

# DEAD ZONES:

THE COLLISION OF THE DIGITAL DIVIDE, HOUSING AFFORDABILITY, & THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

OCTOBER 2020  
**HOUSING**  
**+COVID-19**

**SUPPORT A COVID-19 RECOVERY BY CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE**

**92%**

of AHACO survey respondents say that increasing internet connectivity and providing digital literacy will:

- Ensure students and workers can meet social distancing challenges;
- Advance racial equity and create more level playing field; *and*
- Promote social connectivity and greater community cohesion.

**62%**

say digital inclusivity will help create a strong, resilient workforce of the future.

In October, the State of Ohio announced a \$50 million housing relief program, \$5 million of which will be distributed in Franklin County. If lucky, this will provide a small reprieve for families in November and December. But it is dwarfed by the estimated \$792 million that Ohio needs through the end of January to prevent a rental housing meltdown impacting 400,000 households.

This comes as COVID-19 infections skyrocket, schools return to fully remote status, and the prospect of a new business shutdown looms. Each of which brings renewed attention to the disparities created by unequal access to the digital market. This installment of AHACO's bi-monthly member survey and local conditions report examines the connection between housing and internet accessibility in the age of Coronavirus.

Are internet needs met?

**ZERO**

housing professionals say that either "a great deal" or even "a lot" of low- and moderate-income clients' internet needs are being met

**31%**

say that "a moderate amount" of low- and moderate-income clients' internet needs are being met

**69%**

say that only "a little" of low- and moderate-income clients' internet needs are being met

SOURCE AHACO Member Survey

## Barriers Housing Providers Face in Offering Internet

**85% SERVICE COSTS**  
**62% INSTALLATION COSTS**  
**38% LACK EXPERIENCE**  
**31% MAINTENANCE COSTS**  
**23% LOW SERVICE QUALITY**  
**23% SECURITY CONCERNS**

SOURCE AHACO Member Survey

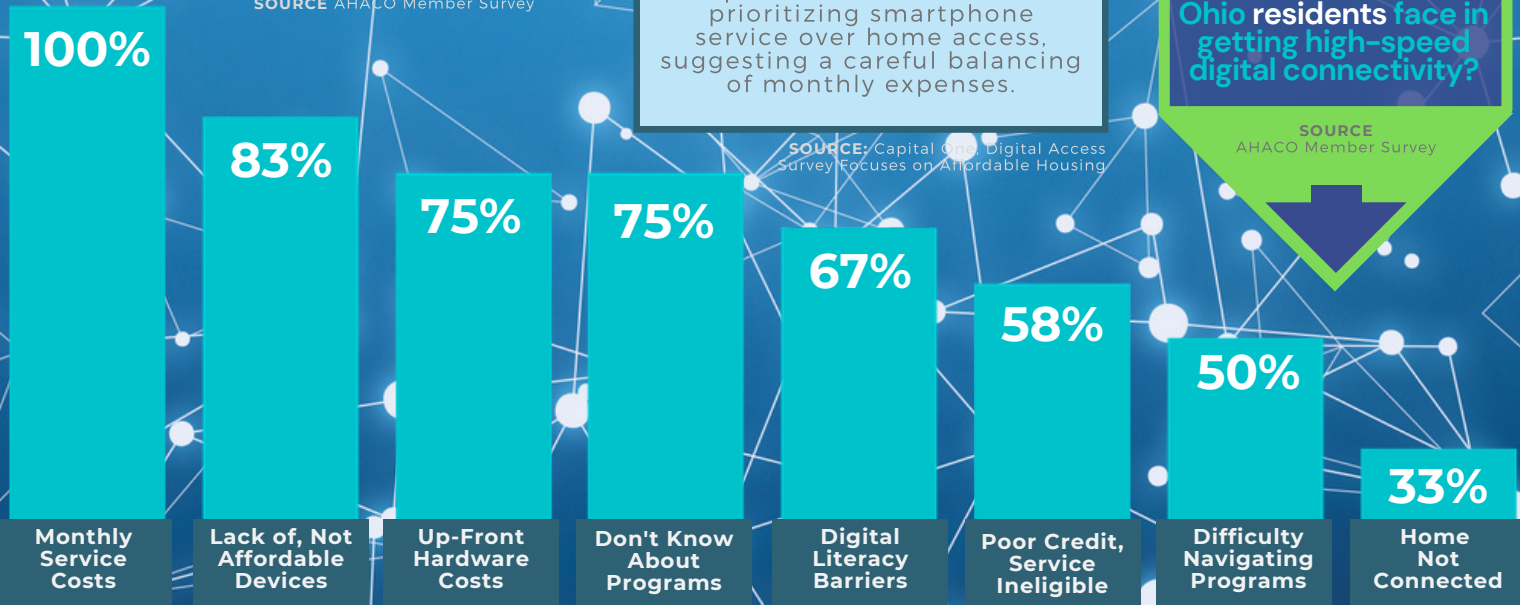
In a national survey of low-income residents, **38% lacked broadband access, despite 93% reporting that internet was available in their area.**

