

Bill #5
The Connecting Canada Act
Moved by: The Minister of Government Services

WHEREAS Canada currently, and has consistently in the past, ranked as having some of the highest prices in the world for consumer telecommunications services, particularly when compared to service quality and coverage;¹³

WHEREAS in addition to the overpricing of telecommunications services in Canada, there are severe inequalities in the services available to residents of rural and indigenous communities compared to more urban areas;¹⁴ and

WHEREAS the COVID-19 pandemic and associated stay-at-home orders have demonstrated that telecommunications services are a necessary public services that enable Canadians to work, study, and entertain themselves.¹⁵

THEREFORE HER MAJESTY, BY AND WITH THE ADVICE AND CONSENT OF THE YOUTH PARLIAMENT OF MANITOBA, ENACTS AS FOLLOWS:

Purpose

1. The purpose of this act is to:
 - a. Establish the Corporation to Operate a National Network for Equitable Canadian Telecommunications [**CONNECT**];
 - b. Nationalize all telecom service providers and telecom infrastructure;
 - c. Expand and modernize telecom infrastructure in Canada to provide all residents with access to high-quality telecom service coverage;
 - d. Establish and maintain an equitable system of telecom service pricing to ensure that all can afford access to telecom services.

Definitions

2. In this act:
 - a. **Telecom Services:** Telephone, cellular, internet, or television services.
 - b. **Telecom Infrastructure:** Any devices, networks, or other infrastructure owned or operated by a Service Provider that facilitates the provision of telecom services.
 - c. **Network Infrastructure/Networks:** Telecom infrastructure used to directly connect users to telecom services, including but not limited to telephone lines, cellular antennae, internet lines, servers, modems and routers, and satellite infrastructure.

¹³ Why is internet so expensive in Canada? Cansumer. (2021, September 23). Retrieved December 8, 2021, from <https://cansumer.ca/canada-internet-pricing/>.

¹⁴ Only 31.3 percent of First Nations reserves met the CRTC's internet speeds target in 2018. MobileSyrup. (2020, January 8). Retrieved December 8, 2021, from <https://mobilesyrup.com/2020/01/08/only-31-3-percent-first-nations-reserves-crtc-internet-speeds-2018/>.

¹⁵ Dr. Reglitz, M. (2020, June 3). Internet access is a necessity not a luxury – it should be a basic right. University of Birmingham Philosophy. Retrieved December 8, 2021, from <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/ptr/departments/philosophy/news/2020/reglitz-internet-access.aspx>.

- d. **Service Provider:** Any corporation that owns or leases telecom infrastructure and/or sells telecom services to subscribers, and shall be interpreted to include its stakeholders.
- e. **Resident:** Any individual who ordinarily resides in Canada, such as a Canadian citizen, permanent resident, refugee, or undocumented immigrant.

Establishing CONNECT

- 3. The Corporation to Operate a National Network for Equitable Canadian Telecommunications [CONNECT] is hereby established as federal crown corporation.
- 4. **CONNECT** shall fulfill the following mandates under this act:
 - a. Negotiate the acquisition of all telecom infrastructure and service providers in Canada;
 - b. Act as the sole telecom service provider in Canada following the acquisition process;
 - c. Oversee the planning and execution of major telecom infrastructure improvements to ensure universal coverage;
 - d. Oversee the development and maintenance of the equitable telecommunications pricing scheme;
 - e. Any and all other duties assigned or authorized under this Act.

Nationalization

- 5. All service providers and telecom infrastructure in Canada shall be acquired or otherwise brought under the control of **CONNECT**.
- 6. **CONNECT** shall be responsible for negotiating acquisition agreements with all service providers.
 - a. In the event that a service provider is not cooperative in the negotiation process, the acquisition process shall be referred to an independent arbitrator.
 - i. A time limit of two (2) months following the referral shall apply for the conclusion of arbitration.
 - b. In the event that a service provider refuses to participate in or comply with arbitration within the time limit, **CONNECT** is authorized to expropriate the service provider and all its assets without compensation.
- 7. All employment contracts, collective agreements, and pension obligations of the service provider, notwithstanding those of its directors and officers, shall be transferred to **CONNECT** as part of the acquisition process.

