

Connecting Families - Community Partner Reference Document

Introduction

Welcome to the Connecting Families initiative guide. As a community resource-person, you are on the front-line of the Government of Canada and Computers for Success Canada's efforts to bring low-cost home Internet, to hundreds of thousands of Canadian households.

Many of the recipients who have letters from the government have never heard of the Connecting Families initiative before. For many, \$10-20\$ a month Internet will sound too good to be true. Others will struggle with reading or navigating the Internet portal that they need to use to register.

This guide complements other resources by providing more detailed information about the initiative, participant eligibility, the letter, and the web Portal participants must use. Your support and reassurance will help those people who are eligible for this initiative take advantage of the opportunity.

The Initiative

As the first point of contact for many people, you could get questions about the initiative and who is eligible to participate. If their question goes beyond your knowledge or expertise, each section of this document will have a link to a resource you can use.

Why was Connecting Families created?

More and more, the daily lives of all Canadian citizens are dependent on digital technology and access to high-speed Internet. Banks push clients to do their banking online. Teachers assign homework that requires students to look things up on the internet. Even government encourages Canadians to access services using online Portals.

Despite that fact, almost half of Canadian households with an income of \$30,000 or less do not have access to high-speed Internet. Because of this, the Government of Canada created the Connecting Families initiative. Connecting Families is part of a suite of digital skill, accessibility and affordability programs and initiatives that aims to bridge digital divides. These programs and initiatives are a way for the Government of Canada to directly encourage the education and success of Canada's low-income families and seniors.

Who's involved in the initiative?

The Connecting Families initiative is a multi-sector partnership between the Government of Canada, Computers for Success Canada (CFSC), and Canadian Internet service providers (ISPs).

The government provides the mandate and the funds for the portal and contacts the eligible recipients. Computers for Success Canada built the online registration Portal and manages various levels of support for the initiative.

Each participating Canadian ISP is voluntarily providing \$10 or 20\$ a month high-speed Internet subscription to eligible families and seniors.

How does the initiative work?

beginning in the fall of 2018 the Government of Canada started to send out letters to Eligible family households. In the spring of 2022, the program expanded the offering to low-income seniors. These letters notify eligible recipients that they can participate in the Connecting Families initiative. Interested recipients need to sign up for the initiative using the online portal. Once signed up, they can contact a participating ISP servicing their area.

Most importantly households are only eligible for the initiative if they receive a letter from the Government of Canada. Families and seniors must retain that letter as it contains important information.

Who is paying for this?

The discounted Internet offer is entirely funded by the ISPs, at no cost to taxpayers or the government. The Government is not subsidizing ISPs to provide low-cost Internet.

Who are Computers for Success Canada?

Computers for Success – Canada Inc. | Ordinateurs pour l'excellence – Canada Inc. (CFSC-OPEC) is a not-for-profit organization, established in 2005, supporting the impacts of Government of Canada digital inclusion and economic development programs.

CFSC-OPEC's services stand in four pillars - marketing and communications, partnership development, strategic planning, and project management.

What is a participating Internet service provider?

An ISP is an Internet Service Provider. Canada has many ISPs. When building the Connecting Families initiative, the government approached Canadian ISPs and asked if they wanted to be part of the program.

The ISPs were asked to offer several low-cost Internet subscriptions to eligible households in their areas. Many, but not all, ISPs decided to participate. An up-to-date list of all of the participating ISPs is available online.

How long is the initiative being offered?

The Connecting Families initiative is being offered until March 31, 2027.

What can recipients receive as part of this program?

Households could receive home Internet service for \$10 or 20\$ a -month (plus tax).

Participating Internet service providers offer eligible households Internet services of at least 50/10 Mbps with at least 200 GB of data usage for \$20 per month (plus tax), with no equipment or installation fees applied. They will also continue to offer the 10\$ plan of at least 10 Mbps download speed (or the fastest available if less than 10 Mbps) and a minimum of 100 GB of data usage each month.

Eligibility

Eligible participants for the Connecting Families initiative are selected from families that are eligible for the maximum Canada Child Benefit (CCB) and seniors receiving the maximum Guaranteed Income supplement. Letters of eligibility for the Connecting Families initiative are sent to households. A household must have received a letter to participate in the initiative.

Can someone sign up for this initiative if they haven't received a letter?

No, eligible recipient's must have received a letter from the Government of Canada with an access code to sign up through the online portal. Currently, this is the only way to sign up for this initiative.

Can someone put themselves on a waitlist in case eligible people aren't interested or don't want to participate?

There is no waitlist for the Connecting Families initiative. The likelihood that some people will not take advantage of this opportunity was considered when the initiative was designed.

Can someone use their eligibility to register one of their family members for low-cost Internet?

The Connecting Families initiative is offered to households, not homes. If one of your family members does not live in the home but is considered by the government as a dependent--for example a child who is away at school--you are free to use your eligibility to provide them with low-cost Internet.

