

Why It Matters: A Digital Inclusion Storytelling Collection

PREPARED FOR WACOSS WA DIGITAL INCLUSION PROJECT

JULY, 2026



Acknowledgement of Country

WACOSS respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Western Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them, their cultures, and to elders both past and present. We acknowledge the land on which we live and work was, and always will be, Aboriginal land. Sovereignty was never ceded.

About WACOSS



WACOSS is the peak body for the community services sector in Western Australia and works to create an inclusive, just and equitable society. We advocate for

social and economic change to improve the wellbeing of Western Australians, and to strengthen the community services sector that supports them. WACOSS is part of a network consisting of National, State and Territory Councils of Social Service, who advance the interests of people on low incomes and those made vulnerable by the systems that have been put in place.

About Two Roads



Two Roads partnered with WACOSS to deliver *Why it matters: A Digital Inclusion Storytelling Collection*. Two Roads is a social impact consultancy working in

Boorloo (Perth), Western Australia. We partner with communities and organisations to navigate complex systems and create meaningful, sustainable pathways for change. Through deep listening, co-creation and culturally safe practice, Two Roads supports people to shape solutions grounded in their lived realities. Our work centres connection, inclusion and impact, helping communities and organisations move toward outcomes that reflect their values and aspirations.

Recognition of community contribution

This report exists only because of the contributions of community members from across Western Australia who generously shared their experiences, insights, and expertise. Their words shape every part of this work. We hold these contributions with deep respect, and our commitment is to reflect them with integrity, care, and accuracy - honouring the people and communities who made this report possible.

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Executive Summary

Across Western Australia, access to devices, connectivity, affordable data, digital skills and trusted support now shapes whether people can participate in education, employment, health care, banking, government services, emergency information, culture and community life. This report shows that digital inclusion is not only about technology. It is about dignity, safety, independence, connection and people's ability to exercise their rights in an increasingly digital world.

The *Why it matters: A Digital Inclusion Storytelling Collection* was developed through the WA Digital Inclusion Project, a Lotterywest-funded initiative led by WACOSS. *Why it matters* gathered stories, insights and reflections from community members and service providers across metropolitan, regional and remote Western Australia. It used workshops, interviews, storytelling postcards and video stories to understand why digital inclusion and exclusion matter to people and communities.

The stories shared through this project show that digital exclusion is more than an issue of technology. It matters because it is related with what it means to be a human being; connection, trust and knowing that you are safe and supported. It is why barriers to digital inclusion can have such a dramatic impact on wellbeing and a person's ability to fully participate in the world.

These barriers are felt most strongly by people already experiencing disadvantage, including First Nations communities, migrants and multicultural communities, older people, young people, disabled people¹, people on low incomes, people experiencing homelessness,

people affected by trauma and communities in regional and remote locations.

A consistent message across *Why it matters* is that digital inclusion cannot be left to individuals or community organisations alone. Government and industry increasingly design the systems people are required to use and therefore have a responsibility to make those systems safe, accessible, affordable and ethical. Community organisations are often left to help people navigate systems that were not designed with them in mind, despite limited funding and growing demand.

The report identifies ten principles to guide digital inclusion policy, planning, design and programs. These principles call for digital inclusion to be treated as a human right and public good, shaped by people's needs and lived realities, built on shared responsibility, grounded in safety and trust, supported through in-person relationships, designed for universal access, strengthened through choice, affordability and local infrastructure, and tested against the realities of regional and remote communities.

Digital inclusion is inextricably linked to social inclusion. It strengthens people's ability to stay connected, access support, exercise their rights, respond to emergencies, participate in education and employment, and contribute to community life. To create lasting change, digital inclusion must be planned and funded as essential social infrastructure, with coordinated action from government, industry, service providers and communities.

¹ The term disabled people has been used deliberately and reflects the social model of disability. People are disabled not by a medical impairment (a medical model) but by society and barriers preventing access. Read more about this here: <https://afdo.org.au/social-model-of-disability/>

About the WA Digital Inclusion Project

The WA Digital Inclusion Project (WADIP) is a Lotterywest-funded initiative led by the Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS) that works to improve digital inclusion across Western Australia. The project focuses on three key pillars of digital inclusion:

- **Access** – ensuring people can access devices and connectivity
- **Affordability** – reducing cost barriers to digital devices and connections
- **Digital Ability** – building the skills and confidence needed to use technology safely and effectively

WADIP was established in response to the growing recognition that digital access is no longer optional. Research by Good Things Australia found that overcoming digital exclusion could generate an estimated \$467.2 million in economic benefits for Australia each year, highlighting the significant social and economic value of investing in digital inclusion¹. Access to education, employment, healthcare, government services, banking, social connection and emergency information increasingly depends on digital participation. Yet many Western Australians continue to face barriers that limit their ability to fully participate in the digital world.

The project works in partnership with community organisations, local governments, Community Resource Centres (CRCs), Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), government agencies, education providers and industry partners to deliver community-led digital inclusion initiatives

¹ Hutley, N., (2024) *The Economic Benefits of Overcoming Digital Exclusion*. Good Things Australia. <https://goodthingsaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Economic-Benefits-of-Overcoming-Digital-Exclusion-report.pdf>

across metropolitan, regional and remote Western Australia.

A Community-Led Approach

Central to WADIP's approach is the belief that digital inclusion solutions are most effective when designed with communities, rather than for them.

The project prioritises co-design, local leadership and place-based responses that reflect the unique circumstances of different communities. What works in Perth may not work in Kununurra, Kalumburu, Gascoyne Junction and Mount Barker. Rather than applying a one-size-fits-all model, WADIP works alongside communities to identify local priorities and develop tailored responses.

This approach aligns with the principles outlined in the *Digital Inclusion in WA Blueprint* and contributes toward a more connected, equitable and inclusive Western Australia.

Key Areas of Activity

Since its commencement, WADIP has delivered a range of initiatives designed to strengthen digital inclusion across the state.

These include:

Community Champions Programs

Building the capability of community members to support their friends, families and communities with digital skills, online safety and access to essential services. From May 2024 to June 2025, 50 Community Champions were part of the pilot program. Since then, 10 of these champions have completed additional training and a further 56 new Community Champions have received facilitation training through the original and co-designed program models, enabling them to deliver support through trusted relationships and in multiple languages.

CRC Champions Program

Delivered with additional funding from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), the CRC Champions Program strengthens digital inclusion capability within Community Resource Centres across regional and remote WA. The program has expanded from an initial cohort of 11 CRCs to a second phase focused on some of Western Australia's most remote communities.

Digital Skills Scholarships

Providing supported pathways for people experiencing digital exclusion to build practical digital skills through accredited and non-accredited learning opportunities. Programs have been tailored to community priorities, including the co-designed Digital Skills for Life Scholarship, rolling out in regional Western Australia in Term 3, 2026.

Digital Inclusion Expos

Bringing together community organisations, government agencies, digital inclusion practitioners and community members to share knowledge, strengthen partnerships and identify solutions to digital inclusion challenges. Events have been held in Perth and regional WA, with participation continuing to grow.

Digital Skills for Emergency Preparedness

A collaboration between WACOSS and the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) that helps communities build confidence in accessing and using critical digital tools such as Emergency WA, Main Roads WA and Bureau of Meteorology applications.

WA Digital Inclusion Project demonstrate that digital inclusion is fundamentally about people.

It is about a grandmother learning how to video call family members living far away. It is about someone gaining the confidence to access healthcare online. It is about a job seeker applying for employment, an elder avoiding online scams, a family accessing emergency information during a bushfire, or a community worker helping others navigate increasingly digital systems.

The project's work across metropolitan, regional and remote Western Australia continues to reinforce a simple insight: digital inclusion strengthens social inclusion, economic participation and community resilience.

I Why It Matters

Digital inclusion is often discussed in terms of technology, devices and internet access. However, the experiences gathered through the

About Why it matters: A Digital Inclusion Storytelling Collection

Digital inclusion is not just about technology - it's about people, connection, and the relationships that hold communities together. *Why it matters: A Digital Inclusion Storytelling Collection* brings together stories from community members and service providers from across Western Australia that show why digital inclusion matters.

In an increasingly digital world, dignity, equity and connection are shaped by whether people can access and use technology in ways that work for them. Digital inclusion helps create these conditions, but it requires targeted support, investment and community-led approaches to ensure everyone can participate fully in community life. Digital inclusion is inextricably linked to social inclusion.

The aim of *Why it matters* is to draw attention to the impact of digital inclusion and exclusion on the lives of real people through storytelling and advocacy.

To do this we asked:

Why does digital inclusion or exclusion matter to you and your community?

Why it matters: A Digital Inclusion Storytelling Collection was designed to identify and elevate the personal experiences, reflections, and everyday realities of digital inclusion and exclusion across Western Australia. The methodology to do this was grounded in supporting people to tell their story of digital inclusion or exclusion in their own words.

To support diverse communities and locations three distinct storytelling methods were used:

- Large and small group workshops
- One-to-one interviews

- An invitation to complete a physical story postcard or a digital video

Why it matters engaged metropolitan, regional and remote community members, migrant and multicultural communities, First Nations people, young people, people with experiences of mental health challenges, trauma or homelessness, service providers as well as WADIP scholarship recipients and Community Champions.

