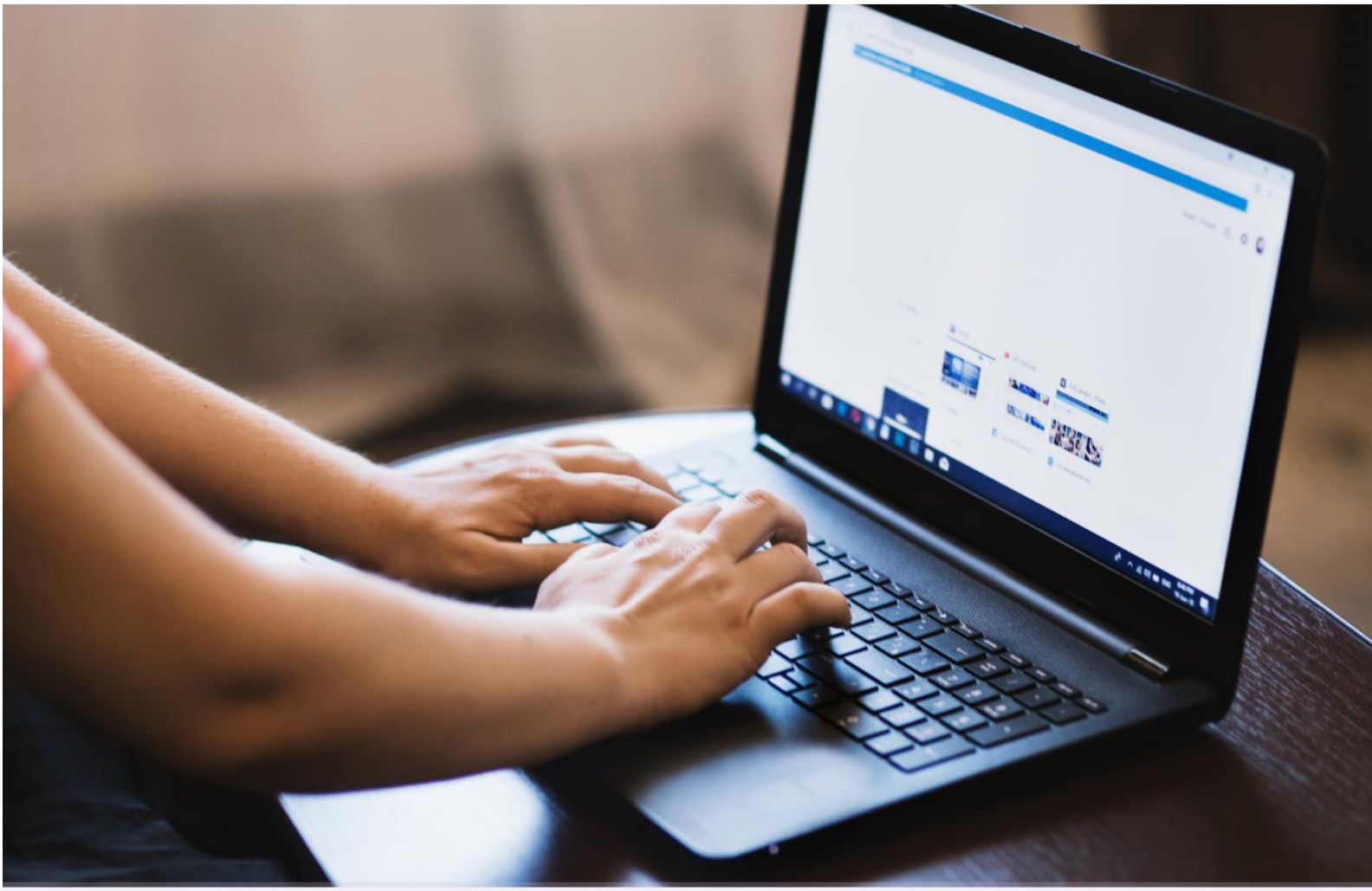
# A Review of Digital Inclusion in Tasmania



3P ADVISORY
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# Executive Summary

Digital inclusion ensures that every Tasmanian, regardless of their circumstances or location, can confidently and affordably access the digital world. From staying connected with loved ones to accessing healthcare, education, job opportunities, or government services, being digitally included is essential for fully participating in modern life.

Despite significant progress since the rollout of the NBN, Tasmania continues to lag behind other states on the three main components of digital inclusion: access, affordability, and ability, as reported by the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII). Nearly 37.2% of Tasmanians live in socially disadvantaged areas, and many rely on costly prepaid mobile data plans that compound barriers to digital engagement. These challenges are particularly pronounced in rural and regional communities, where digital skills training and affordable connectivity options remain limited. Without intervention, these barriers risk further entrenching social and economic inequalities.

While focusing on all three measures, the review has had a more dominant focus on enhancing ability—ensuring all Tasmanians have the opportunity to develop foundational digital skills. In part this is due to the availability of data relating to access to adequately lead to detailed findings and recommendations.  In terms of ability, community consultations and literature reviews revealed that people value local, trusted support provided in accessible community hubs they already frequent for a wider range of purposes, such as Libraries Tasmania, Neighbourhood Houses, Service Tasmania outlets, Child and Family Centres, and Men's Sheds. Key attributes of effective support include personalised, on-demand, and patient guidance, tailored to immediate needs. Many interviewed relied on more informal support through family and friends, rather than a community-based provider.

The findings also highlight that a volunteer-based model is an appropriate framework for delivering digital inclusion support, provided volunteers receive consistent, high-quality training and work within a clearly defined scope of support. Without adequate knowledge in areas like cybersecurity and scams, the model risks being ineffective. Regional variations in digital inclusion needs further highlight the importance of a flexible, targeted approach aligned with the socio-economic characteristics of communities.

Tasmania has a unique opportunity to embed digital inclusion into government strategies that focus on moving services online and front-line services, leveraging community strengths and a statewide volunteer training initiative. This approach can ensure that all Tasmanians, from a young job seeker accessing online training in a regional library to an elderly couple in a remote town using telehealth, have the digital skills and resources needed to thrive in the modern world. By implementing these recommendations, Tasmania can build a more inclusive and equitable digital future, empowering individuals and strengthening communities.

# Summary of Findings, Priority Recommendations and Rationale

| Key Findings | Recommendations | Rationale |
|---|---|---|
| **Persistent Disparities**: Tasmania continues to lag on access, affordability, and ability—the three pillars of digital inclusion—with regional areas and socio-economically disadvantaged groups facing the greatest barriers. | Targeted investment in high-need geographical areas identified through data analysis.<br><br>Develop a long-term infrastructure plan to address connectivity and affordability gaps. | Ensures resources are directed to the areas of greatest need, addressing systemic inequities.<br><br>Improves accessibility and affordability in underserved regions. |
| **Focus on Ability**: This review prioritises strategies to enhance foundational digital skills for all Tasmanians, addressing gaps in knowledge and confidence. | Standardised volunteer training to build the role of Digital Champions within communities.<br><br>Public awareness campaigns to promote available digital inclusion resources. | Provides consistent, high-quality digital support to enhance foundational skills and confidence.<br><br>Reduces barriers to engagement and increases uptake of programs. |
| **Community Preferences**: Community members expressed a clear preference for trusted, local support provided in hubs they already frequent, for example: Libraries Tasmania, Neighbourhood Houses, Child and Family Centres, Men's Sheds, and Service Tasmania outlets. | Embed digital inclusion support in trusted hubs (e.g., Libraries Tasmania, Service Tasmania outlets, Child & Family Centres and a range of NGOs). | Embedding services in familiar, frequently visited locations increases accessibility and trust. |
| **Volunteer-Based Model**: A volunteer-driven approach remains viable but requires a standardised training framework to address risks and ensure that volunteers are equipped to define the scope of their role and refer or have resources to support contemporary challenges like cybersecurity and scams. | Develop a statewide volunteer training program addressing risks like cybersecurity and scams. Align digital inclusion efforts with the new Tasmanian Government Volunteers Strategy | Addresses knowledge gaps and ensures volunteers are equipped to handle evolving challenges & mitigate risk. |

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| | | Ensures sustainability through cohesive volunteer recruitment and support. |
| Implications for OACs: The OAC model, while historically significant, no longer aligns with contemporary digital needs of most of the population. Many services offered by OACs duplicate those available in other community settings, highlighting the need for a more integrated approach that prioritises areas with limited or no other options for support. | Phase out OACs, integrating their functions into broader frontline government and community services.<br><br>Support existing OAC volunteers with upskilling and roles in Libraries Tasmania or similar frontline sites. | Avoids duplication of services and redirects resources to underserved areas.<br><br>Smooths the transition for communities and retains valuable volunteer expertise. |

# Recommendations- detailed

The recommendations developed through this review fall into three interrelated focus areas:

1. **Integrated Front-Line and Community-Based Response**: Enhancing accessibility and quality of support through digital champions, consistent training, and diverse service delivery methods.
2. **Governance, Oversight, and Monitoring**: Ensuring a coordinated, data-driven approach to digital inclusion through centralised governance, measurable KPIs, and monitoring frameworks.
3. **Infrastructure Investment**: Addressing affordability and access barriers while increasing public knowledge of available resources and services, and infrastructure investment and improvement

## Focus area one: Integrated, Front-line and Community Based Response

**1. Standardised Volunteer Training**

Aimed at ensuring consistency and quality in volunteer-driven digital support in conjunction with addressing knowledge gaps in emerging issues like cybersecurity and ensures a defined scope of support.

Develop and implement a statewide training program for digital volunteers (Digital Champions), modelled on successful initiatives like Wales' Digital Champions. This framework would:

- Build a network of "Digital Champions" embedded in communities.
- Provide training on topics such as scams, cybersecurity, and emerging technologies.
- Leverage existing resources, including those from the Good Things Foundation and Be Connected to ensure all Tasmanians can access up-to-date guides and information that has been quality assured and contains appropriate referral information if more specific information is required.

**2. Integration with the Volunteers Strategy**

Align digital inclusion efforts with the Tasmanian Government's new Volunteers Strategy to ensure a cohesive and sustainable approach to recruiting, training, and supporting digital volunteers.

**3. Phased Transition of OACs** A gradual shift allows for resource reallocation without disrupting services and ensuring all existing communities have a smooth transition.

Over the next three years:

- Transition OACs into broader community services, prioritising communities without alternative support.
- Redirect Digital Connections Grant funding to manage statewide volunteer training and support and create a range of resources that provide Tasmanians with easy-to-follow advice and support to engage online.

- Provide upskilling opportunities for existing OAC volunteers, integrating them into Libraries Tasmania or other community hubs.

**4. Targeted Investment**

Direct resources to high-need geographical areas identified through data analysis, ensuring equitable access to digital inclusion services.

Based on data analysis, there are some Tasmanian communities with a high level of digital exclusion indicators and a lower level of support available. Being guided by data can ensure the communities with the greatest risk of exclusion can be provided with targeted support to ensure local people are not further left behind. This is a natural shift 30 years on from the original location of OACs as the demographic profile of the Tasmanian population has shifted.

**5. Public Awareness and Infrastructure Investment**

Enhance public awareness of digital inclusion resources and where and how Tasmanians can get support and information.

Reduces barriers to engagement by improving connectivity and affordability through better supporting people to access some of the available programs they may not be aware of, or may struggle to enrol in.

**Implications for Online Access Centres (OACs)**

**Transition of Services**: Rather than maintaining separately branded OACs, their functions should be integrated into existing community locations like Libraries Tasmania, Service Tasmania outlets, and a range of NGOs such as Neighbourhood Houses. Whilst a number of OACs are co-located with other services such as with Libraries Tasmania sites and Neighbourhood Houses, this is different to and not as effective as fuller service integration as they are co-located rather than integrated into the Libraries Tasmania Service.

It is <u>not</u> suggested that Digital Connections Grants to OACs would cease on 30 June 2025, but that in consultation with the individual OACs and based on the needs of individual communities, OACs would be phased out over the next three years, with the exception of communities where alternative sources of support were not available.

**Focus on Gaps**: Prioritise resources for communities without other support options to ensure no area is left behind. This is highlighted in the Appendices in the data analysis where Tasmania has communities with multiple variables of digital exclusion indicators (low income, older population, low levels of literacy etc.) and also have lower levels of front-line government and/or non-government service centres.

**Support for Volunteers**: Offer existing OAC volunteers opportunities to continue their roles within Libraries Tasmania or other organisations, with access to upskilling through a standardised training framework. Libraries Tasmania and a range of NGOs already have a pool of volunteers who work in various roles with Tasmanians. By incorporating the existing OAC volunteers into the existing volunteer pool, it provides greater opportunities for co-ordination, peer support, shared training and a collegial environment.

In line with the scope of the review and themes emerging from the review, the following additional recommendations are provided.

## Focus Area 2: Governance, Oversight, and Monitoring

1. Establish a high-level, multi-agency governance group to oversee digital inclusion initiatives, ensuring alignment across stakeholders and accountability.
2. Define clear roles and responsibilities for government and non-government stakeholders to enhance collaboration and have maximum leverage of available resources.
3. Where State Government policies or strategies introduce an online service, ensure there is a specific action and budget to support Tasmanians and ensure equity of access.
4. Identify and agree upon measurable Key Performance Indicators to track progress and outcomes for digital inclusion initiatives. (in line with PESRAC recommendations)
5. Implement a centralised monitoring framework with clear reporting timelines to ensure transparency and accountability.

## Focus Area 3: Infrastructure Investment

1. Scope the feasibility of a long-term digital infrastructure plan targeting public and affordable housing, to increase equitable connectivity. This includes ensuring new social housing is digitally connected prior to occupancy and implement annual upgrades for existing public housing to address affordability barriers.
2. Create a clear map of coverage across Tasmania to inform discussions aimed at addressing gaps.

# Introduction, review objectives and background

The digital landscape in Tasmania is evolving rapidly, with a significant shift towards online service delivery across all sectors, including government. Despite a range of long-term and one-off projects and supports, this transition has created a digital divide, where certain segments of the population are at risk of being left behind due to barriers in accessing and utilising digital technologies.

Despite improvements in digital access due to the NBN rollout, Tasmania remains one of the most digitally disadvantaged states in Australia. The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) indicates that while overall digital inclusion has improved, the benefits have not been evenly distributed. Low-income households, older Tasmanians, and those living outside urban centres face significant challenges in accessing reliable internet services and developing the necessary digital skills to navigate online platforms effectively.

It is within this context that the Tasmanian Government has commissioned 3P Advisory to undertake a review of digital inclusion in Tasmania. The objectives and scope of the review has been to report on Tasmania's digital inclusion needs, with recommendation for the most effective targets for investment to address these needs. The context, scope and methodology for the review is outlined below.

## Context for the review

Responsibility for digital inclusion programs within the Tasmanian Government is spread across a number of agencies. Some analysis of digital inclusion support has already been undertaken through the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC). DPAC is currently working on a Digital Inclusion Strategy for the Tasmanian Government. The Digital Ready for Daily Life team in the Department of State Growth is also closely involved, along with Libraries Tasmania, which administers the Digital Connections Grants programs on behalf of the Government.

A cross-agency reference group was convened to provide relevant background information, data and contacts, drawn from the following areas:

Chair: Digital Strategy and Services – DPAC

Digital Ready for Daily Life – State Growth

Service Tasmania – DPAC

Libraries Tasmania – DECYP

Jobs Hubs Tasmania – Skills Tasmania

## Scope

This review aims to:

- Provide a clearer picture of Tasmania's digital inclusion needs and identify cohorts and geographical areas within Tasmania that have the greatest need of assistance.
- Map the current ecosystem of organisations providing digital inclusion infrastructure, services and programs, at a state, federal and local level, including both government and non-government programs.
- Collate any existing data regarding the effectiveness of existing services and programs.

- Review digital inclusion strategies both nationally and internationally to find examples of approaches that may be effective in the Tasmanian context.
- Make recommendations regarding the most effective investments that the Tasmanian Government could make.
- Make recommendations regarding the future role(s) of Online Access Centres and the return on investment of the Digital Connections Grants program.

## Methodology

**Stage 1:** Desk-top review of existing Government and Community programs and services drawing from research, data and information provided by the Reference Group.

