Broadband Challenges and Opportunities in Affordable Rental Housing
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 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

- Trusted messengers
  - Housing providers
  - Digital navigators
  - Resident leaders
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!

Kelly Wert
Senior Associate, Broadband Access Initiative
kwert@pewtrusts.org