From April 2026 to July 2026, community and service provider stories and experiences were collected through the:

- Facilitation of three community workshops at WADIP Community Expo's in Perth, Mount Barker, Broome and Derby
- Facilitation of three service provider and community member workshops in Perth, Port Hedland and Broome
- Facilitation of an online workshop with four regional and remote CRC's
- Interviewing of local community members, WADIP scholarship participants and Community Champions and service providers in Perth, Mount Barker, Port Hedland and Broome

This resulted in 10 interviews, 9 workshops involving over 250 people, the collection of 110 community storytelling postcards and community video stories. The community stories collected are the core data source used to develop the themes and insights of this report.

Creating a supported storytelling environment

Measures taken to ensure that community members and service providers felt safe enough to share their stories and experiences included:

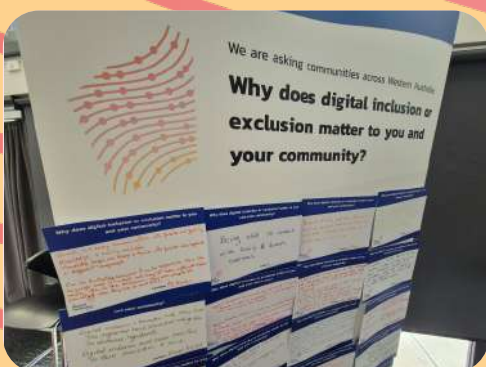
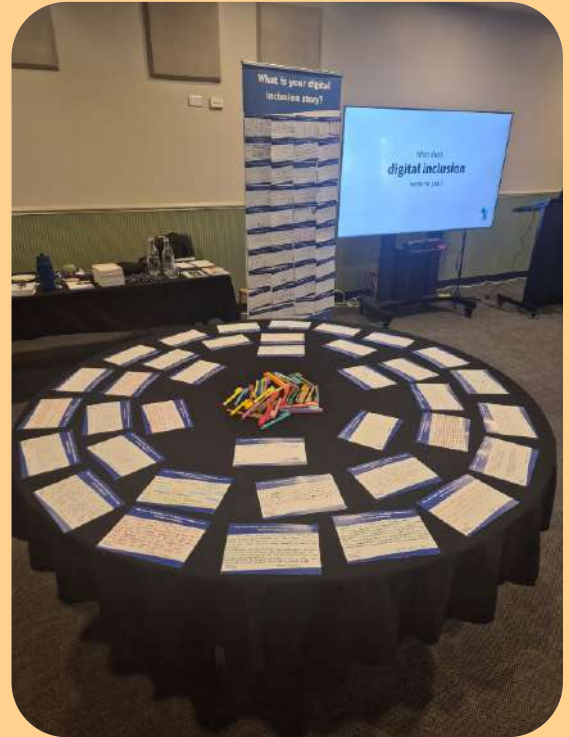
- Clear project information and consent processes which allowed people to

determine how and where their information was shared.

- A commitment that any digital information or videos collected would not be uploaded to the internet and would only be used for the purposes of developing insights and advocacy.
- Being provided with background information on digital inclusion and the time to reflect on what digital inclusion means to people.
- Clear storytelling protocols that supported people to maintain agency and ownership of their story and to only share what they felt comfortable to share.
- Different methods of story sharing from personal reflection, one-to-one and group discussions, writing, drawing and video making.

Why does digital inclusion or exclusion matter to you and your community?





Themes and Insights

From the stories and experiences shared, twelve insights across four themes were identified. These were:

Theme 1: Personal Experience

This theme identifies the direct human experience and impact of digital inclusion and exclusion. These insights highlight the emotional responses people may experience as well as how the digital world connects with their hopes and dreams as individuals.

Insights

- Feeling safe and understanding how to stay safe are top priorities
- AI creates new possibilities but also confusion and fear
- Digital inclusion supports self-belief, dignity and independence

Theme 2: Community inclusion and cohesion

This theme identifies how digital inclusion strengthens connection, belonging, and community participation. These insights show that digital inclusion is not only an individual experience but shapes how people stay connected, support one another, and maintain relationships that sustain wellbeing.

Insights

- Digital inclusion is a human right required to fully participate in society
- Digital inclusion is as much about human connection as it is technology
- Digital exclusion reinforces inequality and marginalisation

Theme 3: Support services and capacity building

This theme highlights the role of community organisations, CRCs, libraries, and frontline workers who help build digital ability and community capacity daily. These insights highlight that digital inclusion depends on human support as much as technical tools - and that capacity building must be ongoing, culturally safe, and delivered holistically across service delivery.

Insights

- Community organisations and groups are at the heart of the work
- Digital ability is built through non-digital relationships and connections
- Emerging tech and AI could strengthen service delivery

Theme 4: Infrastructure, access and affordability

This theme explores the practical foundations that make digital participation possible - reliable internet, stable devices, affordable data, and accessible service pathways. These insights highlight that digital inclusion is not only about having technology available, but about whether people can use it when, where and how they need it.

Insights

- Government and industry should carry more of the responsibility for digital inclusion
- Affordability and its connection to accessibility are major barriers to participation
- Infrastructure gaps in regional and remote WA create deep inequities

Why does digital inclusion or exclusion matter to you and your community?

COMING FROM A CALD COMMUNITY WHERE MANY COMMUNITY MEMBERS FACE DIGITAL EXCLUSION; DIGITAL INCLUSION HAS BEEN ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT TO ME. ORGANISATIONS SUCH AS WALCROSS HAS MADE AN INCREASING IMPACT ON MY COMMUNITY, THROUGH ACCESSIBLE PROGRAMS SUCH AS THE DIGITAL INCLUSION PROJECT. WITH THE DIGITAL WORLD CONSTANTLY EVOLVING, NOW MORE THAN EVER PROGRAMS LIKE THESE ARE VITAL FOR DIGITAL AWARENESS.



Location: PERTH

Why does digital inclusion or exclusion matter to you and your community?

Growing up in a small Pilbara mining town called Tom Price was pretty isolating. Even more so isolating as a young gay person trying to figure out who they are. You can't be what you can't see.

Fortunately, I was digitally included and I could access the internet.

Viewing Youtube videos of other ~~gay~~ gay people sharing their stories and lives validated me, my identity and my future.

I Could be, because I could see.



Location: Perth WA

Why does digital inclusion or exclusion matter to you and your community?



Location: PERTH

THEME 1:

Personal Experience**Feeling safe and understanding how to stay safe are top priorities****What we heard**

Across all communities, engaging with the digital world often triggered feelings of fear and vulnerability, with many people expressing that they lacked the skills or confidence needed to keep themselves safe online. Many community members - especially seniors, migrants, women, and people in remote areas - are afraid of scams, surveillance, and making mistakes online. Direct experience or knowing of others who have been scammed featured across stories told. This fear often stops people from engaging in the digital world.

Increasing trust and emotional safety provides opportunities

For some communities, the 'unknown' of digital spaces feel confusing, or unsafe, even when these systems are in place to help or provide access to core services. This leads to people disengaging, not because they don't want to participate, but because they want to feel safe. Safety is often found through CRCs, libraries, local services and community groups. People spoke about examples where these trusted spaces have allowed for learning and for the development of trusted relationships which directly supported digital inclusion. This allowed for opportunities for people to develop skills and to feel like they had more control of what happens to them in the digital world. Without safety, people withdraw. With safety, confidence grows, and digital inclusion becomes possible.

“People are scared of scams and updates—they're afraid to even touch their phones.”

PERTH WORKSHOP

“Some of them just are scared... they don't understand it.”

MOUNT BARKER INTERVIEW

“Digital inclusion allows for safe spaces for people they may not have had before.”

PERTH POSTCARD

“Inclusion → safety, less noise, less mis-info.”

BUNBURY POSTCARD

What this means**COMMUNITIES**

Communities need safety education delivered in trusted, culturally safe environments where people feel comfortable asking questions and expressing concerns. Community Champions play a vital role in reducing fear, building confidence, and modelling safe digital behaviour. Safety conversations must reach across generations and languages—children, parents, elders and multilingual communities all require guidance that reflects their lived realities and the risks they face online.

SERVICE PROVIDERS

Service providers have a role to encourage feelings of safety and trust before providing digital literacy information. By starting with the emotional challenges associated with a lack of safety and fear it is less likely that people are going to take in information or make decisions to enter the digital world. Workers being able to access clear and accurate information that they can then pass on to communities will make sure that factual and non-sensationalised information becomes the source of truth. This includes information to teach scam awareness, turn on privacy settings, parental controls and safe communication in ways that are practical and accessible. Like all methods of service provision, trauma-informed and culturally safe approaches are essential, ensuring people feel supported in a way that works for them.

Why does digital inclusion or exclusion matter to you and your community?

I really hate AI because it's just taken over everything and it's just all I see now.

WA
digital
inclusion
project

I love The online world because it helps with diversity and meeting people

Location:

INDUSTRY / COMPANIES

Companies have a responsibility to recognise that safety is not a user responsibility alone - it is a design responsibility that must be embedded into every product and platform. This interacts with the insight that industry could carry more of the responsibility for digital inclusion. Examples of what this could mean includes plain language and multilingual systems and support to create opportunities for people to build a stronger relationship and trust with the digital world. Understanding who ultimately bares the cost and responsibility for increasing safety and reducing fear associated with the digital world requires cross sector discussion with the support and oversight of government.

