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Enough is enough: National Day of Action demands affordable internet for Canadians

Pro-consumer coalition launches affordable-internet.ca, says federal government and regulators must deliver more competition and lower prices

February 25, 2021 – A Canadian coalition of consumer advocates, civil society and social justice groups, policy experts, activists and independent ISPs are coming together virtually on March 16, 2021 in a national Day of Action to demand the immediate implementation of federal measures to deliver affordable internet and wireless services in Canada and to put an end to constantly increasing bills.

During the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, reliable and affordable internet connectivity has become absolutely essential for every aspect of life. Yet, the federal government and regulators are giving free rein to big phone and cable companies to drive up prices while posting huge profits, unnecessarily taking hundreds of millions of taxpayer-funded labour subsidies, boosting dividend payouts to shareholders and laying off hundreds of workers. Millions of Canadians are struggling to make ends meet and pay some of the highest telecom bills in the world while others are unable to access high-quality reliable connections entirely as a result.

By launching an online Day of Action for Affordable Internet, happening virtually on March 16 and open to the public for free, participants are saying that enough is enough – the federal government, the CRTC and Competition Bureau must take immediate action to promote competition and affordable pricing. Participants will be urging a range of actions to be taken.

Initial participants include: ACORN Canada; Brookfield Institute for Innovation + Entrepreneurship; activist and author Cory Doctorow; Canada Research Chair in Internet and E-Commerce Law Michael Geist; The Internet Society Canada Chapter; OpenMedia; Public Interest Advocacy Centre; Ryerson Leadership Lab; Samuelson-Glushko Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic; and TekSavvy Solutions.

Organizations and individuals interested in participating in this event can email Laura Tribe at laura@openmedia.org. Final list of participants and agenda to be unveiled on March 9.

Quotes follow:

“After the pandemic, there can no longer be any controversy: broadband is a human right, the nervous system of the 21st century. It is far too important to be left up to the whims of monopolists building atop public infrastructure without any commitment to the public interest.”

– *Cory Doctorow, activist, author and journalist.*

“ACORN Canada is joining this national Day of Action because of the federal government’s complete failure to put people over the profits of the big telecommunication companies during this pandemic. A recent (2019) report from ACORN Canada shows only 80 per cent of low-income people with household incomes under \$30,000 had home internet. Of the 78 respondents without home internet, 72 per cent identified cost as the main reason. Two-thirds of respondents said they had to sacrifice things like food and medication to afford their home internet.”

– *ACORN Canada*

“Canada does not have the affordable, quality Internet that we need and deserve. And it's because Big Telecom has been allowed to put profits before people for far too long. 2020 made clear what so many of us already knew – the internet is essential. But so many people throughout the country simply don't have the services they need, at prices they can afford, and they're being left behind. We can't afford to wait any longer. It's time for the CRTC and the government to step up, and the Canadian public to demand better.”

– *Laura Tribe, executive director OpenMedia*

“Connectivity is increasingly vital in day-to-day life and, given our unique geography, has real potential to improve lives across Canada. Yet for far too long, persistently high profit margins and world-leading prices keep us from realizing this potential. The time to adopt a comprehensive solution is long past due.”

– *Tamir Israel, staff lawyer at the Samuelson-Glushko Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic (CIPPIC)*

“All consumers, but especially low-income Canadians, struggle to afford Internet and cellphone connections in an environment made infinitely more difficult by inadequate laws, regulatory capture and market dominance by big companies. The first step is protest, the next is action on all of these barriers, which must all be swept away to ensure full and fair access for all Canadians to the essential communications they need to face our changing world of democracy, work, education and entertainment.”

– *John Lawford, executive director, Public Interest Advocacy Centre*

“The affordability and accessibility of the internet has never been more critical. More than ever, we are being asked to work, learn and connect online. The lack of meaningful competition in

Canada has Canadians paying more and getting less. Government and regulators need to work together to bring in reforms that make the system work for Canadian consumers.”

– *Franca Palazzo, executive director Internet Society Canada Chapter*

“Delays in implementing fair wholesale rates have resulted in consumers subsidizing the huge profits of the largest and most powerful and profitable telecom companies in Canada. The government has stood by and watched this happen at a time when competition and fair pricing for internet is needed more urgently than ever.”

– *Andy Kaplan-Myrth, vice-president of regulatory and carrier affairs, TekSavvy*

“The digital divide in Canada is sometimes portrayed as exclusively a rural-urban divide. But even in Canada’s largest cities, there are persistent gaps in access to digital services, devices and affordable internet at sufficient speeds that map onto other socioeconomic inequities, including income, age, race and ability. The pandemic has highlighted the urgent need for greater policy and programmatic response to ensure digital inclusion across Canada.”

– *Sam Andrey, director of policy and research, Ryerson Leadership Lab*

“Few issues are more important to Canada’s long-term economic and cultural future than digital policy. Once a top government priority, Canada has discouragingly moved away from prioritizing the interests of Canadian consumers and the broader public interest. It is time to hit the reset button.”

– *Michael Geist, Canada Research Chair in Internet and E-Commerce Law*

To connect with coalition participants, please contact:

Laura Tribe
Executive director, OpenMedia

laura@openmedia.org

1-888-441-2640 ext. 2

Affordable-internet.ca