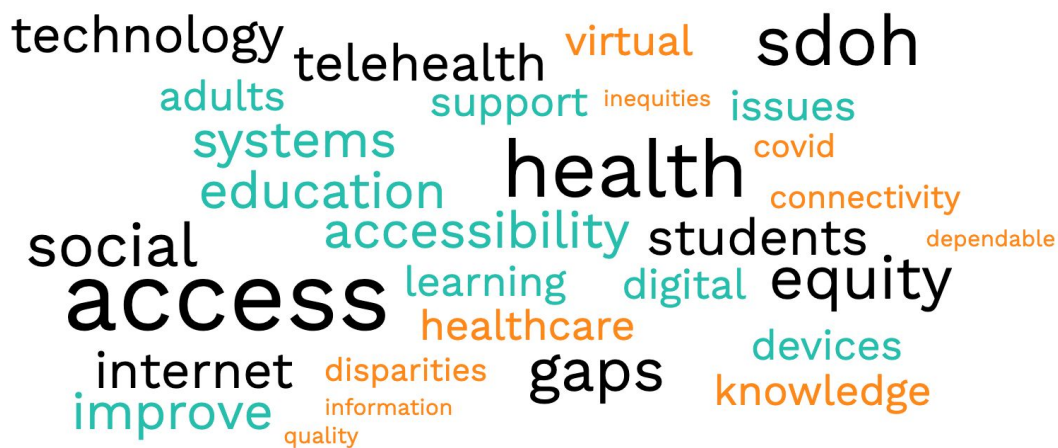


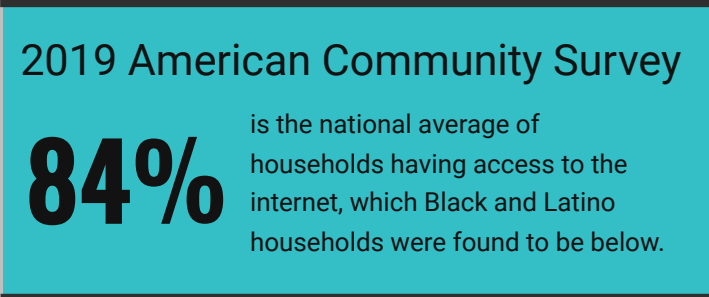
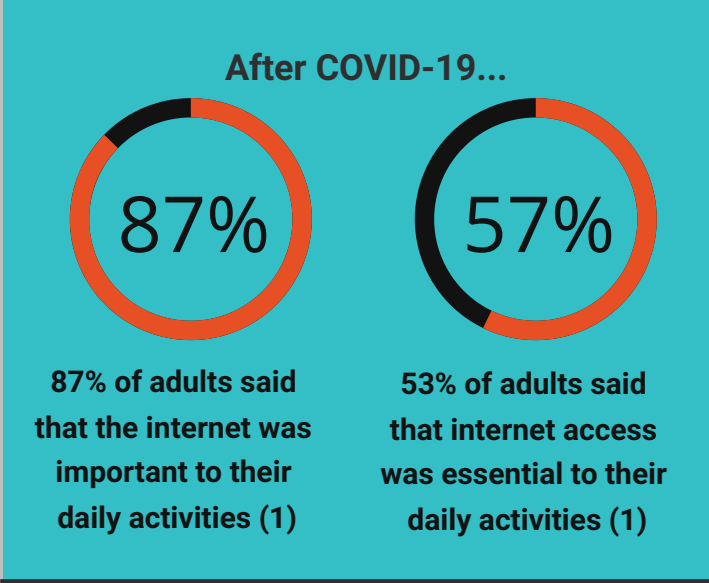
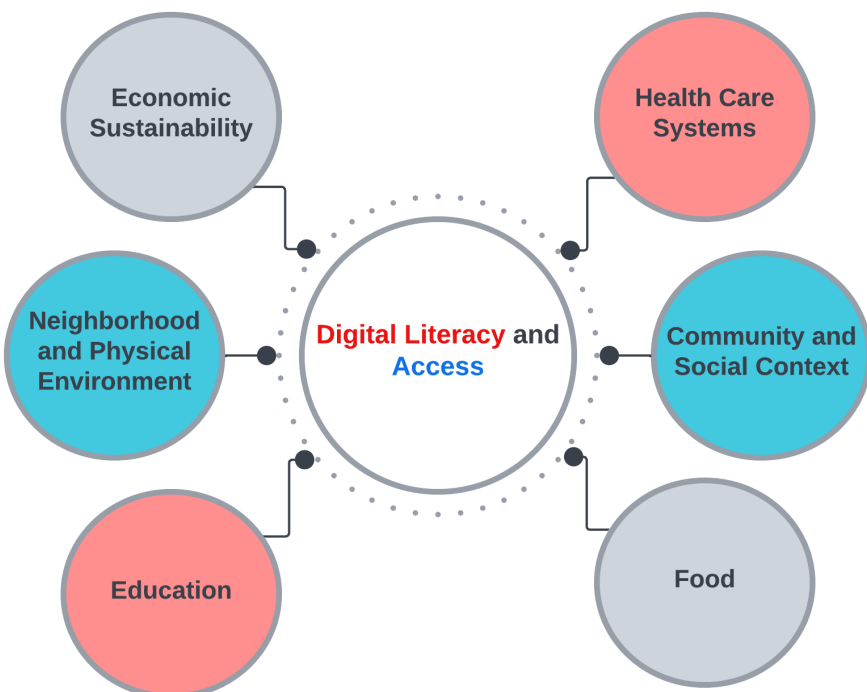
Crossing the Digital Divide



