



**TESTIMONY OF CHRISTIAN GONZÁLEZ-RIVERA
OF THE BROOKDALE CENTER FOR HEALTHY AGING, HUNTER COLLEGE
BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY**

**HEARING
"ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITAL LITERACY PROGRAMS IN NEW YORK CITY"**

JANUARY 12, 2023

My name is christian gonzález-rivera and I'm the director of strategic policy initiatives at the Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging, a research and policy center based at Hunter College.

The Brookdale Center supports Intro. 665. Thank you, Councilmember Gutiérrez for introducing it.

In 2021 we published a study that detailed the demographics of older New Yorkers who lack access to the internet, summarized the academic research on internet adoption that shows how older adults learn and adopt technology differently from younger people, and recommended, among other things, that the city establish a digital literacy program.

I'd like to offer a few of our research findings on how to structure a digital literacy training program for older adults so that it can be effective for the people who are hardest to reach.

Meaningful access to technology for older adults has five components. The first two are access to appropriate devices and access to an adequate internet connection. Those are necessary for anyone to get online. But for older adults in particular, three more interventions are necessary: the education to know *why* the internet would be useful to them, the skills to learn *how* to use the internet, and ongoing tech support so they have somewhere to turn if they run into trouble.

Our review of the academic research literature on technology adoption clearly shows that for older adults in particular, how useful a technology is perceived to be is a stronger predictor of adoption than it is for younger people. This makes common sense: a logical question for an 85 year old to ask is, 'I've lived this long without the internet, why should I start now?' Indeed, it's at that question that any digital literacy program should start.

This means that an effective digital literacy program would not begin by telling a participant, 'this is how you turn this thing on.' Instead, it would begin by asking them, 'what are your needs?' and then showing them how they can get those needs met better or faster online.

Furthermore, our review of the literature shows that older people prefer to learn technology from their peers. So we recommend taking a peer-to-peer learning approach to digital literacy programs. This would mean structuring a program so that older people with more technology experience can be trained to teach those with less experience.

For older people, focusing on *why* they should go through the effort of learning how to get online is just as important as the *how*. While the usefulness of the internet may seem like common sense for a younger person, including people in their early 60s, for older people it is not. People who are younger and/or have higher levels of formal education are more likely to have used the internet for school or work and are therefore familiar with its uses. Immigrants with lower levels of formal education are especially unlikely to have access to the internet at home. After all, it was only in 2002 that half of Americans got online. Those who were retired by then, or were working in a job that did not yet have them using the internet, or living in a country that took longer to adopt internet technology, chances are that they did not have a natural opportunity to use the internet.

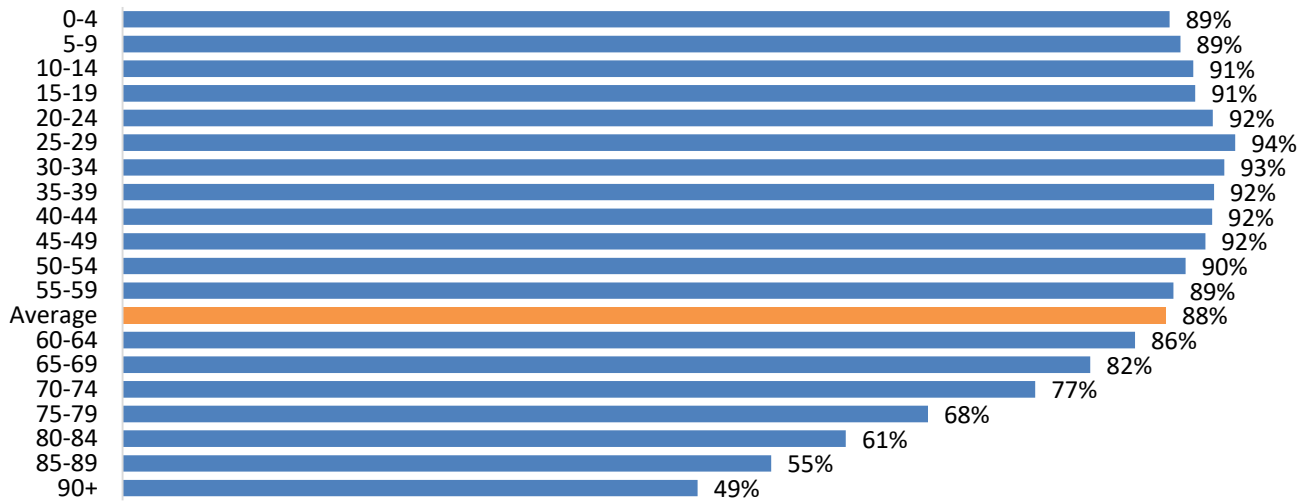
Finally, some of the hardest to reach will be older people with lower levels of formal education. Access to the internet at home is most correlated with three characteristics: age, level of formal education, and income. Majorities of New Yorkers in their 60s across all income and education levels have internet access at home, while people older than 85 are less likely to have access. Likewise, older people of all ages with a bachelor's degree or higher are more likely to have the internet at home than those with a high school degree or less. Reaching this population through peer-to-peer training, rather than formal classroom instruction will be most effective.

More details are in our report, [Meaningful Access: Investing in Technology for Aging Well in New York City](#), which is available on the Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging's website. There are also some charts with data from the report in the appendix attached to this testimony.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify!

Appendix

Home Internet Access in NYC Decreases with Age Cohort



Source: gonzález-rivera, c., & Ruth Finkelstein. (2021, January 22). Meaningful access: Investing in technology for aging well in New York City. Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging. <https://brookdale.org/meaningful-access-investing-in-technology-for-aging-well-in-new-york-city/>

Internet Use in NYC Drops by Cohort and Level of Formal Education

	Less than HS	HS or GED	Some college	Bachelors or Associates degree	Graduate degree	TOTAL
60-64	75%	82%	88%	92%	96%	86%
65-69	69%	77%	87%	90%	94%	82%
70-74	63%	71%	85%	87%	94%	77%
75-79	55%	64%	75%	80%	88%	68%
80-84	52%	57%	67%	71%	79%	61%
85-89	48%	50%	57%	62%	76%	55%
90+	46%	45%	55%	50%	61%	49%
Total	63%	71%	82%	86%	91%	76%

Source: gonzález-rivera, c., & Ruth Finkelstein. (2021, January 22). Meaningful access: Investing in technology for aging well in New York City. Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging. <https://brookdale.org/meaningful-access-investing-in-technology-for-aging-well-in-new-york-city/>

Internet Use in NYC Drops by Cohort and Household Income

	>\$29,999 per year	\$30,000-\$59,999	\$60,000-\$99,999	\$100,000+	TOTAL
60-64	80%	89%	94%	96%	86%
65-69	76%	87%	92%	96%	82%
70-74	70%	84%	92%	96%	77%
75-79	63%	74%	85%	92%	68%
80-84	57%	69%	75%	88%	61%
85-89	51%	62%	71%	80%	55%
90+	46%	54%	60%	70%	49%
Total	69%	83%	90%	94%	76%

Source: gonzález-rivera, c., & Ruth Finkelstein. (2021, January 22). Meaningful access: Investing in technology for aging well in New York City. Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging. <https://brookdale.org/meaningful-access-investing-in-technology-for-aging-well-in-new-york-city/>