GOVERNMENT

Government has a responsibility to understand how fear, confusion and a lack of digital safety shape people's willingness and ability to use essential services. Platforms like MyGov and ServiceWA were frequently described as

overwhelming and intimidating, reinforcing exclusion rather than reducing it. Government can also direct and influence wider digital inclusion policy, funding and service design. By embedding clear digital inclusion requirements into funded service contracts, government can normalise digital support, strengthen frontline capability, and ensure that equitable digital participation becomes a standard part of public service and government funded delivery.

AI creates new possibilities but also confusion and fear

What we heard

Across Western Australia, people described artificial intelligence (AI) as a source of confusion, fear, and misinformation but also as something that sparks curiosity and opportunity. People's experience with AI had the potential to amplify both positive and negative emotions

and thoughts for people. People expressed concern with how using AI can overwhelm people with information, reinforce misunderstandings, or amplify distress. This includes people's stories of how they were using AI to interpret their emotions, diagnose their experiences, and make sense of their thoughts. The concept of an 'AI therapist' was raised by individuals as both a help and a concern. Young people in particular spoke about how they were adopting AI online support as an alternative or in absence of real-world support.

A dualistic relationship with a new and emerging technology

Some also spoke about AI providing genuine benefits to them. These included supporting people to start new businesses or launch community groups or helping them to learn skills that they otherwise wouldn't have the information to learn. For First Nations and multicultural communities, AI translation tools help maintain cultural connection and allows the translation of text and songs. Regardless of these positives, the overwhelming insight was one of a dualistic relationship with AI. Even those who were early adopters or more comfortable with its use, described feeling unsure about what is trustworthy, and what is being done with the information being gathered. It is still unclear for most what the impact of AI is and if they truly understand its potential for good or harm. It can empower, but it can also mislead, confuse, and frighten. For many, AI is now part of people's everyday lives and likely to increasingly influence their lives moving forward.

“AI is evolving faster than us... it's a Pandora's box.”

BROOME INTERVIEW

“We're inadvertently giving away more and more personal information to AI without realising it.”

BROOME INTERVIEW

“People are confused about what AI is actually doing with their information.”

CRC WORKSHOP

“Someone said 'my AI therapist'... Maybe we shouldn't listen to your AI therapist.”

HEDLAND INTERVIEW

What this means

COMMUNITIES

Communities need safe, trusted spaces to learn how AI works, what it can and cannot do, and how to use it without fear or confusion. Local organisations can help people build confidence, challenge misinformation, and understand AI as a tool rather than an authority. Community-led conversations about AI can reduce anxiety, strengthen digital literacy, and ensure people feel supported rather than overwhelmed.

SERVICE PROVIDERS

As the frontline to digital inclusion, community service providers face the challenge of needing to understand the changing impact of AI on communities. This includes often learning 'on the fly' at the same time as the people using their services to understand what the positive and negative benefits may be. With people increasingly getting information and support from AI or digital means, service providers remain a non-digital source that can counterbalance the negative effects of AI-based information overload and confusion.

INDUSTRY / COMPANIES

AI provides an increased capacity to both gather and utilise the personal information of communities. Data use and security concerns are driving many people's suspicion of the use of AI. Technology companies now have a greater responsibility to act both legally and ethically and to demonstrate to people that AI-based systems have a genuine benefit for them, and not just shareholders. Industry should partner with government, service providers and communities to understand the real-world impacts and to ensure that additional harm is not perpetrated through the advancement of AI.

GOVERNMENT

Government policy and legislation often move at a pace slower than the rate that technology is developed. The government has the challenge of keeping pace and understanding AI's influence and possible harms while also looking to adopt AI-based systems to improve efficiencies and spend taxpayers' money more effectively. This will require increased responsiveness and partnering with industry and service providers through education, regulation, and community-based support. Government should invest in programs that help people navigate AI critically and confidently, and ensure this support is delivered through trusted, in-person, relationship-based services. These programs must build on the insights in this report - centring cultural safety, human connection, and the relational approaches that communities have shown to be most effective.

Digital inclusion supports self-belief, dignity and independence

What we heard

Stories gathered throughout *Why it matters*, emphasised the transformative nature of being digitally included. When people can access devices, data and support, they feel more capable of managing their lives, advocating for themselves, and participating confidently in their communities. People spoke about feeling a deeper connection to their communities and building relationships with people that really change their lives and circumstances.

Small steps build agency and lead to larger outcomes

People spoke about how digital exclusion erodes confidence and reduces personal agency creating feelings of shame and isolation. Digital inclusion allows people to take

Why does digital inclusion or exclusion matter to you and your community?


 • Helped me with my anxiety. Thanks.
 • Helped me end my isolation.
 • Opened my mind up to others.
 • Has inspired me to do more study.
 • Realised how similar we all are.
 • I have gained my confidence back, and achieved something.
 • This helps my family & community by feeling proud & capable. 
 • Feel grateful for the opportunity.


 Location: **PERTH.**

some of this lost agency back and allows them to build the capacity to make decisions that lead to a better life. This was seen to be particularly powerful for people facing significant barriers such as mental health challenges, family and domestic violence, isolation and trauma.

Participants emphasised that when digital support is delivered through trusted relationships, people begin to believe in their own ability to learn and adapt. Small wins such as sending an email, accessing a service or recovering a password build confidence that extends beyond the digital world. People feel more in control of their lives, more connected to their communities, and more able to participate fully in society.

“It can foster independence & at the same time bring communities together.”

POSTCARD MOUNT BARKER

“Small things like learning email or Canva made me feel confident again.”

PERTH INTERVIEW

“When they learn how to use their phone, their confidence grows.”

PERTH INTERVIEW

“Digital skill is very important... if you want to live independently.”

PERTH INTERVIEW

What this means

COMMUNITIES:

People spoke about the impact of digital inclusion well beyond the digital world. As seen in other insights, the emotional and mental health impact of exclusion can impact a person's view of their identity and self-worth. Once again, the merits of community-led digital learning are emphasised to provide possibly life-changing positive impacts on people's lives.

SERVICE PROVIDERS:

Service providers spoke of how they have a strong awareness of how digital inclusion is interconnected with the overall wellbeing of people. Service providers can play a crucial role

in strengthening people's confidence, independence and digital agency. Service models need to encourage the time needed to deliver transformative relational digital support that meets people where they are, especially those experiencing mental health challenges, family and domestic violence, isolation or trauma.

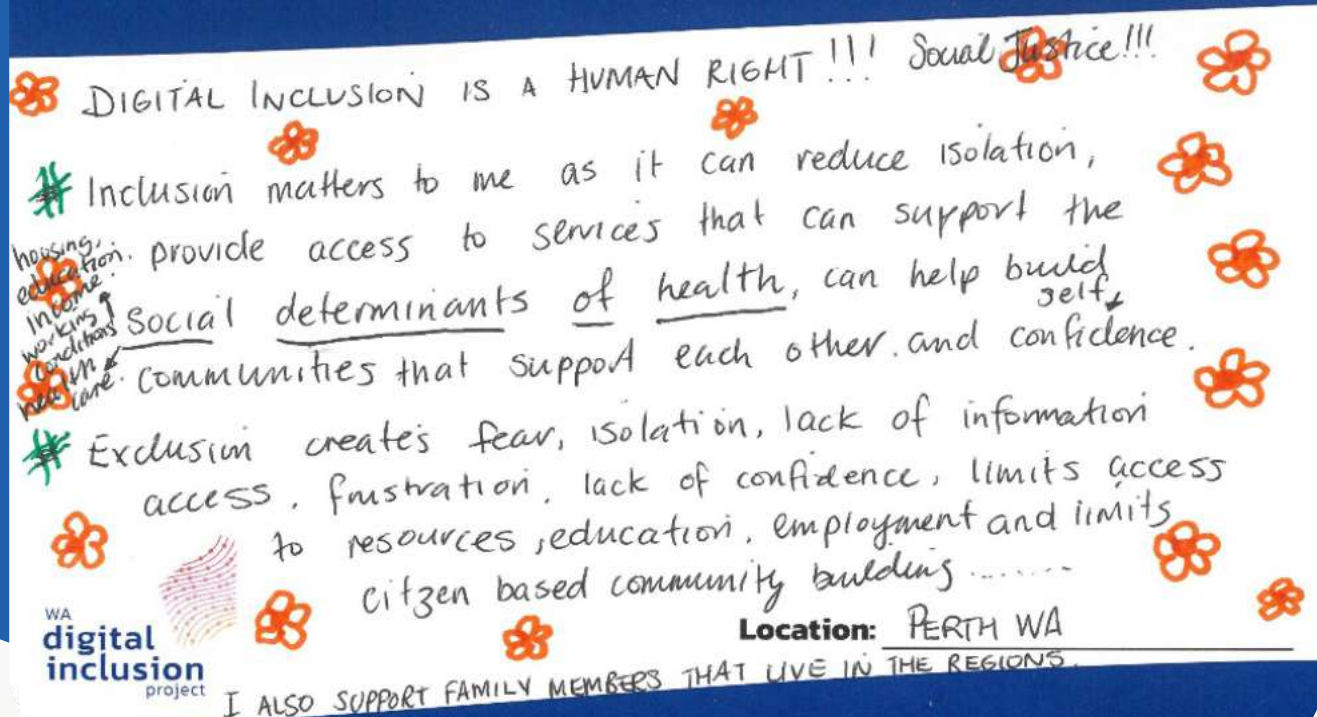
INDUSTRY / COMPANIES:

Industry is at the forefront of driving emerging technologies and have access to the conditions to develop a digital world that encourages personal strengths and agency. How such industry-driven systems could align with dignity and independence is reliant on strong regulatory guidance, ethical design standards, and meaningful collaboration with communities to ensure technology supports human agency rather than undermining it.

