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Press Release

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NEW PHOENIX CENTER STUDY CHALLENGES CLAIMS LINKING BROADBAND ACCESS TO DIABETES OUTCOMES

Analysis finds that socioeconomic factors, not broadband availability, explain differences in health outcomes between “broadband deserts” and other areas

WASHINGTON, D.C. — A recent article published in KFF Health News highlighted “dead zones” — that is, counties lacking both healthcare providers and reliable high-speed internet — and suggested that improving broadband infrastructure could improve health outcomes, particularly regarding diabetes. In response, the Phoenix Center has released a new analysis entitled *Broadband, Diabetes and Advocacy: A Review of Recent Claims* that examines this relationship using empirical methods.

In this new PERSPECTIVE, Phoenix Center Chief Economist Dr. George S. Ford conducts a thorough empirical analysis using the same data referenced in the KFF article, augmented with additional variables reflecting social determinants of health (SDOH). Dr. Ford identifies several flaws in the KFF article’s assumptions, including an overreliance on anecdotal evidence and insufficient statistical analysis. Dr. Ford finds that while simple statistical comparisons show worse diabetes outcomes in broadband deserts, these differences disappear when controlling for factors such as obesity rates, poverty, age, race, and education. As such, Dr. Ford’s analysis suggests that policymakers should consider a more comprehensive approach to addressing rural health disparities rather than focusing primarily on broadband expansion, which his analysis indicates may have little effect on diabetes treatment outcomes.

“Diabetes prevalence is no different in broadband deserts than in other counties when controlling for relevant factors,” notes study author Phoenix Center Chief Economist Dr. George S. Ford. “My analysis finds that the few SDOH factors fully explain the differences in diabetes rates and diabetes-related mortality between broadband haves and have-nots; broadband has no effect.”

A full copy of PHOENIX CENTER POLICY PERSPECTIVE NO. 25-02, *Broadband, Diabetes and Advocacy: A Review of Recent Claims*, may be downloaded free from the Phoenix Center’s web page at: <http://www.phoenix-center.org/perspectives/Perspective25-02Final.pdf>.

The Phoenix Center is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that studies broad public-policy issues related to governance, social and economic conditions, with a particular emphasis on the law and economics of the digital age.