

Broadband Challenges and Opportunities in Affordable Rental Housing

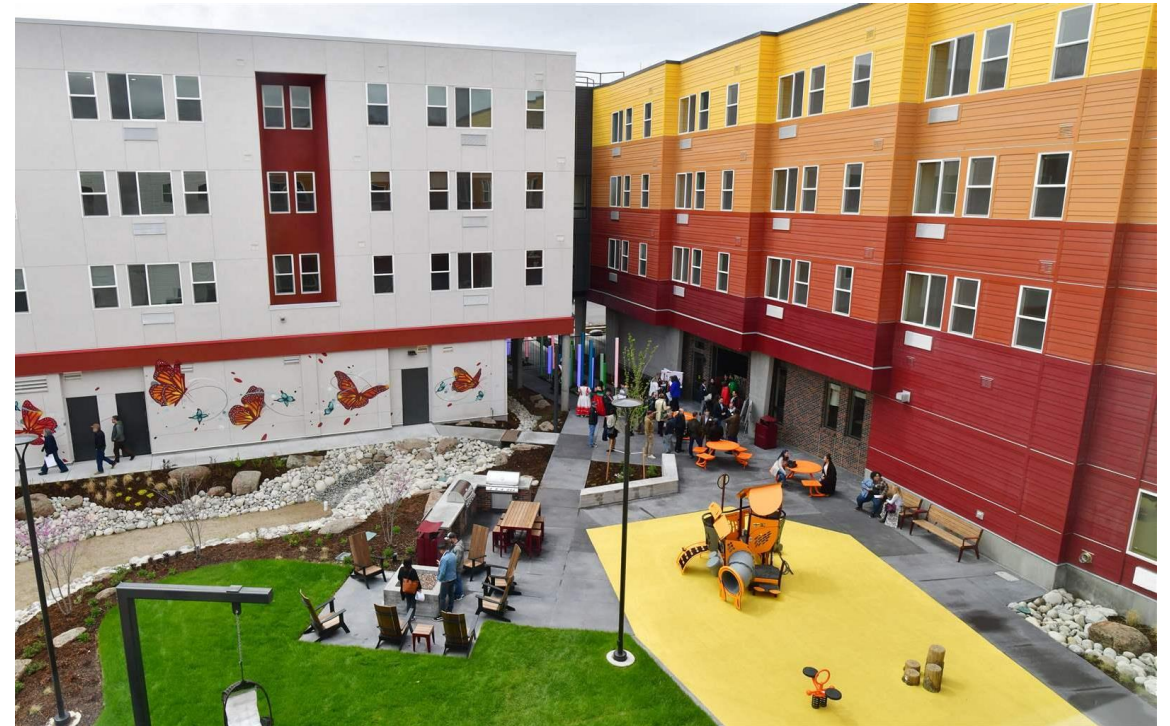
Digital Inclusion Research Forum

October 12, 2023

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Research Background

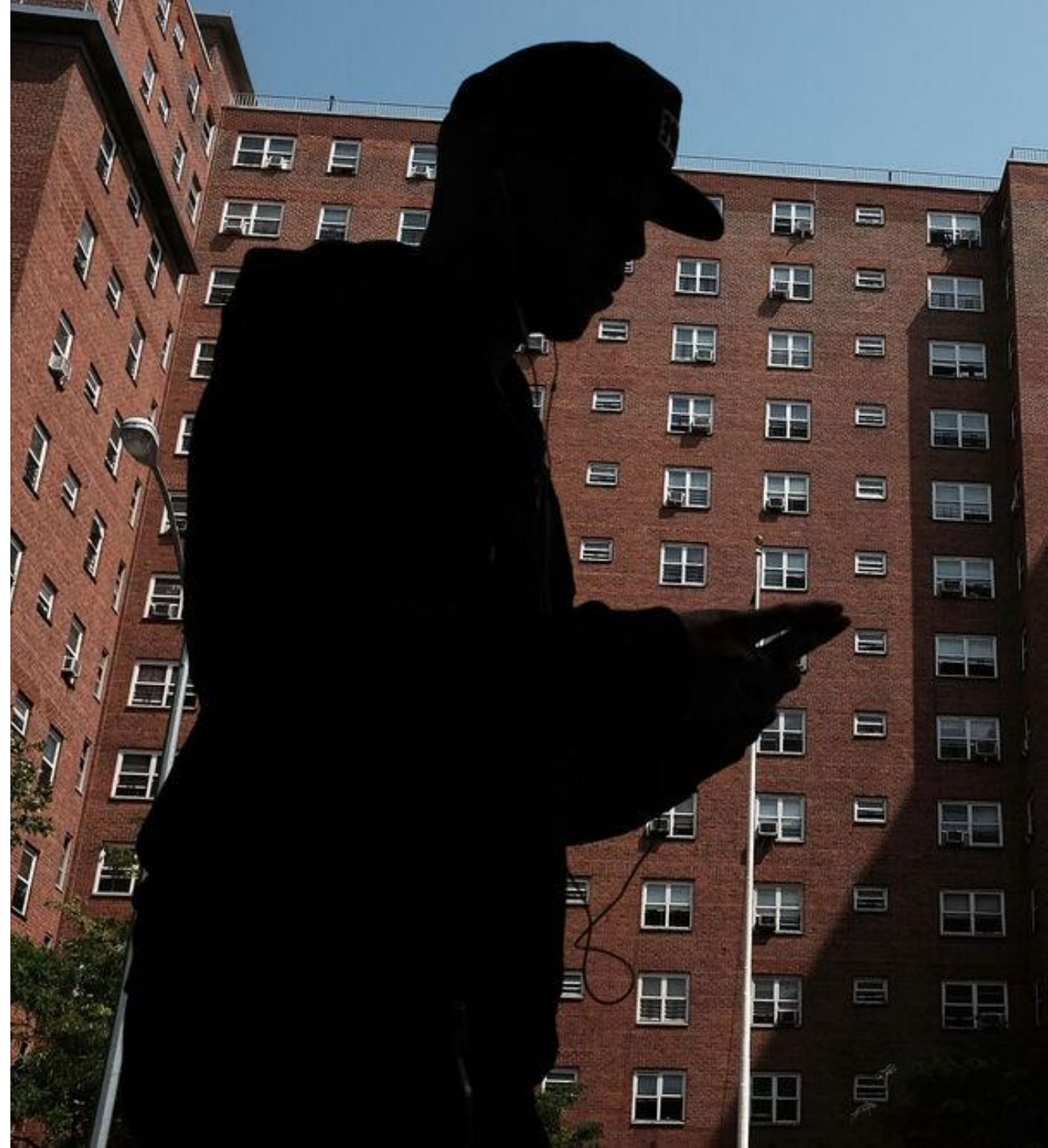
- Housing assistance-eligible households are more likely to have no or slow internet service due to both access and affordability challenges.
- Federally assisted housing is eligible for broadband funding available through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.



