



Digital Inclusion Strategy Team

Via: digitalinclusionstrategy@customerservice.nsw.gov.au

Dear Digital Inclusion Strategy Team

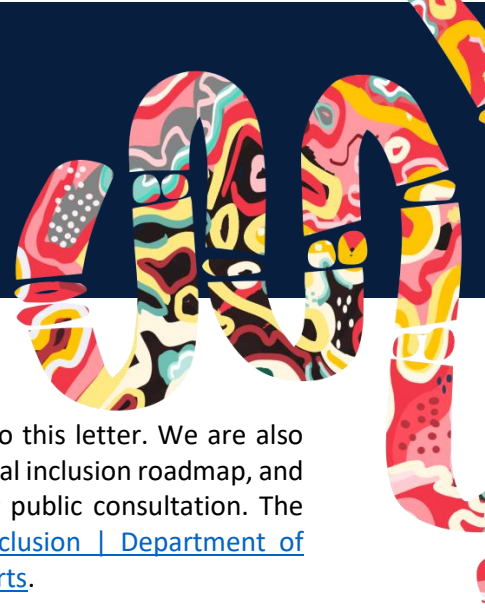
The First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group (the Advisory Group) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Digital Inclusion Strategy for NSW. We would also like to thank the NSW Government for its ongoing engagement with our work, including the contribution of Mr John Chan and Mr Terry Jamieson at our recent workshop in Alice Springs.

The Advisory Group was established by the Minister for Communications to provide advice on progressing Target 17 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which commits all levels of government to support equal levels of digital inclusion for First Nations Australians by 2026. Target 17 underpins Outcome 17 of the National Agreement, which is focused on ensuring First Nations Australians have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives.

Our advice is founded on a strong belief that digital inclusion is a human right and is a key enabler of a number of Closing the Gap targets (for example, those relating to health and education outcomes) and of economic growth, cultural preservation and promotion, and social connectedness for First Nations Australians. While we recognise the ambition of reaching equal levels of digital inclusion by 2026, we also understand that the cost of inaction is far higher, given the economic, social and cultural impact of First Nations Australians not enjoying the benefits of being online.

In October 2023, the Advisory Group published its initial report, which recommends practical measures to address access, affordability and digital ability, as well as improve the collection of data to measure the digital divide. These recommendations helped inform funding of \$68 million in the 2024-25 Budget. A copy of our initial report is available at [Initial Report | First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group](#) and we encourage you to consider its principles and recommendations in developing the scope and structure of NSW Digital Inclusion Strategy, including the importance of:

- place-based solutions and community empowerment
- targeted solutions to improve baseline connectivity and affordability
- culturally appropriate communication and engagement with First Nations people and communities
- ensuring consumer protections are robust and meet the needs of First Nations Australians
- improved alignment and collaboration across government and industry.



More information on these recommendations is included in the **appendix** to this letter. We are also exploring these issues further in the context of developing a First Nations digital inclusion roadmap, and encourage you to review the discussion paper which we have released for public consultation. The discussion paper is available here: [A roadmap for First Nations digital inclusion | Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts](#).

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these matters further. If you would like to contact us, please email our secretariat FirstNationsDigitalInclusion@infrastructure.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

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APPENDIX

The NSW Government should continue to engage with First Nations communities to identify what individual community priorities and aspirations are and shift towards a place-based approach.

When it comes to the benefits of digital technology for First Nations communities, the Advisory Group cannot speak on behalf of each community. Instead we have strongly advised that all levels of government should shift away from a one-size-fits-all approach towards place-based solutions. Place-based solutions means considering and acknowledging the cultural, geographical, economic and aspirational uniqueness of each First Nations community. This involves being flexible on how government works with First Nations communities, empowering communities to be informed decision makers and working together in partnership to achieve a shared outcome.

The Advisory Group respects and acknowledges that digital inclusion can mean different things for different First Nations people or communities, whether that means simply accessing essential services like online banking or Centrelink safely and securely, calling their loved ones anywhere in Australia, tuning in to local media or being at the forefront of digital innovation. It is important that First Nations people have a presence online, to share our experiences and views and shape a part of a digital ecosystem that is uniquely our own.