Knowledge to Action Brief March, 2022

In a world where building equity is at the center of our focus, addressing issues related to lack of access to technology (internet, devices, knowledge of how to access) is essential. How will we improve our support for individuals without personal mobile devices or reliable internet? Access to technology has become a pressing equity issue, as much of our educational and human service systems have pivoted to rely on virtual learning experiences and delivery of information and support throughout 2020 and a majority of 2021 due to COVID-19. Accessibility issues contribute to students, families, and older adults' being able to participate in telehealth, access their healthcare provider on a regular basis, and participate in online learning opportunities. Education, social services, and health care access are among the major issues, defined as Social Determinants of Health (SDOH), that impact a person's health and quality of life (2).

The graphic below shows the array of existing SDOH, with each having a connection to digital literacy and access in some way, highlighting the fact that that digital accessibility is essential to achieving balance in our technologically integrated society (3).



Digital literacy/access has recently been referred to as the **“super social determinants of health”** because of our increase in reliance on technology to address the other social determinants of health (3).

¹ Pew Research Center. (2020). What we've learned about Americans' views of technology during the time of COVID-19. Retrieved from: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/12/18/what-weve-learned-about-americans-views-of-technology-during-the-time-of-covid-19/>

² Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Healthy People 2030. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from: <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/social-determinants-health>


³ Sieck, C. J., Sheon, A., Ancker, J. S., Castek, J., Callahan, B., Siefer, A. (2021). Digital Inclusion as a Social Determinant of Health. Digital Medicine, 4(52). Retrieved from: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41746-021-00413-8>

Gaps in connectivity significantly affect an individual's ability to keep up with the country's rapidly changing education, social services, and healthcare landscape. How do these 'digital' gaps connect to accessibility of education, which is one of the SDOH? It can be argued that these gaps actually affect students the most. A survey published by the CA Public Policy Institute revealed that **1 in 4 K-12 students lacked dependable access to internet in their houses**, which represents a particularly noteworthy hindrance to learning for students who have been required to complete homework and assignments virtually in recent years. Additionally, local disparities are persistent, as some counties in Los Angeles retain a high level of internet access, while other counties down the street have some of the lowest levels of access (4).


As inequities are often present in areas in which the Social Determinants of Health are not as widely addressed, it is particularly important that technological support be expanded for low-income adults, children, and older adults. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services have created an initiative titled "Healthy People 2030" which strives to "Create social, physical, and economic environments that promote attaining the full potential for health and well-being for all" (2). It is essential that initiatives similar to this acknowledge the vital role technology plays in enabling Californian's to achieve healthier, educated lives.

⁴ Public Policy Institute of California. (2021). California's Digital Divide. Retrieved from: <https://www.ppic.org/publication/californias-digital-divide/>


ACTIONS TO TAKE



Consider how access to technology impacts the families who you work with and their relationship with the Social Determinants of Health. Educate yourself about **Healthy People 2030** and their goals



As both healthcare and mental health care providers, **incorporate intake questions when meeting with new patients** in order to identify who may have a device, but no capability to access services such as telehealth opportunities on it. Questions may include "do you find yourself worrying about being able to access your healthcare options virtually?"



For older adults, reach out to local community centers, such as **Oasis San Diego**, to inquire about technology trainings to increase personal knowledge. Become informed about technological resources provided by **AARP**. Utilize the **CA Department of Aging**.



Links

Search the following links to access helpful resources mentioned to the left!

Healthy People 2030:
<https://health.gov/healthypeople/about/workgroups/social-determinants-health-workgroup>

Telehealth incorporation for Providers:
<https://telehealth.hhs.gov/providers/>

Oasis San Diego: <https://san-diego.oasisnet.org/technology-fair/>

AARP: <https://www.aarp.org/home-family/personal-technology/info-2021/programs-older-adults-computers-internet-access.html>

CA Department of Aging:
https://www.aging.ca.gov/covid19/Digital_Divide/

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