Can newcomers to Canada participate in this initiative?

People who are residents of Canada for tax purposes and are eligible for the maximum CCB would be selected for this initiative. More information on the CCB can be found on the Canada Revenue Agency's website.

Can someone lose their eligibility to the Connecting Families initiative?

Participants are evaluated for eligibility in the Connecting Families initiative on a yearly basis. If they continue to receive the maximum CCB, they are still eligible for the initiative and don't have to do anything. If the household no longer receives the maximum CCB, they are no longer eligible to participate in the initiative.

They will be contacted by CFSC-OPEC to let them know that they are no longer eligible. Their ISP will manage what happens next.

Can someone lose their access to low-cost Internet?

If a household relocates to an area that is not served by one of the initiative's participating ISPs or to an area where all the low-cost Internet subscriptions are taken, they may no longer be able to access the \$10 or 20\$ a month Internet plan.

Eligibility Letters

To inform households that they can access the Connecting Families initiative, the Government of Canada sends out letters of eligibility. The letters contain three important pieces of information: the address on file for the household, the Access Code required to set up their plans with the participating ISPs, and the address for the web Portal participants must use to sign up for the initiative and activate their Access Codes. It is very important for households that received a letter to keep their letter as the information contained within it is very important. If a participant can no longer remember the address on the letter or their eight-digit access code, they could lose their low-cost Internet.

What if a participant loses their letter and can't remember the information?

Individuals will need their access code to participate in the initiative. Individuals are encouraged to take a photo of the letter and keep it and the code in a safe place. If an individual has lost their letter or code, they should contact Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada's Contact Centre at 1-800-328-6189.

Can someone who received a letter give it away to someone else?

Each letter is linked to the household that received it. Eligible households cannot give away or sell their letter to someone else.

Can someone check to see if they were chosen for a subsequent mailing?

For security and privacy reasons, there is no way to verify in advance if someone is part of any future mailings.

Services

Participating Internet service providers offer eligible households Internet services of at least 50/10 Mbps with at least 200 GB of data usage for \$20 per month (plus tax), with no equipment or installation fees applied.

The \$10 plan remains available to eligible households as an option. The 10\$ subscriptions have to offer at least a 10 Mbps download speed (or the fastest available if less than 10 Mbps) and a minimum of 100 GB of data usage each month.

Does a household have to sign up for service before a certain date?

A household can sign up for low-cost Internet with the Connecting Families initiative at any point during the duration of the initiative. However, subscriptions are limited and are used on a

first-come-first-served basis. It is possible for the Internet Service Providers in their area of service to run out of available subscriptions.

Also, if a household is no longer eligible (no longer receives the maximum CCB or maximum GIS), ISPs are not obliged to continue to serve them discounted Internet.

What does it mean if an Internet Service Provider says that someone's Access Code isn't active?

Every Access Code must be activated by going through the registration process on the Connecting Families Portal. If a participant has not used the Connecting Families Portal to register with the initiative, the code on their letter is not active. Internet service providers cannot use inactive codes to sign people up over the phone.

What does it mean if an Internet Service Provider says they haven't heard of the Connecting Families initiative?

Not all Canadian Internet Service Providers have chosen to participate in the Connecting Families initiative. If someone wants to know which service providers in their area are part of the initiative, an up to date list of all of the participating ISPs is available online.

If someone is already signed up with one service provider for Internet or other services, do they have to get their Connecting Families Internet from that provider?

People taking part in the Connecting Families initiative are free to use any of the available ISPs in their area to sign up. They are not required to choose the ISP that provides their other services if they don't want to.

What does it mean if someone calls their ISP and they're told that their Access Code is "reserved"?

When someone calls an ISP to start a subscription and gives them their Access Code, the ISP immediately puts it into their system. Their system puts it on hold, or "reserved", while they're discussing the service offer. If someone called one ISP to start a subscription, but didn't finish the process, and then called a different ISP to ask questions, the second ISP would see that their Access Code has been "reserved." If they would like to sign up for an Internet plan with the second ISP, they have to ask the first ISP to release their Access Code. They can do this by calling the first ISP. Please remind them that once they have completed sign-up with one ISP for discounted Internet, they cannot switch ISPs unless they move to an area that the ISP doesn't provide service.

Will the Internet Service Provider run a credit check before someone can sign up?

Every ISP has its own procedures and policies. Some ISPs may require a credit check to sign up, others may not.

Can someone switch ISPs after they've signed up for low-cost Internet?

Unless they move to an area where the current ISP cannot provide service, a recipient cannot switch Internet service providers while they're a part of the Connecting Families initiative.

What happens if a recipient moves after they've signed up for low-cost Internet?