GOVERNMENT:

The stories gathered through this project demonstrate that people feel that programs that support their strengths and independence enrich their lives. The ability of the WADIP Champions Program and Digital Skills Scholarships to support informal and community member peer-based learning were often identified as a demonstration of positive government investment. Infrastructure, access and affordability and investment in emerging technologies are all key elements of the government's digital inclusion responsibilities. Sitting alongside these, investment in place-based, relational programs that build self-belief and dignity will ensure that people feel supported, capable and connected as they navigate an increasingly digital society.

Why does digital inclusion or exclusion matter to you and your community?



THEME 2:

Community inclusion and cohesion

Digital inclusion is a human right required to fully participate in society

What we heard

Across WA, people describe digital inclusion not just as a practical need or a luxury, but as something that is now inseparable from a person's human rights. Digital inclusion is a requirement for dignity, equality, and full participation in society. People from across WA expressed a clear belief: without digital access, people are denied opportunities, excluded from essential services, and prevented from exercising their rights. People emphasise that

digital inclusion is now inseparable from human rights: the right to safety, the right to connection, the right to information, the right to education, the right to participate, and the right to be heard.

Digital exclusion is described by many First Nations communities as systemic discrimination, widening existing gaps and limiting access to health, education, employment, and advocacy. For migrants, digital inclusion is the difference between isolation and belonging. For seniors, digital exclusion means the inability to access the support and benefits that they need to live their life.

Need for non-digital options and the right to 'switch off'

People also spoke of the right to decide when and how they engage with the digital world. When this choice is removed, people spoke about a loss of personal agency and that it had

a negative impact on their wellbeing. The overwhelming deluge and pace of information means that without a choice to engage in non-digital ways to do things, either from a support or social perspective, there is a feeling of being trapped and not in control.

“*Digital inclusion helps people to connect with others and participate fully in society.*”

PERTH POSTCARD

“*All people deserve to access education and information online, and to feel safe in the digital world.*”

PERTH POSTCARD

“*Without digital access, people lose their rights—connection, safety, opportunity, independence.*”

PERTH WORKSHOP

“*If people can't access online forms, they can't exercise their rights.*”

MOUNT BARKER INTERVIEW

What this means

COMMUNITIES:

People are becoming increasingly aware of the way that digital exclusion and the expansion of the digital world impacts them and has the potential to jeopardise their human rights. In a similar way to other movements over the years, community members are expressing frustration and dissatisfaction with the response of the government and industry to what they perceive as a challenge to their rights and entitlements. When people have reliable access to devices, connectivity and support, they can strengthen cultural connection, advocate for their rights and exercise self-determination.

SERVICE PROVIDERS:

Service providers often play the role as advocates for the rights of people and their communities. Daily they see the impact of inequitable systems and work to protect people's rights, even if it is areas that they are not funded to work in. This sees community

service providers, particularly those in regional and remote areas as being core digital inclusion advocates and a key source of data that should inform systems improvements that better protect people's rights. Service providers require stable and expanded funding to better include the key digital inclusion role to those most impacted and most at risk of human rights challenges.

INDUSTRY / COMPANIES:

As industry accelerates the development and adoption of new technologies, people described growing ethical blind spots where innovation is moving faster than the safety measures needed to protect users. Industry must recognise its responsibility in upholding digital rights by designing systems that keep pace with community expectations and the reality of digital inclusion being a human rights issue. The challenge remains, how is industry supported and directed to develop in a way that encourages social good given that it is driven by economic and transactional outcomes?

GOVERNMENT:

Government should provide the regulatory, policy and funding frameworks that guide industry toward ethical, inclusive and socially responsible technology development. As innovation accelerates, government has a critical role in setting safety standards, enforcing accountability, and ensuring that digital rights are protected regardless of income, geography or literacy. Strong public policy, co-design with communities, and clear expectations for ethical practice are essential to ensure emerging technologies serve social good rather than deepen inequity. As a developer and deliverer of digital services themselves, these are also standards that they need to adhere to as well.

Digital inclusion is as much about human connection as it is technology

What we heard

Across WA, people consistently described digital inclusion not as a technical concept but as something that either supported or prevented connection to other people. Digital tools were seen as ways to maintain identity, belonging, culture, safety, and relationships across vast distances. Across metropolitan and regional areas, the strongest theme was that digital connection is a valid form of human connection. People rely on digital tools to stay close to family overseas, to share memories, to participate in community life, and to feel less alone. When digital access is missing, people describe feeling isolated, hopeless, anxious, or excluded from the wider world.

Digital exclusion can amplify isolation

The physical isolation people in regional and remote communities experience from loved ones and the wider world meant that digital inclusion as a point of connection held even more importance. For migrants and multicultural communities, digital tools help to maintain language, culture, and relationships across physical borders. For older people, digital inclusion reduces loneliness and supports wellbeing. For young people, digital connection is how friendships, identity, and social belonging are formed.

Digital exclusion, therefore, is not simply a lack of access - it is a loss of connection, a loss of identity, and a loss of participation in community life, isolating people from their loved ones and community.

Quotes

“Connection = family, friends & services... Without that personal element, digital connection is less meaningful to me.”

PERTH POSTCARD

“Digital inclusion = connection with others that you might not have connected with due to distance.”

MOUNT BARKER POSTCARD

“Digital inclusion allows people to share their story & feel more like community.”

BROOME POSTCARD

“People want connection more than they want technology.”

MOUNT BARKER WORKSHOP

What this means

COMMUNITIES

Digital inclusion strengthens relationships, reduces loneliness, and supports cultural continuity. The digital world can be seen as an extension of the physical community and as a way for people to stay connected and to feel like they belong. Community-led digital spaces do more than teach digital skills and provide access, they provide opportunities for connection.

SERVICE PROVIDERS

Digital inclusion must be treated as part of wellbeing, mental health, and social connection - not just technical support. Support services should embed digital inclusion activity and principles into their everyday work.

INDUSTRY/COMPANIES

Telecommunications and tech companies should recognise that digital inclusion is a social determinant of wellbeing. Products and services should be designed with human connection at the centre and the acknowledgement that the digital world without this has the potential to cause harm and distress.

Why does digital inclusion or exclusion matter to you and your community?

THE DIGITAL EXCLUSION HAS MARGINALISED OUR PEOPLE (FIRST NATIONS). EVEN FURTHER, IT IS A FORM OF SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION & RACISM. DIGITAL INCLUSION IS NO LONGER A CHOICE AS MOST ESSENTIAL SERVICES ARE INCLUSIVE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY. WE DO HAVE THE OPTION TO ^{ACCESS} DIGITAL TECH AS A RECREATION PURPOSE.



Location: DERBY

GOVERNMENT

Digital inclusion should be framed as an indicator of wellbeing and factored into economic and social policies. Investment in infrastructure, affordability, and digital literacy is an investment in community cohesion, mental health and wellbeing, and social participation.

Digital exclusion reinforces inequality and marginalisation

What we heard

Across all locations, people described digital exclusion as a driver of inequality and exclusion. Those already marginalised - First Nations people, migrants, older people, disabled people, remote communities, and low-income households - experience further marginalisation due to digital exclusion. Digital exclusion compounds existing disadvantage, perpetuating existing cycles with people not

being able to access services, education, employment, healthcare, banking, or government systems.

Creating an unequitable scenario for many

People spoke about digital exclusion as a structural barrier that prevents people from doing what they want to do in their life. People spoke about feeling left behind and feeling as though the digital world was another way they were not being treated equitably with the rest of society.

For First Nations communities, digital exclusion intersects with historical and ongoing marginalisation, making essential services harder to access and reinforcing ongoing colonial systems that don't acknowledge cultural knowledge and authority. For migrants and multicultural communities, exclusion limits access to visas, housing, jobs, education, and safety information. For older people, exclusion creates fear, anxiety, and being more vulnerable

to abuse. For young people, reduced access due to financial restrictions and assumptions of digital literacy means missing out on school activities, social connection, and life opportunities.

This insight shows that although digital inclusion can be a point of connection and hope, it can also further marginalise those already experiencing significant challenges to equity and participation.

Quotes

“*Digital exclusion can reinforce inequalities and limit access to education, employment, and social connection.*”

PERTH POSTCARD

“*Digital exclusion makes me feel isolated and hopeless.*”

PERTH POSTCARD

“*Digital exclusion is drastically widening the gap we are supposed to be closing.*”

BROOME POSTCARD

“*Digital exclusion has marginalised our people [First Nations] even further. It is a form of systemic discrimination & racism.*”

DERBY POSTCARD

What this means

COMMUNITIES

Digital exclusion deepens existing inequalities and can create ongoing distrust and fear towards organised systems that are intended to support them. When digital systems do not demonstrate an understanding of the current and historical impacts of exclusion, they risk repeating harm with communities feeling increasingly marginalised.

