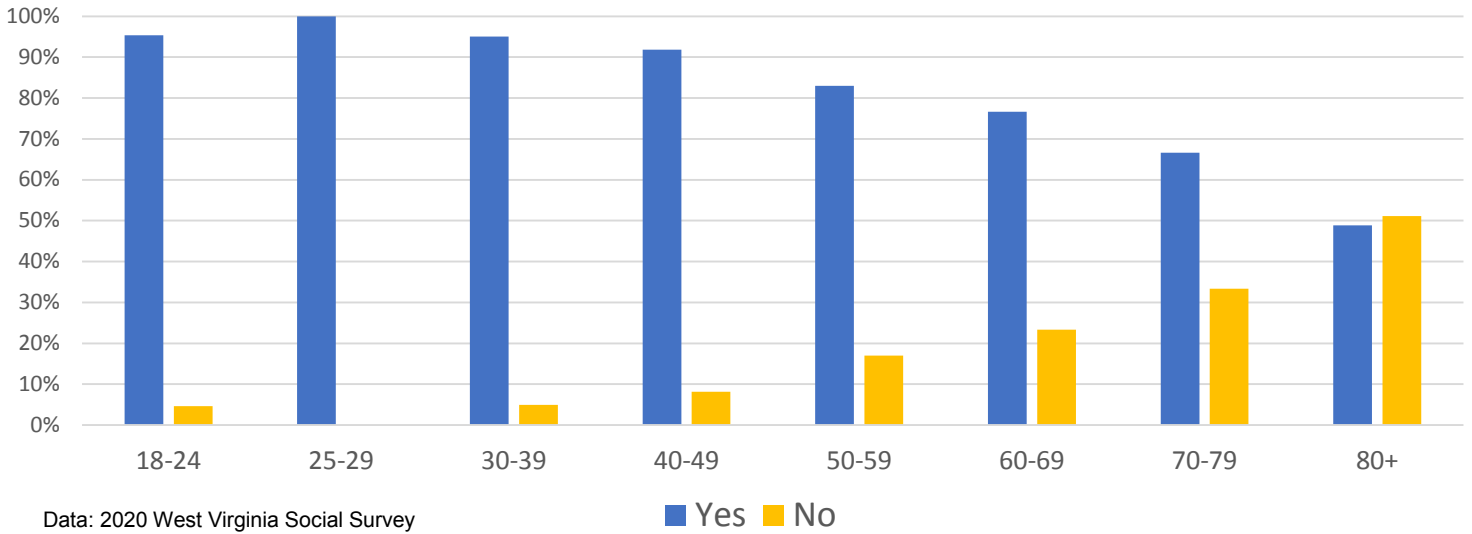
Having access to the internet is most commonly impacted by level of education and income. This means that access is lower for disadvantaged groups. Similarly, older Americans report lower rates of access to the internet, which could be due to limited resources and ability to use technology.

In West Virginia, those with low income and those with lower educational attainment have the lowest rates of access to the internet. Reports of ability to use the internet follow similar patterns.

Highlights

- 83% of West Virginians have access to the internet in their homes.
- Of those reporting that they do not have access to internet in their homes, 33% reported accessing the internet through an internet-enabled mobile device, like a smartphone or tablet.
- Access to the internet at home is most common among West Virginia residents who have high household incomes and education.
- Self-reported ratings of ability to use the internet are highest among residents with high incomes and education.
- Older residents report lower rates of access and ability to use the internet.

Figure 1 - Access to the Internet at Home by Age in West Virginia



Internet Access and Ability in WV

Respondents were asked “Do you have access to the internet in your home?” Approximately 83 percent said yes. When asked “Do you have access to the internet through an internet-enabled mobile device like a smartphone, tablet, or watch?”, roughly 81% of

respondents said yes. Of those who said they did not have access to the internet in their home, 33% indicated that they had access to the internet through a mobile device.

