

Ember Connect

Submission to the

First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group

27th June 2024



Introduction

Digital Inclusion

Digital inclusion is often described as the ability to confidently get online and use the internet safely, which includes having access to the internet and a device (laptop, computer, or smart phone), being able to afford a good internet connection and an appropriate device and knowing how to use the internet for things that are important like banking and accessing services. The digital divide in Australia is significant, with First Nations Australians on average experiencing poorer access to the internet and higher costs relative to income to access the in lower levels of digital ability.

First Nation Digital Advisory Group

The First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group (the Advisory Group) is seeking feedback on the key considerations that should be included in a long-term roadmap outlining the path towards First Nations digital inclusion. The Advisory Group was established in January 2023 by the Hon Michelle Rowland MP, Minister for Communications to focus on Target 17 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which aims for equal levels of digital inclusion for First Nations people by 2026. Following publication of its initial report in October 2023, the Advisory Group is now looking to develop a long-term roadmap towards First Nations digital inclusion, which will outline the path towards equal levels of digital inclusion for First Nations Australians in 2026 and beyond.

Ember Connect

Ember Connect is an online platform of some 3000 plus First Nation Women. Ember Connect provide a valuable on-line consultation forum for First Nation women across Australia. Using an innovative digital platform, Ember Connect delivers a range of free activities and resources aimed at enhancing the social capital and economic independence of First Nation Women. All Ember Connect initiatives - some of which are planned to be place based and in person provide an excellent opportunity for multiple forums from which collective and strategic advice can be harnessed. As such Ember Connect was keen to contribute to the information sought by the First Nation Digital Advisory Group.

The Ember Connect Digital Inclusion Survey

Ember Connect's Digital Inclusion Survey was posted on the Ember Connect Online Platform in June 2024. To review the survey, see attachment one. The 10 questions were designed to identify age and general location of respondents, rate their capacity using the internet as well the capacity of their elder relatives. The survey items also sought information on what aspects of the internet they used and whether they considered it safe.

All responses have been deidentified, and we therefore consent to this submission being publicly available.

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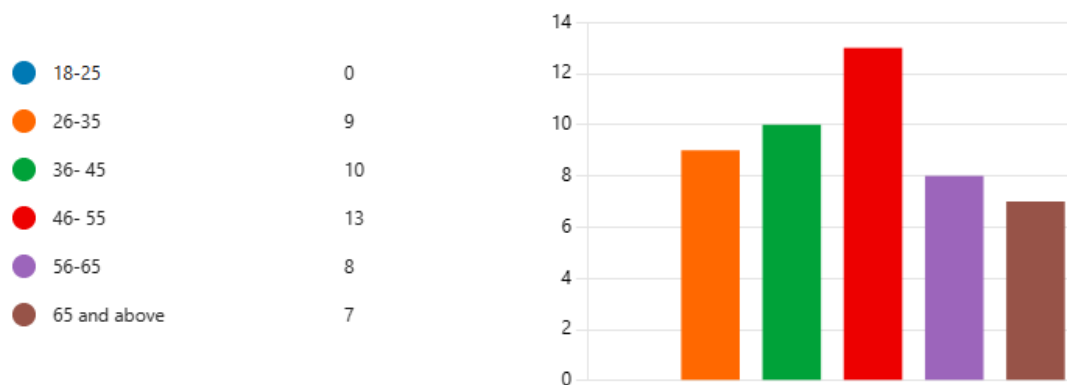
At Ember Connect we have the powerful opportunity to use our collective voice to instigate widespread, systemic change. Currently, we can advise the Federal Government on how easy it is for mob to access the internet, and so we would like to get your view. We've created a quick survey to help frame our response to the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group, who will advise the Minister for Communications. We will also share the outcomes here at Ember Live.

The survey is just 10 questions and will take less than three minutes to complete. Access to the internet is now widely considered to be a human right and, with the Closing the Gap agreement targeting 2026 for equal rights of digital inclusion, there is no time to waste to contribute.

Ember Connect Digital Inclusion Survey Results

Forty-seven First Nation Women responded to the Ember Connect Digital Inclusion survey. This was a small representative sample (at 20% margin of error) from the Ember Connect First Nation Women members.

The age cohorts of those that responded are illustrated in the following graph. There were no respondents between 18-25 which may be indicative of fewer members in that age cohort. There was a strong response rate from member 36 – 55 and a useful response rate from women 56 and over.



Graph One: Ages of First Nation Women respondents.