**Stage 2:** Consultation: interview with 24 stakeholders, including government officials, program administrators, OACS, community and government services, discussions with the general public at drop-in sessions at community based locations, 130 online submissions (see Appendix 2 for full list) to identify:

Areas of greatest need where investment would have the greatest impact.

Example of successful current programs.

Gaps in existing services.

Opportunities for the development of new approaches.

Stakeholders to include:

2 x Community Managed Online Access Centre representatives

Neighbourhood Houses representative

Smith Family representative

**Stage 3:** Findings Report

This report aims to provide an overview of the current state of digital inclusion in Tasmania, contextualising it within the broader Australian landscape. It explores the implications of the digital divide on social equity and provide targeted recommendations to enhance digital inclusion across the state.

# The role of government in digital inclusion

In the 21st century, digital inclusion is fundamental to ensuring equitable access to government services, economic opportunity, and full participation in society. As governments increasingly digitise their services and operations, the risk of exacerbating inequalities grows unless deliberate, active measures are taken to include all citizens in the digital ecosystem.

**Why Digital Inclusion Matters**

1. **Equitable Access to Services**: Online platforms are now the primary gateway to government services, including healthcare, education, social security, payments, regulatory and legal information. Without equitable digital access, citizens—particularly those in remote areas, lower socio-economic groups, or with limited digital literacy—are at risk of exclusion from essential services.
2. **Economic Participation**: The digital economy is a significant driver of employment and economic growth. Lack of access to digital tools and skills creates barriers to employment, entrepreneurship, and participation in the modern workforce, perpetuating economic disparities.
3. **Social Inclusion**: Digital connectivity facilitates family, personal and civic engagement, access to information, and social cohesion. Exclusion from technology diminishes individuals' ability to engage with their communities and participate in democratic processes.
4. **Emerging Technologies**: The rise of AI, smart infrastructure, and the Internet of Things makes digital literacy and access essential for engaging with the evolving technological landscape. Without government intervention, existing inequalities may deepen as technological advances become further out of reach for vulnerable populations.

**The Role of Governments**

1. **Leadership and Equity**: Governments have a moral and legal obligation to ensure all citizens have equal opportunities to access services and resources online. This includes creating policies and programs that address a range of gaps in access.
2. **Addressing Barriers**: Active measures are required to overcome the primary barriers to digital inclusion—affordability, access, and ability. Government programs can provide subsidies, promote the development of community-based access points, and invest in training initiatives for digital skills.
3. **Building Trust**: Governments must ensure citizens feel safe and confident engaging with digital systems by implementing robust cybersecurity measures, privacy protections, and digital literacy campaigns that build trust in online platforms.
4. **Catalysing Partnerships**: Governments are uniquely positioned to bring together stakeholders from the private sector, non-profits, and community organisations to create coordinated and scalable digital inclusion efforts. Public-private partnerships can amplify resources and innovation.
5. **Long-term Sustainability**: By embedding digital inclusion into economic and social policy frameworks and strategies, governments can future-proof communities, ensuring ongoing adaptation to technological advancements and societal needs.

**Broader Benefits of Digital Inclusion**

- **Enhanced Government Efficiency**: Digitally inclusive populations enable more efficient service delivery, reducing costs and improving outcomes for both citizens and Tasmania.
- **Social Cohesion and Resilience**: Closing digital divides strengthens societal cohesion, supports emergency responses (e.g., through digital communication tools), and enhances overall community resilience.
- **Global Competitiveness**: A digitally capable population ensures Tasmania remains competitive in the national and global economy, attracting investment and fostering innovation.

Governments play a pivotal role in bridging the digital divide to ensure no one is left behind. Digital inclusion is not just a skill, technical or economic challenge but a societal imperative that underpins equity, resilience, and contributes overall to Tasmania's productivity. Without proactive government involvement, the ongoing evolution of the digital environment risks further entrenching inequalities rather than the opportunity of a proactive tool to support and address them.

# Tasmanian Context

Digital inclusion in Tasmania is a critical issue that reflects broader socio-economic disparities within the state. The 2023 Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) highlights that while Tasmania has made some progress in digital inclusion, it continues to face significant challenges, particularly in comparison to other Australian jurisdictions. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the digital transformation across various sectors, making access to digital services essential for full participation in social, economic, and civic life.

**Current State of Digital Inclusion in Tasmania**

According to the 2023 ADII, Tasmania recorded an overall digital inclusion score of 58.1, which is below the national average of 73.2. This positions Tasmania as the most digitally disadvantaged state in Australia for the sixth consecutive year. Approximately 54,000 Tasmanians are highly excluded from the digital world, with around one in four Tasmanians unable to fully participate in economic, social, and community life due to digital exclusion.

The ADII measures digital inclusion through three key dimensions: Access, Affordability, and Digital Ability. In 2023, Tasmania's Access score improved to 69.8, but this is still significantly lower than the national average of 72.0. The Affordability score for Tasmania stands at 95.0, reflecting improvements but still indicating that many Tasmanians experience affordability stress (ADII-2023-Summary_FINAL-Remediated.pdf, 2023). The Digital Ability score remains a concern, with Tasmania scoring 46.6, the lowest in the country (Tascoss Digital Inclusion Report, 2023).

**Socio-Economic Disparities**

The socio-economic landscape of Tasmania is a significant factor contributing to digital exclusion. Approximately 37.2% of Tasmanians live in areas classified as socially disadvantaged (Tascoss Digital Inclusion Report, 2023). This demographic is more likely to experience barriers to digital access, affordability, and ability. For instance, the ADII indicates that there is a substantial digital inclusion gap of 32.9 points between the highest and lowest income quintiles in Tasmania (Tascoss Digital Inclusion Report, 2023).

Geographic disparities also play a crucial role in digital inclusion. While Hobart has made gains in digital inclusion, other regions, particularly in the north-west, lag behind. The ADII shows that rural Tasmania has a significantly lower digital inclusion score of 55.7, compared to Hobart's score of 61.3 (Tascoss Digital Inclusion Report, 2023). This geographic divide mirrors socio-economic disadvantage, with many rural areas lacking the necessary infrastructure for reliable internet access.

**Digital Literacy and Ability**

Digital literacy is another critical component of digital inclusion. The 2023 ADII highlights that while there have been improvements in digital ability at the national level, Tasmania continues to struggle. The Digital Ability score of 46.6 indicates that many Tasmanians, particularly older individuals and those with lower educational attainment, lack the skills necessary to navigate digital technologies effectively (ADII-2023-Summary Report).

Older Tasmanians, in particular, face significant challenges, with a Digital Ability score of just 29.3, which is considerably lower than the state average (Tascoss Digital Inclusion Report, 2023). This age gap in digital ability is concerning, especially as more services transition online, leaving older individuals at risk of exclusion.

**PESRAC Recommendations – continued relevance.**

The Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC) was convened in 2020 in response to COVID-19 pandemic. In its final report in March 2021, PESRAC made several recommendations aimed at addressing the digital divide in Tasmania. These recommendations emphasised the need for clear, ambitious, and achievable targets for improving digital access, affordability, and ability. PESRAC's call for the establishment of whole-of-government Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure progress in closing the digital divide is particularly relevant in light of the ongoing disparities highlighted in the 2023 ADII.

The implementation of these recommendations is crucial for ensuring that the gains made in digital inclusion are sustained and expanded. The lead agency for digital inclusion must take responsibility for overseeing and coordinating cross-agency programs, ensuring that efforts are aligned and adequately funded. Establishing a cross-sector digital reference group, as recommended by PESRAC, would facilitate collaboration among stakeholders and help to identify best practices and innovative solutions to enhance digital inclusion across the state.

The Tasmanian context for digital inclusion is characterised by significant socio-economic disparities, challenges in digital literacy, and the ongoing need for targeted interventions. The PESRAC recommendations provide a framework for addressing these issues, but their successful implementation will require a concerted effort from the Tasmanian Government and community stakeholders to ensure that no Tasmanian is left behind in the digital age.

# Summary of Tasmanian Government Digital Inclusion Initiatives

**Overview**

Tasmania has seen the implementation of several government-led projects and programs aimed at addressing digital inclusion, from infrastructure development to community-based training initiatives for individuals and small business operators. While these efforts represent a significant investment in bridging the digital divide, there is limited information available on evaluation, success measures, or return on investment (ROI). In the absence of whole-of-government measures of success, shared across agencies, it is challenging for policymakers to assess the effectiveness of these initiatives and make informed decisions about scaling, adapting, or discontinuing them. It also presents challenges in guiding future government investments decisions.

Long term investments in the Digital Ready for Daily Life and Digital Ready for Business are the two exemplar examples of more structured approaches to annually review and reassess needs. This is in part underpinned by consistency in the government staff who have overseen this program in conjunction with the digital coaches engaged to deliver it. Consistency in feedback captured by program participants, consistency in program data collection and the highly regarded nature of the program has provided a strong example of best practice.

In other Tasmanian and national examples, programs providing grants for community digital hubs or free Wi-Fi/internet access in disadvantaged areas are often well-intentioned but lack rigorous outcome tracking. In addition, many programs are focused on outputs such as number of hours open, number of people accessing support, number of hours of support provided, rather than focusing on outcomes such as:

- How many individuals have successfully improved their digital skills through these programs and no longer rely on these services for support?
- What are the long-term impacts on employment, education, and social connectivity for participants?
- Are these programs delivering measurable economic and social benefits relative to their cost?

**Lessons from Best Practices** The Digital Communities Wales program, for instance, integrates robust evaluation frameworks to track success metrics such as participant engagement, skill improvement, and community impact. These insights inform iterative program improvements and provide clear evidence of value for money.

The digital inclusion landscape in Tasmania features a range of programs led by various government agencies, each addressing critical aspects such as access, affordability, and digital ability. These initiatives aim to equip Tasmanians with the tools and skills necessary to participate fully in the digital age.

The overview of key initiatives, their objectives, timelines, and target demographics are based on information provided to the review by the Reference Group in conjunction with some publicly available information.

| Initiative Name | Lead Agency | Description |
|---|---|---|
| Digital Ready for Daily Life | DSG | A program focused on improving the digital skills of Tasmanians, particularly the vulnerable, through coaching and training sessions since late 2019. The funding for this program has predominantly been discontinued with the final element ceasing in June 2025. |
| Digital Ready for Business | DSG | A program designed to enhance the digital capabilities of local businesses. The funding for this program has now ceased. |
| Device Loaning Scheme | DECYP | Provides laptops and internet hotspots to students in Years 7 to 12 to support their learning off-site |
| Laptop Lockers | TASTAFE | A system for students to borrow laptops for educational purposes, ensuring access to technology |
| TFS/SES Volunteer Station Connectivity Project | DPFEM | A project aimed at enhancing connectivity for volunteer fire and emergency service stations across Tasmania |
| Digital Health Transformation | DOH | A strategy aimed at modernizing clinical information systems to enhance health outcomes across Tasmania |
| Disability Reference Group | DOJ | A group that consults individuals living with disabilities to improve inclusivity within the Department |
| DoJ websites WCAG compliance audit | DOJ | An initiative to ensure that Department of Justice websites comply with accessibility standards |
| Learning Management System | DOJ | A system designed to enhance the training and development of staff within the Department of Justice |
| Digital Inclusion - Digital Connections Grant program | DECYP – Libraries Tasmania | Provides funding to support community-managed Online Access Centres with Wi-Fi and equipment needs |
| Digital Inclusion Lifelong Learning programs | DECYP – Libraries Tasmania | Programs aimed at fostering lifelong learning through digital skills development |
| STEAM Programs - Early Learning | DECYP | Engages children aged 6 to 12 in STEAM activities to promote collaboration and communication |

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| STEAM - Lifelong Learning (school aged focus) | DECYP | Focuses on providing STEAM education to school-aged children to enhance their learning experiences |
| Digital Inclusion - Access to Wi-Fi, Internet, and Technology | DECYP – Libraries Tasmania | A service aimed at increasing access to digital technology and internet services across Tasmania |
| Adult Digital Literacy Service | DECYP | A program delivered by Libraries Tasmania to improve adult digital literacy skills through various learning formats |
| waranta tunapri - the response of Hospitals South | DOH | A framework to address barriers faced by Tasmanian Aboriginal people in accessing health services |

An assessment of current Tasmanian Government funded programs is provided here.

### Key Target Groups

The initiatives collectively generally have a focus on:

- Low-income households
- Older adults
- Students
- Emergency service volunteers
- General Tasmanian population

## Geographic Focus

Most programs are designed to serve statewide needs, ensuring that both urban and rural populations benefit.

### Digital Inclusion Areas

Programs address critical elements of digital inclusion:

- **Access**: Infrastructure and connectivity projects (e.g., Device Loaning Scheme, Volunteer Station Connectivity Project).
- **Affordability**: Providing low-cost or free access to devices and internet.
- **Ability**: Digital literacy programs targeting specific skills such as online safety and health navigation.

## Public and Philanthropic Digital Inclusion Programs current or previously available in Tasmania

Non-government organisations (NGOs) in Tasmania play a pivotal role in advancing digital inclusion, often delivering innovative programs supported by philanthropic funding. These programs fill critical gaps, particularly in communities with a range of disadvantage factors, by addressing barriers such as affordability, access, and digital literacy.

Many NGOs leverage their deep community connections to design and implement initiatives that are tailored to local needs. For instance, they may provide free or low-cost digital skills workshops, distribute refurbished devices to disadvantaged households and school students, or offer mobile data subsidies to those in need. Such efforts often target vulnerable populations, including low-income families, older adults, and people in rural areas, ensuring that support reaches those who need it most.

However, while these programs deliver tangible benefits, their sustainability often depends on continued philanthropic support. The lack of systematic evaluation and long-term funding models can pose challenges to scaling successful initiatives or integrating them into broader government strategies. The lack of a centralised, co-ordinated governance model for digital inclusion in Tasmania also presents challenges in a full picture of current demand and need across Tasmanian Government

Agencies and the NGO sector. By fostering stronger partnerships between NGOs, philanthropic entities, and government agencies, Tasmania can amplify the impact of these efforts and ensure a more cohesive approach to digital inclusion and the most effective leverage of resources.

A snapshot of Tasmanian examples is outlined below.

**Good Things Foundation –** provide funding to not-for-profit/charities and training resources to volunteers/mentors in a range of community settings including Neighbourhood Houses.

- **Programs**:
    - *Be Connected*: Targets seniors to improve digital literacy and online safety.
    - *Digital Sisters*: Focuses on supporting women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
- **Funding**: Grants range from $1,000 to $20,000 for community organisations.
- **Timeline**: Ongoing

**Telstra's Tech Savvy Seniors Program**

- **Objective**: Provide seniors with skills to confidently use technology.
- **Description**: Delivered in partnership with Libraries Tasmania, this program offers free workshops.
- **Funding**: Supported through a collaboration between Telstra and the State Governments.
- **Timeline**: Annual review and renewal.

**Digital Access Program (Smith Family)**

- **Objective**: Equip students from low-income families with devices and internet access.
- **Description**: Provides subsidised laptops and internet plans, alongside digital literacy training for families.
- **Funding**: National funding sources, with allocations specific to Tasmania.

## Tasmania Community Fund (TCF)

Through the range of grant fund rounds and focus areas the Tasmanian Community Fund from time-to-time provides funding for digital inclusion related programs. Over the last three years some examples include:

**WorkVentures $746 842**

This project will improve digital access and literacy for children across Tasmania, supporting up to 1,000 primary and high school children over two-years.

Three main barriers to digital inclusion in education are access, affordability and digital ability. WorkVentures will directly tackle these barriers by allowing more children to have access to

affordable technology, such as laptops, and provide education that means they can effectively use those technologies to engage with their learning.

The program will provide high-quality, refurbished technology that comes pre-loaded with video-based guides that educate children on how to be digitally literate. Phone based training for parents will be available, dedicated to encouraging the development of a healthy and safe relationship with the internet for their child.

**The Smith Family**

The Tasmanian Community Fund (TCF) sees the development of digital skills as equally important as literacy or numeracy skills and have funded The Smith Family's Digital Student2Student (DS2S) program to help children around Tasmania develop their digital and literacy skills through online peer-to-peer tutoring.

Through the DS2S program, students are selected by The Smith Family's partner schools as being eligible. Their families are then contacted by The Smith Family, and they work collaboratively to assess their digital access. If required, the family will be given a 'Digital Access Pack', which may include a device, data or training and support from digital mentors to ensure the family is digitally included. The children are then paired up with trained 'buddies' - students a few years older than them - that will support and foster their confidence in reading and using a computer.