If the recipient moves to a different residence in the same region, their move should have no effect on their low-cost Internet. They should call their Internet service provider and let them know that they'll be moving. If they contact their ISP and find out that they can't receive service in their new area, they need to close their service agreement with the ISP they've been using. Once their account is closed, they need to register with the Portal again using their new service address. When they reach the end of the registration, the Portal will give them the contact numbers for the ISPs available in their new area. They can call the ISP they're interested in and use their Access Code to set up a new account.

Web Portal

The web Portal was designed by Computers for Success Canada. It is the tool that allows validation of eligibility while still protecting the security and privacy of the recipients. For this reason, anyone who wants to sign up for the initiative must use the online portal, rather than verifying their information over the phone or in person. The Portal registers participants in the system, activates their Access Codes, and matches them to the available ISPs in their area.

What if the Portal won't recognize the code on someone's letter?

If the user types in their code and the Portal can't recognize it, first double check that all the letters and numbers are correct. If the Portal still won't recognize the code, recommend that the participant calls the Government of Canada's call center, where an agent will assist them (1-800-328-6189, (TTY) 1-866-694-8389).

What if the Portal says the address from someone's letter is "invalid"?

If the user types in their address and the Portal says it isn't valid, first double check that they've entered the address correctly. If that doesn't work, go back to the page where they've entered their Access Code. Make sure that all the letters and numbers match the Access Code on the letter. If the Access Code was entered correctly, recommend that the participant calls the Government of Canada's call center, where an agent will assist them (1-800-328-6189, (TTY) 1-866-694-8389). The agent will walk the participant step-by-step through the Portal.

What if someone can't find their Internet Service Provider in the list of available service providers?

If someone cannot find their Internet Service Provider on the list, there could be two reasons. First, not all ISPs are participating in the Connecting Families initiative. If they are not participating, they will not be listed as an option.

Second, if their service provider is participating but doesn't appear on the list of service providers available to them, they might not have any discounted subscriptions left or they cannot service the Connecting Families plan at their location.

What does it mean if someone gets to the last page of the Portal and no ISPs appear?

There are two reasons why someone might not receive a list of available ISPs. First, subscriptions were available in their area, but they have all been taken. Low-cost Internet subscriptions are not guaranteed and are given away on a first-come-first-served basis. If demand in their area has been high, all the subscriptions could have been taken by the time they called their ISP.

There may also be no participating ISPs that service their area. New ISPs could join the initiative later. Recommend they check the list of participating ISPs regularly to find out if new ISPs that might service their area have joined.

What if someone gets an error message while they're using the Portal?

If someone receives an error message saying there was a problem with the server or with the Portal, they will have to start the registration process again. Have them close the window or tab they were using to navigate the Portal. Have them open a new window or tab and enter www.connecting-families.ca. The error will not affect their ability to sign up.

If you wish, you also have the option to go to the Portal status page <https://status.cf-fb.org/> to see if there is currently a generalized problem with the Portal. If that is the case, a red box will appear at the top of the page. You can inform the user that the Portal is experiencing issues and suggest that they try again later. If the box at the top of the status page is green, the bug might be specific to that user's login. You can recommend that the participant calls the Government of Canada's call center, where an agent will assist them (1-800-328-6189, (TTY) 1-866-694-8389)

Why do people have to use the Portal and call the ISP? Why can't the system do both things?

For privacy and security reasons, neither the Internet Service Providers nor the Government of Canada have access to the other's databases. The Portal is a tool that lets them work together, making sure both sides have all of the information they need for you to access low-cost Internet. The Portal verifies that they received their letter of eligibility from the government and activates their Access Code for all of the ISPs. It's up to the participant to choose which ISP they want to use and contact them.

Privacy

All information will be handled according to the disclosure policy listed on the web Portal permission page. The policy was formed according to the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents guidelines set by the Canadian government.

Will the Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have access to more personal information than they would in a regular Internet service contract?

The ISPs are not responsible for determining eligibility and will not have access to more personal information than what they would for a regular Internet service contract. The

protection of customers' privacy is very important to the Government of Canada and the ISPs participating in the Initiative.

Why are people required to give the Connecting Families portal permission to collect their information?

The portal is the tool that validates eligibility and enables eligible participants to sign up for the initiative. Some personal information is required to check the participant's eligibility with the government database. Once they've been verified, the Portal activates their Access Code, which tells the ISPs that they can be part of the initiative and can receive the discounted Internet.

Will it be public knowledge who participates in the Connecting Families initiative?

No. The information collected by the Portal will be used in accordance with the policy listed on the "permission" page of the site. The information collected is governed by the same policy. The policy was designed to follow the Canadian government's privacy guidelines.

Feedback and Complaints

If someone comes to you and wants to know who they can speak to about a problem they're having, direct them to the Government of Canada's call center at 1-800-328-6189, (TTY) 1-866-694-8389. The call center was designed as the centralized point of contact to facilitate user experience. Call agents will either answer the caller's question directly or transfer them to the right partner.

If the question or issue is clearly related to the Internet service, the user can call their ISP directly.

Thank you for your collaboration!