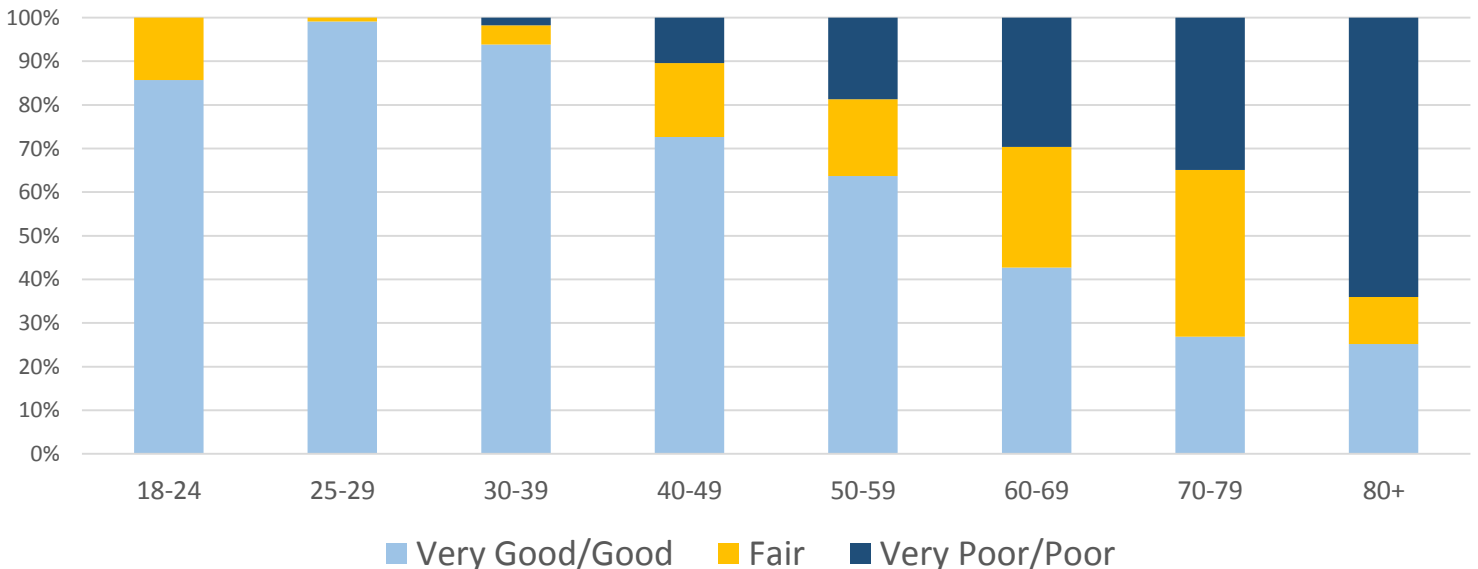
Respondents were asked: “How would you rate your ability to use the internet?” and were given the options “very good,”

“good,” “fair,” “poor,” and “very poor.” Most West Virginia residents rated their internet ability as “very good” or “good” (62.62%), 24% rated it as “fair,” and about 19% rated it as “poor” or “very poor.”

The Internet and Age in WV

The lowest rates of access to

Figure 2 - Ability to Use the Internet by Age in West Virginia



Data: 2020 West Virginia Social Survey

home internet according to age were reported by those 60 and older. This reflects national trends showing internet use to be lower among those 65 and older.

In West Virginia, the lowest access rate was reported by those aged 80 or older. This is likely due to older populations having lower educational attainment and income, including those in West Virginia. Of respondents reporting access to the internet through a device only, about 33% were aged 50-69.

The highest rates of having access to the internet at home were reported by those 18-24 (95%) and those 25-29 (100%).

While rates of home internet access are lower among older West Virginians, another

barrier to internet use is a lack of confidence in using technology, which is common among older populations.

