

Digital Inclusion Section
Communications Infrastructure Division
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
GPO Box 594
Canberra ACT 2601

18 July 2024

Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance submission on the First Nations Digital Inclusion Roadmap

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. The Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance (ADIA) commends the Government's commitment to Closing the Gap, in particular in relation to Target 17, that by 2026, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equal levels of digital inclusion. We welcome the opportunity to continue our engagement with the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group (FNDIAG) through the roadmap consultation, along with the reframed focus on innovation and excellence.

The ADIA is pleased to support ongoing and collaborative engagement regarding First Nations Digital Inclusion:

- In December 2022 we attended the First Nations Digital Inclusion Roundtable and accepted the invitation from the Hon Michelle Rowland MP, Minister for Communications, to provide feedback on the event.
- In September 2023 we welcomed the opportunity to brief the FNDIAG on our program of work to uplift digital capability across Australia, in partnership with the Future Skills Organisation.
- In March 2024 FNDIAG Co-Chair, Ms Dot West OAM, supported the launch of the ADIA's [paper](#) on device access and affordability, *A Digital Inclusion Approach to Device Donation and Reuse*, alongside The Smith Family, WorkVentures and ACCAN, to discuss the Advisory Group's recommendation for the establishment of a National Device Bank.

Most recently, in April this year the ADIA hosted an online meetup in conversation with the FNDIAG, as a precursor to the current consultation on the First Nations Digital Inclusion Roadmap. The meetup provided an opportunity to generate early discussion on the roadmap's focus, with speakers including FNDIAG Co-Chairs, Dot West OAM, and Associate Professor Lyndon Ormond-Parker, along with Professor Ellie Rennie, a member of the Digital Inclusion Expert Panel that works to support the work of the Advisory Group. The panel discussion was moderated by ADIA Chair and Infolchange CEO, David Spriggs, and a recording of the session is available to view on the [ADIA YouTube channel](#).

What we heard during the meetup

A 70-strong audience joined the event, with a number of active participants throughout the discussion. Key themes and questions which emerged from the discussion are as follows:

Digital inclusion by definition

Participants enquired about the definition of digital inclusion, and whilst the panel noted the broadly accepted three pillars of digital inclusion (digital ability, accessibility and affordability), they also acknowledged the nuanced nature of the issue, especially in relation to the needs of First Nations communities in remote areas.

Co-design, place-based initiatives & data sovereignty

Participants noted the importance of engaging First Nations companies and organisations to co-design place-based strategies. The panel acknowledged the ongoing work of the Mapping the Digital Gap project, conducted by the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision Making and Society in partnership with Telstra, and the ways in which local communities are engaged and empowered through the research. This includes co-designing digital inclusion strategies for individual communities.

Connectivity literacy

There was a brief discussion around connectivity literacy, especially relevant for those with differences in choice and availability of services dependent on their level of remoteness.

Artificial intelligence

Participants queried the potential for AI to support digital inclusion for First Nations communities, and its intersection with the Advisory Group's work. The panel noted the importance of ensuring that the implementation of AI technologies did not further increase the digital divide, and provided commentary on data sovereignty and AI governance when it comes to using large language models. Additionally, the panel noted issues surrounding the protection of indigenous intellectual property rights in relation to AI.

Looking at digital inclusion more broadly

Since 2017 the ADIA has advocated for initiatives to bridge the digital divide in Australia, across the three pillars of digital ability, accessibility and affordability. Our most recent focus has been on digital ability and affordability (including access to appropriate and affordable digital devices and internet connections). We outline below details of our work and position reflective of these pillars.

Digital ability

Uplifting digital capability for all Australians will have the associated impact of increasing a person's media literacy, digital resilience and digital citizenship; all of which play an important role in a person's capacity to participate in an online world, and critically assess the information with which they engage.

Over the past few years, the ADIA has been working collaboratively with the [Future Skills Organisation](#) (FSO), the Finance, Technology and Business [Jobs and Skills Council](#), funded by the Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations on a project focused on pushing towards an economy-wide, Government-endorsed national common language around what it means to be digitally capable. As such, we have positioned the existing [Australian Digital](#)

[Capability Framework](#) (ADCF) as the national common language for digital capability, such that it enables efficient communication and collaboration across sectors and industries.

In October 2023 the ADIA [welcomed](#) the Australian Government's recognition of the ADCF as Australia's national common language on digital capability in the [White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities](#).

It is imperative however that the ADCF be extended to cover pre-levels, as articulated in the Australian Core Skills Framework - Digital Literacy Skills Framework, to cover the most foundational digital skills and provide the necessary on-ramp for the many digitally excluded Australians from various backgrounds taking their first steps into a digital world. Pre-levels also provide guidance for organisations working with individuals – whether a registered training provider or an organisation in the community working with people – as to where to focus to get people started.

During earlier consultation on this program of work, inDigiMOB indicated that through their small group digital inclusion sessions, most participants lack basic digital skills assumed at Level 1 of the ADCF and above such as:

- Understanding the basic functions of a device.
- Identifying and opening a web browser.
- Setting up an email account; sending and receiving emails.
- Identifying, accessing and understanding different file types.