Infrastructure improvements

- 8. **CONNECT** shall undertake projects to expand and modernize network infrastructure in order to provide universal, equal access to fast and reliable telecom services to all persons and businesses in Canada, including but not limited to:
 - a. Construction of new cellular antennae and fibre-optic or satellite internet infrastructure in areas without existing coverage;
 - b. Upgrading outdated internet infrastructure by connecting all buildings to modern fibre-optic infrastructure;
 - c. Installation of Wi-Fi network infrastructure in all buildings and public areas;
 - d. Construction of nationwide 5G cellular network infrastructure;

- e. Replacement of all dedicated telephone and television infrastructure with internet and/or cellular based alternatives.
9. **CONNECT** shall prioritize projects in areas with little or no existing reliable telecom infrastructure, particularly in Indigenous and rural communities, over improvements in areas with high-quality coverage.

CONNECT user accounts

10. **CONNECT** shall issue user accounts, which shall be required for access to any telecom services in Canada.
11. All adult residents shall be mandatorily issued a **CONNECT** user account and shall pay an account maintenance fee of \$10.00 per month.
12. **CONNECT** user accounts may also be optionally issued to:
 - a. Residents under the age of 18, with an account maintenance fee of \$5.00 per month;
 - b. Businesses or non-residents, with an account maintenance fee of \$5.00 per week.
13. A \$500.00 fine or shall apply to any instance of a person or entity accessing or attempting to access telecom services under a user account other than their own.

User groups

14. Individuals residing together in a household or working together at a single place-of-work may have their user accounts grouped together under a user group.
 - a. All members of a user group may have their account maintenance or subscription fees paid by a single member, called the Account Administrator.
 - b. A user account may be attached to both a household and workplace group, in which case only services accessed at the place-of-work will be billed to the workplace group.
15. The account administrator shall have access to monitor all telecom services accessed by other members of their user group and limit other users' access to certain services.

CONNECT to monitor and control service usage

16. **CONNECT** is authorized under this Act to monitor and keep record of all telecom services accessed by user accounts, which may be used for any purpose deemed useful by **CONNECT**.
17. **CONNECT** is authorized under this Act to limit or disable user access to telecom services for any of the following purposes:
 - a. Disabling or limiting access to services to which a user is not subscribed or when the user's subscription has not been paid,
 - b. Prioritizing network access for government entities, essential services, educational institutions, or users accessing basic services;
 - c. Limiting user access to services to prioritize communications in the event of network failures or emergencies;
 - d. Preventing user access to websites or web services known to enable criminal activities.

Subscriptions and services provided

18. All buildings shall have the following infrastructure installed by **CONNECT**, regardless of subscriptions:
 - a. A high-speed wireless internet router available for access by all **CONNECT** users, and
 - b. A VoIP or cellular landline telephone.
19. **CONNECT** users shall be required to sign into their accounts to access any telecom service, including to make or receive calls from any phone, starting a web-browsing session, or watching television.
 - a. A device that is only used by one user account may be permanently signed-in to that account for the convenience of the user.
20. All **CONNECT** user accounts shall be given unlimited access to all of the following basic telecom services free-of-charge, without any additional subscription:
 - a. Access to the websites and web-services of all Canadian municipal, provincial, and federal governments; nonprofits and charities; public services; news providers; educational institutions; unions; co-ops; political entities; and financial institutions through internet or mobile data;
 - b. Access to all search engines and email services;
 - c. Province-wide talk and text on mobile or landline phones;
 - d. Access to all television channels airing at least 80% Canadian-content programming.
21. **CONNECT** users shall have the option to purchase subscriptions for unlimited access to any of the following service areas with an additional fee of \$15.00 per month per service:
 - a. Access to all .ca websites;
 - b. Access to international websites;
 - c. Online gaming services;
 - d. Online video streaming and social networking services;
 - e. Online investment services;
 - f. Canada-wide talk and text;
 - g. Talk and text to another country, *à la carte* per country;
 - h. All available television channels not meeting Canadian-content quotas.

Equitable service pricing

22. **CONNECT** shall apply a fee adjustment multiplier on all users or user group's monthly total, which shall be applied using a sliding scale based on each user's household income, with the following guidelines:
 - a. Users with an annual household income less than \$20,000 per person shall have a multiplier of 0% and pay no account maintenance or subscription fees;
 - b. Users with a median household income shall have a multiplier of 100%;
 - c. Users with a household income above median shall have a multiplier such that their fees offset the costs of the service subsidies and infrastructure improvements such that **CONNECT** operates revenue-neutral.
23. Businesses or other entities that exert a disproportionately large load on network infrastructure shall have an additional fee applied proportional to their data usage above median.

24. **CONNECT** is authorized to partially or fully waive account maintenance or subscription fees for users who, provided the user self-identifies as such at user registration:
- a. Are visibly or invisibly disabled;
 - b. Are refugees;
 - c. Identify as First Nations, Inuit, or Métis.