

Even with the private sector voluntarily providing affordable Internet access to low-income households, there are still gaps across the province. There is no 'quick fix' for fast, affordable in-home internet due to well know last-mile connectivity costs in rural and remote communities. The Information Communications Technologies (ICT) division within CITZ continues to work on policy options for improving access to Internet across the province.

Covid-19 website

The BC Government is careful not to favour or promote one telecommunications provider above others. With this caveat in mind, it is still important for government to highlight changes to internet and cell phone plans, and the availability of low-cost internet. The draft language can be found in Appendix B and the final wording will be approved by GCPE.

Concerns of small Internet Service Providers (ISPs)

Small ISPs may be negatively impacted by the low-cost Internet being offered by large ISPs, in particular the expansion of \$9.95/month internet to low-income families, and TELUS providing school boards with mobile internet sticks that do not require in-home installation. ICT is monitoring the impacts on small ISPs. If necessary, ICT will develop policy options for consideration to support small ISPs.

Sharing information across the social sector

ICT is preparing an information note for Deputy Ministers across the social sector to inform them of Internet and cell phone options for low-income and marginalized British Columbians.

NEXT STEPS:

The week of April 14, 2020, ICT will take the following actions to promote access to internet and cellular phone during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Provide content for the www.gov.bc.ca/covid19 website;
- Provide Deputy Ministers with information on Internet and cell phone options for low-income and marginalized British Columbians; and
- Continue to monitor the concerns of small ISPs.

Attachments: Appendix A: Summary of Covid-19 Telecommunications Offers
Appendix B: Content for Covid-19 website

Contact: Daphna Mills, 250-216-7301