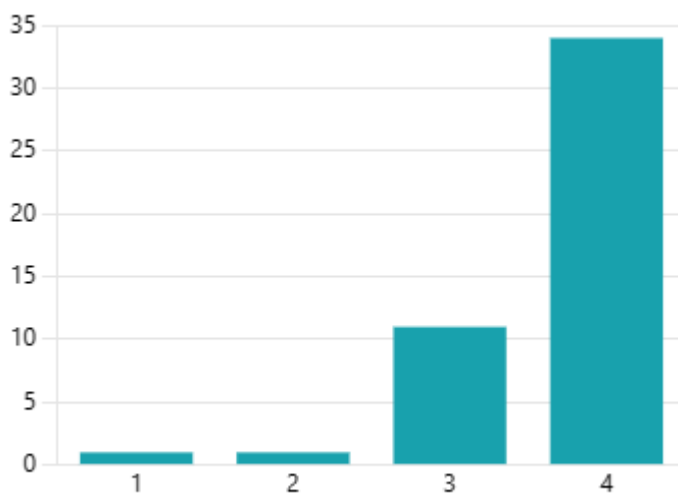
Most of the respondents were based in metropolitan cities across Australia with others spread somewhat equally across regional Australia. There were no remotely based respondents.

Remote Australia	0
Regional Australia	13
Regional City Australia	11
Metropolitan or Capital City Aus...	22
Other	1



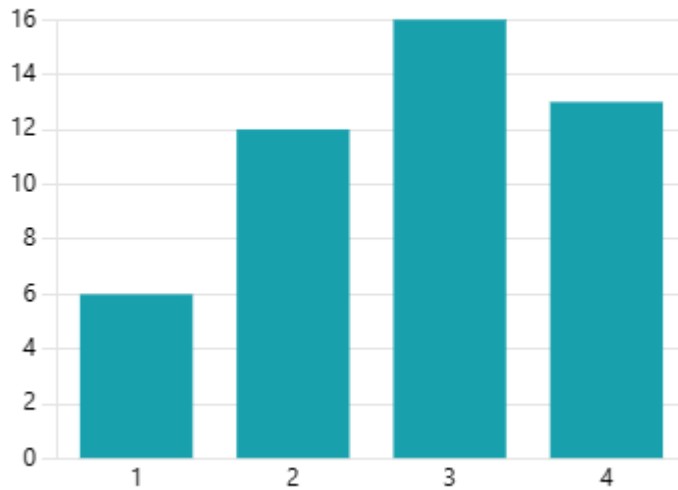
Graph Two: Location of First Nation Women respondents.

In response to the question: How would you rate your personal capacity to access the internet? A response of 1 meant that the respondent believed they were not at all capable and a response of 4 meant they considered themselves highly capable. The vast majority 72% considered they were highly capable at accessing the internet.



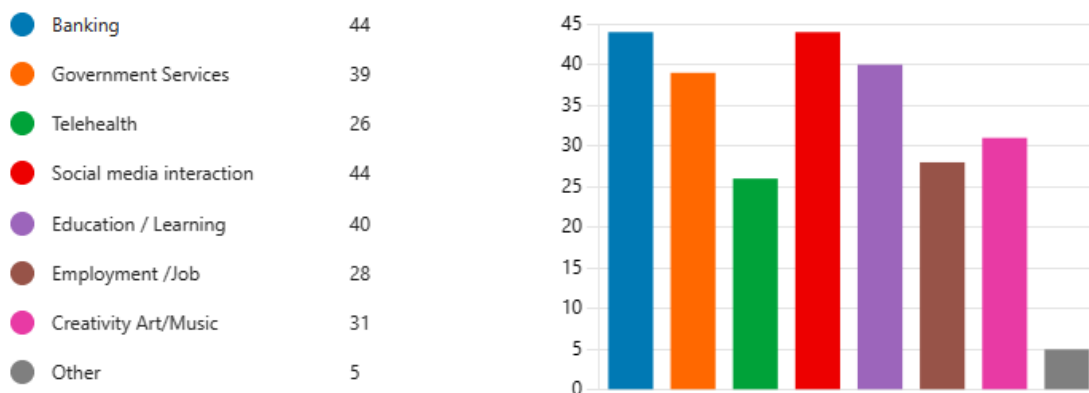
Graph Three: Respondents personal rating of their ability to access the internet. (1 – low capacity to 4 – High capacity).

Understanding that those people who were not confident or capable of accessing the internet, would not be members of Ember Connect. The survey design included a question that asked respondents to consider their extended family members' capability in accessing the internet. The question stated: How would you rate the older members in your family's access to the internet, those over 55 years of age?



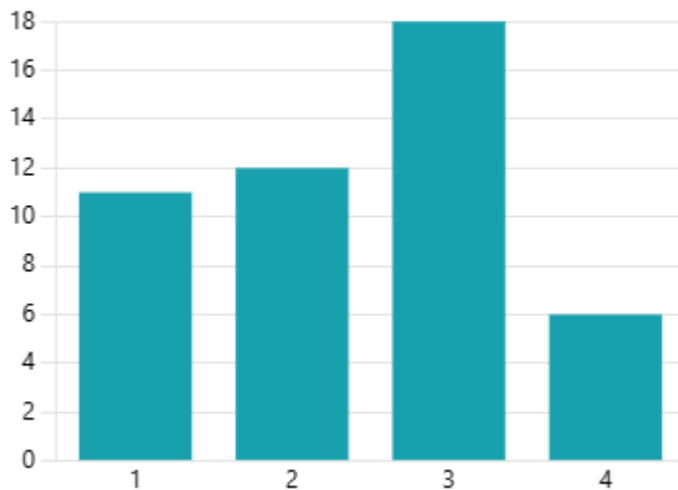
Graph Four: Respondents rating of extended family members (over 55 years of age), capability to access the internet. (1 – low capacity to 4 – High capacity).