In West Virginia, ratings of ability to use the internet were lowest among those 80 or older with 64% reporting “poor” or “very poor” ability.

In contrast, none of those aged 18-24 or 25-29 reported “poor” or “very poor” ability to use the internet. The highest ratings of ability to use the internet were reported by these respondents. This is likely due to a high percentage of students within these age groups who use the internet for their education as well as national trends that show faster technology adoption among younger populations.

Education and the Internet

Level of education influences access to the internet. In West Virginia, internet access is lowest among those with less than a high school education (48%). Access in the state is highest among those with professional or doctoral degrees (99% each).

The most dramatic increase of reports in having access to the internet at home occur between those with a high school diploma (78%) and those with some college education (94%). Those accessing the internet through a mobile device only are more commonly high school graduates (59%).

Figure 3 - Access to the Internet at Home and Ability to Use the Internet by Education in West Virginia

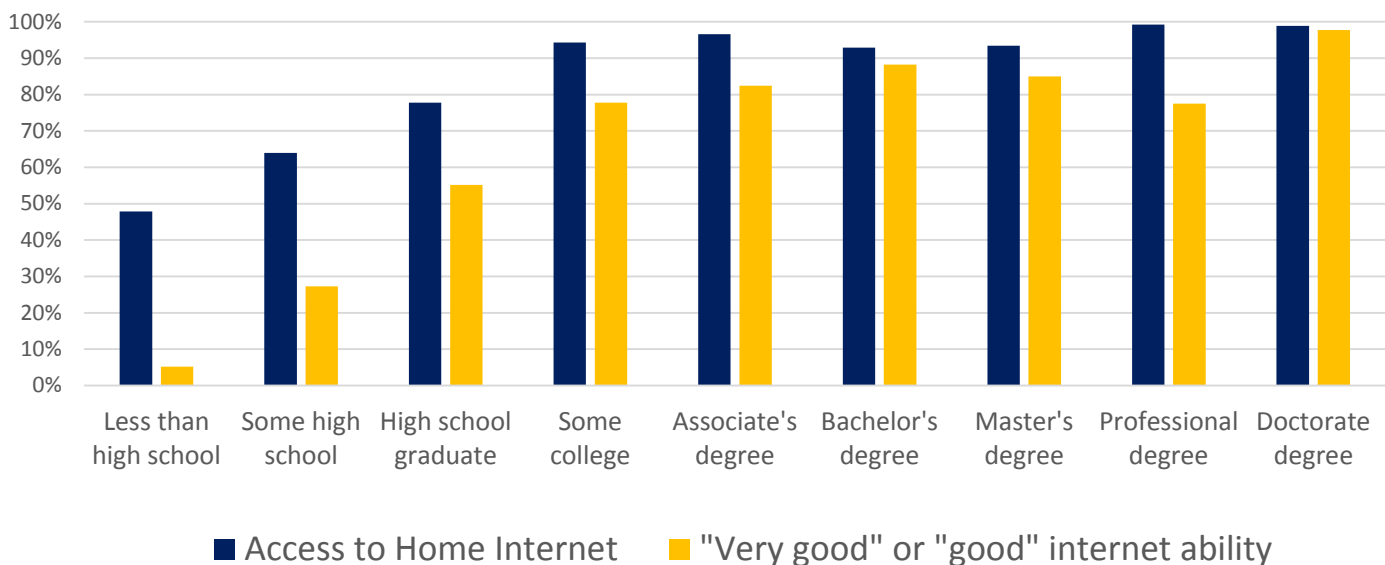
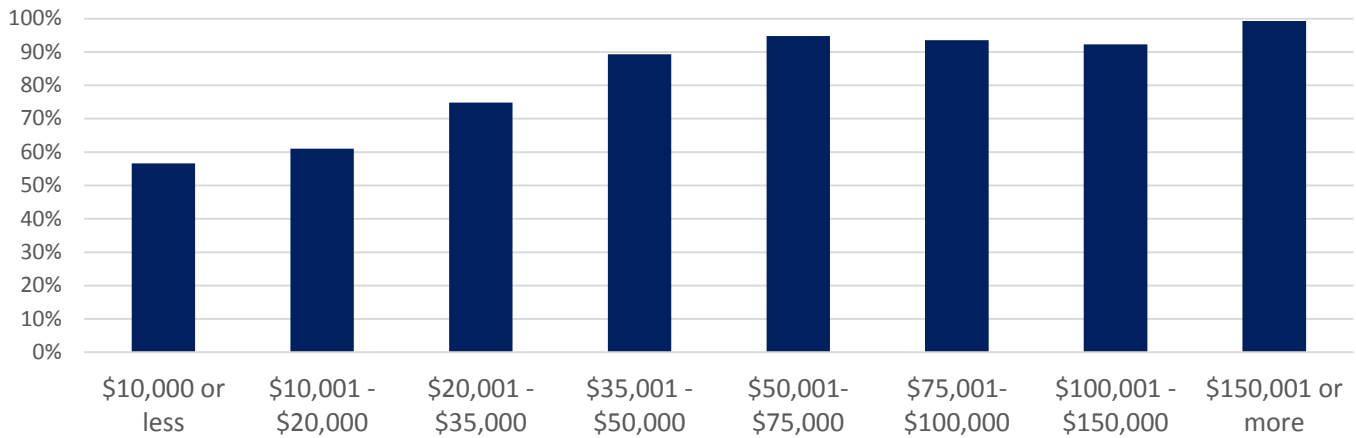


