



First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group – Meeting 3

Communique

The First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group, established by the Australian Government in January 2023, had its third meeting on Thursday 20 April. The meeting was held in Darwin on Larrakia Country.

Attendees included the Hon. Michelle Rowland MP, Minister for Communications, members of the Advisory Group and Digital Inclusion Expert Panel, and members of the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.

The Advisory Group met to discuss options to address the digital divide for First Nations people and communities, and to consider the issues which have been raised by stakeholders, including the Central Land Council, Northern Land Council, the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, and the Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group.

Stakeholder Engagement

Members of the Advisory Group and Expert Panel discussed the key issues raised by stakeholders across recent meetings. These included:

- just like basic telephony, digital connectivity is a human right and is a key enabler for employment opportunities, telehealth, remote learning and access to government services. Like power and water, it is critical for community safety and wellbeing.
- affordability is a critical issue with the relative high cost of data on pre-paid plans compared to post-paid plans. Affordability challenges are amplified due to the reliance on pre-paid mobile connectivity for many regional and remote First Nations people.
- digital literacy is an important element of digital inclusion, not only in people understanding and navigating online service, but also ensuring First Nations people and communities understand their connectivity needs and the options available to them.
- there is an urgent need for greater coordination around how governments are responding to digital inclusion to help make sure resources go to the communities of highest need.

The members noted the positive experience they have had in having discussions with stakeholders so far, and the Advisory Group looks forward to continuing their engagement with community groups and peak bodies.





What the Advisory Group is working on

The Advisory Group discussed a number of ideas which are focused on some of the barriers to better digital inclusion for First Nations peoples and communities, including:

- ways to improve the national collection and use of First Nations data
- solutions to address the need for digital mentoring in remote communities
- possible pilots of alternative and complementary technologies to deliver high speed internet in remote areas
- solutions to address affordability issues of pre-paid data plans
- improving support for First Nations communities to identify their connectivity needs and options available to address them, including accessing grants
- engaging First Nations businesses in providing local solutions to closing the digital gap.

Update from the Minister

The Minister spoke about the announcement of a \$250 million plan for A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia, which will provide an additional \$10 million under Round 3 of the Regional Connectivity Program (RCP), which will help deliver digital connectivity solutions for First Nations communities in Central Australia.

It is expected the additional \$10 million will help address low levels of digital inclusion for First Nations people and communities, which will help support improved social inclusion and access to online services including health, education and social support services.

This commitment will increase the Government's total funding available under the combined grant opportunity to \$160 million, bringing together the RCP and the Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP) across two streams:

- \$110 million under Round 3 of the RCP, including indicative funding for solutions that improve telecommunications infrastructure in First Nations communities in eligible areas across Australia (\$15 million) and in Central Australia (\$10 million).
- \$50 million under Round 7 of the MBSP, including indicative funding of \$7.5 million for solutions that provide new mobile coverage in First Nations communities.

The Government will also extend the application period, providing more time for applicants to develop proposals that support First Nations communities and to ensure substantial engagement with stakeholders, including local communities and councils.

Next steps for the Advisory Group

The Advisory Group will continue to develop the digital inclusion initiatives discussed at the meeting. The Advisory Group is expected to hold its next meeting in July. For more information, feel free to email FirstNationsDigitalInclusion@infrastructure.gov.au.

