



The Australian Digital Inclusion Index



ACOSS/Infoxchange Briefing Note



October 2018

ACOSS and Infoxchange are working together to advance digital inclusion and technology for social justice as key public policy issues. This briefing note provides an introduction to, and summary of the key findings of, a key piece of research on digital inclusion – Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2018.

About ACOSS

The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) is a national advocate for action to reduce poverty and inequality and the peak body for the community services sector in Australia. Our vision is for a fair, inclusive and sustainable Australia where all individuals and communities can participate in and benefit from social and economic life.

About Infoxchange

Infoxchange is a not-for-profit social enterprise that has delivered technology for social justice for close to 30 years. With over 120 staff across Australia and New Zealand we tackle the biggest social challenges through the smart and creative use of technology. We work with community, government and corporate partners to solve family violence, homelessness, mental health and issues facing people with disabilities, the elderly, Aboriginal, Maori and Pasifika communities.

Our community programs focus on digital inclusion and social innovation. We use technology to improve the lives of vulnerable people, driving social inclusion and creating stronger communities. We believe no-one should be left behind in today's digital world.

Why is Digital Inclusion Important?

Access to digital technologies enables us to participate in education and employment, buy and sell products online, access government and other essential services, and stay in touch with

our family and friends. Affordable access to these technologies enhances our wellbeing and quality of life. Unfortunately, as this research shows, there are too many people in Australia today who are digitally excluded, who face barriers to accessing digital technologies, and cannot participate fully in our online world.

The Research

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) was first published in 2016, and aims to provide a comprehensive picture of Australia's online participation. It measures three dimensions of digital inclusion: access (how and where we access the internet, the kinds of devices we use to access it, and how much data we can use), affordability (the capacity of the user to pay for digital services, including relative to their income) and digital ability (the capability of users to interact with digital technologies). The data is comprised of more than 100 indicators of personal internet access, expenditure, activity and attitudes. The research paints a picture of how these dimensions change for people over time according to their social and economic circumstances and where they live.

The ADII research team was led by Professor Julian Thomas at RMIT University, in partnership with Telstra, the Centre for Social Impact (Swinburne University of Technology) and Roy Morgan Research.

The Findings

The research made a number of key findings, summarised here.



Digital inclusion is increasing

Australians are doing more things online than ever before. At a national level, there has been an improvement in digital inclusion since 2014, with a steady rise in overall access and digital ability. However, this improvement was not evenly distributed across geographic locations and socioeconomic groups. The research found rural residents, older Australians, people with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and those who have low levels of education, income or employment, are seen to be left behind.

People on low incomes, and with low levels of education and employment are less digitally included

Although digital inclusion is increasing overall, the gap between those on lower incomes and those on higher incomes, along with the gap between those in the workforce and those out of the workforce, has widened. Households with higher incomes saw the biggest increases in digital inclusion.

Older people are significantly less digitally included than younger people

Digital inclusion declines as age increases, and the gap between older people and younger people is largely driven by the gap in “digital abilities”. That said, “affordability” is also in decline for older people, particularly those on low incomes. Interestingly, the gap between the digital inclusion of older people and younger people widened in each year between 2014 and 2017, and declined slightly in 2018.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are less digitally included

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban and regional areas are less digitally included than the national average. While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people score lower than the average on “access” and “digital ability”, the biggest gap was in “affordability”, partly as a result of the prevalence of mobile only access by Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander people. The research does not extend to remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, although the report does discuss the experience of digital inclusion in Ali Curung (a community located 380 km north of Alice Springs) as a case study.

People with disability have generally lower digital inclusion, however the gap is narrowing

The research found that people with disability (defined as receiving either the Disability Support Pension or “disability pension”) had lower rates of digital inclusion, but the gap is narrowing. Between 2014 and 2017 there has been an increase in the digital inclusion of people with disability, largely due to gains in “access” and “digital ability”. Despite these improvements, “affordability” for people with disability declined.

Case Studies

The research examines three case studies in more detail, to better understand how various communities experience digital inclusion in Australia. The report focusses on a remote Aboriginal community (Ali Curung), the deaf and hard of hearing community, and single parents.

Digital inclusion in Ali Curung

The research did not examine digital inclusion in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, but did report on a case study of Ali Curung (a community 380km north of Alice Springs). The research indicates low levels of digital inclusion in Ali Curung, driven largely by a heavy reliance on mobile phones to access the internet. This reliance on mobile technologies impacts negatively on both “access” and “affordability”. Despite the fact that higher costs, restricted data allowances and device limitations often diminish “digital ability”, the findings in Ali Curung show high level of digital ability. People were more likely than the Australian average to use the internet to engage in shopping or banking,



accessing government services, or otherwise access the internet. The Ali Curung example demonstrates the complexity of digital inclusion in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community

A key point recognised by the report is that the data presented on people with disability is limited to those in receipt of a Disability Support Pension. Through a focus on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, the report aims to “diversify our knowledge of digital inclusion for Australians with Disability”. The research shows that the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community are significantly more digitally included than the Australian population average. Members of this community are significantly more likely to use the internet for a range of tasks, including making video calls, social media, buying and selling products and using government services. The key issue faced by the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community is “affordability”, with a higher than average proportion of household income spent on digital access.

Single parents

Single parent families were significantly less digitally included than two-parent families, and less digitally included than the national average. Although single parent families had higher rates of “access” to digital technologies than the Australian average, they also had a greater reliance on mobile-only technologies. Affordability is a key barrier to digital inclusion for single parent families, with internet access accounting for almost double the proportion

of single parent families’ incomes when compared with the national average. The higher reliance on mobile technologies also means that single parent families are getting poorer value for money than other Australians.

State and Territory Data

The research looks at how digital inclusion varies across the states and territories, and provides a detailed snapshot of digital inclusion in each state and territory. The research showed an increase in digital inclusion in each state and territory except the Northern Territory. It also showed that regional/country areas were significantly less digitally included than capital cities, driven by lower scores in each of the domains (access, affordability and digital ability).

Conclusion

The research demonstrates that digital inclusion in Australia is increasing. Since 2014, every state and territory has seen an increase in digital inclusion. Despite this increase, the research also shows that affordability is in decline, with households spending a greater proportion of their income on digital technologies. The research also shows that digital inclusion remains linked to geography, age, income and education. As the report states, “If the benefits of digital technology are to be shared by all Australians, digital inclusion should be considered an integral part of state and national policy making and strategic planning in relation to the development of the digital economy, including next-generation industries and services.”