SERVICE PROVIDERS

The influence of digital exclusion and practical measures to combat this should be embedded into service delivery, especially for hardly reached and marginalised groups. Services

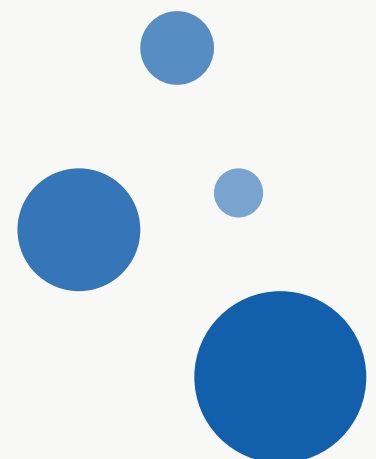
should also not assume digital inclusion for populations that may be seen to have digital capability (i.e. young people and those in metropolitan areas).

INDUSTRY/COMPANIES

There is an opportunity for telecommunications and tech companies to provide stronger leadership in reaching marginalised groups. As a starting point, understanding the harm of digital exclusion and aiming to not do additional harm should be considered when designing and implementing systems. If current levels of corporate social responsibility do not support industry to take additional responsibility, government regulation or incentivisation should be considered.

GOVERNMENT

Digital inclusion should be embedded in Closing the Gap, multicultural access strategies, ageing strategies, disability inclusion, and regional development. Without acknowledging how digital services (including MyGov and others) impact people who are already marginalised, these systems risk creating further harm — leading to long-term disengagement from services, missed opportunities, and reduced participation in community life.



Why does digital inclusion or exclusion matter to you and your community?

The impact of digital exclusion is very noticeable working with community members in Hedland. Poor affordability and barriers in gaining ID mean a lot of people aren't able to either purchase or activate phones. Without access to their own phone, people can become isolated and unable to receive support from services, attend appointments, stay on top of bills, fines and court dates, putting them in further disadvantage. This is exacerbated for people in domestic violence situations. I think to be digitally included is fantastic, but the impact for those who are excluded can outweigh benefits.



Location: South Hedland

THEME 3:

Support services and capacity building

Community organisations and groups are at the heart of the work

What we heard

Across Western Australia, community organisations, CRCs, neighbourhood centres, cultural groups, youth services and volunteer-run programs are the primary contact and means of support for digital inclusion. They are the places people trust, the places they already gather, and the places that understand the realities of their lives. In regional and remote towns, they are often the only places for digital support, printing, scanning, online forms, device

troubleshooting, or simply a safe place to ask questions without shame.

The frontline of digital inclusion and exclusion

Whenever a new form, process or service is introduced, these organisations and groups are the frontline for community support. The relational way they work allows for the strengths and resources of communities to be maximised - including cultural knowledge, intergenerational learning and peer support. Although community organisations have some resourcing and staffing for digital inclusion (particularly CRCs and libraries), they are doing this with limited resources, volunteer labour, and without the structural support needed to meet the scale of demand.

“We are it. We are the place to come to for public computers, printing, scanning... the post office don't provide those services. The newsagents don't provide that service.”

MOUNT BARKER INTERVIEW

“Community centres are where people feel safe to learn.”

PERTH INTERVIEW

“If there wasn't a place like us, how would they know what to do?”

MOUNT BARKER INTERVIEW

“CRCs are the only place people can get help with online forms.”

PORT HEDLAND WORKSHOP

What this means

COMMUNITIES

People are choosing to seek in person digital help from local community organisations, CRCs, neighbourhood centres, cultural groups and youth services. This choice is itself evidence of their worth: communities turn to these places because they are trusted, relational, culturally safe and grounded local knowledge. Informal interactions and volunteer organisations are providing true options and choice for people who want to have their digital inclusion needs met in a humanistic and accessible way.

SERVICE PROVIDERS

Effective digital inclusion requires access, tools, training and resources that embed digital support into everyday service delivery. This is the case for all organisations working to support the community, whether digital inclusion is part of an organisation's core activity or not. Due to the holistic and 'overlapping' impact of digital inclusion communities have a responsibility to work in partnership to ensure that there are not service gaps or duplications that becomes barriers to service.

INDUSTRY/COMPANIES

Industry can play a major role by partnering with local groups to improve device access, provide refurbished technology, and invest in community-led training. This will require maintaining an ongoing dialogue with communities to identify and develop responses to local need and that maximise local resources. When technology is designed with community supports in mind, it strengthens inclusion rather than creating new barriers.

GOVERNMENT

Shifting from short-term project funding to long-term investment for CRC's, libraries and community organisations working in digital inclusion should be identified as a key strategy by government to improve digital inclusion. Strengthening these organisations strengthens community connection, confidence and wellbeing. Policy should reflect that digital inclusion is relational work which is most effective when it is delivered locally through existing community points of contact. This is the case in both metropolitan and regional and remote locations.

Digital ability is built through non-digital relationships and connections

What we heard

Across WA, people emphasised that digital skills are best learned through in-person trusted relationships. CRCs, libraries, community centres, youth workers, Elders, volunteers, and multicultural leaders are the frontline digital mentors in WA. People come to them not just for technical help but also to feel connected to their wider community.

Developing digital ability requires people asking simple questions, being allowed to experiment, make mistakes, and learn at their own pace. Older people, migrants, First Nations community members, and people with low

literacy rely heavily on trusted service workers and community members to navigate digital systems.

People want a world that values human connection

People across WA spoke about the success of community-based in-person interactions and of programs such as the WADIP Community Champions Program and Digital Skills Scholarships to support informal and community member peer-based learning. The important benefit people identified from these programs was feeling connected to people and their wider community. A by-product of this was the increased ability to access and use the digital world. This insight shows that digital inclusion is not just about teaching skills - it is about building connection and providing opportunities for relational two-way learning.

“They learn because they trust me... the relationship comes first.”

PERTH INTERVIEW

“People learn best when they can ask simple questions in person.”

MOUNT BARKER INTERVIEW

“Learning together in a room made us feel connected and confident.”

PERTH INTERVIEW

“People only learn when someone sits with them.”

MOUNT BARKER INTERVIEW

“Digital inclusion could mean more face-to-face connection & touch.”

MOUNT BARKER POSTCARD

What this means

COMMUNITIES

People across both metropolitan and regional WA, spoke about the importance of community leaders and services that emphasise relational in-person learning. This often included CRC's and libraries but also those not formally funded or supported to do this work. Community-led,

Why does digital inclusion or exclusion matter to you and your community?

CONNECTION: FAMILY, FRIENDS & SERVICES.

~~WITHOUT~~, WITHOUT THAT PERSONAL ELEMENT, DIGITAL CONNECTION IS LESS MEANINGFUL TO ME. IT'S IMPORTANT TO STRIKE A BALANCE BETWEEN THE DIGITAL & PHYSICAL, BECAUSE IT'S EASY TO ~~RELY~~ RELY ON THE DIGITAL & BECOME PHYSICALLY REMOVED.

culturally safe approaches ensure digital ability grows through connection, belonging, and shared learning and communities will continue to operate in this way as they always have.

SERVICE PROVIDERS

Frontline workers need the time, training and resourcing to provide relational digital mentoring that not only meets the needs of the person they are supporting, but that encourages that community member to support others. Embedding digital mentoring and peer-learning opportunities into service practice ensures people with low literacy, limited English, or who are otherwise marginalised can learn safely through in-person supportive environments.

INDUSTRY/COMPANIES

People prefer face-to-face, relationship-based support to improve digital inclusion. This conflicts with the increasingly transactional and impersonal ways that many companies are currently operating. People have identified the closing of physical company offices and a greater reliance of online services, particularly

in regional and remote areas as a barrier and a form of digital exclusion. Partnership models which leverage the existing strengths and relationships within communities encouraged by funding and support from industry have the potential to support more inclusive digital communities.

GOVERNMENT

Government investment should prioritise community-led digital peer-based learning, recognising that people learn best through trusted relationships rather than formal training alone. Consistent, long-term funding for CRCs, libraries as supported by WADIP - identified by communities as essential, practical supports - should be maintained and expanded. Strengthening these relational supports ensures digital inclusion strategies build confidence, connection and long-term capability across both metropolitan and regional communities.

Why does digital inclusion or exclusion matter to you and your community?

The ability to communicate with staff across WA on site to stay informed, connected and safe.

Its important for our business who provide shared services to Indigenous owned entities.

Emerging tech and AI could strengthen service delivery

What we heard

Across WA, service providers described how emerging technologies- including AI, translation tools, automated systems and new connectivity options- are creating opportunities to support people more effectively. AI tools can help workers draft documents, simplify complex information or translate materials making services more accessible. In remote areas, improved connectivity options such as Starlink have enabled telehealth and remote case management providing services that people would otherwise not receive. AI can also amplify misinformation, create confusion, or have the potential to violate people's privacy rights if used without care. Service providers should be supported with training, ethical guidance and culturally safe frameworks to use emerging technologies responsibly.

Tech can create space for more opportunities for human connection

Service providers also highlighted how new technologies can streamline administrative tasks, freeing up time for relational work. Automated reminders, digital forms, and AI-assisted processes can reduce workload pressures and allow workers to focus on human connection.

People want digital systems that enhance service quality and allow them more opportunities to get support how they would like to receive it. In person through the development of a trusted relationship, not systems that reduce choice in ways that feel unsafe or impersonal. Technology used well supports this work.

“I look at it to how it frees up some of my time, helps me deliver better results, and then it can free up more of my time to be able to give more of that face-to-face interaction.”