Of those lacking home access, 37% cited service costs as the biggest barrier. The second most common reason also implicated costs, with 35% prioritizing smartphone service over home access, suggesting a careful balancing of monthly expenses.

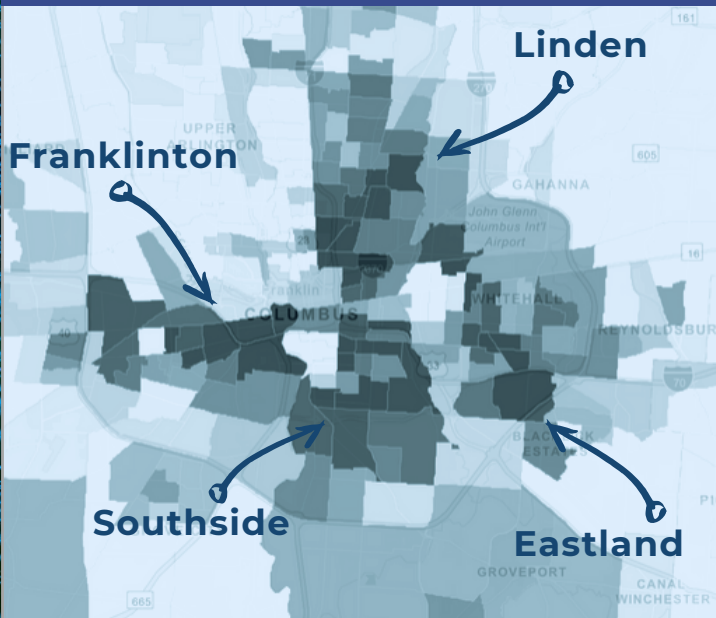
SOURCE: Capital One Digital Access Survey Focuses on Affordable Housing

According to housing professionals, what barriers do Central Ohio residents face in getting high-speed digital connectivity?

SOURCE AHACO Member Survey



internet connectivity map



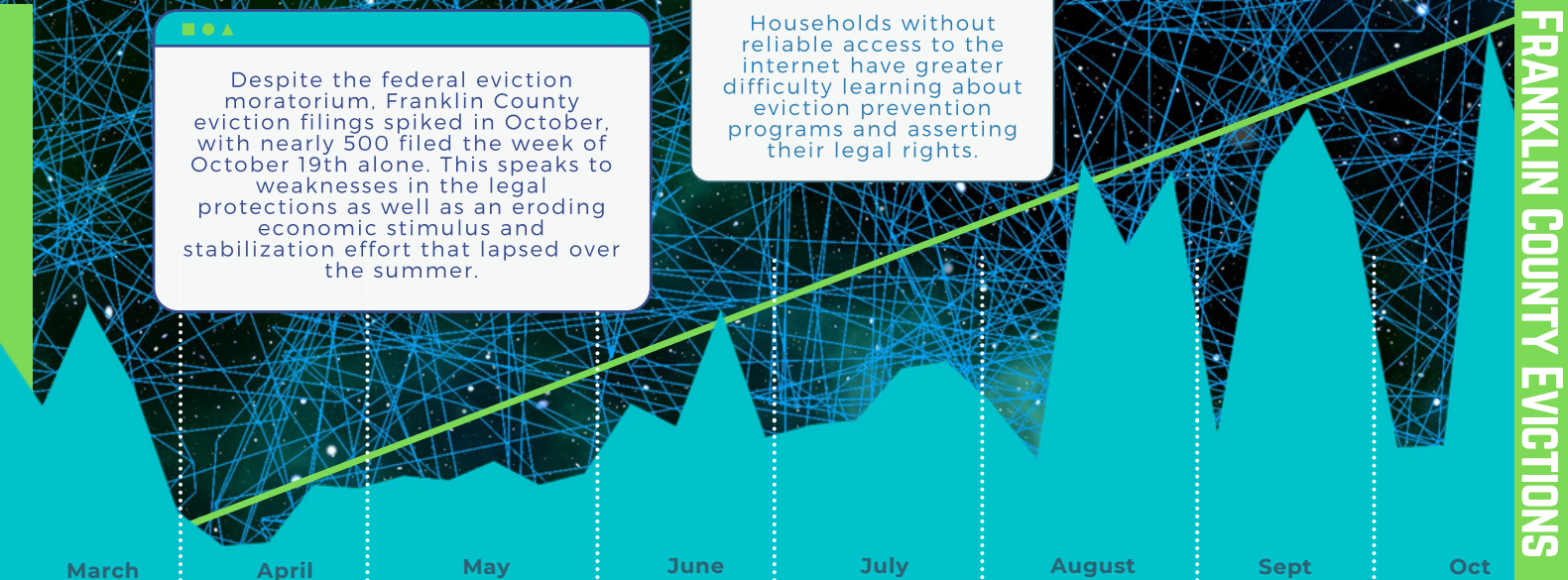
The darkest areas in the map on the left show areas where 31% or more of households lack internet access. Striking similarities to the 1930s HOLC "redlining" maps underscore the way systemic racial disparities continue to impact our community.  
 SOURCE: Internet Connectivity, American Community Survey 2013-2017



