30 November 2017

Digital Economy Strategy Team
Department of Industry, Innovation and Science
GPO Box 2013
Canberra, ACT, 2601
By email: digitaleconomy@industry.gov.au

RE: The Digital Economy Strategy: Opening the conversation

Response from the Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance (ADIA) to Question 21

We would like to thank the Australian Government for providing the opportunity for us to contribute to this timely conversation. We support the approach to develop a new digital economy strategy for Australia and envisage one that includes all aspects of economic and social life in Australia.

In responding to this consultation we have chosen to specifically address question 21 which seeks to explore the opportunities we have in Australia to bridge the digital divide and the benefits that digital technologies present for social inclusion.

The Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance

The Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance (ADIA) is a coalition of more than 200 organisations from across government, community, business and academic sectors working together to accelerate action on digital inclusion. It was formally launched in Sydney in August 2017 by the Hon. Angus Taylor MP, Assistant Minister for Cities and Digital Transformation.

The ADIA (www.digitalinclusion.org.au) emerged from the momentum developed by the National Year of Digital Inclusion (2016) which was an integral part of the Go Digi Program (www.godigi.org.au), and the 2016 release of the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (www.digitalinclusionindex.org.au) where a number of community, corporate and government bodies identified the need to work in partnership in order to "move the needle" to increase digital inclusion.

As such, the ADIA is a response to the need for a national and coordinated approach to digital inequality. Through collaboration and information sharing we believe we can amplify the work of the industry and locate the gaps for future initiatives.

Supported by not-for-profit Infoxchange and backed by Australia Post, Google and Telstra, the ADIA's vision is to harnesses the collective skills, knowledge and capabilities of organisations across the country to help reduce the digital divide.

The underlying value of our operating model is to welcome any contribution that people, organisations and businesses are willing to make. The ADIA is facilitated by a backbone, a steering committee and volunteer contributions from those that share our vision.

The ADIA has three major areas of focus:

- To raise awareness of the issue of digital inclusion
- To build momentum to address digital inclusion as a major policy issue
- Accelerate collective action in the three critical areas of Affordability, Digital Accessibility and Digital Ability.

One of the key value points of the ADIA is its ability to leverage the collective experience and resources of participating organisations for action. For example since the launch eight Alliance working groups led by organisations including Lively[1], nbn and Queensland University of Technology have been established to bring the work of the Alliance forward. The projects are summarised below.

Current ADIA projects 2017

Project Name	Project aim 2017	Project Lead
Raising Awareness	Development of campaign strategy to raise awareness of digital inclusion with identified audiences across government and the broader community.	David Spriggs – CEO Infoxchange
Event Accessibility Checklist	Work with ADIA backbone to develop a practical checklist and resource to help people host events that are inclusive of everyone's needs.	Natalie Collins– Head of Special Projects Centre for Inclusive Design
Seniors and Digital Literacy	Facilitation of a network of organisations working on digital literacy for seniors and the development of a gap analysis of digital inclusion initiatives for seniors.	Anna Donaldson – CEO Lively

---

1 http://www.lively.org.au/about-us/

Network of Volunteer Digital Mentoring Programs	Assist organisations to establish digital literacy programs for their communities and clients. This will aim to establish three pilot programs at Evolve Housing, Chatswood Library and CESPHN mentoring.	Himalee Raj – DI Project Officer LEEP NGO
ADIA Collective Voice	Develop a draft set of principles on how to establish policy positions with the Alliance and development of ADIA policy positions.	Brendan Fitzgerald – Senior Executive 641 DI
What works on the ground?	Coordinate a community-research co-design event to establish priorities and opportunities to improve digital participation.	Michael Dezuanni – Associate Professor QUT
Mapping Digital Inclusion Work	Development of a prototype heat map of digital inclusion activities around the nation, aggregating various data sources.	Justin Melton – CSR Manager nbn
Connecting Customers	Development of an Inclusive Design checklist for NDIS service provider website for SME/commercial organisations to make their communications are more accessible	Natalie Collins – Head of Special Projects Centre for Inclusive Design

Q 21. What opportunities do we have to bridge the 'digital divide' and make the most of the benefits that digital technologies present for social inclusion?

The ADIA is well placed to work closely with the Australian Government to advance the capacity of all Australians to participate in the digital economy. The ADIA is working with community, corporate and government and as such we are able to provide government the opportunity to develop an inclusive approach to bridging the digital divide involving all sectors.

As highlighted by the digital economy consultation paper, the uptake of digital technology is high, however, many are still being left behind. This has impact across society and the economy and is now being tracked in increasing levels of granularity through such initiatives as the Australian Digital Inclusion Index[2].

Some headline findings include:

- the gaps between digitally included and excluded Australians are substantial and widening even though positive progress is being made overall,
- digital ability remains an area for further improvement,
- affordability remains a challenge for some excluded groups,
- the "age gap" is substantial and widening,
- women are less digitally included particularly those aged 65+,
- digital inclusion is low for people with a disability,
- Indigenous digital inclusion is low,
- geography plays a critical role with substantial difference between rural and urban areas.

The Digital Economy Strategy must be a fit-for-purpose support strategy that enables all people who are digitally excluded to realise the benefits of engagement with the digital economy. While awareness raising and skill development are critical, the Strategy must also recognise issues of affordability and access remain a concern for many.

We would advocate that additional co-designed and appropriate interventions are also required for other digitally excluded populations. This includes people on low levels of income, persons with limited education, persons experiencing unemployment, persons living with a disability and indigenous communities. This approach is essential - particularly where government services, programs and other initiatives are increasingly digitised.