## Environmental scan and literature review summary of best practice

A full environmental scan and literature review is provided in Appendix 1. Based on the environmental scan of digital inclusion approaches in Tasmania, nationally and globally, the key findings of common elements of best practices are outlined here.

1. **Collaboration and Partnerships**

Effective initiatives are often partnerships between government, private sector, and community organisations. For example:

- Telecom partnerships (e.g., UK's National Databank) ensure affordable internet access.
- Community collaboration (e.g., Deadly Digital Communities) fosters cultural relevance.

2. **Culturally Tailored Approaches**

Programs targeting specific populations, such as Indigenous or CALD communities, are more effective when they incorporate cultural sensitivities and localised content.

3. **Accessibility and Affordability**

Successful initiatives address cost barriers by providing free or subsidised internet access and devices (e.g., Canada's Digital Literacy Exchange Program).

4. **Embedded Training and Support**

Embedding Digital Champions within communities ensures that support is ongoing and locally accessible, as demonstrated by Wales' Digital Communities program.

5. **Use of Data-Driven Insights**

Programs leveraging data for targeted interventions, like New Zealand's Digital Inclusion Action Plan, deliver more effective and measurable outcomes.

This section provides a more detailed look at the Digital Communities Wales model as it provides a highly relevant and well-tested model for consideration in Tasmania.

**Spotlight on Wales Digital Champions model.**

The Digital Communities Wales (DCW) program is a flagship initiative funded by the Welsh Government to tackle digital exclusion and promote digital inclusion across Wales. With £6 million allocated for the program's continuation from 2022 to 2025, DCW is delivered in partnership by Cwmpas (formerly the Wales Co-operative Centre), the Good Things Foundation, and Swansea University. This multi-agency collaboration enables DCW to address digital barriers through a comprehensive and community-focused approach.

DCW operates on the premise that digital inclusion is essential for equitable access to services, economic opportunities, and civic participation. It offers a range of programs that provide tailored support to individuals and organisations, empowering communities to build the digital skills and confidence required to thrive in the digital age.

The program employs Digital Champions, trained staff and volunteers embedded in community organisations, healthcare providers, and social services. These champions assist individuals in developing basic digital skills, such as accessing online services, using email, and navigating digital tools for health, education, and finance.

Training and support are central to DCW's model:

- For Digital Champions, DCW offers in-depth training on digital skills, accessibility, and online safety.
- For the general public, free sessions address practical needs like using the NHS Wales app, managing finances online, and digital literacy for older adults.

DCW also works closely with public and private sector partners, ensuring its reach extends to rural and underserved areas. The program's flexibility, tailored training modules, and strong community partnerships have made it a leading model for tackling digital exclusion.

By focusing on equity and accessibility, DCW serves as a best-practice example for governments aiming to close the digital divide and enable inclusive digital participation.

**Lessons from Digital Communities Wales** The Digital Communities Wales model offers valuable insights for Tasmania. This initiative successfully embeds digital champions in local community hubs to deliver tailored digital skills training and support. By leveraging existing networks and services, the program ensures digital inclusion is accessible to all residents, especially those in areas with high levels of disadvantage. Key features of the Welsh model that translate well for Tasmania include:

- Comprehensive training programs for digital champions, focusing on issues like cybersecurity, scams, and navigating online services.
- Integration of digital support into locations where people naturally congregate or need to be supported in paying a bill, such as libraries, community centres, and public service outlets.
- A focus on empowering volunteers and staff to build digital confidence and resilience within their local communities.

By adopting a similar approach, Tasmania can expand the reach and impact of its digital inclusion initiatives. Embedding digital champions in Libraries Tasmania, Service Tasmania outlets, Neighbourhood Houses, Child and Family Centres, and Men's Sheds can create an environment where that support is localised, trusted, and responsive to the unique needs of each community.

# Detailed Findings

This section outlines the key findings in more details. Supporting qualitative and quantitative data and research relating to these are included in the Report and Appendix. The key findings are informed by the review methodology and draw from the evidence and sentiment captured through:

- Environmental scan of models and best practice locally, nationally and globally
- Qualitative data analysis based on interviews and survey data from stakeholders
- Quantitative data analysis of population and geographical need and inclusion analysis

**The current and emerging digital inclusion needs of Tasmanians.**

Tasmania continues to improve across a range of measures as reported in the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII). As part of the review of digital inclusion needs in Tasmania an analysis undertaken through qualitative and quantitative input provides insights into the current state of play.

Tasmania's digital inclusion needs continue to be shaped by our unique geographical and demographic profile, with a dispersed population across rural and regional areas and a significant proportion of the population experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. Some communities also still face barriers to reliable internet access and digital infrastructure, this is then compounded by lower income levels and low literacy and/or educational levels. In other communities, access is reliable, but affordability and ability remain consistent needs.

Despite these ongoing challenges, the "village" around individuals and communities rich in grass-roots support and services has resulted in many more Tasmanians accessing support beyond specifically branded options such as the Online Access Centres (OAC). The data provided to the review shows a decline in both the number of people accessing support through an OAC and a decline in the number of OACs. Family, friends, Libraries Tasmania, Service Tasmania front of house staff, Child and Family Centres, Neighbourhood Houses through to informal support within an individual or a community network demonstrates how more integrated options are becoming the norm. These options are preferred by many Tasmanians as they present "just in time" and immediate relevance opportunities that underpin the motivation for people to seek support. This multiple entry point approach is also contributing to overcoming the challenges that exist in awareness of what support is available and where to find it.

As part of the review process, many people were interviewed or participated in an online survey. Participants emphasised the need for **increased availability of support** (with extended hours, workshops, and remote support options), **improved internet speed and reliability**, and **simplified, user-friendly technology or online government services with clear instructions**. Additionally, affordable or free access to technology, personalised in-person support, and flexibility for specific needs would greatly enhance their ability to use technology independently. The analysis of the consultation input from Tasmanians highlights the importance of accessibility, user-centred design, and multiple community-based support options for digital inclusion. (Full thematic analysis of the stakeholder consultation is contained within the Appendices).

Beyond the experiences of Tasmanians and community-based providers and stakeholders, the review of has identified the challenge of finding a single, centralised source of data and knowledge relating to digital inclusion in Tasmania. This lack of centralised data sources within government makes it difficult to strategically inform multi-agencies decision-making processes. Comprehensive agency

representation through membership of a community of practice (COP), drawn from across agencies is providing an important point for sharing of knowledge and agency activity. However, the COP does not have an accountability or decision-making role at a whole-of-government level. The review has found that relevant information and funding is distributed across various platforms, reports, and agencies. This has been a constraint in the review process in terms of having a comprehensive picture of the current state of play, particularly at an infrastructure level. This can lead to inefficiencies and missed opportunities for comprehensive planning and targeted interventions. For example, where the Department of Health may be looking to roll out a telehealth solution to a local need, having access to centralised data to ensure an understanding of the range of variables that could impact the implementation - such as access or population profile or other digital exclusion factors would provide an informed, strategic approach.

The risks associated with a decentralised approach are significant, particularly for government planning of services and support for Tasmanians. Without centralised governance, planning and data, there is a higher likelihood of duplicating efforts, overlooking critical insights, and making decisions based on incomplete or outdated information. This can result in less effective policies and programs that may not fully address the needs of the community. Moreover, it can hinder the ability to track progress and measure the impact of initiatives over time.

In summary, over the last decade, there has been a rapid increase in online services and online socialising, and more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift and need to adapt quickly to online platforms. It is therefore timely to reassess both the governance and front-line support including the alignment of the range of existing support models such as Online Access Centres, with the need and demand by those in the community who are digitally excluded. This will inform a strategic approach for the decade ahead to ensure all Tasmanians can live a good life and co-exist in the digital world around them with access to the support they need.

## Quantitative data

The data review process has found that centralised and consistent data is challenging to access at a geographic or population level relevant to, and appropriate for, representing variations in need across the state. Whilst there is data available from various state and federal government sources, data availability and consistency limitations are a significant barrier to mapping current supports against variations in need.

Social, economic, and geographical circumstances are significant influences on digital inclusion of individuals and communities across Tasmania. Consideration of the social, economic, and geographical variations between communities is required to design digital inclusion supports and initiatives that are accessible and meaningful to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. This in turn will reduce gaps and avoid duplication and appropriately match the context of each community's strengths and needs.

Based on data availability and consistencies, there are significant limitations on:

- embedding this understanding of variations in need into how supports are designed, delivered and prioritised
- mapping how well supports align to need
- identifying future priorities.

To overcome this, for the purposes of this review, additional data was collected at a local government area level to identify variations in need, vulnerabilities and risk factors across Tasmanian communities.

In addition, geographic mapping was also conducted to represent the number and location of specific in-person services, across Online Access Centres, Libraries Tasmania and Service Tasmania Centres within each LGA. While this desktop-level collation and analysis was conducted to highlight the variations in need and capacity across Tasmania at this time, the absence of centralised data coordination, and consistency remains a significant issue. This presents a barrier to designing and implementing future initiatives as well as assessing the effectiveness and suitability of current supports.

This is true for both digital inclusion specific initiatives, but also for the services and supports other sectors and agencies are designing and implementing. Through limited access to digital inclusion specific data that highlights variations in access, affordability or capacity, and need at a community or even Local Government Area (LGA) level, agencies are less able to embed a digital inclusion element into policy or strategies. For example, should there be an intent to roll-out telehealth services into areas of workforce shortages – the lack of consistent and available data on the digital inclusion variations and specifics of Tasmanian communities, prevents this from being embedded within the design of this type of initiative. Not only does this limit the effectiveness of a range of initiatives, but it also creates further divides when those excluded digitally are not able to be considered and accommodated for meaningfully in these processes to reduce inequity.

In summary, the quantitative data process has been conducted to allow a point-in-time representation of how in-person services align alongside risk factors and vulnerabilities within Tasmanian communities. To move forward, it is critical to collaborate across agencies and system partners to develop a more robust and accessible dataset that reflects variations in digital access,

affordability, and capacity across the state. Such data will enable a comprehensive mapping of current supports against community needs, while also identifying gaps and avoiding duplication. By integrating this data-driven understanding into policy and program design, digital inclusion initiatives can be tailored to build on community strengths and address vulnerabilities, ensuring they are meaningful and accessible to those most at risk of exclusion.

This approach not only enhances the effectiveness of digital inclusion efforts but also supports broader social and economic goals by ensuring that services—such as telehealth, education, and government programs—are accessible to all. Embedding digital inclusion considerations into agency strategies is an essential step towards reducing inequity and fostering resilience in Tasmanian communities. Future efforts need to prioritise data coordination and consistency to enable evidence-based decision-making and sustainable improvements in digital inclusion outcomes.

## Qualitative data

In exploring the experiences of digital inclusion within the Tasmanian community, we conducted a series of face-to-face and online interviews and surveys/submissions with community-based service providers and the public. In addition, a number of interviews and a workshop with a range of state government agencies represented on the Reference Group was undertaken. A full list of the participants in the review are provided in the Appendices.

These qualitative insights offer a range of personal perspectives, highlighting the diverse challenges and successes encountered as Tasmania works towards improved digital inclusion. The following section provides the key findings from this qualitative data, shedding light on the human stories behind the statistics and providing a deeper understanding of the barriers and opportunities that shape our collective digital landscape. In addition to the personal stories from Tasmanians, a range of service provider and government agency staff sentiment are included in the themes.

**Usage patterns:**

Community members incorporate digital technology into their lives in various ways. Many use social media, email, and messaging apps to stay connected with family and friends, especially to reduce experiences of isolation in rural areas. Digital tools are essential for managing daily tasks like online banking, paying bills, and accessing government services. People also turn to streaming services, gaming, and online courses for entertainment and learning, while search engines are frequently used for quick information access on topics of interest.

**Needs for enhanced engagement and simplified systems:**

To engage more effectively with digital technology, community members expressed the need for more accessible support services, such as extended hours, personalised support as well as workshops at the various sites they access support through.

Financial barriers often prevent access to devices and internet services, highlighting a need for affordability options to enhance engagement. Users of government and commercial services desire simpler systems with straightforward instructions, and practical, hands-on learning opportunities. They also describe in-person workshops or easy to follow, step by step “videos” as the most effective way to build confidence and skills.

**Challenges:**

Several challenges hinder digital engagement, including poor internet connectivity, particularly in rural areas, which disrupts access. Security concerns about scams and hacking deter usage, while rapid changes in technology create frustration as users struggle to adapt to updates and new devices. Many participants, especially older adults, lack confidence in their digital skills, making them reluctant to engage with technology independently.

**Effective Supports:**

Despite challenges, various supports help people navigate digital technology effectively. A common theme among effective supports is the provision of personalised, patient assistance. Libraries Tasmania, Neighbourhood Houses, Online Access Centres and Service Tasmania are highly valued for offering tailored and/or generic support, while family and friends often serve as informal tech support, providing immediate help. Libraries Tasmania and community hubs such as George Town offer accessible technology and learning environments, and more confident users rely on online

tutorials and forums for self-help. These supports, characterised by personalisation, availability, and patience, are crucial for fostering digital inclusion. Support that is highly relevant to an immediate need was also highlighted by participants, for example, a Child & Family Centre staff member guiding an online form relating to a child's enrolment or a Service Tasmania staff member guiding someone through an online payment option.

**Gaps and Unmet Needs:**

Significant gaps remain in digital inclusion efforts. Reliable and affordable internet access is still lacking in many rural areas and where there is internet access, affordable devices present barriers. For others, there is a need for more accessible and tailored training, particularly for older adults and those with low levels of literacy. Many participants called for a mix between comprehensive digital literacy programs that address a variety of skills and learning styles and availability of support across the range of government front-line services they interact with on a regular basis.

**Participants/Stakeholder - Key Suggestions for Improvement:**

To improve digital inclusion, participants suggested a range of flexible support models. These varied and included more front-line staff in government and community services who are trained to support the public, increased access or awareness of free public Wi-Fi spots, access to a range of pre-recorded generic information to guide people for specific tasks, like registering for online banking or checking whether a car registration was still up to date. Some participants suggested a live chat support. Simplifying online government processes with clearer instructions and fewer steps is desired, and there is potential for cross-sector collaboration to enhance digital education and inclusion efforts.

**Use: How People Engage with Digital Technology**

Through our conversations with community members, we learned about the varied ways they incorporate digital technology into their lives:

- **Staying Connected**: Many people mentioned using social media, email, and messaging apps to maintain relationships with family and friends. For some, this was essential for reducing isolation in rural areas.
    - *"I send and receive emails and use my mobile phone to keep in contact with family, friends, and community."*
- **Managing Day-to-Day Needs**: Internet banking, paying bills, and accessing government services were frequently mentioned. *"I mostly use it for sending and receiving emails, paying bills, and banking."*
- **Entertainment and Learning**: People used streaming services, gaming, and online courses for relaxation and skill development. *"Banking, telehealth, YouTube, and watching Netflix or catch-up TV, email."*
- **Information Access**: Search engines were frequently used for quick research, such as recipes or local information. *"Looking up information, stuff I might want to know about, like what's at Bunnings."*

**Needs: What Would Help People Engage More**

Community members shared a range of needs to enhance their digital experience:

- **Accessible Support Services**: Community based support including Online Access Centres (OACs), Libraries Tasmania, Neighbourhood Houses and other frontline services were appreciated by people requiring support, with requests for longer hours and more workshops. *"More hours of availability and workshops would help."*
- **Affordable Technology and Connectivity**: Many expressed financial barriers to purchasing devices or internet services. *"I cannot afford my own computer or printer."*
- **Simpler Systems**: Participants often found online systems and platforms complex and difficult to navigate. *"Just give me plain English instructions."*
- **Practical Learning Opportunities**: Hands-on, in-person workshops were seen as the most effective way to build confidence. *"I like going to courses where they teach me how to use technology better."*

**Challenges: Barriers People Face**

Participants highlighted several recurring obstacles that make it difficult to engage with technology:

- **Connectivity Issues**: Rural participants frequently cited poor internet access. *"A storm will knock the internet out."*
- **Security Concerns**: Many were worried about scams and hacking. *"I'm haven't got a clue what to do to or how to know whether something is a scam or if someone is trying to hack me."*
- **Rapid Changes in Technology**: Adapting to updates and new devices was a source of frustration. *"When technology gets upgraded, just when you've mastered it, you have to learn new things and start all over again."*
- **Low Confidence**: Participants often lacked confidence in their digital skills, especially older adults. *"I'm technophobic and need assistance regularly to operate a computer."*

**Supports: Where do people go for help?**

Despite challenges, several supports were highlighted as effective:

- **Libraries Tasmania**: Described by people as providing accessible technology and skilled staff and learning environments. *"Libraries help provide access and really great support, especially when online centres are closed."*
- **Online Access Centres**: These centres were described by people as being available for providing support in areas where there are no other options. *"The staff and volunteers are very patient."*
- **Family and Friends**: Informal networks were key for troubleshooting and family members also raised the need for some basic guides for guiding their family members. *"My daughter is very helpful; she knows a lot about technology."*
- **Self-Help Tools**: Confident users relied on tutorials and forums. *"I google most of my queries or watch YouTube."*

**Supports: What's Working Well**

Participants identified key sources of support that enable them to navigate digital technology effectively. These supports share common qualities that make them highly valued:

- **Personalised Assistance**: Whether from family, friends, or community-based resources, the most effective help comes from individuals who can take the time to understand the specific issue and provide tailored guidance.
- **On-Demand Availability**: Having access to someone who can help when a problem arises—whether a trusted family member or a skilled community volunteer—makes a significant difference.
- **Time and Patience**: The ability to receive one-on-one coaching, without feeling rushed or judged, helps build confidence and skills, particularly when it relates to an immediate and relevant online need.

