

# REPORT AT A GLANCE

UPDATE ON THE CONNECTING BRITISH COLUMBIA PROGRAM

## Why we did this information report

- High-speed internet is increasingly essential to education, health care, public safety, justice, economic development and daily life.
- British Columbia faces a digital divide: Almost all urban areas have high-speed internet. But 60% of rural and remote communities and 62% of rural and remote Indigenous communities still lack adequate internet (i.e., access to the 50/10 Mbps target speed).
- This report provides information on phases 3 and 4 of Connecting British Columbia, a program that funds internet infrastructure in rural and remote areas of B.C.

## What this report covers

**Connecting British Columbia** is a program funded by the Ministry of Citizens' Services and administered by Northern Development Initiative Trust. Since 2015, the ministry has provided \$190 million in funding across four phases.

This report focuses on phases 3 and 4 of the program, which are ongoing.

- **Phase 3** (\$50 million), launched in 2019, aims to achieve a goal of 58% of rural and Indigenous communities with access to high-speed internet (50/10 Mbps) by March 2025.
- **Phase 4** (\$90 million), launched in 2020 as part of the StrongerBC Economic Recovery Plan, aims to improve connectivity in 200 communities, provide service along 140 kms of highway and in 14 rest areas, and install 4 call boxes.

**Why an information report?** We began planning an audit, but shifted our approach when government extended the timeline of the program. Instead of delaying an audit, we chose to do an information report. We did not audit the information in this report, which was compiled from the Ministry of Citizens' Services and Northern Development Initiative Trust.

**Report period:** The information in this report is current as of May 31, 2021, but figures may change as phases 3 and 4 progress.

## Key information

### Program update

- **Phase 3** has so far committed \$48 million for 85 projects expected to benefit over 29,000 households.
- **Phase 4** has so far committed almost \$85 million for 55 projects to benefit more than 32,000 households in 224 communities and provide 429 kms of new cellular coverage on highways.



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## Key information (continued)

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### Response to COVID-19

- **Phase 3** provided a special short-term application intake to fund equipment upgrades for immediate benefit.
- **Phase 4** was part of the StrongerBC Economic Recovery Plan.

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### Extended timelines

- **Phase 3** end date was extended from March 31, 2022 to March 31, 2025.
- **Phase 4** end date remains October 31, 2021, but some projects were extended to October 31, 2022.

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### Challenges

- Higher speeds require complex construction.
- Federal funding timelines can extend project completion dates.
- Program requires internet service provider participation.

**After reading the report, you may want to ask the following questions of government:**

1. *Why is government extending the timelines of the program?*
2. *How will government keep legislators and the public informed about progress on the program?*
3. *How is government meeting challenges faced by the program?*