

Broadband

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) has declared broadband internet to be a basic telecommunications service.

Reliable broadband is necessary for RMs to maintain the health, safety, and economic well-being of those living in rural and remote areas. Dependable broadband has become essential to utilize technology in equipment and machinery; stay connected for work; provide educational opportunities; engage in social activities; and access healthcare.

The federal government has committed to connect ninety-eight percent of Canadians to high-speed internet by 2026 and all Canadians by 2030.

Since 2015, The federal government has invested approximately \$3.5B in broadband. Saskatchewan has received the lowest per capita investment from the Federal Government at 2.46% of the total dollars when compared with federal broadband investments distributed across Canada.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Invest at least \$400 million in rural broadband per year over ten years, taking into consideration the funding potentially saved when virtual delivery of key government-funded services such as education and healthcare becomes a reliable option.
- Collaborate with provinces and territories on a service plan that considers each province's population and geography individually rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach. Maximize the benefits of investments and better meet the needs of Canadians.
- Use service reliability and availability as separate performance measurements, do not interchange the two.
- Provide access to reliable broadband which has become essential for agriculture, and industry as a whole. In order to find efficiencies, maximize technology, and evolve in a changing world producers need broadband to function flawlessly so they can continue to be the most responsible stewards of the land.
- Level out the playing field, provide additional support for applicants of smaller organizations who may have limited resources compared to the more established applicants.
- Streamline the application process for the CRTC Broadband Fund/Universal Broadband Fund. Ensure that projects can be approved and completed much sooner. Making this change will combat rising construction costs and help get broadband projects where they need to be in a timelier fashion.



Federal Recommendations:

1. Work with groups like the *Saskatchewan Broadband Action Committee* (SBAC) to establish an 'Industry Table' that meets regularly with federal government officials which will enable greater dialogue with local internet service providers and help to address prairie-specific policy issues and market barriers;
2. Establish a 'Prairies Broadband Capacity Fund' that provides matching funding in support of community awareness, community capacity development, and greater regional planning;
3. Recognize the SaskTel Capital Investment as part of the provincial matching contribution investment and target; and,
4. With respect to broadband infrastructure funding, SBAC strongly recommends the following directives:
 - That the federal government gets beyond funding based on a percentage of population, this approach is outdated and short-sighted as it relates to Saskatchewan given our specific challenges related to rural, Indigenous, and remote / Northern communities; and,
 - That the Federal Government immediately release much-needed broadband funding from the *Universal Broadband Fund* in order for local internet service providers to continue with vital investment in broadband infrastructure. The inequitable investments made from the federal Government across Canada is disheartening and counterproductive.

The recent Federal Auditor's Report highlighted Saskatchewan's lagging position in terms of services for 'rural and remote communities and First Nations'.

- Nearly 91 percent of Canadian households had access to high-speed internet in 2021. In rural Canada, only 59.5 percent enjoyed the same access.
- Furthermore, in Saskatchewan only 48.9% of residents living in rural and remote areas had access to a 50/10 Mbps connection.

The story is similar in the neighbouring prairie provinces which is alarming when you factor in how the prairies contribute to Canada's food security and GDP.

SARM believes that the federal government should do all that it can to meet the CRTC's targets of download speeds of 50 megabits per second (Mbps) and upload speeds of at least 10 Mbps.