While community-based access points are critical, participants spoke more of the qualities of the support than a preference to where the access points were located. These qualities—personalised, on-demand, and patient support—are critical to building trust and fostering a supportive environment digital inclusion.

**Gaps: Where Needs Remain Unmet**

Community members identified areas where digital inclusion efforts could be improved:

- **Rural Connectivity**: Many rural areas still lack reliable internet access. *"There are significant pockets of the community who require support to use technology or prefer in-person interactions."*
- **Accessible Training**: Participants called for more tailored workshops, particularly for older people or those new to technology. *"Older people need easier instructions."*
- **Affordability**: High costs for devices and internet services were a persistent barrier. *"Free computers and free internet would make it easier."*
- **Holistic Digital Literacy**: Some noted the need for comprehensive programs that address a range of skills and learning styles. *"Clients need help with smartphones, laptops, and online portals."*

**Ideas: How People Think We Can Do Better**

Participants shared practical suggestions to improve digital inclusion:

- **Flexible Support Models**: Many suggested having digital supporters/mentors available in communities or offering live chat support. *"Availability to ask my local Service Tasmania centres things, maybe on a chat arrangement."*
- **Sustainable Funding**: Expanding the resources and reach of the range of community-based access points and programs was a top priority. *"The local programs come and go; we need to have consistency in what is available —it's essential for many of us."*

- **Simplifying Design and Processes**: People wanted clearer instructions and fewer steps for online tasks. *"Very, very simple instructions would help."*
- **Cross-Sector Collaboration**: Respondents saw value in partnerships to address gaps. *"Every organisation forcing us to go online should contribute to an education program."*

# Quantitative Data:

Understanding digital inclusion across Tasmania requires a granular examination of variations in community need, vulnerabilities, and risk factors. While limitations in centralised and consistent data present ongoing challenges, additional data collection and analysis at the local government area (LGA) level have been undertaken to provide a clearer picture. This data aims to fill critical gaps by identifying key indicators of risk and resilience that influence digital inclusion outcomes across diverse Tasmanian communities.

The datasets selected for this analysis were informed by research and literature on factors that increase the risk of exclusion or enhance inclusion. By representing these indicators as percentages of each LGA's population, this approach ensures equitable comparisons across areas with differing population sizes. The resulting analysis offers insights into how vulnerabilities and strengths are distributed geographically, shedding light on the factors driving digital inclusion disparities and highlighting potential areas of priority for future interventions.

This section explores the findings from this quantitative data process, offering a foundation for evidence-based decision-making that supports equitable and effective digital inclusion initiatives across Tasmania.

The categories identified for analysis include:

- Age Groups identified as vulnerable to digital exclusion
- Income and Affordability
- Household Capacity

To complement this, a geographic mapping exercise was completed to represent the availability of specific in-person services that support digital inclusion, including Libraries Tasmania, and Service Tasmania centres and Online Access Centres, within each LGA. The total number of these supports was quantified and compared against the identified vulnerabilities and risks to digital exclusion within each community.

This analysis allowed for a ranking of LGAs into Tier 1 and Tier 2 communities, based on the convergence of multiple risk factors, higher proportions of vulnerable populations, and fewer-than-average in-person support options. Tier 1 communities were those with the most acute needs, characterised by a high percentage of the population experiencing multiple vulnerabilities and a lower-than-average Digital Inclusion Index score. Tier 2 communities displayed similar, albeit less pronounced, characteristics.

By aligning these findings with digital inclusion index scores, this approach identifies where targeted interventions are most urgently needed to address gaps, strengthen supports, and reduce digital exclusion in Tasmania.

## Risk and vulnerability indicators: data and rationale overview

### Vulnerable Age-groups to digital exclusion

% of population aged 0-14, 15-24 and 75+

A high percentage of the population in the age groups of 0–24 and 75+ can be considered a risk factor regarding digital inclusion due to the unique challenges these demographics face in accessing, using, and benefiting from digital technologies:

- **Age 0–24: Limited Autonomy and Resources**
  - Younger populations, particularly children and teenagers, often lack financial independence, restricting their ability to access digital devices and reliable internet without support from families or institutions.
  - Access to digital skills education may vary significantly depending on their socio-economic background, the quality of their school curriculum, and extracurricular opportunities. Inadequate digital literacy at this stage can lead to lifelong exclusion.
  - Vulnerabilities such as being part of disadvantaged households or rural/remote areas can further limit access to essential digital resources.
- **Age 75+: Barriers to Adoption**
  - Older adults often face physical, cognitive, and psychological barriers that impede their engagement with digital technology. These may include declining fine motor skills, eyesight, or memory, as well as anxiety or resistance toward adopting new technologies.
  - This age group may also lack digital literacy due to limited exposure during their working years or because they retired before the digital age became prominent.
  - Financial constraints, particularly for those relying on fixed incomes, can hinder their ability to afford devices or internet services.
  - The increasing shift to online services (e.g., healthcare, banking, social services) disproportionately affects this group, as they may be less equipped to navigate digital platforms effectively.

- **Shared Impacts: Dependency and Gaps in Support**
  - Both groups are often reliant on caregivers, families, or external institutions to bridge the digital divide. This dependency can lead to uneven levels of inclusion based on the support structures available.
  - Without targeted interventions, these demographics risk being left behind, amplifying existing inequalities in education, healthcare, social connection, and access to critical services.
- **Societal Consequences**
  - Limited digital inclusion for these groups not only impacts individual wellbeing but also has wider societal consequences. For the younger population, it can impede workforce readiness and innovation potential. For older adults, it can lead to increased isolation, poorer health outcomes, and reliance on overstretched traditional service delivery models.

## Income and Affordability

% age pensioners
% disability support pensioners
% female sole parent pensioners
% people receiving a JobSeeker Payment or Youth Allowance (other) long-term
% low income, welfare-dependent families (with children)
% Pensioner Concession Card holders
% Health Care Card holders
% Seniors Health Card holders

- **Pensioners and Support Recipients:**
  - **% Age Pensioners, % Disability Support Pensioners, % Female Sole Parent Pensioners**
    Individuals receiving pensions or disability support often face financial constraints that limit their access to digital technologies. Fixed or limited incomes can restrict their ability to afford internet services or digital devices, creating a barrier to digital inclusion.
    - The reliance on government assistance indicates a potential lack of disposable income to invest in the necessary technology for accessing digital services, further exacerbating digital inequalities.
  - **% People Receiving a JobSeeker Payment or Youth Allowance (other) Long-term**
    Long-term dependence on job-seeking or youth allowances suggests a precarious financial situation. This group may prioritise essential living expenses over digital connectivity, limiting their access to online resources necessary for job searching and skill development.
    - The lack of digital access can create a cycle of exclusion, reducing opportunities for employment and further interactions in a digital economy.
- **Low-income, Welfare-dependent Families:**
  - **% Low Income, Welfare-dependent Families (with Children)**
    Families in this category are likely to prioritise basic needs over technology, potentially leaving children without adequate digital resources for education and social development.
    - The digital divide in these households can perpetuate educational and social inequalities, as children may lack access to digital learning tools and platforms that are increasingly integral to modern education systems.
- **Concession Card Holders:**
  - **% Pensioner Concession Card Holders, % Health Care Card Holders, % Seniors Health Card Holders**
    Holding concession cards often signifies financial vulnerability. These individuals are at risk of digital exclusion due to the high costs associated with maintaining connectivity and purchasing devices.
    - For seniors, particularly, this can compound existing barriers such as technological literacy and adaptability, leading to increased isolation as more services move online.
- **Shared Impacts: Economic Dependency and Accessibility Gaps**

- Individuals reliant on government support or living in low-income households may depend on public services or community programs to access digital resources, leading to varied levels of digital inclusion.
- Without targeted financial support and affordable access to digital technologies, these groups risk being marginalised in an increasingly digital world.

• **Societal Consequences: Amplifying Inequality and Limiting Opportunities**

- Economic barriers to digital inclusion can exacerbate social inequalities, limiting access to education, employment, healthcare, and social services.
- Ensuring digital equity for these groups is crucial, as it impacts not just individual prospects but also broader societal wellbeing and economic growth by fostering inclusive participation in digital economies.

## Household Capacity

% people living in crowded dwellings
% households in dwellings receiving rent assistance
% people living in social housing
% people living in privately-owned rental dwellings
% in mortgage stress
% in rental stress
% Low income households under financial stress from mortgage or rent
% Low income households
% dwellings with no motor vehicle

• **Crowded and Assisted Living:**

- **% People Living in Crowded Dwellings:**
  - Overcrowded living conditions can strain resources and limit the personal space necessary for effective digital engagement. The lack of privacy and quiet environments can hinder activities such as online learning or remote work. Additionally, the increased number of occupants may lead to bandwidth challenges, affecting the quality and reliability of internet connectivity.
  - These conditions often indicate economic hardship, where financial resources are insufficient to secure adequate housing, impacting digital access and use.
- **% Households in Dwellings Receiving Rent Assistance, % People Living in Social Housing:**
  - Dependence on rental assistance or social housing often reflects financial vulnerability, which can result in limited access to digital technologies due to budget constraints. Residents in these situations may face challenges in installing technology, such as broadband, due to restrictions imposed by property owners or the physical limitations of the building infrastructure.
  - Frequent moves, common in rental and social housing situations, can lead to repeated costs for setting up digital services, further straining limited financial resources.
  - These households may prioritise essential expenses over digital connectivity, creating barriers to digital inclusion and participation in online services.

• **Rental and Mortgage Stress:**

- **% People Living in Privately-owned Rental Dwellings, % in Mortgage Stress, % in Rental Stress:**
    - Financial stress from high rental or mortgage costs can limit disposable income available for digital access. This stress underscores a precarious financial situation where digital needs are often deprioritised.
    - The constant financial pressure can also limit opportunities for upgrading digital devices or maintaining consistent internet services, exacerbating the digital divide.

• **Low-income and Financial Stress:**

- **% Low Income Households Under Financial Stress from Mortgage or Rent, % Low Income Households:**
    - Low-income households experiencing financial stress are likely to have limited access to digital resources, affecting their ability to engage with digital platforms for education, employment, and services.
    - The financial burden of housing costs can overshadow digital needs, perpetuating cycles of exclusion and limiting upward mobility.

• **Lack of Mobility:**

- **% Dwellings with No Motor Vehicle:**
    - Households without a motor vehicle may have limited access to locations with public internet or community digital resources, especially in areas with inadequate public transportation.
    - This lack of mobility can also signify broader economic constraints, affecting the ability to participate in a connected society.

• **Shared Impacts: Economic and Environmental Constraints:**

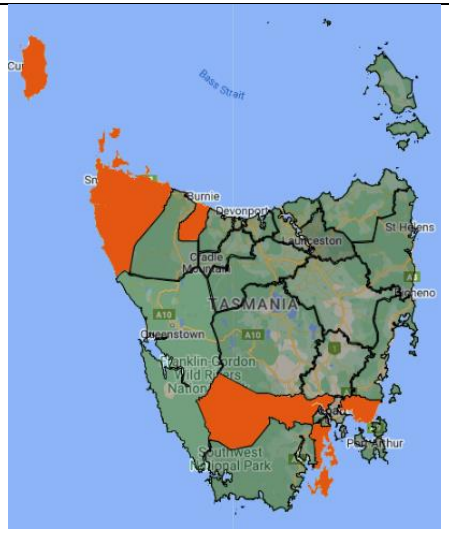
- Households under financial and spatial stress often face compounded barriers to digital inclusion, relying on external support and resources to bridge the gap.
- Without targeted interventions to address these economic and environmental challenges, these groups risk deepening digital exclusion.

• **Societal Consequences: Exacerbating Inequality and Reducing Opportunities:**

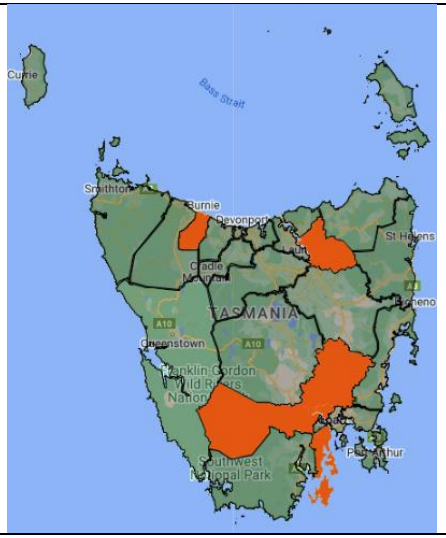
- Limited digital inclusion due to household capacity issues can further entrench socio-economic disparities, affecting access to education, employment, and essential services.
- Addressing these barriers is vital to fostering inclusive digital participation and enhancing overall societal resilience and development.

