**Statement of Aaron Smith**
**Senior Researcher, Pew Research Center's Internet Project**

**Before the**

**U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet**
*Broadband Adoption: The Next Mile*
**October 29, 2013**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Aaron Smith, and I am a senior researcher with the Pew Research Center's Internet Project. The Pew Research Center is a non-profit research organization funded primarily by the Pew Charitable Trusts, and its Internet project has been conducting national surveys of internet use and broadband adoption since early 2000.

The Pew Research Center and its experts do not promote specific policy positions, but I do hope that my comments can provide a better understanding of the current state of broadband adoption; which groups have low levels of broadband use; and the major factors preventing people from adopting.

## National trends in broadband adoption

When we conducted our first survey of broadband adoption in early 2000, just 3% of American adults had some sort of broadband connection at home. That figure has risen to 70% of Americans as of our most recent survey in May of this year.

But despite this long-term growth trend, the pace of broadband adoption has slowed substantially in recent years. After increasing by an average of nearly seven percentage points per year from 2000 through 2009, the national broadband adoption level increased by a total of just seven percentage points from 2009 through 2013.

## Demographic differences in broadband adoption

Although 70% of the American public has a high-speed internet connection at home, that figure is lower among some groups than among others. Broadband adoption levels are especially low among three demographic groups in particular.

The first group is <u>older adults</u>. Today just 43% of Americans age 65 and older have a broadband connection at home, which is roughly half the adoption rate for those between the ages of 18 and 49.

The second group is <u>people with low levels of educational attainment</u>. Among Americans who have not received a high school diploma, just 37% are broadband adopters. By comparison, nine in ten college graduates have broadband at home.

The third group is <u>people with low household incomes</u>. 54% of Americans with an annual household income of less than $30,000 are broadband adopters.

These are not the only groups for whom broadband adoption levels are low. Rural residents are less likely to have broadband than urban or suburban residents; African Americans and Latinos are less likely to have broadband than whites; and broadband adoption is also low among people with physical disabilities or severe chronic health conditions. But overall, age and socio-economic status are the demographic factors most strongly correlated with whether someone has broadband or not.

**Non-broadband users and their reasons for non-adoption**

Since 70% of the public *does* have some sort of broadband connection at home, that means that 30% of the adult population *does not* have high speed home access. That 30% of Americans includes two distinct groups, each of which faces different challenges and barriers to adoption.

The first group is the 15% of the adult population that <u>does not use the internet at all</u>. This group is significantly older than the population as whole, with a median age of 64 years old.

These non-users tend to have little connection to the online world, and they often face significant challenges in terms of their comfort level with technology. Just 17% of these non-users feel confident that they could go online on their own if they chose to do so in the future, while 63% say that they would need someone to assist them.

When we ask these non-users to tell us the main reason why they don't go online, they tend to point to their perceptions of the relevance online content and their challenges using technology in general. One third of these non-users say things like: they just aren't interested in going online; don't need to go online; or think the internet is a waste of time. And a similar number mention usability-related issues such as: finding it to difficult or frustrating to go online; saying that they don't know how to go online or are too old to learn; or are physically unable to use a computer.

The second group of non-broadband adopters, which also makes up 15% of the population, includes people who *do* <u>use the internet from one location or another, but *do not* have high speed access within their home</u>.

In contrast to the non-internet-user population, this group is much younger—around half of them are under the age of 45. They also tend to have relatively low incomes, relatively low levels of educational attainment, and include a relatively large number of non-whites.

Also in contrast to non-internet-users, issues related to price and affordability are this group's primary barrier to adoption. When asked why they do not have internet service at home, 42% of internet users who lack home broadband cite financial issues such as: not having a computer; not being able to afford internet service; or having a cheaper option for access outside the home.

## Summary

In summary, three out of every ten Americans currently do not have broadband service at home, and many of these individuals face substantial hurdles to adoption. Some—especially working-age adults at the lower end of the income spectrum—see the value of broadband but simply lack the necessary financial resources. But others face significant challenges using technology, or do not see the benefits of broadband access in the first place. For this group of non-adopters, a lower price may be necessary but not sufficient—they will likely require a great deal of coaching and encouragement before they are ready to join the broadband world.

Thank you again for inviting me to speak on this subject.