The survey asked respondents what they used the internet for. Results are shown in the following graph. The primary uses of the internet were reported to be banking and social media interaction, with secondary uses being government services and education and learning.



Graph Five: Respondents primary use of the internet.

The survey also sought to gather insights into respondents' perceptions of internet safety and so asked the following question. "Do you believe all your family are accessing the internet safely?" Examples of unsafe internet usage are identity theft, data breaches, malware and viruses, phishing and scam emails, fake websites, inappropriate content cyberbullying or faulty privacy settings. Very few (15%) believed their family were accessing the internet safely. Thirty-eight per cent believed family members were accessing the internet somewhat safely. The remaining 46% (including responses 1 and 2) indicate strong concern with family members safe access to internet.



Graph Six: Respondents rating of internet safety (1 – family not accessing internet safely to 4 – family accessing internet safely).

To better understand the harmful effects experienced by Ember Connect respondents, the survey asked; "What harmful effects have you or your family experienced as a result of digital access?"

Respondents' answers are illustrated in the following word cloud, social media was most strongly reported with many concerns around scams, including fake websites and identity theft and associated risks.



To better understand the barriers to internet access, Ember Connect members were asked: “Please describe in a few words what stops those in your family who are not using the internet?”

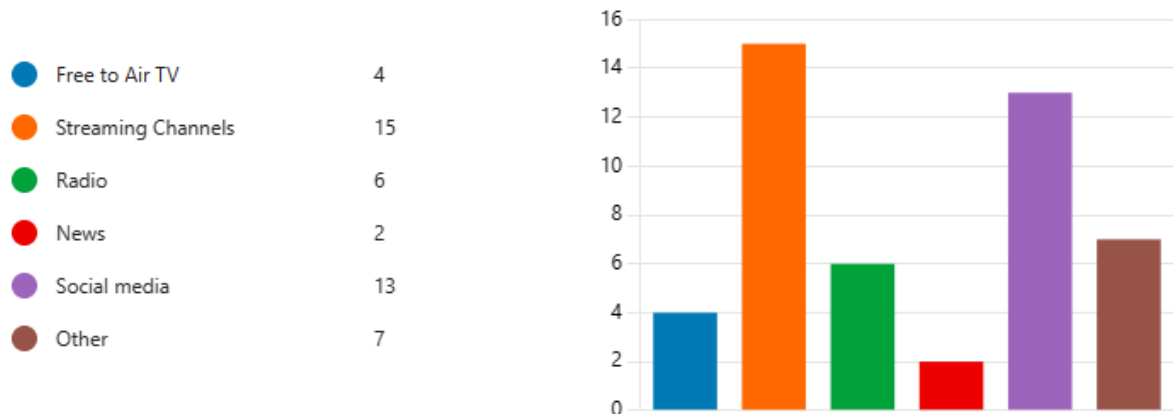
Answers to the survey item are illustrated in the following word cloud. They included inability to use the internet, being scared including scared of issues around safety. Other reasons included access to internet including having the hardware. Many respondents reported various aspects regarding lack of knowledge and experience.



To gain insight as to what might help overcome barriers to internet access Ember Connect members were asked: “When you consider the hurdles to accessing the internet, what do you consider would be helpful?” Strongest responses related to education with other responses identifying support to access, connectivity, and safety.



In addition to knowing what respondents actually used the internet for, the survey included an item including access to other / alternative forms of media. Very few respondents identified using free to air TV, with most respondents citing streaming channels and social media, both only possible with access to internet.



Graph Seven: Respondents identification of media they use including those requiring internet and those not requiring internet access.

Conclusion - Ember Connect Digital Inclusion Survey Findings

- The Ember Connect Digital Inclusion survey was completed by 47 first Nations women whose ages ranged between 26 and over 65. They were based across regional and metropolitan areas in Australia. Respondents rated their personal ability to access it internet quite highly and reported those family members over 55 as being less capable.
- Most of the reasons that people access the internet were to do with personal administration, including access to banking and government services with access to education and employment also frequently identified. Interestingly, Social Media access was frequently reported (equal with banking).
- In terms of internet safety, concerns were identified that included fear of being scammed. Reasons for not acting accessing the internet were lack of knowledge and understanding, being scared, the cost of internet and not having the hardware.
- To overcome the challenges to internet access, education was reported most strongly together with support for internet connectivity to make it cost effective.
- Alternatives to Internet use were not strongly reported. Free to air TV had minimal responses whereas streaming channels and social media, both of which require internet, were the most commonly used media.

The findings from the Ember Connect Survey support a growing need for digital inclusion for all First Nation people no matter what their age or the location in which they live. Education and access support remain critically important as does internet safety.