## Risk and Vulnerability Mapping:

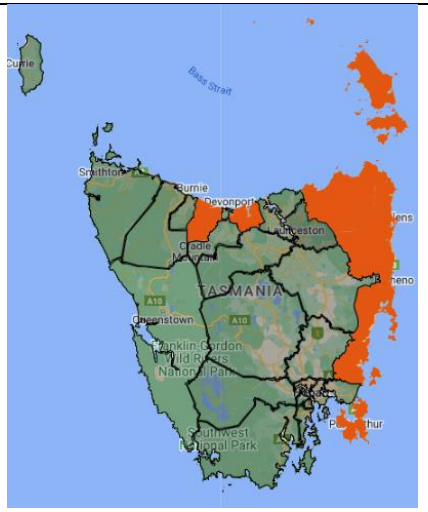
### Community Vulnerabilities and Risk Factors: Age




| highest % of population 0-14 | |
|---|---|
| Brighton | 22.7 |
| Circular Head | 19.4 |
| Burnie | 18.4 |
| King Island | 18.2 |
| Kingborough | 17.8 |
| Derwent Valley | 17.5 |
| Sorell | 17.4 |

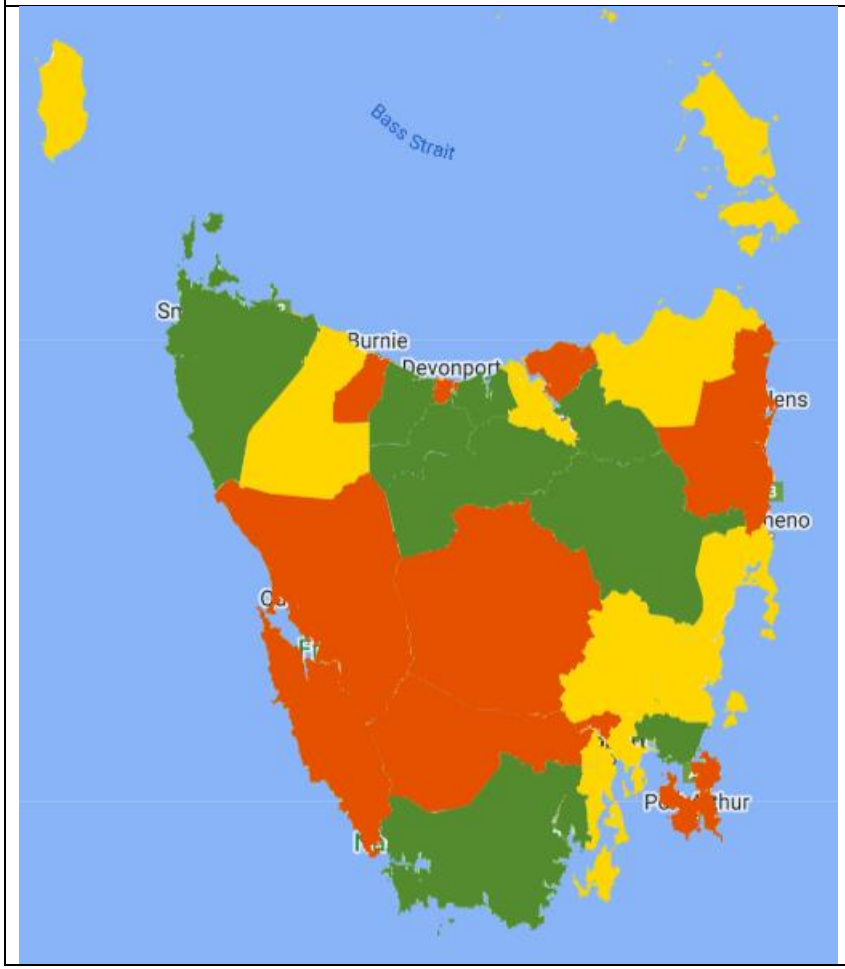



| highest % of population 15-24 | |
|---|---|
| Hobart | 13.5 |
| Brighton | 12.9 |
| Launceston | 12.5 |
| Derwent Valley | 12.4 |
| Burnie | 12.3 |
| Southern Midlands | 11.5 |
| Kingborough | 10.8 |




| highest % of population 75+ | |
|---|---|
| Flinders (Tas.) | 15.0 |
| Glamorgan-Spring Bay | 14.2 |
| Break O'Day | 12.3 |
| Tasman | 12.0 |
| Latrobe (Tas.) | 11.9 |
| Central Coast (Tas.) | 11.2 |
| Dorset | 11.1 |

## Community Vulnerabilities and Risk Factors: Income and Affordability




LGAs with the highest % of the population (top 25%) with income or affordability risk factors

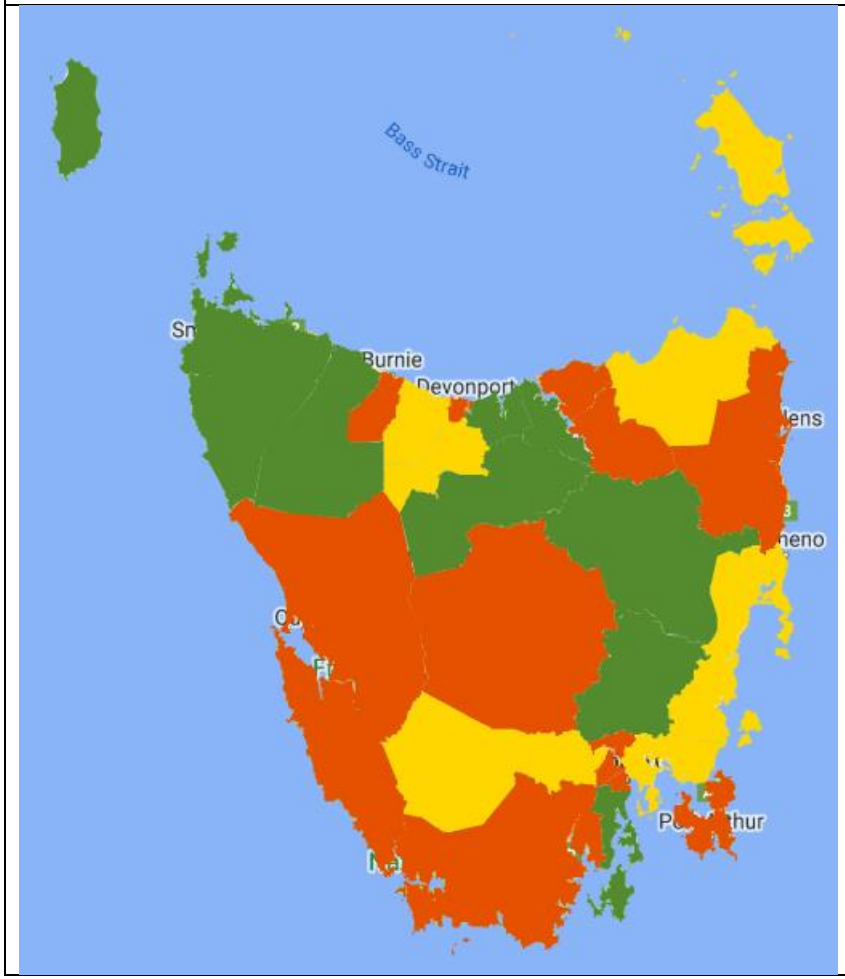
Key:

| |
|---|
| Top 25% for 0 income or affordability indicators |
| Top 25% for 1-2 income or affordability indicators |
| Top 25% for 3+ income or affordability indicators |

LGAs with the highest % of the population (top 25%) across 3 or more income or affordability indicators:

- Break O'Day
- Brighton
- Burnie
- Central Highlands (Tas.)
- Derwent Valley
- Devonport
- George Town
- Tasman
- West Coast

## Community Vulnerabilities and Risk Factors: Household Capacity




LGAs with the highest % of the population or households (top 25%) for household capacity indicators

Key:

| |
|---|
| Top 25% for 0 household capacity indicators |
| Top 25% for 1-2 household capacity indicators |
| Top 25% for 3+ household capacity indicators |

LGAs with the highest % of the population or households (top 25%) across 3 or more households capacity indicators:

- Break O'Day
- Brighton
- Burnie
- Central Highlands (Tas.)
- Devonport
- George Town
- Glenorchy
- Hobart
- Huon Valley
- Launceston
- Tasman
- West Coast

## Collated Analysis: Risk and Vulnerability VS availability and accessibility of in-person supports

| LGA | Age Vulnerability Indicators | Income and Affordability Indicators | Household Capacity Indicators | Total in-person supports |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Break O'Day | 🚩 | 🚩 | 🚩 | 6 |
| Brighton | 🚩 | 🚩 | 🚩 | 2 |
| Burnie | 🚩 | 🚩 | 🚩 | 2 |
| Central Coast (Tas.) | 🚩 | ✓ | ! | 3 |
| Central Highlands (Tas.) | ✓ | 🚩 | 🚩 | 2 |
| Circular Head | ! | ✓ | ✓ | 2 |
| Clarence | ! | ! | ! | 3 |
| Derwent Valley | 🚩 | 🚩 | ! | 4 |
| Devonport | ! | 🚩 | 🚩 | 3 |
| Dorset | 🚩 | ! | ! | 4 |
| Flinders (Tas.) | 🚩 | ! | ! | 2 |
| George Town | ! | 🚩 | 🚩 | 2 |
| Glamorgan-Spring Bay | 🚩 | ! | ! | 5 |
| Glenorchy | ✓ | ! | 🚩 | 2 |
| Hobart | ! | ! | 🚩 | 2 |
| Huon Valley | ✓ | ✓ | 🚩 | 5 |
| Kentish | ✓ | ✓ | ! | 2 |
| King Island | ! | ! | ✓ | 3 |
| Kingborough | 🚩 | ! | ✓ | 4 |
| Latrobe (Tas.) | 🚩 | ✓ | ✓ | 1 |
| Launceston | ! | ✓ | 🚩 | 5 |
| Meander Valley | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 5 |
| Northern Midlands | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 4 |
| Sorell | ! | ✓ | ! | 2 |
| Southern Midlands | ! | ! | ✓ | 3 |
| Tasman | 🚩 | 🚩 | 🚩 | 1 |
| Waratah-Wynyard | ✓ | ! | ✓ | 2 |
| West Coast | ✓ | 🚩 | 🚩 | 6 |
| West Tamar | ✓ | ! | ✓ | 4 |

Key:

| 🚩 | ! | ✓ |
|---|---|---|
| *High number in the top 25% for this indicator* | Moderate number in the top 25% for this indicator | Low number in the top 25% for this indicator |

## Data and Community Profile- Deep Dive

When reviewing the risk and vulnerability data alongside the number of in-person community-based services per community, there are clear indications of alignment between risk/service availability, alongside notable gaps. When looking at the communities with the highest indicators of risk and vulnerability across all categories, the following LGA areas stand out with high numbers (top 25%) across multiple indicators:

| Tier 1 | Tier 2 |
|---|---|
| • Break O'Day<br>• Brighton<br>• Burnie<br>• Tasman | • Central Highlands (Tas.)<br>• Derwent Valley<br>• Devonport<br>• Dorset<br>• Flinders (Tas.)<br>• George Town<br>• West Coast |

The analysis takes a nuanced approach when comparing high-risk communities to the availability of community-based, in-person supports within their respective LGAs. While elevated risk and vulnerability factors highlight a greater need for targeted interventions, the number of community-based support options reveals a more complex picture. In some cases, communities with higher-than-average risk factors also benefit from above-average in-person supports, suggesting that existing services may already be well-placed to address some challenges. Conversely, communities such as Brighton and Tasman, which have similarly high-risk indicators but fewer support options, may require greater prioritisation to ensure equitable access to services.

This underscores the importance of not solely assessing risk and vulnerability but also understanding the capacity, reach, and sufficiency of current supports. Balancing risk indicators with support availability allows for the identification of gaps and opportunities to optimise the distribution and delivery of integrated, community-based in-person supports. Revisiting prioritisation through this lens ensures that resources are directed to where they are needed most, enabling a more equitable approach to service provision.

Furthermore, this lens also highlights the importance of a cross-agency, whole-of-government approach to digital inclusion planning and prioritisation. Such collaboration is particularly critical when considering changes to service locations or the establishment of new supports. Aligning efforts across agencies ensures that decisions are informed by a comprehensive understanding of community needs, avoiding duplication of services while addressing gaps in the most vulnerable areas. This approach strengthens the overall capacity to deliver effective and sustainable support systems.

## Rurality Lens

When this analysis is then layered with rurality as a considered factor, the community context and capacity insight is further enhanced. There are multiple ways that rurality is classified, depending on context and purpose, with the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) and the Modified Monash Model (MMM) being two widely used frameworks. In the absence of available, up-to-date data regarding internet connections geographically across the state, this analysis has incorporated both the ASGS and MMM classifications to highlight the specific context of each high-risk Local Government Area (LGA). This dual approach ensures that the unique challenges of remoteness and population distribution are fully considered, providing a comprehensive understanding of how rurality impacts digital inclusion and access to support services.

As the research and literature regarding digital inclusion highlights (see Appendice), the more rural a location is, the less likely it is to have reliable and high-speed internet connections due to infrastructure limitations, such as fewer telecommunications towers or restricted fibre-optic coverage. Geographic isolation also means these communities often have fewer in-person support services, which are further compounded by limited access to public transport. The lack of reliable transportation options creates additional barriers for residents needing to travel to access essential services, education, or training opportunities.

Populations in rural and remote locations may also experience additional compounded challenges. These include lower population density making service provision less economically viable, higher travel costs, and reduced access to digital skills training. These factors collectively contribute to a widening digital divide, limiting the ability of residents in these areas to engage with services like telehealth, online education, and government programs.

By integrating rurality, as defined through the MMM framework and ASGS classification into this analysis, these structural barriers can be explicitly considered. This enables a more targeted and equitable approach to planning and prioritisation. It ensures that the specific needs of rural and remote communities are addressed and that solutions are designed to overcome both digital and logistical barriers to inclusion, tailored to the remoteness levels of each community.

## Community Context and Accessibility: A Multi-Layered Approach to Prioritisation

As shown, when multiple layers of analysis are conducted, the context of each community is better understood, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the variations in need and capacity across the state. By considering not just risk factors but also the availability and accessibility of in-person supports, as well as rurality and remoteness classifications, this approach provides a nuanced perspective on the challenges faced by different Local Government Areas (LGAs). This deeper analysis ensures that resource allocation and prioritisation strategies are informed by the unique circumstances of each community, ultimately leading to more equitable and effective outcomes.

**Key Points to Note**

1. **Accessibility of Supports:** In-person supports are only valuable if people can access them. For large, remote LGAs like Flinders, Central Highlands, and West Coast, limited public transport, difficult driving conditions particularly in winter and distances make accessing even nearby services a significant challenge.
2. **Impact of Remoteness:** Higher levels of remoteness, as identified by the MMM and ASGS classifications, exacerbate barriers to accessing both digital and in-person supports. Communities with classifications of MM6-MM7 and ASGS RA4-RA5 face compounded challenges due to isolation and sparse population densities.
3. **Transport Limitations:** Limited or non-existent public transport options further restrict residents' ability to utilise available services. This is particularly critical in geographically large LGAs where even minimal travel can become a significant burden.
4. **Service Concentration:** The distribution of in-person supports does not always align with population needs in remote areas. Even LGAs with higher service counts, such as Break

O'Day and West Coast, may struggle to provide meaningful access due to geographic dispersion and travel barriers.

5. **Tailored Prioritisation:** Prioritisation must balance the availability of in-person supports with their accessibility. LGAs with extreme remoteness and minimal services, such as Flinders and Central Highlands, require a greater focus on tailored solutions that address the unique logistical and infrastructural challenges they face.
6. **Equity in Resource Allocation:** By considering accessibility alongside service availability and risk factors, this multi-factor assessment ensures that resource allocation is both equitable and effective in addressing the most significant barriers to inclusion.

| LGA | Risk Factor Ranking | In-Person | MMM | ASGS | Revised Prioritisation and rationale | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Tasman** | 1 | 1 | 5 | 3 | **1** | Despite being classified as less remote than the others in this group (MMM 5, ASGS RA3), Tasman's high risk factors, very limited in-person supports, and transport challenges place it among the highest priorities. |
| **Central Highlands** | 2 | 2 | 6 | 4 | **1** | This LGA faces moderate to high risk factors, significant remoteness (MMM 6, ASGS RA4), and minimal in-person support options, compounding accessibility challenges for residents. |
| **Flinders** | 2 | 2 | 7 | 5 | **1** | With moderate risk factors, extremely high remoteness (MMM 7, ASGS RA5), and very limited in-person supports, accessing services is particularly challenging for those with transport issues. |
| **West Coast** | 2 | 6 | 6 | 4 | **2** | Although it has higher in-person support availability, West Coast's significant remoteness (MMM 6, ASGS RA4) and geographic dispersion create barriers to accessing these services, especially for those without transport. |
| **Burnie** | 1 | 2 | 5 | 3 | **2** | High risk factors and low in-person supports are mitigated somewhat by its lower remoteness (MMM 5, ASGS RA3), placing Burnie in the second tier of priority. |
| **Break O'Day** | 1 | 6 | 5 | 3 | **2** | While it has a higher number of in-person supports, Break O'Day's moderate remoteness (MMM 5, ASGS RA3) and geographic dispersion mean these supports may not be accessible to all residents, combined with high risk factor rating |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Brighton** | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | Despite high risk factors and limited in-person supports, Brighton's low rurality (MMM 2, ASGS RA2) and better accessibility to services reduce its priority compared to more remote areas. |
| **Dorset** | 2 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 3 | Moderate risk factors and a moderate number of in-person supports are balanced by lower remoteness (MMM 5, ASGS RA3), placing Dorset in the third priority tier. |
| **Derwent Valley** | 2 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 3 | With moderate risk factors, a reasonable number of in-person supports, and less rurality (MMM 5, ASGS RA3), Derwent Valley is considered a lower priority for additional resources. |
| **George Town** | 2 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 3 | With moderate risk factors, low in-person support options, and less rurality (MMM 5, ASGS RA3), George Town remains a priority due to accessibility challenges combined with risk factors |

# Discussion- Responding to the changing environment

As outlined in the previous section, there is a correlation between rurality and limited digital inclusion outcomes, especially in areas where rurality and socio-economic disadvantage coincide. Preliminary findings of the 3P Advisory research and analysis align with ADII and national DI trends show rural and regional Tasmanian LGAs are more likely to have poorer access to digital infrastructure, skills, and services. These LGAs are also more likely to have reduced digital confidence and a lack of diversity amongst service delivery methods, devices, and training opportunities. In conjunction with this, a higher proportion of people living on lower income levels are likely to be in these LGA's and the age demographic trends older. This is validated through the consultation and in discussion with the Council of the Aging whose data and consultation also supports this observation.

