

Department of Premier and Cabinet
Office of Digital Government
By email: dgov-administrator@dpc.wa.gov.au

14 September 2020

Digital Inclusion Blueprint Consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission.

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 everyone in Australia. The ADIA is supported by Infoxchange and backed by Google and Telstra.

Our vision is to reduce the digital divide and enable greater social and economic participation for everyone in Australia. We believe everyone in Australia should be able to make full use of digital technologies.

The Department's consultation draft

The ADIA commends the Department on its Digital Inclusion Blueprint consultation draft. It is encouraging to see a well thought through, whole of state government approach.

The ADIA supports the Department's strategy of addressing digital inclusion through its four pillars of connectivity, affordability, skills and design. These four pillars are broadly in line with the ADIA's own approach to digital inclusion, which is:

Digital Inclusion		
<p style="text-align: center;">Affordability</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Addressing availability and affordability of internet services.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Removing cost as a prohibitive barrier - Individual's access to devices and the internet 	<p style="text-align: center;">Ability</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Ensuring everyone has the capabilities and confidence to benefit from and complete activities on the Internet</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analysis of digital capability programs being 	<p style="text-align: center;">Accessibility</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Allowing everyone to use the internet including those living with disability, from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds, or with other needs.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensuring websites are

	<p>provided to understand gaps and overlaps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating a Digital Capabilities Framework to provide a common understanding of what it means to be a digitally capable individual - Implementing a consistent way for individuals and community organisations to find out what is available locally by way of programs and resources to encourage digital inclusion. 	<p>compliant with accessibility standards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensuring whole of government adherence to accessibility requirements suitable for public procurement of ICT products and services
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A proposed addition to the work on Skills

The ADIA commends the Department on the identification of the various initiatives in the consultation draft. In addition, the ADIA suggests an addition to the work proposed on Skills: that the WA Government leverage opportunities to promote the development and adoption of a National Digital Capabilities Framework.

A National Digital Capabilities Framework would define the digital skills Australians need. This would provide a common language and understanding as governments, the private sector and community organisations continue to deliver programs to develop Australians’ digital capabilities.

In the view of the ADIA, it is important the framework is driven by the Federal Government, in partnership with the States and Territories. With a myriad of programs currently underway all focussed on developing people’s digital skills, it is necessary to have a Government-backed shared understanding. This will support organisations to work together to increase digital capability across the country, ensuring a more productive and connected society.

The Framework would be a guideline - not regulatory in nature. It would articulate a common language and shared understanding of what it means to be digitally capable.

The Framework would define the key capabilities that every Australian requires in order to safely and effectively benefit from and contribute to the digitally enabled world. This framework will provide a common language for discussing the digital capabilities Australians should possess. It will clearly articulate the capabilities that the sector is working to equip Australians with.

The Framework would act as the basis upon which to examine the range of capabilities that training programs currently cover; addressed to which audiences. It would enable identification of gaps and overlap to support efficient and effective expenditure of combined resources to give every Australian the best chance of having the digital capabilities necessary to be digitally included.

The Framework would inform measurement of digital capabilities of Australians to enable tracking of a common understanding of progress against a core set of capabilities.

In terms of development the Framework - There is currently an array of work both in Australia and internationally to articulate what it means to be a digitally capable individual. The ADIA has examined these various Frameworks and includes at the ANNEXURE (*Annexure - Digital Capabilities: International and Domestic Frameworks and Skills*) a summary of the existing Frameworks and the capabilities they include. This work could be leveraged in developing an Australia specific Digital Capabilities Framework.

The most notable example of work in this space to date is from the Federal Department of Education, Skills and Employment which is piloting the inclusion of essential digital skills in the [Australian Core Skills Framework](#) (ACSF). The ACSF is intended for use by the Federal Government in evaluating Registered Training Organisations' applications for funding, meaning it is very limited in purpose and has not been created with the wider set of digital capabilities programs in mind. Further, the current ACSF only includes essential digital skills to a very basic level. If it were to be useful for the purposes described above, it would need to extend to illustrate the capabilities a more competent digital citizen needs to fully participate in society and the economy. Having said that, the ACSF could be a valuable starting point for creating a more widely relevant National Digital Capabilities Framework.