Such interventions would benefit from being aligned with or channelled through the ADIA and built out from existing programs such as Tech Savvy Seniors[3], Indigimob[4], Be

---

2 Thomas, J, Barraket, J, Wilson, C, Ewing, S, MacDonald, T, Tucker, J & Rennie, E 2017, *Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: the Australian digital inclusion index 2017*, RMIT University, Melbourne.

3 https://www.telstra.com.au/tech-savvy-seniors

4 https://irca.net.au/projects/indigimob

Connected[5], Go Digi[6], Digi House[7] as well as state government and local government initiatives. This would allow integrated solutions with strong outcome and impact measurements to demonstrate success. Critically, this would allow the government to fully embrace a collective impact approach through the strategy.

Seniors

Australians aged 65 years and over are the most digitally excluded age group (13.6 points below the national average). The gap between this group and younger Australians has been steadily widening since 2015.[8] Research in 2014-15 found that 71 percent of adult Australians who have never accessed the internet were in this age group.[9] They are also less likely to engage with digital government services.[10] This will continue to cost government as the opportunity to streamline service delivery and gain the administrative efficiencies that come with digital services will be slowed.

The ADIA welcomes initiatives to improve digital inclusion for older Australians through training and support such as the Be Connected program; Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Association; Infoxchange and the Australia Post Go Digi program; and the Telstra/government partnerships to deliver the Tech Savvy Seniors initiative. However, it is important to ensure that these programs increase the capacity of older people to engage with critical business, community and government services in addition to facilitating greater connectivity via emails or social media.

With so many programmes operating in this space including the government funded Be Connected program, the commonwealth could benefit by ensuring that it builds on a collective impact rationale and enable all programmes focussed on older Australians to have a better impact. In doing so, the Commonwealth, via the Digital Economy Strategy would build on this work focussed on older Australians.

Rural and regional Australia

Digital inclusion is recognised as being far worse in regional and rural Australia than in capital cities.[11] This has a significant impact from an economic perspective. There are high numbers of small businesses and primary producers across rural Australia who increasingly need to access global markets. In fact many homes double as businesses whether they be farms, wineries or tourism operators. For them to operate in a

---

5 https://beconnected.esafety.gov.au/

6 https://www.godigi.org.au/?&ecid=p14356750772

7 https://www.godigi.org.au/digihouse

8 Thomas, J, Barraket, J, Wilson, C, Ewing, S, MacDonald, T, Tucker, J & Rennie, E 2017, *Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: the Australian digital inclusion index 2017*, RMIT University, Melbourne.

9 Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) Research snapshots *Digital lives of older Australians* 4 August 2016 accessed at https://www.acma.gov.au/theACMA/engage-blogs/engage-blogs/Research-snapshots/Digital-lives-of-older-Australians on 21/9/17

10 DWA +JM Bruce *Report Transformation Index Monitor Baseline Prepared for Digital Tranformation Office* July 2015 accessed at https://www.dta.gov.au/blog/how-do-australians-really-feel-about-digital-government-services/

11 Thomas, J, et al. Ibid p.17

competitive manner they not only need fast and affordable broadband, but also strong creative digital skills.

It should also be noted that no two towns are the same - as the Local Digital Profiling done by Optima Digital[12] demonstrates. It is dangerous for anyone in policy, provisioning or infrastructure to assume that all small regional centres are much the same. It is vital to have a good understanding of local digital profiles to set the baseline for identifying gaps and appropriate local interventions.

There is a high proportion of Indigenous Australians living in rural and remote locations that are in risk of digital exclusion[13]. Clear calls were made at the 2017 Broadband for the Bush Forum's 'Indigenous Focus Day' to include digital inclusion as a 'closing the gap' indicator and to develop pathways towards including Indigenous Australians in the digital economy.[14]

The Strategy must also recognise that there will always be a proportion of the population that will never engage with the digital world and should ensure that these people are not penalised with social or economic exclusion.

The ADIA and the government share the key aim to empower all Australians through digital skills and inclusion, positioning the Alliance as a strategic platform that could extend the work of the government. Our network and operating model has already been established by sponsors, however we would welcome further support, and leadership.

We believe the implementation of the strategy will be a priority as the impact of digital is fast moving. As such the strategy needs to also ensure that it can be agile, flexible and understand that some initiatives may fail but in doing so they provide great learning opportunities.

 The ADIA is in a strong position to lead and coordinate digital inclusion efforts that support the implementation of the new digital economy strategy through its extensive reach.   We invite the government to work with the Alliance to ensure greater public advocacy and awareness around digital inclusion as it relates to participation in the digital economy.

We would welcome further discussion and input on the issues raised in this submission. Please contact David Spriggs, Chair of the ADIA, by email dspriggs@infoxchange.org or phone 0417 190 319.

---

12 https://www.optimidigital.com.au/

13 Thomas, J, et al. Ibid p.17

14 http://broadbandforthebush.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Chrisine-RossReduced.pdf

Yours sincerely,

David Spriggs
Chair, Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance (ADIA)
CEO, Infoxchange
Email: dspriggs@infoxchange.org

Supported by

Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance
John Huigen – Alliance Facilitator

Spirit Communities
Ric Benjamin - Engagement Consultant

Australian Library and Information Association
Sue McKerracher - Chief Executive Officer

Start Broadband
Andrew Whelan – Managing Director

Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Association
Nan Bosler - President

Queensland University of Technology
Michael Dezuanni - Associate Professor

Digital Life Lab
Kate Davis - Senior Research Fellow

Yarra Libraries
Natasha Savic – Team Leader Customer Experience

Lively
Anna Donaldson – Chief Executive Officer

641 DI
Brendan Fitzgerald - Director