Providing an integrated support eco-system through well-trained staff and volunteers in a range of trusted and regularly used services can provide people with a relevant, consistent and impactful outcome. Moving to this approach aligns more closely with the regular touchpoints of people's day-to-day lives. Ensuring an embedded layer of support within existing services as well as generic support through a range of entry points provides for an expanded and targeted support model. It is supported by the literature and best practice approached with the Wales Digital Communities model a stand-out in this regard.

## Informal Digital Support in Community Hubs

Throughout the consultation, Libraries Tasmania, Service Tasmania outlets, Neighbourhood Houses, Child and Family Centres, and Men's Sheds were described by Tasmanians as well-established and trusted, community-facing services that already provide informal digital support. For people seeking support, these locations were described as logical and natural entry points for help and therefore logical to embed digital champions more broadly, leveraging their existing role in connecting Tasmanians to essential resources and services.

**Service Tasmania** Service Tasmania outlets already support a range of transactional and advisory services, offering a critical touchpoint for individuals seeking assistance with navigating digital platforms for Tasmanian Government services. Participants in the consultation spoke of how staff often provide informal guidance on accessing online government services, troubleshooting basic digital issues, and helping people build confidence in using technology. Embedding digital champions within these sites would formalise and enhance this support, enabling Tasmanians to access consistent and expert guidance in familiar, trusted settings.

**Neighbourhood Houses** Neighbourhood Houses are deeply integrated into their communities, serving as accessible and inclusive spaces where individuals seek help with diverse challenges, including digital literacy. Houses focus support to socio-economically disadvantaged groups, offering tailored support that builds trust and engagement. In discussion with houses, digital champions co-located in Neighbourhood Houses can provide targeted training and personalised assistance, addressing gaps in digital skills and confidence. Many Houses already provide informal digital support, and some Houses have accessed philanthropic funding to enhance the level of support they can provide to local people. Many Houses report they are already acting as a digital "go to" when there is a need such as natural disaster, to support local people get online and apply for vouchers and subsidies.

**Child and Family Centres** (CFCs) are trusted spaces for families and caregivers, with younger parents participating in the consultation describing how the CFCs often providing informal digital support alongside other community services. Embedding digital champions here can enhance parents' and carers' ability to access vital online resources, including educational platforms and government services, while building broader digital confidence.

**Men's Sheds** Men's Sheds regularly raised by participants in the consultation as valued places of social connection and learning, particularly for older men who may face barriers to digital inclusion. These hubs provide an opportunity to integrate digital champions who can offer patient, tailored support, helping participants build confidence with technology in a familiar and supportive environment.

Integrating digital support through a network of consistently trained staff and volunteers into existing organisations (government and community) ensures Tasmanians receive holistic assistance tailored to their unique circumstances. Trained staff/volunteers can offer personalised guidance, build trust, and address broader issues that might hinder engagement, such as confidence or anxiety about using technology. There are already a range of existing volunteer located in Libraries Tasmania, Neighbourhood Houses, and other similar front-line facing services. Similar approaches exist in a range of other Tasmanian contexts. For example, the No Interest Loan Scheme, a community-based not-for-profit, has a network of "loans officers" across Tasmania. These trained volunteers support Tasmanians on low incomes to apply for a safe, no-interest loan. Located in Neighbourhood Houses, Charities such as Anglicare and the Salvation Army, through to the Electorate Offices of many Tasmanian politicians, they undertake annual training to ensure the knowledge and skills required to provide support. Similarly, Libraries Tasmania has a wealth of staff and volunteers who are assisting Tasmanians in a range of digital and literacy activities.

It may be timely to capture, through an audit, the number of volunteers across government and non-government service sites, and it is likely Volunteering Tasmania has insights and data into the NGO element.

This approach also overcomes single-person or single-entry-point dependency which can create ongoing capability challenges and does not support a person to develop and build their own skills and/or awareness of what affordability options may be available.

This is not to say Online Access Centres have not played a critical role over many years as Tasmanians have come to terms and adapted to living in an ever-changing digital world. They have provided a consistent point of contact and sometimes been the only available support in rural areas. However, they are often limited in reach and relevance for communities that lack physical proximity to these centres or have specific needs that go beyond basic digital access. As the pace and diversity of the digital world has changed, it has been challenging for many to be able to adapt in skills and capacity to guide and coach local people who also present with a diverse range of needs. As this has occurred, in some instances it has heightened risks. For example, in areas such as demand for online banking support or advice on possible scams that are out of scope for an OAC but where staff/volunteers may feel obliged to provide support the risk is high. (see next section for assessment of risk). The unintended scope creep that has occurred as the scope of the online world has increased presents a range of risks and potential for unintended consequences.

In summary, as more and more areas of government, broader commercial services and elements of daily life move to a digital platform, integrated models of support enhance and expand the access points for Tasmanians. This approach also increases collaboration among local services, creating a

safety net that ensures some of the existing gaps are addressed. This is particularly critical in rural areas, where the challenges of digital inclusion often intersect with broader issues like limited transport options, socioeconomic disadvantage, and reduced access to education or health services.

This approach needs to be combined with the development of a training module to ensure those tasked with and available to provide support can do so with underpinning knowledge and access to quality-controlled resources. Development of training and broader accessible resources does not require re-inventing the wheel. The literature review provides examples of where these resources already exist and two stand-out examples, one in Wales in conjunction with many resources already available through the Good Things Foundation and the Australian Government's *Be Connected* site.

Using the community profile and digital data analysis undertaken as part of this review, prioritised transitions of the current models being funded across agencies will set up for a flexible, integrated support model in the decade ahead. The model would transition existing staff and volunteers into a range of frontline services. Where possible over the next three years it would be able to offer the training model to others with the goal of building a broader network of trained people across Tasmania. The support would move from a branded Online Access Centre site to an integration of staff, volunteers and support into a range of entry points already frequented by people needing support.

**Key advantages:**

- **Reduce Barriers:** Address the impact that socio-economic and geographic barriers have on digital inclusion for individuals and communities, by developing and eco-system of flexible support models and partnerships across Tasmania. In many places this already exists but is informal or person/relationship dependent. The recommended approach formalises and provides a more structured, funded authorising environment to ensure diverse options of local support. In areas of inter-related need, for example, low literacy or family violence, embedding a network of trained digital support staff/volunteers in Libraries Tasmania, NGO's, Child & Family Centres, Service Tasmania, health services etc. increases the number and timeliness of support available.

- **Expand Accessibility:** Increase the accessibility of support and related referral points for rural and remote communities by leveraging existing infrastructure and community access points to strategically expand the existing direct and indirect resources available for support.

  In city centres, an integrated model also enhances the level of support available for people with affordability or capability challenges.

- **Support Community Capacity:** Work with government and non-government partners and priority communities to identify opportunities to support or enhance community capacity and resilience in accessing and using technology. This is achieved by supporting more local people in front-line services to have an increased understanding about the way local people access and/or afford services.

# Current service risks

## Risk Assessment: Supporting the Public with Online Banking, Scams, and Digital Safety

Supporting digital inclusion through Online Access Centres (OACs) has helped Tasmanians develop essential digital skills and confidence. The dedication of OAC staff and volunteers in assisting members of the public with navigating the online world reflects a genuine commitment to their communities. However, well-intentioned support can sometimes lead to unintended risks, particularly when staff or volunteers assist with complex or sensitive activities such as online banking, scams, and phishing. A clear understanding of these risks is essential to protect the public, staff, and the integrity of publicly available digital inclusion programs and support.

The consultation highlighted a number of underlying considerations and themes, regarding the trust and security of people accessing support. As risks online increase, the nature of support requests in risk areas such banking, government services, expands.

Particularly prominent in conversations with rural communities and support providers, it was clear that a large portion of support requests and contacts relate to these types of services and a need for people to seek reassurances (eg around hacking, scams and support with online banking). Whilst these were consistent across conversations, the approach and response from support providers was not – highlighting significant differences in understanding safe scope and engagement when providing advice and information on these types of topics. Previously, Digital Ready for Daily Life coaches may be in communities and supporting individuals through the training. The conclusion of the funding for this program has implications for access to up-to-date, quality-controlled resources created by the trained digital coaches funded through this program.

## Key Risks

### *1.* Risk to the General Public

- **Privacy and Security Breaches**:
    - Handling online banking involves entering sensitive information such as usernames, passwords, and security codes. Without proper protocols, this information could be unintentionally disclosed, leading to breaches of privacy or financial theft.
    - Scams and phishing attempts often involve sophisticated tactics that even well-informed individuals can miss. Incorrect advice could lead a member of the public to inadvertently share personal or financial information with malicious actors.
- **False Confidence in Assistance**:
    - Members of the public may assume that OAC staff or volunteers are trained experts in online banking and cybersecurity, leading them to over-rely on advice that might be incomplete or incorrect.

### *2.* Risk to OAC Staff and Volunteers

- **Legal and Ethical Exposure**:

    - Providing incorrect advice about online banking or scams could result in legal complaints or reputational damage for the staff member, volunteer, or the organisation.
    - Staff or volunteers may inadvertently take on responsibilities that exceed their expertise, exposing themselves to liability if something goes wrong.
- **Emotional Impact**:
    - The stress of handling complex situations such as resolving banking issues or identifying scams can lead to burnout or emotional strain for untrained individuals.

### 3. Organisational and Systemic Risks

- **Scope Creep in Services**:
    - Digital inclusion services, if not clearly defined, risk expanding into areas that require specialised knowledge or training, such as financial advising or fraud prevention. This overextension dilutes the focus and effectiveness of core services.
    - A single incident involving a privacy breach or financial loss could damage the trust and reputation of frontline digital support services, reducing public trust and participation in the program.

## Additional Areas of Risk

Beyond online banking and scams, there are other activities that were highlighted in the consultation that are potential red flags due to the possibility of untrained assistance posing risks:

- **Identity Verification**: Helping users with MyGov or other government platforms often involves uploading sensitive documents, posing privacy and security risks.
- **Device Security**: Advising individuals about antivirus software or settings can backfire if incorrect recommendations expose users to malware or hacking.
- **Online Purchases**: Supporting users with e-commerce transactions can lead to risks of fraud or disputes if errors occur.

## Mitigation Strategies

### *1*. Define the Scope of digital inclusion support services

- Clearly outline the types of support frontline staff and volunteers can provide, such as basic digital literacy, accessing public information, or navigating non-sensitive websites.
- Prohibit high-risk activities, such as entering banking credentials, providing advice on financial matters, or assisting with identity verification.

### 2. Provide Targeted Training

- Offer digital literacy training that includes basic cybersecurity principles, scam awareness, and referral pathways for complex issues.

- Equip staff and volunteers with the knowledge to identify when to refer a user to specialised services, such as a bank, government department, or cybersecurity helpline.
- Develop a range of generic, specialised videos/webinars that can be accessed by members of the public, either onsite in front-line services or at home, that guide users through some of the common areas of need.

### 3. Develop Robust Referral Networks

In addition to the above, other resources to equip front-line staff and volunteers with include:

- Partner with trusted organisations, such as banks, government agencies, and cybersecurity experts, to create a referral system for high-risk issues.
- Provide users with clear instructions on how to seek specialised help safely and securely.

### 4. Implement Privacy and Security Protocols

Provide clarity of scope to staff and volunteers to prevent them from handling sensitive information, such as entering login credentials or uploading identity documents on behalf of users.
In frontline service areas where there is access to public computers, establish secure workstations with privacy screens and ensure all interactions comply with data protection best practice.

### 5. Enhance Public Awareness

Educate the public on the scope of support available through an integrated frontline support model, and encourage access to pre-prepared, generic resources for sensitive tasks. Distribute resources, such as printed guides or links to reputable online safety websites, to empower users to handle these issues independently. Make available online tutorials in frontline services such as Libraries Tasmania, Service Tasmania, Neighbourhood Houses etc to support people to have access to guided support.

## The Value of Boundaries

It is vital to recognise the limits of roles to ensure the safety and confidence of both users and service providers. By setting clear boundaries, providing training, self-paced resources and building strong referral networks, integrated frontline support options can focus on promoting digital inclusion without exposing the public or staff to unnecessary risks.

This approach can ensure that users receive the appropriate level of expertise for sensitive activities. In a rapidly evolving digital landscape, safeguarding both users and staff is essential for sustaining and enhancing Tasmania's digital inclusion efforts.

Appendices:

1.Environmental scan, literature review and references

2.List of consultation participants and communities engaged

# Appendix 1: Environmental Scan

**Introduction**

This environmental scan seeks to explore best practices in digital inclusion at both national and international levels. The report will examine the current state of digital inclusion, identifying key areas where inclusion is thriving and where significant gaps remain. It will provide insights into how digital inclusion is defined, the factors contributing to both inclusion and exclusion, and the critical role digital technologies play in modern society.

**What is digital inclusion?**

Digital inclusion refers to the ability of individuals to access, afford, and effectively use digital technologies to fully participate in social, economic, and civic life (1). The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of digital services, making it clear that without digital access and skills, many are excluded from essential aspects of modern life. Despite the widespread adoption of digital technologies, the benefits are not equally distributed. Digital inclusion goes beyond mere access to the internet; it requires individuals to possess the skills and knowledge to navigate the digital world effectively. The concept of digital inclusion has evolved from merely having an internet connection to encompassing the ability to afford digital devices, data, and the necessary skills to use them (2).

**What is the digital divide?**

The 'digital divide' refers to the gap between individuals and communities who have full access to digital technologies and those who do not. This divide is defined by three key dimensions: access, affordability, and digital skills (3).

**Access** pertains to the availability of digital infrastructure, such as internet connections and devices. In Australia, while access has improved with widespread adoption of the NBN, significant disparities remain, particularly in rural and remote areas (3).

**Affordability** involves the financial ability to pay for internet services and devices. Even as value for money has improved, affordability continues to be a barrier for many, especially in low-income households, where the cost of staying connected can be prohibitive (3).

**Digital skills**, or the ability to effectively use digital technologies, are critical for meaningful participation in the digital world. Despite increasing overall digital inclusion in Australia, certain groups, such as older adults, people with disabilities, and Indigenous communities, continue to face challenges in acquiring the necessary skills to engage fully online (3).

The digital divide is not just about who has access, but also about how social and economic inequalities are intertwined with digital inequalities, leading to tangible impacts on people's everyday lives (3). As society becomes increasingly digitised, addressing these dimensions of the digital divide is crucial to ensuring that all members of the community can benefit from the digital economy and participate fully in civic and social life.

**The global context**

Globally, digital inclusion is recognised as a fundamental component of social and economic development. While digital connection has become a fundamental part of daily human life in OECD countries, there is considerable variation in the uptake and use of the internet and digital technologies, linked with age and education and often intertwined with income levels (4). The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) underscore the importance of digital technologies in achieving greater equality, reducing poverty, and enhancing education and healthcare (5). However, the digital divide remains a significant challenge worldwide, particularly in developing countries where infrastructure, affordability, and digital literacy lag behind. In response, various international organisations, governments, and private sector initiatives have been launched to promote digital inclusion. There is a broad

spectrum of innovation and progress across developing and OECD countries. These global efforts highlight the diverse approaches needed to address digital exclusion, with a focus on not just access but also the skills, affordability, and trust required to fully participate in the digital world.

**The national context**

In Australia, digital inclusion has become a critical focus as the nation continues to embrace digital technologies in everyday life. The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) provides valuable insights into the state of digital inclusion across the country, revealing that while 93% of Australians have a home internet connection, significant disparities remain (2). Similar to international examples, these disparities are often linked to socioeconomic status, geography, age, and cultural background, with rural and remote communities, older Australians, and those from lower-income households being particularly at risk of digital exclusion. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the importance of digital access, as many services, including education, healthcare, and government support, moved online. In response, both government and non-government initiatives have intensified efforts to bridge the digital divide, focusing on improving digital literacy, affordability, and access to reliable internet services. (2).