499

Despite the federal eviction moratorium, Franklin County eviction filings spiked in October, with nearly 500 filed the week of October 19th alone. This speaks to weaknesses in the legal protections as well as an eroding economic stimulus and stabilization effort that lapsed over the summer.

Households without reliable access to the internet have greater difficulty learning about eviction prevention programs and asserting their legal rights.



FRANKLIN COUNTY EVICTIONS

Maintaining Healthy Spaces	23%
Reduced Funding & Income	31%
Maintaining Workforce Coverage	31%
Getting Building Permits & Approvals	31%
Securing Construction Materials	38%
Securing Construction Teams	38%
Lowered Tax Credit Pricing	38%
Providing Supportive Services	54%

PREVALENCE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING CHALLENGES IN OCTOBER

Lumber costs surged 170% since April, forcing large construction cost increases industry-wide. Homes in any stage of the construction pipeline (from concept formation, to seeking funding, and building) are finding it difficult to survive.

Swelling COVID rates also strained employers' ability to retain sufficient staffing, particularly to provide social services to at-risk residents.

Social distancing requirements on construction sites slowed completion times, adding pressure and cost to affordable development.



Connectivity is a Social Determinant of Health

1.6 million telehealth visits occurred from January to March, more than double since last year.

Making sure low-income seniors can access digital healthcare is increasingly important.

SOURCE: CDC, Trends in the Use of Telehealth During the Emergence of the COVID-19 Pandemic

## SENIORS & DIGITAL ACCESS

### SOLUTIONS THAT WORK

**NEVER AGAIN** Congress must establish a 4% LIHTC "floor" and all policymakers must fund affordable housing to close our 54k household affordability gap and protect against future economic shocks.

**BIG NEED** Congress must allocate \$100 billion in rent relief to stop a January eviction crisis and help housing providers pay their mortgages and maintain safe properties.

**SAVE OUR DREAM** Congress must provide \$75 billion for a housing assistance fund to help homeowners that are struggling to make ends meet due to the pandemic.

**PREPARE NOW** Cities and the State of Ohio must prepare to halt a wave evictions in January without waiting for uncertain federal aid. We must also plan for an equitable recovery that gets the fragility out of our housing system.

### ABOUT US

The members of the Affordable Housing Alliance of Central Ohio are twenty-one non-profit and for-profit organizations that represent the full spectrum of affordable housing activities in Franklin County, from homeless and housing services, to housing development and housing finance. Working together, we are advancing solutions to address the affordable housing challenge, which will support economic progress and strengthen the community. Sign up for our newsletter at [www.AHACO.org](http://www.AHACO.org).

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CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION AT AHACO'S  
November Learning Exchange Webinar

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A CONVERSATION ON THE DIGITAL DIVIDE, HOUSING, & COVID-19

Friday, November 20, 2020 @ 12:00 PM

RSVP AND STREAM LIVE AT [WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/AHACOHOUSING](http://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/AHACOHOUSING)

AHACO thanks our Strategic Advisory Council for supporting this publication: AEP, Affordable Housing Trust for Columbus and Franklin County, Cardinal Health, EMH&T, Fifth Third Bank, Huntington Bank, JPMorgan Chase & Co., Nationwide Children's Hospital, Nationwide Foundation, Park National Bank, PNC, Starry Internet, Tidwell Group and United Way of Central Ohio. Thirteen AHACO members, representing over 10,500 housing units in Franklin County, responded to this survey. Survey respondents, allies, and media reports were used to compile this publication.