BROOME INTERVIEW

“I think it's all about how we utilise [AI]... complement each other rather than dominate...”

BROOME INTERVIEW

“I use my phone to FaceTime them [to provide support] all the time... definitely used as a tool for social connection.”

PORT HEDLAND INTERVIEW

What this means

COMMUNITIES

Emerging technologies can help communities access clearer information, multilingual support and more responsive services. When used well, AI and digital tools reduce barriers created by literacy, language and distance. Communities have a strong preference for human connection and support and benefit most when technology strengthens this.

SERVICE PROVIDERS

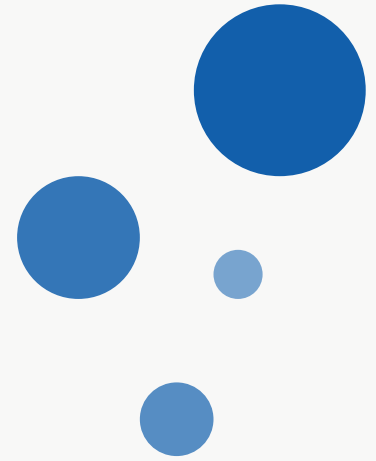
Service providers at both worker-level and organisationally are racing to understand how technology can support their work. Although this provides an opportunity to improve service delivery for communities and to better support staff, this is being done largely without direction or guidance. Service providers should ensure that their adoption of technology is aligned with their vision and values and that people's data and privacy are not compromised to find competitive advantage or to maintain financial sustainability. Service providers should also advocate for training and support to ensure technology complements relational practice and supports culturally safe, trauma-informed service delivery.

INDUSTRY / COMPANIES

Industry has an opportunity to develop ethical and values-aligned systems that support service providers and communities in real-world contexts. Companies should collaborate with communities and organisations to ensure tools strengthen human support rather than replace it, and that technology works reliably in low-coverage, low-literacy and multilingual environments.

GOVERNMENT

The main source of income for service providers remains federal and state government funding. Government should ensure that procurement and contracting processes support the development of technological service advances that don't take ethical shortcuts or encourage adoption at a rate that doesn't support the existing strengths of service providers and communities. Government can also work with industry and invest in emerging technologies that enhance service delivery while ensuring they are safe, ethical and culturally appropriate. Funding must support training for workers, accessible digital tools, and improved regional connectivity. Policies should also ensure AI complements human support rather than replacing it.



Why does digital inclusion or exclusion matter to you and your community?

Digital Inclusion matters to me and the community because it is about 'Connections'. More and more services are moving to a more digital platform eg. Centrelink, ATO, shopping, Medicare. If we share our knowledge with each other and help, no one will be left behind.

Being able to connect with family and friends that live far away easily.



Location: BROOME

THEME 4:

Infrastructure, access and affordability

Government and industry should carry more of the responsibility for digital inclusion

What we heard

Across postcards and workshops, a clear message emerged: digital inclusion is not something individuals or community organisations can solve alone. Government systems, banking processes, school platforms, health services, and technology companies increasingly require people to be digitally literate, have stable devices, maintain email

accounts, manage passwords, and navigate complex online systems.

Shared responsibility should lead to shared outcomes

People spoke about their awareness of the benefits for government and industry adopting digital systems including reduced staffing costs, streamlined processes, automated decision-making, and higher profit margins. They spoke about how they felt the responsibility of navigating these systems falls to themselves, particularly those who are least equipped and least resourced. It was felt that the responsibility of navigating a digital world should be shared more equitably and that government and industry should be required to do more to make sure that the benefits and outcomes from an increasingly digital world is better shared with people and communities. Digital inclusion should be seen as a public good, not an opportunity to increase systems efficiencies and profits only.

“Government doesn’t accept paper anymore... without digital access you fall behind.”

PERTH INTERVIEW

“I don’t want to be sent to the internet... the bank wants your money but they don’t want you.”

MT BARKER POSTCARD

“Without access to online services, people can become isolated and unable to receive support.”

SOUTH HEDLAND POSTCARD

What this means

COMMUNITIES

The expectations for communities to navigate digital systems that were never designed for them without additional support are currently higher than most people’s realities. When digital participation becomes a prerequisite for essential government and corporate systems,

inclusion support should be strengthened rather than seen as mainly a personal responsibility. People should be better able to identify the benefits they are gaining by adopting digital systems and services.

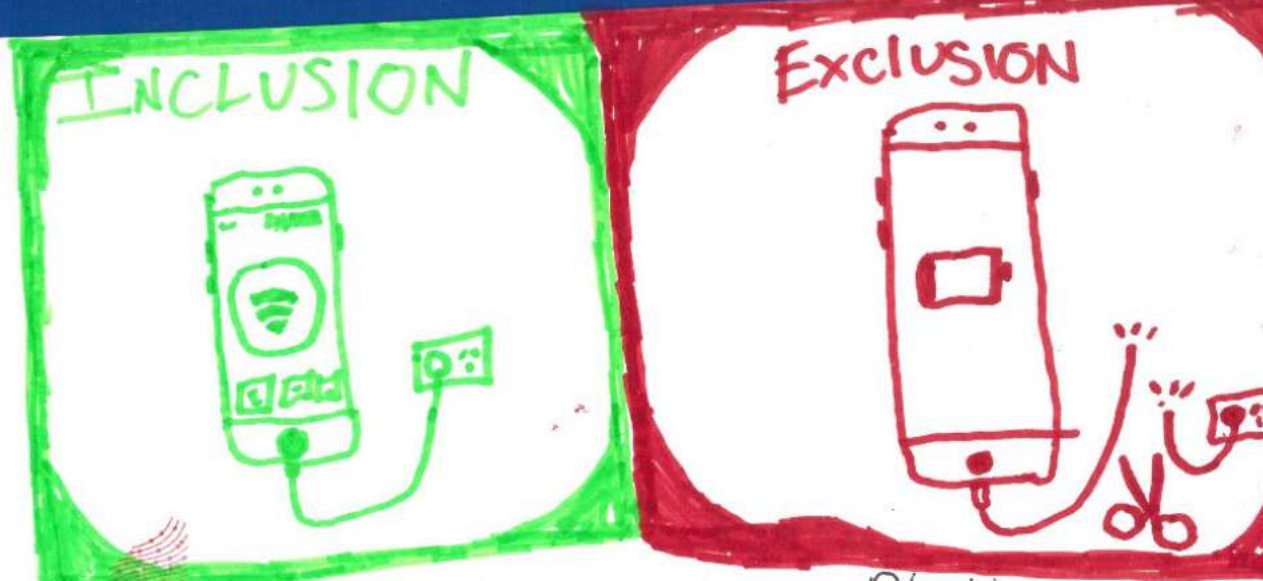
SERVICE PROVIDERS

Many frontline workers spend significant time that is often not directly funded or part of their formal role to help people navigate confusing platforms, recover accounts or complete online forms. This added and increasing responsibility is impacting service providers capacity to deliver intended service outcomes for people. Additionally, as community service funding requirements become more complex and onerous, services are increasingly moving to digital services themselves. The challenge is to develop digital systems that help and don’t add to the digital burden.

INDUSTRY / COMPANIES

Industry must take greater responsibility for the digital barriers created through service and

Why does digital inclusion or exclusion matter to you and your community?



WA
digital
inclusion
project

Location: PE HEDLAND

product changes that assume high literacy, high data use and constant device replacement. Digital solutions should not only provide benefit to the company and shareholders but also to the wider community. This includes considering how new services and products impact marginalised communities including those in regional and remote locations. Industry should hold a higher level of responsibility for providing a more equitable digital world, either through corporate responsibility or through government intervention. More equitable online experiences would ensure technology strengthens inclusion rather than creating new layers of exclusion.

GOVERNMENT

Government should treat digital inclusion as essential public infrastructure, comparable to roads, water and electricity. This means sustained investment in regional connectivity, stable platforms, and human support options that recognise diverse needs and contexts. The design of new and existing government systems and services should consider the added digital burden on people and community service providers. A perceived small change (i.e. fuel support payment) can add significant hours of largely unfunded support time to an organisation or volunteer group.

Affordability and its connection to accessibility are major barriers to participation

What we heard

Across metropolitan and regional WA, people spoke about affordability as one of the strongest and most consistent barriers to accessing the digital world. People often cannot afford devices, data, repairs, or upgrades. Many spoke about how they rely on shared phones, prepaid credit, or outdated devices that cannot run essential apps. Community members and service providers spoke about how for low-income households, affordability determines whether they can access MyGov, banking,

school platforms, telehealth appointments, or employment systems.

Affordability reduces the ability to have an identity

With affordability being a large factor in determining access for people, it also becomes a major factor in maintaining a digital identity. People described that you need a mobile and unique number to access business and government services through two factor identification. If a family is sharing a mobile or someone has lost access for whatever reason (including lack of data) then their online identity is compromised or lost. In remote communities, the cost of data is also significantly higher, and reception is poorer, with a reliance on prepaid phone and data plans significantly increasing costs. For migrants and CALD communities, affordability intersects with settlement challenges and staying culturally connected. Maintaining a device and access is an ongoing financial commitment that many cannot afford. This in turn impacts their ability to maintain the digital identity to access services and benefits that they are entitled to.

“Unable to afford internet/devices.” Derby workshop

“Poverty – cannot or don’t have a computer – fall behind in work and education.”

