

The Treasury  
2021-22 Pre-Budget Submissions  
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### **Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance pre budget submission**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission.

The ADIA is committed to working in partnership with the Government, the private sector and community organisations to improve levels of digital inclusion across Australia. To this end, a short while ago we released the position paper - [A National Digital Inclusion Roadmap](#).

The core recommendations of our position paper are:

1. Developing a whole-of-government strategy – a National Digital Inclusion Roadmap – so businesses, nonprofits and government can work towards the same goal.
2. Creating a Digital Capabilities Framework to provide a common understanding and goal for what it means to be a digitally capable individual.
3. Assessing which internet services affordability measures taken in the immediate response to COVID-19 can be retained going forward. This may include a permanent low cost option for those on low incomes.
4. Move towards all federal, state and local government websites being compliant with the latest accessibility standards.

Our position paper and its recommendations have been referenced and supported by numerous stakeholders, including:

- [Australian Broadband Advisory Council](#)
- [Australian Industry Standards - Digital Transformation Expert Panel](#)
- [NBN Futures Group](#)

We would like to take this opportunity to urge prioritisation of funding these initiatives, and outline the potential costs involved in implementing the recommendations of the ADIA. We would be very happy to discuss these further and provide more detail as needed.

#### **1. Ongoing coordination across Government and support for the efforts to address digital inclusion**

Currently, there are numerous programs and initiatives to increase digital inclusion. Some are national, some are targeted at particular demographics, some are short-term, some are

online, some are group based. In totality, they lack coordination and there is not a common understanding of what the map of efforts looks like.

The ADIA has compiled a list of the most prominent government, private and community programs, strategies and frameworks in the digital inclusion space, the detail of which can be found in our [Position Paper](#).

There are 11 frameworks and strategies focused on specific workforces, all written without a common capability framework. Some organisations, such as the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research, recognise this as a problem and specifically call for a national digital skills framework to address this fragmentation.

The Federal Government alone has several departments working on projects looking at digital inclusion, without whole-of-government coordination. The projects span from Social Services to Defence to Health, all working in silos without collaboration or a shared end goal.

Currently, the scattered approach to improving digital inclusion is not providing as much of an impact as it could with greater coordination. Providing a central strategy would enable the Government to harness community and industry efforts to amplify its own efforts.

This strategy would be operationalised by a dedicated small team, perhaps within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. This team would, amongst other things, be responsible for:

- coordination across governments
- coordination with private and community sectors
- ongoing maintenance of the Digital Capabilities Framework (see below)
- implementing and maintaining a gap and overlap analysis of efforts to address digital inclusion
- creating, maintaining and distributing a comparison tool for cost of internet access per gigabyte across service providers (see 4. below)
- tracking of implementation and progress.

We believe the Government is best placed to determine the required funding for establishing and supporting a team of this nature.

## **2. Digital Capabilities Framework development**

A National Digital Capabilities Framework that defines the capabilities Australians need would provide a common language and understanding as the government, the private sector and community organisations continue to deliver programs to develop Australians' digital capabilities.

A Framework would become a reference for people and organisations as they develop the ability to safely and effectively benefit from and contribute to the digitally enabled world. It

would support potential employees and employers to clearly articulate levels of digital capability that are required for jobs.

Prioritising investment in developing and piloting / testing a National Digital Capabilities Framework would ensure Australia has a valuable reference document that:

- a. informs digital capability training programs, particularly where provided by community organisations and the private sector;
- b. builds a common language around development and attainment of digital capability. This would support people being able to clearly articulate their learning needs and achievements. It would form the basis for employers being able to describe the level of capability they need job applicants to have; and job seekers being able to articulate their level of digital capability.

The Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment is piloting the inclusion of essential digital skills in the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF). The ACSF is intended for use by the 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.

The ADIA recommendation is to extend the current ACSF work on digital capabilities to illustrate the capabilities a more competent digital citizen needs to fully participate in society and the economy. We urge the prioritisation of funding to extend the ACSF work to become a National Digital Capabilities Framework.

We believe that consultation with DESE would be valuable to inform a cost estimate on developing the ACSF work up to level 6 and extending it to ensure it is appropriate for use by a broad range of stakeholders.

### **3. Affordability measures for internet connectivity**

It is imperative to remove cost as a prohibitive barrier when accessing internet services and devices. Without affordable internet access and appropriate devices, school children have a harder time keeping up in school - both academically and socially, it makes it difficult for adults to find employment and lift their family out of poverty, and it is a barrier to access support services and stay socially connected.

As an immediate action, the affordability measures taken in the immediate response to COVID-19 can be retained going forward. This may include a permanent low cost option from the NBN. See ACCAN's 'No Australian Left Offline' initiative: <https://accan.org.au/no-australian-left-offline>. It would be a matter for the Government whether it chose to subsidise these measures or require the market to bear it.

In the medium term, the ADIA recommends that, like any foundational utility, those on low incomes should automatically be afforded discounts for their internet services. Again it would be a matter for the Government whether it chose to subsidise these measures or require the market to bear it.

Also in the medium term, the team established to operationalise the central strategy on digital inclusion (see 1. above) could create an easy comparison tool for cost per gigabyte for both fixed and wireless internet access across service providers, that includes information about expiry dates for use of data. This would be a valuable tool for community organisations and agencies such as Centrelink as they support families to make choices about the internet service option best suited to them. There would be a cost associated with creating and maintaining this comparison tool, as well as ensuring its delivery to the organisations for whom it is most relevant and training staff in how to leverage it. This cost could be built into the operational budget for the team established to operationalise the central strategy on digital inclusion (see 1. above).

#### **4. Accessibility**

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.

In order to make substantial progress towards achieving accessibility, the government should:

- Move towards all federal, state and local government websites being compliant with the latest accessibility standards (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines - WCAG 2.1).
- Ensure whole of government adherence to the Australian Standard AS EN 301 549, accessibility requirements suitable for public procurement of ICT products and services.

There should not be additional cost beyond associated with these efforts, beyond regular operating budgets. What is, however required, is prioritisation of this issue in governance and culture efforts. For example, progress on the accessibility measures identified above could be reported on by each Department at Secretaries meetings or through another appropriate governance vehicle. Setting the expectation and targets at the top will drive culture and behavioural change.

Thank you for your consideration of our submission. In 2020, we adjusted our lives to an online world. Even before the pandemic, Australians were being left behind because they did not have the affordable access or the skills necessary to participate in a digital world. Now, with COVID-19 changing the way we live, addressing digital inclusion must be a priority so all Australians can participate in every aspect of our economy and society.

We would be pleased to discuss these matters with you further.

Yours faithfully



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