**The Tasmanian context**

In Tasmania, the state government is committed to ensuring that all residents have equal access to digital services and information, recognising the critical role these play in modern life. While the state has historically lagged behind the mainland in terms of digital literacy and inclusion, significant strides are being made to bridge this gap. The Tasmanian Government, through the Department of State Growth and in collaboration with industry partners, Libraries Tasmania, and community organisations, is spearheading initiatives to promote lifelong learning and digital inclusion (6). These efforts aim to equip all Tasmanians with the tools and skills necessary to engage effectively in a digital environment, ensuring that essential services are accessible, user-friendly, and available to everyone, regardless of their location or socio-economic status. The government's approach is grounded in principles of accessibility, ability, and affordability, focusing on delivering services that can be accessed 'anywhere, anytime' through mobile devices while also providing traditional options for those with more complex needs.

The report will further examine the thresholds of digital inclusion, highlighting the persistence of digital exclusion and its correlation with broader social and economic inequalities. Through examination of contemporary digital inclusion examples, Tasmania can continue to address the ongoing challenges associated with the digital divide and foster a more inclusive digital society.

**Methodology**

This report employed a comprehensive desktop research methodology to conduct an environmental scan of digital inclusion practices in Australia and internationally. The methodology encompasses three key phases: (1) scanning the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) website for key reports and data, (2) performing a literature scan using PubMed to identify relevant studies, and (3) conducting a desktop search for grey literature to gather contemporary best practice examples of digital inclusion.

**Scanning the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) Website**:

The initial phase involved a thorough exploration of the ADII website to gather foundational insights into the current state of digital inclusion in Australia. The ADII provides valuable reports and datasets that highlight various dimensions of digital inclusion, including

accessibility, affordability, and digital skills across different demographics and regions. Key reports were identified and reviewed to establish a contextual understanding of digital inclusion within the Australian landscape. This step was critical for framing the introduction to the report and ensuring that subsequent analyses were grounded in credible, relevant data.

**Literature Scan via PubMed**:

Following the initial contextualisation, a systematic literature scan was conducted using the PubMed database. The search parameters included the following terms in the title only: 'digital inclusion,' 'digital inclusion strategy,' and 'digital divide,' with a publication date range from 2019 to 2024. This search yielded a total of 166 results. Each entry was scanned for relevance, focusing on studies that contribute to understanding contemporary digital inclusion strategies and challenges. The relevance assessment considered factors such as the study's geographical context, target populations, and the specific themes addressed regarding digital inclusion. This phase ensured that the literature review reflected recent and pertinent findings in the field.

**Desktop Google Search for Grey Literature**:

The final phase involved a desktop search using Google to identify grey literature that showcases contemporary best practice examples of digital inclusion initiatives. This search aimed to navigate various source websites, including government publications, reports from non-government organisations, and academic institutions, to gather up-to-date information on successful digital inclusion strategies. Key terms related to digital inclusion were employed to locate relevant documents, policy papers, and case studies that illustrate innovative approaches in Australia and globally. This phase was crucial for identifying practical examples that inform the report's recommendations and highlight effective strategies in addressing the digital divide.

This multi-faceted approach to desktop research and scanning provided a robust foundation for the environmental scan, enabling the identification of key trends, challenges, and best practices in digital inclusion. The findings from each phase were synthesised to produce a comprehensive analysis of the current landscape of digital inclusion efforts, informing the recommendations and conclusions of the report.

## Environmental Scan

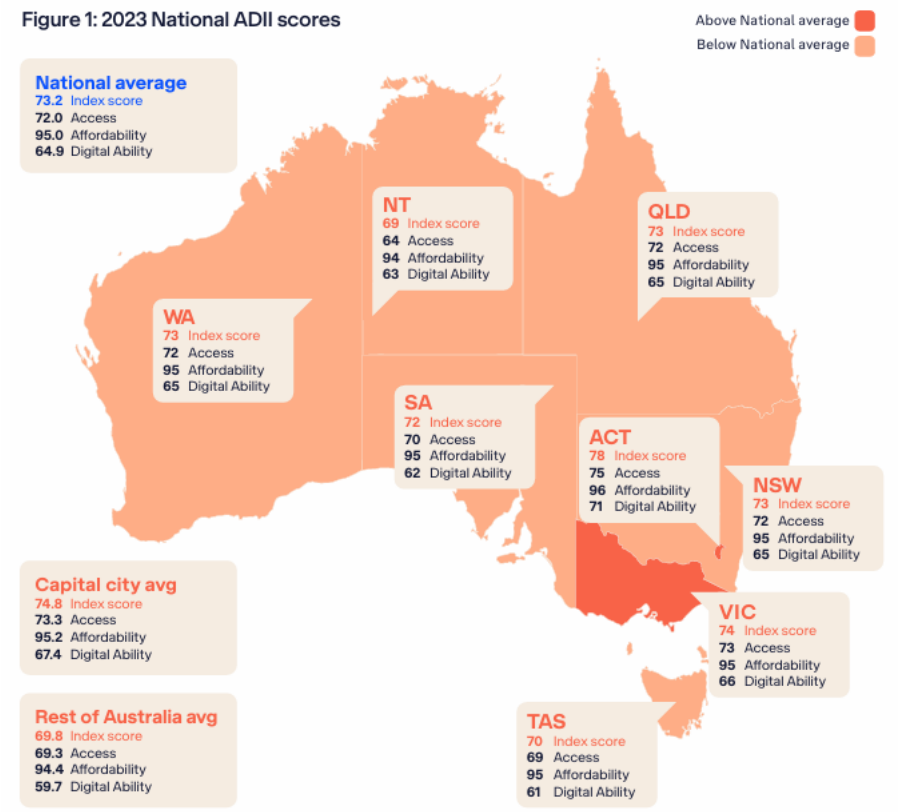
### The digital divide

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) 2023 report assesses the digital divide in Australia across three dimensions: Access, Affordability, and Digital Ability (12). The report, which includes data from the Australian Internet Usage Survey reveals a national Index score of 73.2, indicating a steady improvement in digital inclusion since 2020. However, significant disparities persist, particularly among First Nations Peoples, older Australians, and those with lower incomes and education levels (12).

The report notes the increasing shift toward digital services and the need for faster connections and more data, which presents new challenges and pressures, particularly for mobile-only users and those in regional, rural, and remote communities. It suggests that addressing these issues will require a collaborative effort from all levels of government, industry, education, and the community (12).

Tasmania has an overall score of 70, which is below the national average of 73.2, placing Tasmania towards the lower end of the spectrum compared to other states and territories. Tasmania's lower-than-average scores in Access and Digital Ability suggest that while the

state has maintained a good level of Affordability, there is room for improvement in expanding access to digital services and enhancing digital literacy (12) (See Figure 1).




Source: (12)

**Influencing factors and barriers to digital inclusion**

The digital divide is significantly shaped by a complex interplay of socio-economic, geographic, and demographic factors. Individuals and communities with lower socio-economic status often face barriers to digital inclusion, such as limited access to technology and the internet, and reduced ability to afford digital services. Geographic location also plays a critical role, with rural and remote areas typically experiencing poorer digital infrastructure, resulting in lower connectivity and access to digital resources. Demographic factors, including age, education level, and cultural background, further influence digital skills and the capacity to engage with digital technologies. Together, these factors create a multifaceted digital divide where certain populations are disproportionately excluded from the benefits of a digitally connected society.

According to the 2023 ADII report, the digital gap between First Nations and non-First Nations people is 7.5 points, widening to 21.6-23.5 points in remote and very remote areas. The report highlights the critical role of culturally appropriate data collection and collaboration with community partners in understanding and addressing these disparities (7). Affordability has improved nationally, with the Affordability score increasing from 93.1 to 95.0. Nonetheless, many Australians still face affordability stress, especially those with disabilities, public housing residents, the unemployed, and those over 75. The divide between capital cities and other parts of the country persists, particularly in Digital Ability (7) .

Following the pandemic, there has been a plethora of literature developed exploring impacts and evolution of the digital divide, including research highlighting the extent of the digital

divide that persists for certain population cohorts. Research suggests that there was a disproportionate impact on older people, with factors such as physical impairments and a lack of confidence in leading to social isolation, vulnerability and misinformation (8). Digital literacy disparities persist for ethnic minorities in many countries where access to reliable internet connectivity and limited digital literacy have been substantial barriers (9). Cultural and language barriers can limit access to digital resources, services, and technologies, often leaving people disconnected from essential services such as health, education, and hindering employment opportunities (10). In Australia, the ADII score for those born on non-English speaking countries who speak a language other than English at home has fluctuated above and below the national average score, with evidence suggesting that recently arrived culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) migrants digital inclusion fares less well than the broader CALD migrant community, particularly in terms of affordability (10)

Age significantly influences an individual's digital skills and capacity to engage with digital technologies, particularly among the elderly, who are at a higher risk of experiencing the digital divide. As people age, they encounter physical and cognitive changes that can affect their ability to learn and use new technologies. These changes can include reduced vision, hearing, and motor skills, as well as slower processing speeds and memory recall (10). Elderly individuals are at a higher risk of lacking the necessary digital literacy and skills required to navigate modern technology, which has become increasingly complex and rapidly evolving.

Financial barriers to digital inclusion, often described as "digital poverty," significantly impact individuals who cannot afford a quality internet connection (11). This affordability stress creates substantial barriers to accessing education, employment, and essential services, thereby exacerbating existing social and economic inequalities. For some, the inability to afford internet access at home or the lack of a suitable device severely limits opportunities to participate in the digital world, hindering the development of crucial digital skills (12). These limitations can create a cycle of exclusion, where the lack of access to affordable digital resources further deepens social and economic divides, often referred to as an "inequality loop." (13) In recognising the importance of affordability in digital inclusion, the ADII measures the proportion of household income needed to achieve a reliable, quality internet service. Ideally, households should spend no more than 2% of their income on internet access, which includes a fast and uninterrupted connection, unlimited data, and sufficient mobile data to meet modern connectivity needs. However, for those unable to meet this standard, financial barriers continue to impede their full participation in a digitally connected society (12).

The OECD's study on digital equity in education identifies several educational barriers to digital inclusion. These barriers include disparities in digital literacy and skills development among students, which are often influenced by socio-economic status, immigrant background, and gender (14). Students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds tend to have lower digital skills and less access to a variety of digital devices at home, which can hinder their ability to benefit from the personalization and flexibility that digital tools offer. Moreover, parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds may have less digital skills themselves, which can affect their ability to support their children's digital learning and navigate the digital environment effectively (14). The study highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these issues, as disadvantaged students faced additional obstacles to digital inclusion due to a lack of connectivity, devices, and digital skills.

Infrastructure barriers to digital inclusion also affect the availability and quality of internet connectivity, particularly in rural and remote areas. The unequal distribution of broadband

infrastructure leads to stark differences in access, where urban regions benefit from faster and more reliable internet services, while rural and regional communities often face limited options (15). This 'digital divide' in infrastructure can be attributed to the high costs and logistical challenges of deploying high-speed broadband in sparsely populated areas, which disincentivises telecommunications companies from investing in these regions. Studies consistently show that inadequate infrastructure in these areas results in slower internet speeds, frequent service disruptions, and lower data limits, further marginalising already disadvantaged populations (16).

Policy and regulatory barriers to digital inclusion arise from outdated or inadequate frameworks that fail to address the evolving needs of communities in the digital era. These barriers can include inconsistent policies on internet access, restrictive telecommunications regulations, insufficient funding for digital infrastructure, and the lack of comprehensive national strategies to address digital disparities. In Australia, while some efforts have been made to improve broadband access through the NBN, rural and remote areas still face significant challenges in achieving reliable, affordable connectivity. This is compounded by a regulatory environment that often favours market-driven solutions, potentially sidelining underserved populations.

**Australia Best Practice Examples**

**NSW**

In New South Wales, the state government has partnered with Telstra to deliver free and low-cost technology training to seniors in regional and remote areas of the state. The 'Tech Savvy Seniors' program offers face-to-face training in digital literacy, focusing on essential skills such as using mobile devices, the internet, and social media (19). This program stands out for its targeted approach towards older Australians, a demographic identified as highly vulnerable to digital exclusion. It directly addresses barriers related to digital ability by offering face-to-face support in culturally appropriate ways, recognising the challenges of self-paced or online learning for older individuals. The program's success is supported by its partnership with Telstra, providing accessible venues across rural and remote areas where digital literacy programs are often scarce. Furthermore, the program's expansion into various languages ensures that non-English speakers can also benefit, creating an inclusive framework (19).

**Queensland**

Similarly, the State Library of Queensland, in partnership with Telstra, has an initiative called "Deadly Digital Communities" at providing digital literacy training to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Queensland. The program involves local Libraries Tasmania working closely with Indigenous leaders to deliver culturally appropriate digital skills training. Deadly Digital Communities is a leader in culturally responsive digital inclusion programming. It recognises that digital literacy cannot be approached with a one-size-fits-all mentality and that Indigenous communities face unique challenges in accessing digital services. By involving community leaders and local Libraries Tasmania in the design and delivery of the training, this program ensures cultural appropriateness and community trust. The program is also lauded for empowering Indigenous people to use digital technologies to share cultural knowledge and stories (20).

**Victoria**

The ADII report for North-East Victorian Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) presents a detailed analysis of the digital inclusion landscape within SME workforce in the North-East Victorian region with nuanced insights into the digital readiness of regional businesses,

which is essential for fostering economic growth and social inclusion in an increasingly digital world (21). The report reveals that the SME workforce in North-East Victoria frequently engages with the internet, with a significant portion using it multiple times a day. However, this high frequency of internet usage has not been matched by proportional investments in internet access or digital skills development. This discrepancy suggests that while SMEs are active online, there may be underlying issues with the quality of their connectivity or the depth of their digital capabilities (21).

This targeted deep dive into the Victorian SME workforce, using an empirically reliable and recognised survey method to measure digital inclusion needs and interests, provides valuable insights for policymakers, businesses, and community organisations, not just in the North-East Victorian region, but more broadly, offering a roadmap for enhancing digital inclusion and driving economic and social progress through digital empowerment (21). The Victorian Government uses these key data insights to develop and improve state-wide initiatives such as Connecting Victoria, a policy-driven infrastructure improvement program with a strong focus on access to address the digital divide in historically neglected regional and rural areas (22).

**South Australia**

In South Australia, the Department of Innovation and Skills funds an accessible Digital Skills Program, free to all South Australians covering a broad range of digital topics from cybersecurity, online banking and general internet use with a focus on more digitally vulnerable groups such as older adults or people from CALD backgrounds. South Australia's Digital Skills Program stands out for its focus on CALD communities, which often face language and cultural barriers to digital inclusion. The program is accessible, with offerings in multiple languages, and it integrates community centres and local Libraries Tasmania to ensure the program is available to underserved populations. Additionally, by focusing on cybersecurity and safe internet use, the program ensures that participants are not only digitally connected but also informed and secure in their online activities, which is crucial for fostering confidence in digital environments (23).

**Western Australia and Northern Territory**

The Royal Flying Doctors Service (RFDS) is a good example of a non-government organisation (NGO) filling significant gaps in the digital divide in rural Australia, particularly in Western Australia and Northern Territory. In addition to their core business of emergency evacuations and aeromedical retrievals, the RFDS also deliver telehealth consultations, allowing remote patients to connect with health professionals through satellite communication. RFDS is widely regarded as a leader in telehealth services for remote communities (24). It demonstrates best practice by using innovative technology to bridge the geographic divide, as well as the digital divide, providing continuous and sustainable health care despite significant logistical challenges, limited digital infrastructure and literacy in rural Australia (24).

Empowered Communities is an Indigenous-led organisation that partners with various regional authorities to address educational disparities through tele education platforms. In remote communities, children often have limited access to quality schooling, and Empowered Communities focuses on increasing access to digital learning platforms to bridge this gap (26). Similarly, the School of the Air is an iconic Australian initiative that provides education to children in remote areas of WA through distance learning. Using satellite internet and radio communication, the school enables students in the most isolated regions of Australia to participate in classroom activities, receive instruction, and interact with teachers and peers (27). These NGOs exemplify best practice by using innovative digital tools

to deliver essential services like healthcare and education to remote and underserved communities in WA and the NT. Their models often include partnerships with government and private sectors but are predominantly community-driven and non-profit initiatives, addressing not just the digital divide but also broader social and health inequalities.