Figure 4 - Access to Home Internet by Income in West Virginia



Data: 2020 West Virginia Social Survey

■ Access to Home Internet

For ability to use the internet, ratings of “very good” and “good” are most common among those with a doctorate degree (98%). Ratings of “very good” or “good” ability to use the internet are high among those with a Bachelor’s degree (88%), Master’s degree (85%), and those with an Associate’s degree (82%). Ratings of “very poor” or “poor” ability to use the internet are most common for those with less than a high school education (64%) and those with some high school education (62%).

Income and the Internet

Income also influences access to the internet. In West Virginia, those with a household income of \$10,000 or less reported the lowest rates of access to the internet in their homes (57%). In contrast, those with a

household income of between \$35,001-\$50,000 report having access to the internet at rates of 90% or higher.

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Those with the highest household income of \$150,000 or more report the highest rate of home internet access (99%). Those who access the internet through a mobile device only more commonly have lower household incomes (\$35,000 or less).

Among those in the lowest income categories, ratings of “very good” or “good” are the least common. Less than 50% of those with a household income below \$35,000 rated their ability to use the internet

in this way. More than 50% of those with a household income above \$35,000 rated their internet ability as “very good” or “good.”

Summary

As of 2018, WV was ranked 45th for access to broadband internet. There has been a push to increase access to quality internet in the state and other rural locations. Improved internet connectivity in the state could attract remote workers and improve access to virtual health services and remote education and employment in the altered social and economic environment of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 2020 West Virginia Social Survey finds that the majority of West Virginia residents have access to the internet in their

homes or through an internet enabled mobile device.

However, access and self-reported ability to use the internet are also low among older West Virginians and residents with lower incomes and education.

Low access to the internet and lower ability to use the internet also inhibit opportunities for self-employment and small businesses as well as virtual healthcare and education.

Data Source

The WVSS is produced by the Survey Research Center at West Virginia University. The purpose of the WVSS is to gather information on the attitudes, concerns, and challenges facing WV residents.

The WVSS is a mail survey utilizing an address-based sample of nearly 5,000 households across the state.

The 2020 WVSS received nearly 1,900 responses for a response rate of 38.1% (American Association of Public Opinion Research Definition #3). Data are weighted to be representative of the West Virginia adult population.

Suggested Citation

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