



# Telephone and Internet Access

## What is this?

This measures household and individual access to telecommunications and the internet.

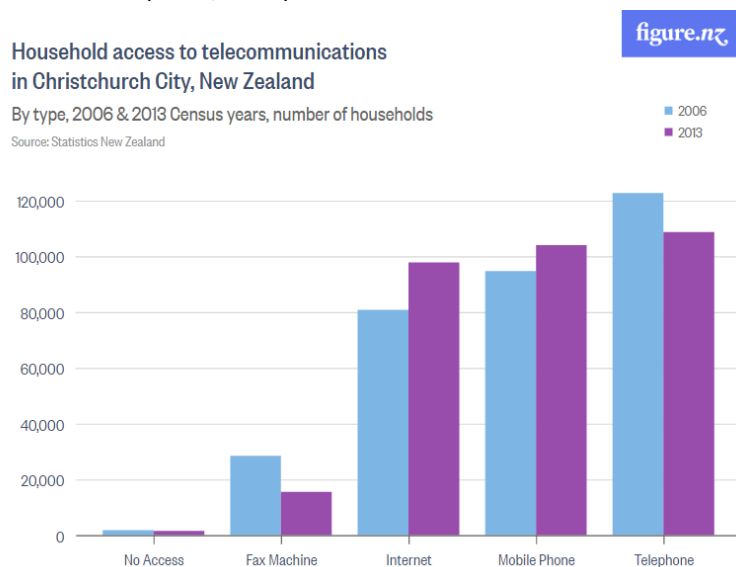
## Why is it important?

Telephones and the internet allow people to access key public, social, and commercial services, education and employment opportunities, as well as helping people maintain social connections. Socially connections are important because they help people to feel they belong and have a part to play in society, and this is important for people's sense of wellbeing<sup>1</sup>. Access to phones and video calling enables social contact with friends and family in the absence of frequent face-to-face contact. It also ensures a line of communication in times of need or emergency. Through social media on the internet, social networks can be expanded considerably allowing people from disconnected groups e.g. people living in rural areas, migrants connecting with family members, and gender diverse people to find community and support online. However, new communications technology can also be used for antisocial purposes.<sup>2</sup>

The internet is an increasingly important means of accessing a wide range of information and services, as more and more information moves from paper to electronic form. Lack of access to this resource may have adverse effects on educational outcomes, employment prospects and other aspects of wellbeing.<sup>3</sup>

## Data

**Figure 1** Household access to telephones, mobile phones and the internet in Christchurch, New Zealand (2006/2013)<sup>4</sup>



Overall, household access to telecommunications is increasing in New Zealand. However, the ways in which we communicate and access the internet are changing. Figure 1 shows that access to telephones (land line) and fax machines is decreasing. Nationally, in 2013, 85.5% of households had access to a landline at home, down from 91.6% in 2006. Fax access has significantly decreased from 26% in 2006 to 14.6% in 2013. Conversely, rates of internet and cellphone access have increased significantly. Internet access is now 76.8% (compared with 60.5% in 2006, and 37.4% in 2001) and 83.7% of households now have access to a cellphone at home compared to 74.2% in 2006. A small percentage of households (1.6%) did not have any access to any telecommunications at home.<sup>5</sup>

The household use of Information and Communication Technology is a survey carried out regularly by Statistics New Zealand and has identified the following information.<sup>6</sup> The age group with the highest use of the internet was 25-34 year-olds. In 2012, 94% of this age group had used the internet over the previous 12 months. The age group with the lowest internet usage was those 75 years and over, where less than one third accessed the internet.

The methods for accessing the internet have also changed over time with 40% of households using more than one device to access the internet, this figure has doubled since 2009. Laptops were the most popular means of accessing the internet in more than two-thirds of households. One third of households access the internet via a cellphone, up 26% since 2009.

Younger people were more likely than older age groups to have access to a cellphone in the household. In 2013, 89% of those aged under 65 years had access to a cellphone in the household, compared with 82.3% of people aged 65–74 years and 60.9% of those aged 75 years and over. However, between 2006 and 2013, people aged 65 years and over experienced a greater rate of increase in cellphone access than younger people (increases of 18.8 percentage points for those aged 64–74 years and 21.1 percentage points for those aged 75 years and over). The increase for people aged less than 65 years was 6.4 percentage points.<sup>7</sup>

### *Impact on inequalities*

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Accessing the internet showed some variation by ethnicity. The highest rates of access were for NZ European and “Other” at 84%, Māori rates were 77% and Pacific were 62%. Those not in employment were much less likely to use the internet (68%), compared to 90% for those in employment.<sup>8</sup>

The main reason for not having internet access was lack of interest (52%) however 30% of households state that costs are too high, and 18% of households lack confidence, knowledge or skills to have internet access.

There is no data for people with disabilities, such as vision and hearing impairments, facing extra barriers to participating online. The Age and Dementia Friendly City issue paper covers this in more detail.



Digital technology is becoming a fundamental part of secondary school education. The majority of schools (62%) now have a “Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy in place. The inability of families to buy a device for their child was a barrier for some students especially for students at low-decile schools. As fewer students at low-decile schools had their own devices, these schools (85%) were more likely to provide shared devices.<sup>9</sup>

## *Solutions*

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Free wireless internet is available in many Christchurch City Council libraries which enable users with Wi-Fi enabled laptops or phones to use the internet on these devices. This service is not available in Diamond Harbour, Little River and the mobile libraries. A number of cafes offer free Wi-Fi access with purchases.

Several community service providers offer free internet access to the communities they work alongside and many other people have access through schools and educational institutions. SeniorNet<sup>10</sup> is a community training network that supports and encourages people aged over 50 years to enjoy and use technology in their everyday lives.

Services such as New Zealand Relay<sup>11</sup> are available for hearing and vision impaired individuals. Advances in adaptive technologies have made a range of applications (e.g. voice recognition software) available to people with a range of health or accident related disabilities, including sensory, physical, learning and multi-disabilities.

The New Zealand Government sets out accessibility standards for public service websites, designed for usability by the widest number of people. The standards include accessible language and website compatibility with specialist software such as that used by people with visual impairments. All web designers should consider complying with these standards.<sup>12</sup>

The Office of Ethnic Affairs offers Language Line<sup>13</sup> to non-English speakers. Language Line is a free interpreter telephone service available to migrants. The service offers privacy, accuracy and neutrality. It is primarily used for dealing with government agencies, councils and health care providers.

## *Data limitations*

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Data is not available on the number and types of households that have no access to either a landline or a mobile phone. Census data is collected at the household level, not at the individual or family level. The circumstances of each individual or family in a household may differ.



## *Connections with other issues*

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Social Connectedness, Education, Age and Dementia Friendly City, Religious organisations, social and sports clubs.

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Prepared by Community and Public Health, a division of the Canterbury District Health Board.

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## References

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- <sup>9</sup> NZCER. (2016) *Secondary schools in 2015; Learning with Digital Technology* pg 31-34 [http://www.nzcer.org.nz/system/files/NZCER%20survey%20chapter%204.%20Learning%20with%20digital%20technology\\_0.pdf](http://www.nzcer.org.nz/system/files/NZCER%20survey%20chapter%204.%20Learning%20with%20digital%20technology_0.pdf) Accessed 04.10.16
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- <sup>13</sup> <http://ethniccommunities.govt.nz/story/using-language-line> Accessed 29.09.2016

Read about the Te Pae Mahutonga Māori Health Model at  
<http://www.hauora.co.nz/resources/tepaemahutongatxtvers.pdf>