We note however that digital abilities exist across a continuum, and in line with Mapping the Digital Gap findings, inDigiMOB also found that a reliance on mobile devices has led to some community members being highly skilled in the use of mobile applications such as video editors, audio-visual communication tools and social media platforms, however, they do not have the ability to open or operate a word processor to prepare a resume, for example.

Separately, with the rapid surge in Artificial Intelligence, the ADCF has become out of date. If it is to be valuable as the national common language for digital capability, then it must urgently be updated.

We are continuing in our efforts to support the practical application of the ADCF to enable existing fragmented digital inclusion efforts to have increased impact. You can read more about the importance of solidifying a common language around digital capability [here](#).

Affordability

Digital inclusion is a multifaceted challenge. One aspect is affordable access to devices. In our highly digitised society, this is fundamental to being able to participate in all kinds of activities; from access to Government services, to banking, telehealth, studying and finding or undertaking employment.

We acknowledge that access to an appropriate device isn't a holistic solution, rather one part of the digital inclusion challenge. Importantly, device access must be paired with the digital capability to purposefully use it, along with access to an affordable internet connection.

Recently the ADIA released a [paper](#) highlighting the demand for affordable digital devices across Australia and the challenges and opportunities that device donation can play in addressing this demand.

With the issue of access to an appropriate and affordable device sitting at the intersection of digital inclusion and the circular economy, there is an opportunity to amplify the positive digital inclusion outcomes of device re-use. Additionally, providing a donated device to low-income Australians not only helps address the issue of access to an affordable and appropriate device, but also provides a tangible opportunity for digital upskilling.

The Productivity Commission's 2021 [Right to Repair Inquiry Report](#) recommended that reuse be included within [National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme](#) (NTCRS) annual recycling targets. This would allow NTCRS co-regulatory bodies to determine the best outcome for collected e-waste, instead of requiring all of it to be recycled. It also suggested that any future product stewardship schemes should also include repair and reuse as options within their targets, where practical.

The Australian Government has since committed to develop a mandatory product stewardship scheme to reduce waste from small electrical products, with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water's proposed scheme – currently in development – to include reuse obligations. The ADIA supports increased obligations and options to facilitate the donation of devices for reuse for enterprise and government agencies, to support digital inclusion outcomes.

Furthermore, in their initial [report](#) released in 2023, the FNDIAG recommended that the Australian Government consider developing a National Device Bank to help provide low-income earners in First Nations communities with refurbished donated devices free of charge, based on the UK [National Device Bank](#) model coordinated by Good Things Foundation.

WorkVentures has since [called for](#) a national strategy on devices, including the introduction of a National Device Bank, and is advocating to secure one million pledged devices to support digital inclusion programs within five years.

When it comes to affordable internet access, research undertaken by the ADIA aimed at organisations working with low-income Australians found:

- 50% of respondents indicated that their clients/the communities that they work with are spending between \$70-\$100 per month on their internet connection.
- In order to cover this cost, people are compromising on other expenses, with 50% of respondents acknowledging that people are favouring internet connectivity over household necessities such as groceries, utility bills, and fuel or vehicle repairs.

Through this research, along with our membership in the National Broadband Network Low Income and Digital Inclusion Forum (LIDIF), the ADIA is advocating for a permanent, low-cost broadband offer

to support more Australians to be able to access the internet and in turn, increase their capacity to engage with digital technologies, including AI. The ADIA is a signatory of ACCAN's [No Australia Left Offline](#) initiative, which calls for a 50 mbps service for \$30 per month to be available to households receiving income support. In the meantime, we welcome the LIDIF commitment to investigating targeted options for digitally excluded cohorts, such as for those who will be transitioning from the School Student Broadband Initiative upon its expiry.

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the diverse internet access needs of First Nations Australians, particularly those living in remote areas where broadband may not be an option, and that a one size fits all approach to affordable connectivity solutions is insufficient. The ADIA welcomed the 2024 Federal Budget commitment to funding the roll out of community Wi-Fi in remote communities as a first step in improving affordable connectivity.

Please do not hesitate to reach out if you would like to discuss our submission further.

Yours faithfully,



David Spriggs
CEO, Infoxchange
Chair, Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance



Ishtar Vij
Director, Eloquium Group
Convenor, Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance

About the ADIA

The Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance (ADIA) is a shared initiative with over 500 business, government, academic and community organisations working together to accelerate action on digital inclusion. Our member organisations conduct a variety of research and practical programs aimed at reducing the digital divide and enabling greater social and economic participation for all Australians. The ADIA is supported by Infoxchange, Google, Telstra and TasNetworks. Australia Post was also a founding partner.

The ADIA's vision is to build a digitally inclusive Australia where everyone is equipped to fully participate in the economy and society. Being digitally included means a person has:

- Affordable access to quality internet and appropriate devices.
- Access to inclusively designed online content, that's readable and accessible, including if they are differently abled or from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- The knowledge, ability, skills and confidence to complete tasks safely and securely online.

Visit: <https://www.digitalinclusion.org.au/>