**Global Best Practice Examples**

**United Kingdom - Good Things Foundation's National Databank**

The National Databank is an initiative by the Good Things Foundation in the UK, part of the broader Digital Poverty Alliance. It aims to provide free mobile data, texts, and calls to people experiencing data poverty across the UK. The target cohort includes low-income households, individuals who are unemployed or socially excluded, and those who do not have access to reliable digital connectivity. The key objective is to improve accessibility by reducing barriers related to affordability, ensuring people can connect to essential services, education, and work opportunities (28).

This initiative is regarded as best practice because it addresses a fundamental barrier to digital inclusion—affordable and consistent internet access. The National Databank has had measurable success, distributing millions of gigabytes of data to underserved communities. Evidence of its success includes widespread uptake, community feedback, and national recognition for tackling the digital divide. The biggest enabling factor for this initiative's success has been collaboration between telecom providers (such as Vodafone, Three, and O2), the third sector, and local community organisations. The simple, scalable model ensures that the resources reach those in need through existing community networks that people already trust (29).

**New Zealand - Digital Inclusion Action Plan**

New Zealand's Digital Inclusion Action Plan, managed by the Department of Internal Affairs, is a strategic government initiative that seeks to improve access, affordability, and digital skills across the population. It particularly focuses on groups at risk of digital exclusion, including Māori, Pasifika communities, rural residents, people with disabilities, and older adults. The plan outlines clear goals for improving digital infrastructure, creating digital skills training programs, and ensuring all New Zealanders can engage with digital services (30). The Action Plan is seen as best practice due to its holistic and multi-faceted approach to digital inclusion. It doesn't just focus on connectivity but ensures that people have the skills and confidence to use digital technologies.

One of its major successes is the Stepping UP program, which provides free digital skills training to low-income and disadvantaged individuals, resulting in high levels of participation and satisfaction, with participants reporting improved confidence and digital competence (31). The success of this program stems from strong government leadership, sustained funding, and collaboration with community groups to ensure tailored interventions. The government's focus on digital inclusion as part of its broader social development strategy has been key in scaling efforts nationally.

**Canada - Digital Literacy Exchange Program**

Managed by the Government of Canada, the Digital Literacy Exchange Program (DLEP) funds non-profit organisations to deliver digital skills training to people who face barriers to participation in the digital world. The target cohorts include older adults, low-income individuals, rural residents, and Indigenous communities. The program focuses primarily on enhancing digital skills, ensuring that participants are equipped to engage safely and confidently in the digital economy (32).

The DLEP has been successful in reaching thousands of Canadians through community organisations that deliver tailored training sessions. The program's success is reflected in the high levels of participation, completion rates, and improved digital confidence among learners. Post-program surveys consistently show participants reporting increased usage of online services and greater confidence in navigating digital technologies. The enabling factor for success has been the decentralised approach, where local organisations deliver programs in culturally relevant ways (33). Additionally, sustained government funding and a clear policy framework underpinned by the Universal Access principle in Canada's Digital Charter have ensured ongoing support and growth for the initiative (34).

**Estonia - e-Estonia Initiative**

The e-Estonia initiative is a landmark program that has transformed Estonia into one of the world's most advanced digital societies. Launched by the Estonian government, this initiative focuses on providing seamless digital services to all citizens, ensuring they can access everything from healthcare to voting online. Targeted at all Estonian residents, the program's objectives encompass improving accessibility, enhancing digital skills, and promoting affordability through innovative solutions like e-ID and digital signatures (35).

e-Estonia is lauded as a best practice model due to its remarkable outcomes. Nearly 99% of Estonians have access to e-services, and the initiative has significantly improved the efficiency of public services. The government reported a 60% reduction in paperwork, saving time and costs for citizens and businesses alike. Studies indicate that around 30% of citizens use e-services daily, showcasing widespread acceptance and integration into daily life. Furthermore, the successful implementation of e-residency allows global citizens to access Estonian services, demonstrating a pioneering approach to digital inclusion (36).

The success of the e-Estonia initiative can be attributed to a forward-thinking government strategy, strong public-private partnerships, and a robust digital infrastructure. The initiative has received continuous investment, ensuring that services remain secure, accessible, and innovative. Moreover, Estonia's commitment to digital literacy, which includes educational programs and awareness campaigns, has fostered a digitally savvy population capable of utilising these services effectively.

**Wales – Digital Communities**

The Digital Communities Wales (DCW) initiative is a collaborative program aimed at enhancing digital inclusion across Wales, particularly targeting vulnerable and underserved populations. Managed by Welsh Government in partnership with local authorities and community organisations, DCW seeks to ensure that all residents can access digital technologies and develop the necessary skills to navigate the digital landscape. The program primarily focuses on enhancing accessibility, affordability, and digital skills to promote greater participation in a digitally connected society. Its key objective is to bridge the digital divide, ensuring that no one is left behind in an increasingly digital world (37).

Digital Communities Wales is recognised as a best practice model for its community-focused approach and measurable impact. The program has successfully reached over 60,000 individuals since its launch in 2017, with approximately 35,000 people receiving direct support to improve their digital skills. A 2022 report highlighted that over 85% of participants reported increased confidence in using digital technologies, demonstrating the program's effectiveness in fostering digital literacy (38). Moreover, the initiative has led to the establishment of over 1,000 digital champions across Wales—local volunteers trained to support their communities in becoming digitally connected and proficient. This grassroots involvement has enhanced the initiative's reach and impact, making it a model of community-driven digital inclusion (38).

**TechSoup Global**

TechSoup Global is a non-profit organisation that connects non-profits and charities with technology resources and expertise. While it partners with various entities, including governments, it primarily operates through a network of local NGOs and tech companies to facilitate digital inclusion. Their goal is to ensure that civil society organisations have access to essential digital tools and resources, enabling them to operate effectively and engage with their communities (39).

The initiative focuses on affordability by providing discounted technology products and services, as well as digital skills training for non-profit staff and volunteers. Since its inception, TechSoup has provided technology assistance to over 1 million non-profits in more than 236 countries. This wide reach underscores its effectiveness in building digital capacity in the non-profit sector. Feedback from organisations that have used TechSoup's services often highlight significant improvements in operational efficiency and engagement with their communities due to enhanced digital capabilities. The success of TechSoup is largely due to its extensive partnerships with major technology companies, which provide software donations and discounts. Additionally, the focus on localised support means that organisations receive tailored assistance that addresses their specific needs, fostering a sense of community ownership (40).

**Connecting Up**

Place-based and collective impact approaches have proven effective in improving digital inclusion by fostering collaboration among local stakeholders, tailoring strategies to specific community needs, and mobilising resources effectively. These approaches involve multiple sectors, including government, non-profit organisations, and private entities, working together towards a common goal of enhancing digital literacy, access, and usage in the community. By focusing on local contexts, place-based initiatives can address unique barriers that specific communities face, such as socio-economic disparities, geographical isolation, and cultural differences, thereby fostering a more inclusive digital environment.

A notable example of a successful place-based approach in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific is the Connecting Up program. Initiated by the Australian Government, this program partners with local organisations, community groups, and tech providers to deliver digital skills training and resources tailored to the needs of various populations, including those in rural and remote areas. The program’s holistic approach encompasses workshops, mentoring, and resource provision, ensuring that participants not only gain technical skills but also develop confidence in using digital technologies. Evaluation of the program has shown significant increases in participants' digital literacy levels and their ability to engage with essential online services, demonstrating its impact on bridging the digital divide (41).

**Analysis of Contemporary Digital Inclusion Practices**

Across various digital inclusion strategies and initiatives, several common elements and enablers emerge as critical to their success. A strong emphasis on collaboration is evident, particularly between government entities, non-government organisations, and local communities. This collaboration ensures that programs are culturally relevant and tailored to the specific needs of diverse groups, including older adults, Indigenous communities, and individuals from CALD backgrounds.

Access to digital literacy training is a recurring theme, with many initiatives focusing on practical, face-to-face training methods that cater to the unique learning styles of participants. Furthermore, accessibility and affordability are consistently highlighted as

pivotal components. Programs that address language barriers and provide multilingual resources significantly enhance participation among non-English speaking populations. The integration of technology—whether through partnerships with telecommunications companies or innovative digital platforms—also plays a vital role in ensuring that underserved populations can engage effectively with digital services. Ultimately, the successful implementation of these strategies hinges on strong community involvement combined with sufficient resourcing, and ongoing evaluation to adapt programs to the evolving digital landscape.

Emerging trends in digital inclusion reflect a growing recognition of the importance of leveraging technology to address systemic barriers. The rise of telehealth services, particularly in remote and underserved regions, exemplifies how digital tools can bridge geographic divides and enhance access to essential services. Programs like the Royal Flying Doctors Service in Australia and similar initiatives globally illustrate the potential for telecommunication technologies to deliver vital healthcare remotely.

Additionally, there is an increasing focus on using data and analytics to inform digital inclusion strategies. Programs that assess digital readiness and tailor interventions based on empirical data are becoming more prevalent, allowing for more targeted and effective approaches. Furthermore, the integration of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and mobile applications, is expected to enhance user experiences and engagement in digital services. The continued development of community-driven initiatives, such as Digital Champions in Wales, reflects a trend towards grassroots involvement in promoting digital literacy. These trends indicate a shift towards more sustainable and inclusive digital ecosystems, where technology is not merely a tool but a catalyst for empowerment and social equity.

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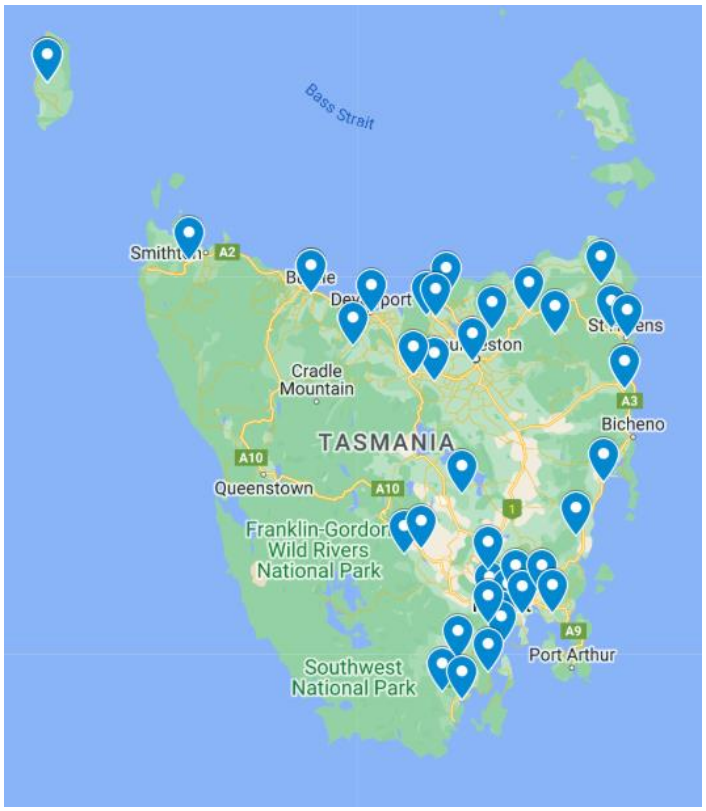
# Appendix 2: Stakeholder consultation

**Consultation Approach**

The consultation involved a mixed-methods approach to engagement. This multi-faceted approach enabled the collection of diverse viewpoints, ensuring the voices of individuals, organisations, and communities were heard and considered throughout the process.

The approach utilised a mix of in-person and online engagement opportunities, such as online submissions, one-on-one interviews, and community consultation sessions.

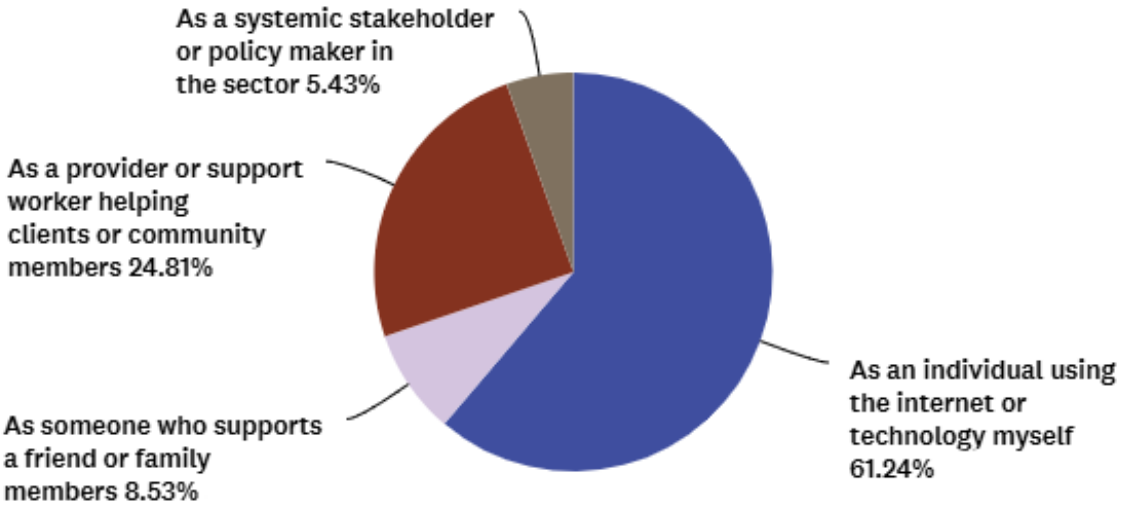
The engagement approach allowed for significant geographical reach across the state, with a collated picture of the input and engagement represented geographically on the map below.



## Online Submission Summary

The online submission process saw a total of 130 submissions, from a diverse range of groups, including:

- Individuals who use technology themselves,
- Friends and family members who support loved ones,
- Support workers assisting clients or community members, and
- Systemic stakeholders and policymakers contributing broader sector perspectives.




## In-person and Organisational Engagement summary

The consultation process combined in-person and organisational engagement to complement the online submissions. It involved a series of community sessions, workshops, and one-on-one interviews conducted across multiple locations, providing opportunities for deeper, face-to-face discussions, interactive group conversations, and targeted organisational input.

Participants engaged through a variety of methods, with some contributing via multiple avenues—such as submitting feedback online, attending workshops, and participating in interviews—while others opted for a single method of engagement. This approach ensured flexibility and inclusivity, capturing diverse perspectives across individuals, organisations, and communities.

Consultation locations were selected based on insights from the Australian Digital Inclusion Index, the availability of suitable venues, and the readiness of locations to collaborate and host a community session. Where establishing a community consultation pop-up was not feasible, additional one-on-one interviews were conducted, and targeted promotion of online engagement opportunities was undertaken to maintain accessibility.

In some cases, both community consultation sessions and one-on-one interviews were held at the same location, enabling a blend of group discussions and in-depth individual conversations. This dual

approach supported the collection of broader community insights as well as detailed organisational perspectives to inform the findings of the consultation process.

Where organisations were unavailable for 1:1 interviews, we provided them with the opportunity to provide an online submission as an alternative to a discussion.

Consultation occurred directly via 1:1 interviews and/or open community sessions with:

- Northern Suburbs Community Centre
- Beaconsfield Neighbourhood House
- George Town Library/Service Tasmania/Child and Family Learning Centre building
- Scottsdale Library
- Bagdad Online Access Centre
- Deloraine Online Access Centre
- St Helen's Online Access Centre
- Swansea Online Access Centre
- Ouse Online Access Centre

In addition, we conducted interviews, received specific submissions from, or conducted systemic workshops or with:

- The Smith Family
- Council of the Ageing
- Meander Valley Council
- Service Tasmania
- Department of Education, Children and Young People
- State Growth
- Libraries Tasmania
- Derwent Valley Online Access Centre Inc
- Neighbourhood Houses Tas
- King Island Regional Development Org.Inc
- King Island Online Access Centre
- St Helens Athletic Club
- West Winds Community Centre (Woodbridge Online Access Centre)
- Break O'Day Employment Connect
- West North West