

# Broadband & Cellular Coverage

Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities



The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) has declared broadband internet a basic telecommunications service, emphasizing its

essential role in modern life. Equally, reliable cellular coverage is a vital necessity in today's connected world, especially in rural and remote regions.

Reliable broadband and cellular services are essential to unlocking the full potential of Saskatchewan's rural areas. The current federal funding model, based on population density, fails to address prairie-specific challenges like vast rural areas and remote Indigenous communities. This limits the province's ability to contribute fully to national growth.

Broadband and cellular coverage are essential in powering key aspects of rural life, such as:

**PUBLIC SAFETY:** High-speed internet and mobile connectivity ensure effective communication during emergencies, support modern 911 services, and enable timely weather alerts and disaster warnings in rural areas, allowing for quicker and more efficient responses.

**MODERN AGRICULTURE:** Precision farming technologies rely on a dependable broadband connection and cellular service for real-time data and efficient operation of machinery. As agriculture becomes more reliant on connected equipment, stable internet and cell signals are crucial for farmers to optimize production.

**REMOTE WORK:** In an increasingly digital world, rural residents need reliable broadband and mobile connectivity to fully participate in the workforce, access global markets, and work remotely. The digital economy relies on consistent, high-quality connections to support both rural businesses and workers.

**EDUCATION:** Online learning opportunities are only accessible when students in remote areas have both strong broadband and cellular coverage. These connections open doors to education, helping students stay competitive no matter where they live.

**HEALTH CARE:** Telemedicine services, critical for rural health care, require strong internet and mobile networks. With reliable connectivity, rural residents can access essential health care without having to travel long distances to urban centers.

**SOCIAL CONNECTION:** High-quality broadband and cellular coverage help rural residents stay connected with family and friends, reducing isolation and enhancing overall well-being. For professionals relocating to rural communities, access to reliable connectivity is a key factor in recruitment and retention, not only in the workplace but as a part of a positive work life balance for their families.

The Voice of Rural Saskatchewan

# Challenges

**ACCESSIBILITY:** In 2017, 45.4% of Saskatchewan households had access to speeds of 50/10 Mbps. By 2026, this is projected to reach 86.4%. Most other provinces are approaching or exceeding 91% broadband coverage.

**INVESTMENT DISPENSITY:** Since 2015, the Government of Canada has invested \$88 million in connectivity projects in Saskatchewan. The Universal Broadband Fund (UBF) totals \$3.225 billion, but Saskatchewan has received just 2.73% of the fund.

**CONNECTIVITY COMPARISON:** Saskatchewan is significantly behind both national and rural averages with 48.9% connectivity compared to 62% for rural Canada and the 91.4% national average.

## Advocacy Asks

SARM, a founding member of the Saskatchewan Broadband Action Committee (SBAC), is working to achieve broadband parity by 2025 and exceed CRTC standards by 2030 for all residents, regardless of location.

To ensure equitable broadband and cellular coverage in rural Saskatchewan, we propose the following:

**INDUSTRY TABLE:** Collaborate with SBAC to create an "Industry Table" for ongoing dialogue between local ISPs, wireless carriers, and federal officials to address prairie-specific challenges.

**PRAIRIES BROADBAND AND CELLULAR CAPACITY FUND:** Establish a dedicated fund to support community awareness, capacity development, and regional planning.

**SASKTEL CAPITAL INVESTMENT:** Recognize SaskTel's capital investment as part of the provincial matching contribution required for federal funding, to accelerate broadband and cellular project rollouts.

**BEYOND POPULATION PERCENTAGES:** Adjust broadband funding models to consider Saskatchewan's vast rural areas and remote communities, rather than focusing solely on population density.

**UNIVERSAL BROADBAND FUND:** Release the remaining UBF funds to allow local providers to continue building infrastructure and ensure timely progress.

Broadband and cellular infrastructure are essential to driving rural growth. By improving connectivity, we can support food security, strengthen the local and national economies, and help rural Saskatchewan residents thrive.

Thank you  
for your time!

SARM looks forward to working with the federal government on projects and initiatives positively impacting Saskatchewan's rural municipalities.