DERBY POSTCARD

“There’s definitely more people in Hedland who don’t have access to devices and might share like one phone for a whole family.”

PORT HEDLAND INTERVIEW

“It definitely creates a barrier when people don’t have devices... you might have someone who has a phone and then the phone will go to a different family member and then be lost forever.”

PORT HEDLAND INTERVIEW

What this means

COMMUNITIES

Affordability is a key driver of decision making when people are considering whether to access the digital world. The challenge becomes when core needs such as banking, MyGov and school platforms require digital access and stable data. It then becomes a decision to whether money is used to maintain a device and data or whether other core needs such as rent and food are met. Affordable digital access is therefore not optional - it is foundational to community wellbeing, identity, and participation, shaping whether people can stay connected, informed, and included.

SERVICE PROVIDERS

Service providers see firsthand how affordability limits people's ability to engage with essential digital services and often have limited resources and methods to address this. When clients rely on shared phones, prepaid credit, or outdated devices, engaging in core services and receiving support becomes difficult. Programs and services that support people with device access, sustainable data, tech troubleshooting, and non-digital options will provide community services with the levers to support communities to maintain their digital rights and options.

INDUSTRY/COMPANIES

Telecommunications and technology companies play a critical role in addressing affordability issues. High data costs, expensive devices, and rapid upgrade cycles disproportionately impact low-income households, First Nations and remote communities and other marginalised groups. As has been echoed in other insights, there is a role and responsibility for companies to facilitate a more equitable and inclusive digital society. This includes working with government, service providers and communities to offer affordable plans, subsidies, refurbished device programs, and backwards compatibility for older, more affordable applications.

GOVERNMENT

Government has access to some of the strongest levers to reduce affordability barriers by embedding digital access into legislation and social policy. Concessions, subsidies, compliance, device access programs, and investment in regional connectivity are essential to ensure people can maintain a digital identity and access the services they are entitled to. Treating digital affordability as a core component of social inclusion with an economic and societal impact is necessary for equitable participation across WA.

Infrastructure gaps in regional and remote WA create deep inequities

What we heard

Regional and remote communities consistently described digital access as unreliable, unaffordable, and insufficient. Connectivity black spots, slow speeds, limited towers, and unaffordable data create structural barriers that prevent people from accessing essential services. In places like the Gascoyne, Kimberley, Pilbara, and remote towns, people may have only one or two mobile towers covering tens of thousands of square kilometres. This means long stretches of travel without coverage, creating safety risks and limiting access to telehealth, banking, education, emergency services, and government systems.

Improving connection options have the potential to increase the divide

The introduction of Starlink and the rollout of the NBN across some towns has been a gamechanger for many communities. People spoke of how it has allowed for connection to fast data speeds for the first time, allowing First Nations communities to be involved in creating and transmitting digital media highlighting their culture across the country. It has also allowed for business and community support options

Why does digital inclusion or exclusion matter to you and your community?

IT MATTERS IMMENSELY IN THE KIMBERLEY AS DIGITAL EXCLUSION IS DRASTICALLY WIDENING THE GAP WE ARE SUPPOSED TO BE CLOSING.



Location: BROOME

that were not possible previously. The challenge with Starlink and other emerging services is the high initial and ongoing costs. People spoke about the growing divide in regional towns between those that can afford Starlink, and those that cannot.

Geography currently has a large bearing on whether you are digitally included or not and regional infrastructure continues to have a significant influence on whether people are digitally included or not.

“In our 57,809 square kilometres, there’s two mobile towers with a 10-kilometre radius, so you certainly have a lot of time in between where you’re not connected.”

CRC WORKSHOP

“Connectivity black spots mean people can’t access emergency healthcare.”

CRC WORKSHOP

“For people to make an emergency drive from here to our nearest hospital 176 kilometres away, you’ve only got 20 kilometres where you’ve got phone coverage.”

CRC WORKSHOP

“Exclusion – Black spots – no internet/mobile services.”

MOUNT BARKER POSTCARD

“Lack of infrastructure can often impact connectivity.”

MOUNT BARKER POSTCARD

What this means

COMMUNITIES

Infrastructure gaps continue to create frustration and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness for regional and remote communities. These gaps are systems issues that communities can do little about to remedy, yet they impact their daily reality and effects what they can and cannot do. Connectivity gaps deepen inequity, limit opportunity and reinforce geographic disadvantage, making digital inclusion impossible without strong, dependable infrastructure.

SERVICE PROVIDERS

Service delivery models must account for the reality of connectivity gaps across regional and remote WA. Telehealth, online forms, digital identity systems and remote service platforms all require offline or low-bandwidth alternatives. Providers need flexible, hybrid approaches that ensure people can access support regardless of coverage, speed or cost, preventing essential services from becoming inaccessible due to infrastructure limitations.

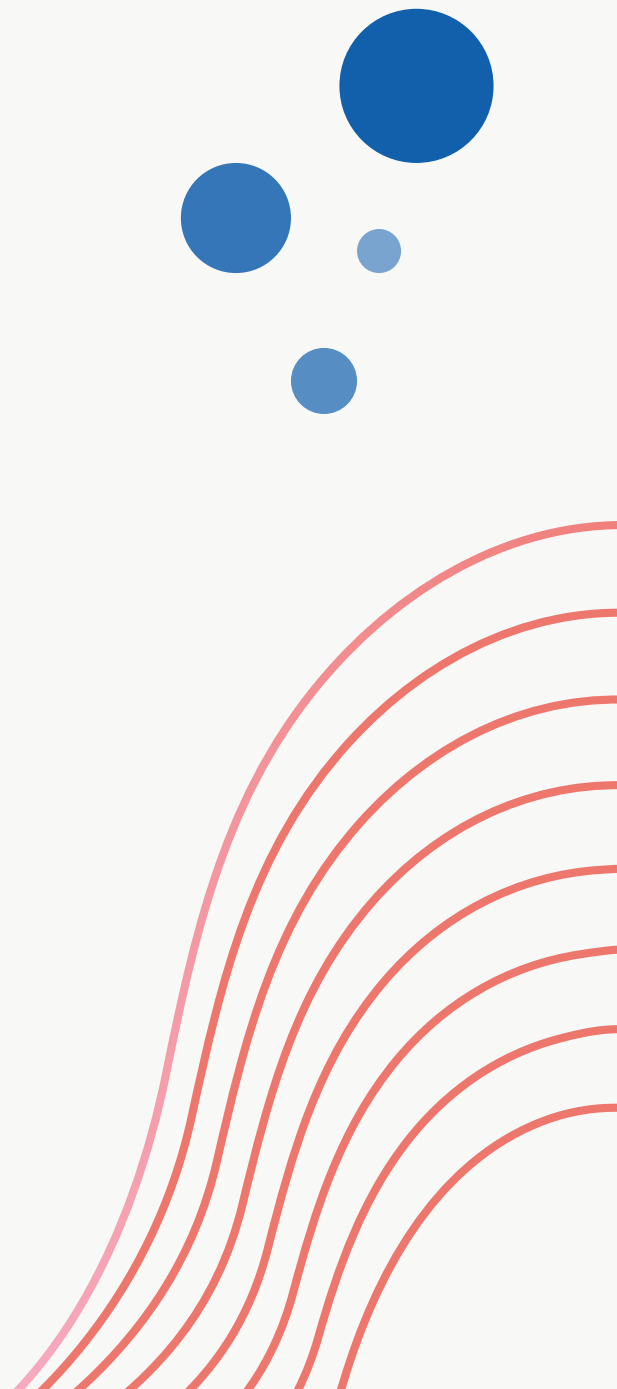
INDUSTRY/COMPANIES

Industry has played a constructive role in developing online connection options that have provided choice for some communities and the people within these communities. Emerging technologies like Starlink show what is possible, but high costs risk widening the divide between those who can afford connectivity and those who cannot. Industry should work with government and other partners to prioritise affordability, stability and equitable access to ensure regional communities are not left behind.

GOVERNMENT

The WA government has been playing a more significant role in investing in the rollout of Wi-Fi within towns and communities as well as working with NBN Co to roll this out faster and more widely than what could be done without partnership. The government should look at a longer term, more sustainable plan for regional

and remote connectivity and invest in permanent or more consistent community Wi-Fi access plans. Infrastructure investment in regional and remote connectivity is urgent and must be treated as essential public infrastructure - in a similar way to how roads, water or electricity are viewed.



ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION:**The under 16 social media age restrictions**

As of 10 December 2025, the Australian Government introduced a social media age restriction that prevents young people under 16 from creating social media accounts. This legislation and its level of effectiveness has significant implications for digital inclusion. This sits outside the core insights of this report as it represents a targeted policy change with a specific and disproportionate impact on young people under 16 and on the parents, guardians and trusted adults who support them. Its inclusion as an additional consideration recognises that age-based restrictions create a unique digital inclusion issue.

Feedback and stories from young people aged under 16 engaging with *Why it matters* stated that the social media age restrictions did not impact their ability to have an account or post on social media. Young people spoke about

how most were able to create new accounts by entering dates of birth older than 16. Some young people spoke about how they felt the age restriction legislation meant that they may be less likely to discuss this with adults.

Some parents across *Why it matters* spoke about the concerns they had about the lack of effectiveness of the under 16 social media age restrictions to keep their child safe online. Others spoke about how they had altered their parenting style to develop more of a harm minimisation approach which included initiating transparent conversations about social media with their child. There appeared an inevitability that children would access the internet and social media and that the age restrictions meant that they may have less knowledge of this.

