



# DHS News

Newsletter of the Allegheny County  
Department of Human Services



**January 2021**

## **Bridging the digital divide**

From telehealth visits to online schooling, the last few months have made internet-enabled devices and internet access an even more essential part of everyday life. Yet, the 2018 American Community Survey shows that more than 50,000 Allegheny County households didn't have an internet-enabled device such as a computer, tablet or smartphone, and nearly 70,000 households didn't have access to internet.

To help local families access needed programs and services, DHS has spent the last few months working on a three-pronged approach to address the digital divide. These projects have been made possible by CARES Act funding.

The first initiative was getting devices into the hands of those who need them. Since mid-March, more than 1,500 laptops have been distributed to DHS and provider clients. These devices allow clients to access virtual appointments, pay bills, apply for government services, register to vote, and complete other online activities. Clients will be able to keep the devices after the pandemic, free of charge.

DHS has also been working to improve access to Wi-Fi. Four hundred T-Mobile jet pack hotspots have been distributed to families and individuals to provide in-home internet access. For those who can't use internet at home, DHS has established nine community and public Wi-Fi hot spots around the County with two more sites in progress. Additionally, DHS has teamed up with Allegheny County's GIS Team and Remake Learning to create a [community Wi-Fi map](#). This map lists free public Wi-Fi around the County and allows the user to filter locations by amenities such as public restrooms, seating or vending machines.

Finally, DHS has partnered with community groups such as the University of Pittsburgh Community Help Desk, the Neighborhood Allies training program, and the Learning Collaborative helpline to enhance digital literacy and assist providers with online delivery and virtual programming.

"We are extremely grateful that Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald and the Allegheny County Council chose to allocate CARES Act funding towards a mission as important as bridging the digital divide," said Scott Hemphill, DHS chief information officer. "This effort wouldn't be possible without their leadership and foresight to set the table for our success."

The distribution of devices purchased through the CARES Act funding was completed in December; however, DHS plans to continue identifying alternative ways to help providers reach clients safely.