Additional comments on the consultation draft

Connectivity and Affordability:

- The ADIA supports the Department's proposed strategy of leveraging opportunities to influence sustainable pricing in telecommunications and digital technology, as well as mitigating costs for increased data usage.
- The ADIA believes that affordability and access issues can be tackled by:
 - Incorporating NBN rollout and wireless plans to demonstrate progress towards 100% connection across Australia.
 - Assessing which affordability measures taken in the immediate response to COVID-19 can be retained going forward. This may include a low cost permanent entry level option from the NBN.¹
 - Spearheading efforts to support low income and vulnerable populations to access devices.

¹ For more information visit ACCAN's 'No Australian Left Offline' page, available: <https://accan.org.au/no-australian-left-offline>

- Identifying and funding free public wifi access points in community centres, libraries and other public locations.

Skills and Ability

- The consultation paper defines a digitally able person as someone with the 'skills to use digital technology'. The ADIA believes that 'skills' form only one aspect of digital ability and could instead be thought of in terms of 'capability' and 'confidence'.
- Digital ability is about ensuring everyone has the capabilities and confidence to benefit from and complete activities on the Internet. The capabilities necessary are essential and basic skills that will enable people to navigate the digital world, such as using email, setting up online accounts, keeping passwords secure and utilising online services like banking, shopping and completing government forms. Also, as Australian businesses adapt to a world with COVID-19, employees must be digitally capable to support a digitally transformed business.
- It means they have the knowledge and confidence to safely, securely and discerningly navigate different devices and the internet. It is a commitment to lifelong learning and adapting to new technologies and platforms. It means they can make sound judgements on the safety and authenticity of a product, service or information source. Digital capability encompasses the ability to do certain things online, as well as to do them safely and effectively.

Accessibility and design

- The Department's 'design' pillar is broadly similar to the ADIA's definition of 'accessibility'. From the perspective of the ADIA, accessibility refers to supporting everyone to use the internet including those living with disability, from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds, or with other needs posed by current barriers built into online technologies. As the consultation draft recognises, it is vitally important to enable meaningful engagement with digital technology by applying inclusive and universal design principles for online and digital services.
- In order to make substantial steps towards achieving accessibility, the ADIA supports:
 - Moving towards all government websites being compliant with accessibility standards (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines - WCAG 2.1).
 - Ensuring government adherence to the Australian Standard AS EN 301 549, *accessibility requirements suitable for public procurement of ICT products and services*.
 - Incentivising the adult learning sector to incorporate inclusion and accessibility in ICT and design courses by 2022.

The State of Digital Inclusion in Western Australia

As the Department's consultation draft recognises, the latest Australian Digital Inclusion Index published in 2019 shows:

- WA's digital inclusion score is 0.6 points below the national average and ranks fourth out of Australia's eight states and territories.

- Improvement in WA's score has not been consistent - the state's score rose from 55.0 in 2014 to 56.4 in 2015, but fell to 55.8 in 2016.
- Since 2016, digital inclusion has improved in WA, with the ADII score for the state rising to 57.4 in 2017, 59.8 in 2018 before reaching its current level of 61.3.
- Since 2014 WA has reported steady annual improvements in access, underpinned by a steady take-up of NBN fixed broadband services.
- By contrast, affordability declined in each year between 2014 and 2017.
- WA's digital ability score rose 7.8 points in the past five years, from 43.0 in 2014 to 50.8 in 2019.
- In line with national trends, Western Australians who have lower income, education, and employment levels tend to be less digitally included.
- Western Australians aged 65+ recorded the lowest ADII score (46.2) of all age cohorts in 2019.
- West Australians with disability have an ADII score of 53.0, which is 8.3 points below the state average.
- Several sociodemographic groups in WA are more digitally excluded: people in Q5 low-income households, people aged 65+, people who did not complete secondary school, people not in the labour force and people with disability.

With the economy and society digitising rapidly, it is vital that the WA Government continue its work to address digital inclusion. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the most vulnerable Australians were being left behind. While Australia learns to live with COVID-19, many of the programs and services forced to digitise will not revert back to operating as they did before the pandemic. This will only highlight the digital inequity in Australia. The ADIA and its members are committed to improving digital inclusion in Australia. With a coordinated approach, we can work in unison to lessen the digital divide and give Western Australians the capabilities they need to thrive in a modern, digital society.

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

Yours faithfully



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