It is unclear what the implications of this will be over time, but the stories suggest that age restrictions alone are unlikely to create safety without trusted adults having a more active role in educating and supporting children with the social media decisions they are making.



Principles to guide digital inclusion

Across insights and themes shared throughout *Why it matters* there are guiding principles which can be used by service providers, industry and government to guide digital inclusion policy, planning, design and programs.

These principles synthesise the stories and information gathered and leverage what communities know work best for them.

1. Treat digital inclusion as a human right and a public good

Access to digital services, information, education and connection is now central to full participation in society and should not depend on income, geography, age, language, disability or cultural background.

2. Start with people's needs and lived realities

Digital inclusion programs and services should be shaped by what communities say they need, how they live, what their strengths are, and the barriers they experience every day.

3. Share responsibility across government, industry and community

Digital inclusion cannot be left to individuals or frontline services alone. Government and industry must design inclusive systems, reduce digital burden, support ethical technology use, and invest in equitable outcomes.

4. Prioritise safety and trust

People need safe, culturally respectful, trauma-informed and non-judgemental spaces where they can ask questions, make mistakes, learn about scams and privacy, and feel ok about sharing their vulnerabilities about digital learning.

Why does digital inclusion or exclusion matter to you and your community?

** (Living in Rural Scotland)*
 - my father in his 90s connected to family daily via WhatsApp after losing his wife (overseas) (my mother)
 He emailed daily + even uploaded videos on YouTube during COVID. I once told him he could talk to his laptop + it would record him.
 This was a revelation to him - he wrote his life's story by talking to his laptop every night for months - he then had the story made into a book for his family + friends.
 Digital literacy kept him connected & alive.
 Location: PERTH

5. Support digital ability through in-person support

Digital skills grow through practical in-person contact that has the time to build helping relationships with people and organisations that communities already know and trust.

6. Design for universal access

Services, programs and platforms should use plain language, visual guidance, hands-on support, multilingual options and flexible pathways that meet people where they are.

7. Provide choice, including non-digital and assisted options

People should be able to engage through digital, phone-based, in-person, paper-based or supported pathways, particularly during crisis, device loss, poor connectivity or when digital systems feel unsafe.

8. Make access and affordability foundational

Devices, data, repairs, upgrades and connectivity must be affordable, reliable and available, especially for low-income households, mobile-only users, shared-device households and regional and remote communities.

9. Invest in local community infrastructure

CRCs, libraries, community organisations and local champions are essential digital inclusion anchors. Strengthening them through consistent funding and resourcing strengthens the whole system.

10. Design government and business systems around regional and remote realities

When essential government and business services move exclusively online consideration should be given to accessible, in-person and assisted support so that distance, connectivity, documentation or limited local services do not become barriers to participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A principle-based guide to implementation and action

Creating a more digital inclusive world is a complex and multifactorial challenge. People throughout *Why it matters* spoke about their own personal responsibilities to continue to learn and grow in a rapidly changing digital world. There are limits to what individuals and communities can do alone to make these changes. To make true and lasting change in this area it will require concerted and consistent action by government, industry and support services.

Below is a guide that service providers, industry and government can use to ensure that the actions that best support communities, as identified throughout this project are considered and implemented.

PRINCIPLE	SERVICE PROVIDERS
1. TREAT DIGITAL INCLUSION AS A HUMAN RIGHT AND A PUBLIC GOOD	Ask whether digital access is being treated as essential to dignity, participation and rights, rather than as an optional extra. Build digital inclusion into intake, assessment, advocacy, case work and service delivery.
2. START WITH PEOPLE'S NEEDS AND LIVED REALITIES	Use co-design principles, client experience and local knowledge to shape programs. Avoid assuming what people need; ask communities what works, what does not, and what barriers they face.
3. SHARE RESPONSIBILITY ACROSS GOVERNMENT, INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY	Identify digital barriers in collaboration with people and inform government and industry. Advocate to government and industry for better design, clearer communication, funded support and less digital burden on frontline services.
4. PRIORITISE SAFETY AND TRUST	Create culturally safe, trauma-informed and non-judgemental spaces for people to learn. Include digital inclusion information and skill building as part of your usual service offerings.
5. SUPPORT DIGITAL ABILITY THROUGH IN-PERSON SUPPORT	Develop the service capacity to deliver face-to-face, practical and relationship-based learning programs. Allow time for staff or volunteers to sit with people, troubleshoot problems, practise skills and build confidence.
6. DESIGN FOR UNIVERSAL ACCESS	Use plain language, visuals, step-by-step guides, interpreters, translated resources and hands-on support. Test resources with people who have different literacy levels before using them widely.
7. PROVIDE CHOICE, INCLUDING NON-DIGITAL AND ASSISTED OPTIONS	Maintain phone, paper, in-person and supported pathways wherever possible. Make sure people are not excluded when they cannot use digital systems independently.
8. MAKE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY FOUNDATIONAL	Consider whether people have the device, data, connectivity and support needed before expecting digital participation. Build referral pathways and partnerships for devices, affordable data, repairs, public access points and emergency alternatives.
9. INVEST IN LOCAL COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE	Work with people and services already doing this work. CRCs, libraries, neighbourhood centres, ACCOs, multicultural groups and local champions. Strengthen existing trusted places rather than duplicating or replacing them.
10. DESIGN GOVERNMENT AND BUSINESS SYSTEMS AROUND REGIONAL AND REMOTE REALITIES	Continue the crucial work of supporting people to access government and business systems that are not always fit for purpose in regional and remote areas. Advocate for in-person and more accessible options.

INDUSTRY/COMPANIES

Consider whether products, services and business models support people's right to access information, services, connection and participation. Treat digital inclusion as part of social responsibility, not only as a market opportunity or customer preference.

Design for real users, especially people who experience digital exclusion. Test products and service pathways with low-income households, regional and remote communities, older people, disabled people, First Nations communities, migrants and people with low literacy.

Recognise that companies create many of the digital systems people must navigate. Take responsibility for reducing complexity, improving customer support, investing in inclusive design and partnering with government and community organisations to address barriers.

Build safety, privacy, scam prevention, transparency and consent into products from the start. Use clear language, accessible warnings and human support pathways so people understand risks and feel confident using digital services.

Provide options for in person support, even if this is online or on the phone. Resource, support and partner with trusted community organisations, CRCs, libraries and local champions to provide hands-on learning, troubleshooting and customer support.

Use plain language, intuitive design, visual prompts, multilingual support and simple steps. Reduce jargon, unnecessary logins, confusing forms and complex password or verification processes wherever possible.

Maintain phone, in-person, paper-based or assisted options for essential services. Ensure customers are not locked out of banking, telecommunications, utilities, insurance, health, education or other essential services if they cannot use digital channels independently.

Consider pricing, data use, device requirements, upgrade cycles and compatibility. Offer affordable plans, hardship options, low-data alternatives, refurbished devices, and don't charge a premium for regional and remote access when no other option exists.

Support existing community infrastructure through partnerships, sponsorships, equipment donations, training, connectivity support and long-term investment. Work with local organisations that already have trust and reach, rather than creating one-off corporate programs.

Test whether digital products and customer pathways work in places with poor connectivity, limited transport, shared devices, unstable phone numbers and limited local support. Provide low-bandwidth, offline, assisted and place-based options so regional and remote customers are not excluded.

GOVERNMENT

Embed digital inclusion into policy, funding and service design as essential social infrastructure. Treat access to digital services, information, education, connection and safety as part of equitable public participation.

Use lived experience and local evidence to shape policy and programs. Co-design with people who experience digital exclusion, including regional and remote communities, First Nations communities, older people, disabled people, migrants, people on low incomes and people with low literacy.

Recognise that government systems often create digital requirements that communities and service providers must help people navigate. Fund the support needed to meet those requirements and work with industry and community partners to share responsibility fairly.

Build privacy, online safety, scam awareness, data protection, consent and trauma-informed practice into public digital systems and funded programs. Fund programs that prioritise safety and trust through service relationship and peer learning.

Fund place-based, relationship-based and in-person digital support through WADIP, CRCs, libraries, community organisations, ACCOs, neighbourhood centres and local champions. Recognise that digital capability is built through trust, time and human support.

Require government forms, websites, platforms and communications to use plain language, accessible design, multilingual options, visual guidance and step-by-step support. Test systems with people who have low literacy, low digital literacy and limited English before implementation.

Maintain phone, paper, in-person and assisted pathways for essential services. Avoid making digital-only access the default where exclusion risks are high, especially for people in crisis, people without devices, people with poor connectivity or people who need support to engage safely.

Use policy and funding levers to improve access to devices, affordable data, repairs, upgrades and connectivity. Consider the wider investment in concessions, subsidies, public access points, device programs and investment in community Wi-Fi or other shared infrastructure.

Provide long-term, consistent funding for WADIP and trusted local organisations that already support digital inclusion. Strengthen CRCs, libraries, ACCOs, neighbourhood centres, multicultural organisations and community champions with long term strategies and investment.

Test public systems against the realities of poor connectivity, long travel distances, limited transport, limited ID, shared devices, unstable phone numbers and limited local services. Require low-bandwidth, assisted, in-person and regional service options before moving essential services online.