Top Takeaways

- There is no one-size-fits-all solution
- Ongoing service cost is usually the biggest challenge
- Housing providers cannot do this alone

Access Challenges



Affordable housing residents are unconnected

34%

have both a high-speed internet connection and a device

35%

are underconnected (smartphone only or limited access)

31%

have no internet access at all

Affordable housing residents are unconnected

Affordable housing residents are disproportionately members of groups that are **already less likely** to be connected, including:

aging
Americans

people with
disabilities

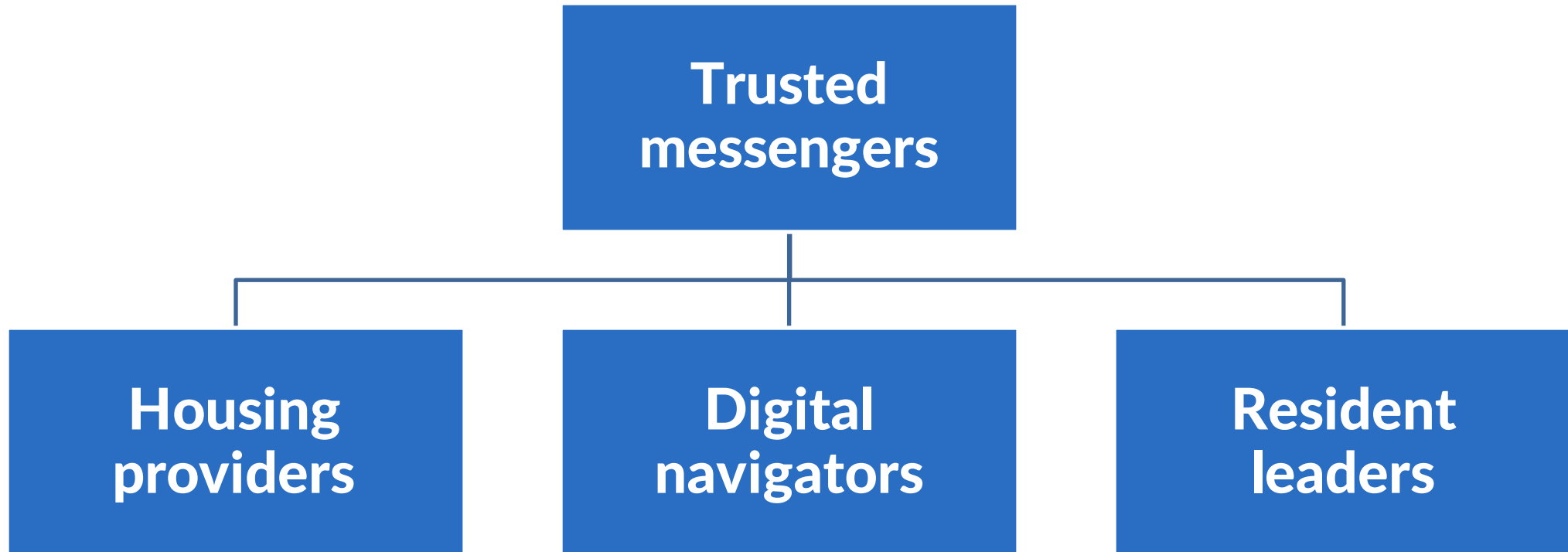
people of
color

Affordable housing residents face multiple barriers to connectivity

- Building infrastructure constraints
- Extremely limited budgets
- Restrictive provider agreements
- High need for support services
- Need for accessible devices



Lack of trust in ISPs



State and Local Efforts



State examples

- California Advanced Services Fund Public Housing Account
- Rhode Island Housing Digital Divide Fund
- Nevada low-income multidwelling unit connectivity program
- Connecticut improving broadband access in low-income housing
- Massachusetts Digital Equity Partnerships Program



People Inc

In 2022, People Inc partnered with LISC and CTC to develop a practical framework for improving broadband in affordable housing.



Abingdon

- 44 units
- Rehab
- Requires new wiring and underground construction



Damascus

- 22 units
- Retrofit
- Requires new wiring and devices around existing infrastructure

Lessons learned

- Ongoing costs remain the bigger concern
- Rural properties struggle to meet state incentives
- Lack of design standards for broadband in MDUs
- Capacity constraints limit impact
- Every property is different

Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

- Affordable housing residents need both BEAD—especially non-deployment uses—and the Digital Equity Act
- Meet people where they are
- Flexibility is key



Thank you!

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