Ensure online communication and accessibility is culturally appropriate

Digital ability and online safety play a key role on an individual's willingness and capacity to engage online. We cannot simply assume people will go online by simply providing infrastructure. Our initial report highlights both the importance of and how to improve digital ability. In particular:

- more training and support is needed, especially for the elderly, people with disabilities, and community members with low English literacy
- online access facilities are needed to develop digital skills required for many workplaces, governance and leadership roles, and to access some services.
- digital programs run through either schools or community centres can create opportunities for skill development and creative or cultural content production

While we understand that social media can play an important role in communities and could be harnessed for increased awareness of programs and sharing of information, we believe that stronger regulation is required to reduce racism, misinformation and other potential harms spread via social media.

Ensure baseline connectivity meets the needs and preferences of First Nations consumers and that both access and device affordability are addressed



The Mapping the Digital Gap project and Australian Digital Inclusion Index note that for many First Nations communities there is a high take up of pre-paid mobile plans¹. Although pre-paid plans might not provide value for money and come with limited data, there can be a wariness from First Nation communities about post-paid plans following people experiencing negative mis-selling practices with some retail service providers. Current measures addressing affordability have also not kept up with the costs associated with getting and staying connected. This creates multiple disadvantages for First Nations communities who would like to get online but are unable to afford the ongoing cost or even the initial cost of purchasing a device that suits their needs.

To address the affordability of devices, the initial report recommends that government work together with industry to create a National Device Bank that can provide refurbished devices for people in need, valuable job opportunities for technicians, and reduce the amount of e-waste Australia produces. The Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance (ADIA) have also launched a paper titled “A Digital Inclusion Approach to Device Donation and Reuse”, which echoes our recommendation on the benefits of refurbished devices². We note that other states and territories are beginning to take action on this issue, whether through directly donating old government devices or through coordinating with local charities and organisations for the public to donate, and we would welcome the NSW Government taking a similar approach.

Ensure, regardless of technology, that consumer protection, cybersecurity and privacy are initiated by default and that both industry and government have accessible and appropriate ways for consumers to seek assistance and redress

We need to ensure there are appropriate consumer safeguards, data protection/cyber security and industry accountability in place so that First Nations Australians are able to access and use new technologies in a safe and supported way. With the constant emergence of new technologies, there is a risk that our regulatory frameworks will not be able to keep up, which could have a negative impact on consumers. This risk is compounded for many First Nations Australians, given that low levels of connectivity and digital literacy can make it difficult to assess the benefits and costs of different technologies.

At the same time the Advisory Group acknowledges that no online system is 100 per cent secure and that humans make mistakes. It is important that both industry and government have user-friendly, culturally appropriate avenues of communication to seek assistance and redress when things do go wrong. As a starting point, we suggest governments do more to ensure awareness of consumer protections and rights in First Nations communities, and work with industry to do more to streamline complaints and redress processes. It is also important for these materials to be translated into First Nations languages and/or Easy English to support those First Nations Australians for whom English is not their primary language.

¹ [Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2023](#)

² [Paper Launch: A Digital Inclusion Approach to Device Donation and Reuse - Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance](#)



Work across all levels of government and industry to enhance current initiatives, prevent duplication and promote collaboration

Closing the Gap is a commitment for all levels of government and the Advisory Group acknowledges the incredible work being done by NSW Government. It is important that the Digital Inclusion Strategy for NSW takes into account the work of local and Commonwealth government as well, this can include providing supplementary funding for successful digital inclusion initiatives so that they can be expanded or implementing similar or complimentary programs in other First Nations communities.

For example, at the last 2024-25 Federal Budget, the Australian Government announced \$68 million which includes funding to:

- deliver free community Wi-Fi in remote communities
- establish a First Nations Digital Support Hub
- establish a network of digital mentors to provide culturally competent support
- improve the national collection of data on First Nations digital inclusion

There is opportunity for NSW Government to expand on these initiatives, contribute or take part. More generally, our initial report also notes the need for governments to collaborate more effectively, particularly in terms of aligning future investment and effort so that outcomes for First Nations Australians are maximised. It is our view that improving the collection and use of First Nations digital inclusion data provides an opportunity for cross-jurisdictional collaboration and look forward to working with NSW further on this issue through Data and Digital Ministers Meeting (DDMM).