



SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND DATA CENTRES

Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance
1 September, 2026

Committee Secretary

Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications

PO Box 6100, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Re: Senate Inquiry into artificial intelligence and data centres

Dear Committee Secretary,

Despite advancements, and significant economic and social benefits on offer, nearly 24% of Australians remain digitally excluded, with stark divides along geographic, socio-economic, and demographic lines. Key barriers include affordability, access, and ability—core pillars essential for equitable digital participation.

Digital inclusion is a vital factor in spreading the benefits and limiting the potential harms of Artificial Intelligence (AI). With respect to this inquiry, it is specifically relevant to the potential impacts of AI on Australian communities.

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) highlights a persistent digital divide across society, with pronounced gaps for First Nations communities, older Australians, people with disability and individuals in low-income households. Challenges remain for improvement across all three inclusion pillars, while ability - as the lowest scoring pillar - presents a particular opportunity for focussed attention, particularly as AI becomes more prevalent.

Digital exclusion exacerbates broader social inequities, impacting education, employment, and access to essential services like telehealth, government services and banking. Conversely, enhancing digital inclusion offers significant benefits, with conservative estimates projecting \$467 million in annual economic contributions from improved digital participation of highly excluded groups.

Like other emergent technologies previously, AI presents a risk of further compounding or accentuating digital exclusion. Its rapid onset and pervasive nature highlight the need for consistent and coordinated action, including a standardised approach to enhance generalist entry-level digital skills and literacy.

The Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance has consistently sought to draw attention to these challenges and opportunities throughout the development of the Federal Government's National AI Plan. As Australia looks to harness AI across business, government and broader society, there is a corresponding requirement to ensure that as many people as possible are equipped to participate effectively.

While the National AI Plan includes high-level aspirations to spread the benefits and mitigate the risks of AI, we are yet to see this translate into meaningful action to ensure that digitally excluded people are not left out or more vulnerable.

Australia's positive embrace of AI in the national interest represents a significant and compelling opportunity for government to define how to approach equity, inclusion and community capability.

AI certainly brings risk of accentuating existing problems and deepening divides, and equity must be on the table from the outset. Meanwhile, as the broad success of AI relies on mainstream adoption, inclusion, equity and capacity strategies are an important factor in maximising productive engagement.

It is also worth noting that effectively addressing issues around AI capability in the community - and by extension the enablers of digital inclusion - helps to instil confidence and empowers people to engage more safely. This has the flow-on effect of helping mitigate a wide array of risks, not limited to security, privacy, online harms and evolving skills requirements. Meanwhile, AI has a very real potential to enhance the capacity and capability of the not-for-profit and community sector working at the frontlines of disadvantage and digital exclusion.

As the Committee considers the potential impacts of AI on Australian communities, we ask that equity issues are on the table, particularly with respect to digital inclusion.

ADIA has previously called for a national approach to digital inclusion, advocating for accountability and coordination at federal level to help overcome fragmentation across government and the community sector. We have also called for a fresh focus on digital ability, with actions to build digital skills and literacy across the community, helping all Australians to engage effectively in the digital world. This is clearly an imperative in the AI dynamic.

To assist the Committee in its understanding of these issues, we commend the most recent [Australian Digital Inclusion Index](#) as an important resource outlining the current state of digital inclusion. We also offer our paper, [A National Approach to Digital Inclusion](#), which outlines our thinking on national leadership and responsibility in this space. Meanwhile, we commend the [UK Digital Inclusion Action Plan](#) as a template for inspiration, noting its emphasis on cross-portfolio coordination and sector engagement, while setting a coherent long-term, evidence-based vision and principles.

While we recently welcomed the establishment of the Office of AI to coordinate a national interest approach to AI, we are concerned that it may not have the scope to address the challenges we have outlined. Improved digital skills and literacy will be fundamental to ensure all Australians are able to engage confidently and safely with AI, and we are hopeful that the Office of AI can play a role in coordinating responses in this area.

Specifically with respect to skills and literacy, we believe there is a significant opportunity for Australia to adopt a national common language on digital ability, a definition of digital literacy, and a minimum benchmark of the level of digital ability we aspire for all Australians to achieve. This work should reflect needs across digital connectivity, media and AI literacy, including with respect to issues around safety and confidence.

Recognising that the challenges and opportunities of improved community AI capability and digital inclusion span cross-government responsibilities, the ADIA believes that this inquiry can play an important role in helping establish a foundation for coordinated action on these issues.

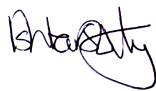
The stark requirement to upscale AI capability and capacity in the community means that this initiative should serve as a platform to build momentum around a central digital inclusion policy, leveraging government's convening and coordinating power and role in leading the national agenda.

We are grateful for the opportunity to put these matters forward to the Committee.

Yours faithfully,



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About the Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance

The Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance (ADIA) is a shared initiative with over 500 not-for-profits, businesses, academic and community organisations, and government agencies 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. Supported by Infoxchange, Telstra and Google, we work to enable collaboration and advocacy on key priorities for those organisations who work daily to advance progress on digital inclusion. Our work is guided by a governance and strategy committee - including representation from Infoxchange, Telstra, Google, Swinburne University of Technology, Good Things Australia, The Smith Family, the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Alannah & Madeline Foundation, The Inclusive Design Collective and Education Services Australia.