

The Hon Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister of Australia
By Email

11 May 2020

Dear Prime Minister

Moving towards a digitally included Australia following COVID-19

We commend you on your decisive, collaborative response to the COVID-19 crisis. As you will no doubt agree, the crisis has underlined the importance of digital inclusion. Only those with access to the internet and the skills to make the most of it, are able to truly participate in work, learning, telehealth, access to government information and services, and maintain connection during this time of social distancing.

We welcome the steps you have taken in partnership with NBN Co and industry to improve connectivity and affordability for all. The internet has never been more important and as businesses look at being post-COVID-19 ready, digital ability will become increasingly important to be employable and able to learn.

In recognition of the fact that digital inclusion is imperative, we call on the Government to commit to a **National Digital Inclusion Roadmap** as it steers Australia forward and out of the current crisis.

We have been in discussions with the Digital Technologies Taskforce within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, in particular around the development of a National Digital Capabilities Framework (see below). Alongside such a Framework, there are a number of measures that could be brought together to form a National Digital Inclusion Roadmap.

A single government department could be appointed to lead on the Roadmap, bringing a whole of government perspective. Initiatives in the Roadmap could include:

1. Access and affordability of internet services - removing cost as a prohibitive barrier.
 - a. Incorporate NBN rollout and wireless plans - including those announced in recent weeks - to demonstrate progress towards 100% connection across Australia.
 - b. Assess affordability measures taken in the immediate response to COVID-19 and examine measures that can be retained going forward. This may include a low cost permanent option from the NBN or a reduction in wholesale prices charged.
 - c. Efforts to support low income and vulnerable populations to access devices.

- d. Identify and fund free public wifi access points in community centres, libraries and payphone locations.
2. Digital Ability - Ensure everyone has the skills and confidence to benefit from and complete activities on the Internet. As businesses re-engage employees following COVID-19 it is critical there is a clear understanding of the capabilities their employees need to support the digitally transformed business.
 - a. Implement a National Capabilities Framework that defines the skills Australians need to safely and effectively engage online. This would provide the foundation for Government, businesses and community organisations to work together to progress digital skills development. It would inform the Schools Curriculum, tertiary education objectives, registered training organisations' work, program delivery by the private sector and the community sector. It would ensure we have a common language and objective against which we can measure progress.
 - b. Digital Ability encompasses the *capability* to do certain things online, as well as to do them *safely and effectively*. Through collaboration and information sharing we believe we can amplify the work of the private sector and community organisations, and locate the gaps for future initiatives.
 - c. Implement a central index of the programs available from the Government, the private sector and community organisations. At present, information about the various programs is disparate and can be difficult to navigate. A whole of government initiative to provide a searchable database would help people find and benefit from programs that support development of their digital skills. This database should:
 - i. Contain information on as complete a range of programs as possible, so that it becomes a 'one stop shop' for Australians;
 - ii. Be searchable by location and topic, so that people can see what is relevant to them.
 - d. Support sharing of learnings about how online digital skills training can be delivered to those with low digital ability. For example we are learning that trainers, such as librarians, have varying levels of digital capability to run webinars and this is a gap we are having to address before we can engage with the community. Phone support has also become critical as a precursor to engagement in online digital skills training, including to overcome people's uncertainty about engaging online.
3. Accessibility - Allow everyone to use the internet including those living with disability, from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds, or with other needs.
 - a. Move towards all federal, state, local government websites being compliant with accessibility standards (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines - WCAG 2.1).
 - b. Ensure whole of government adherence to the Australian Standard AS EN 301 549, *accessibility requirements suitable for public procurement of ICT products and services*.



- c. Incentivise the adult learning sector to incorporate inclusion and accessibility in ICT & design courses by 2022.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters with you and your team.

Please don't hesitate to be in touch with Ishtar Vij, convenor of the Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance, to progress discussions.

Signatories

Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance	InfoXChange
Australian Communications and Consumer Action Network	Leep
Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Association	OZeWAI Australian Web Accessibility Initiative
Adult Learning Australia	Professor Julian Thomas, RMIT
Centre for Inclusive Design	Start Broadband
Centre for Social Impact Swinburne	The Smith Family
Connecting Up	Dr Chris K Wilson, Research Fellow, Swinburne University
Associate Professor Michael Dezzuani, QUT	Women with Disabilities Australia
Good Things Foundation	



everyone's family



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(WWDA)

Copy to:

The Hon Karen Andrews MP
Minister for Industry, Science and Technology

Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash
Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business

The Hon Paul Fletcher MP
Minister for Communications, Cybersafety and the Arts

The Hon Josh Frydenberg MP
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The Hon Stuart Robert MP
Minister for Government Services

Senator the Hon Anne Ruston
Minister for Families and Social Services

The Hon Dan Tehan MP
Minister for Education