



Digital Inclusion

Rights to access digital services

The whole community benefits when technology is accessible to everyone. Consumers should not be excluded from services because they do not own smartphones or other such devices. Digital inclusion requires that all Australians can make full use of digital technologies. This includes using technology to manage their health and wellbeing.

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) measures the extent of digital inclusion in Australia. Access and affordability can present barriers to digital inclusion. However, a person's digital engagement is also affected by attitudes, as well as skills and activities.

The ADII reports on digital inclusion in Australia each year by measuring access to the internet, affordability, and digital ability. In 2020, the Index showed that digital inclusion needs to be improved for those with lower levels of education, income and employment; people living in rural and remote areas; adults over 65 years old and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The index also showed that the people with the lowest digital inclusion were people who only have access to the internet on their mobile phone rather than a computer (35% Indigenous Australians and 31.2% of Australians with disability are mobile-only users); people aged over 65 years old, people who did not complete high school, and households with incomes less than \$35,000 per year. Financial hardship related to the COVID-19 pandemic might exacerbate internet access affordability. People "living with mental illness are significantly more likely to have no internet access because of affordability issues than those without mental illness" ¹.

During COVID-19, public health restrictions mean that people with disability need to rely on digital platforms to access carers and disability and health supports. The main way of accessing some essential government services, such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme and My Aged Care is online. People who are not digitally included are at greater risk of being left further behind in terms of access and equity, as digital service delivery is here to stay.

Checklist: Rights to access digital service

Does your service:

Have a plan for identifying digitally excluded consumers?

Have a plan for reaching digitally excluded consumer groups? For example, if clients of your service live in a community where internet service is inadequate, are they also able to access a phone or text hotline?

Have intake procedures that require technology, or can digitally excluded consumers access your services through other means?

Support digitally excluded consumers to develop skills to use technology effectively or can you refer them to services that can assist them acquire these skills?

¹ Too L, Leach L, Butterworth P, 2020, *Mental Health Problems and Internet Access: Results from an Australian National Household Survey*, JMIR Mental Health 2020;7(5): e14825, Available: <https://mental.jmir.org/2020/5/e14825>, DOI: 10.2196/14825

Accessibility of digital services to people with disability

Digital service delivery can increase access to support services for people with disability. However, digital services that are poorly designed or poorly delivered may further exclude people living with disability.

Australia is a party to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which aims to promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities. It also provides for the right of people with disability to access technology provided to the public. These rights to access technology supports people with disability to realise a range of other rights. For example, the right to highest attainable standard of health can be compromised when the cost of assistive technology is prohibitive.

Your organisation should ensure that technology used to provide digital services has been designed with the needs and aspirations of people accessing the service central to all considerations. Mainstream technology designed for the entire community is described as 'functionally accessible' when it also meets the needs of a person's disability. This is different to assistive technology, which is specifically designed to support people with a particular disability to perform a task.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) helps to ensure that people with disability have access to goods, services and facilities that enable participation in the community. Under the NDIS, people with disability receive 'reasonable and necessary' supports under individualised NDIS plans. However, the rules and policies on the funding of assistive technology (which include digital communication technologies) are complex. The NDIS does not always support improved access to the internet and 'mainstream' goods, services and facilities that use digital communication technologies.

Your organisation should consider this point when providing digital health and support services to consumers with disability.

Checklist: Accessibility of digital services

In your organisation:

For existing consumers with disability, is your organisation's technology accessible?

For new consumers with disability, does your organisation assess the individual's needs and the benefits and risks of using technology before offering appropriate digital health services?

Is the written material of your organisation in an accessible format, such as Easy English or large print?

Are your apps accessible for people who have a vision impairment? For example, if your program uses a chat tool, is it compatible with screen-readers?

Is visual content captioned to enable accessibility for consumers with a hearing impairment?

If the consumer has a carer - have you discussed their role in digital service delivery with the consumer?

If the consumer has an NDIS plan, does that include access to mainstream technology, such as smartphones?

Further resources

[Thanks a Bundle toolkit](#): This toolkit comprises templates of Easy English factsheets for people with cognitive disabilities with things to know when buying or signing up for a phone, tablet or internet service.



User agreements

Where possible, community-managed organisations may assist people to access digital services by providing devices, software or data. Consumers and their carers can sign a user agreement when receiving a device, software or data, which outlines their responsibilities and the organisation's responsibilities.

The specific content within a user agreement is up to your organisation, but some suggestions include:

- Protocols of use, including a requirement to return device, software or data after the consumer is no longer with the organisation, or the process following a breach of the user agreement.
- Disclosure of information and restrictions on sharing of documents.
- A code of conduct for use of the organisation's devices, software or data when engaging in social media.

Checklist: User agreements

Does your organisation provide user agreements that outlines the roles and responsibilities of your organisation and the consumer and their carers in relation to digital services?

Making technology available to consumers

Community-managed organisations should have policies in place to ensure that technology is used for their intended purpose. In terms of distributing devices to consumers and their carers, some strategies to limit the risk of hardware being misused or not returned include:

- The community-managed organisation keeps a log of all devices. For example, iPads can have serial numbers, corresponding to the log and can be tracked via MDM license if required.
- Hardware is only distributed to long-term consumers and/or their carers who express commitment to engage with the service.
- Devices such as iPads can be locked so that only certain software or websites can be used.
- Devices such as iPads can be monitored via MDM software, which means that their physical location can be tracked, or they can be remotely made un-usable. This reduces the likelihood of the hardware being sold or consumers being pressured to allow their hardware to be used for other purposes.
- In terms of distributing data to consumers and their carers, community-managed organisations can roughly estimate how much data is needed to attend sessions and monitor whether this amount seems to be exceeded unreasonably quickly.

Checklist: Making technology available

Does your organisation:

Have a strategy in place for managing the use of devices, software or data given to consumers and their carers?

Provide training to consumers and their carers in the use of devices, including a troubleshooting service?

Further resources

- For the latest research about digital inclusion in Australia, see the fifth [Australian Digital Inclusion Index](#).
- For programs to build digital ability, please see:
 - [Digital Springboard](#): a learning program to help people learn the digital skills. Courses are delivered face-to-face by local, trusted delivery partners such as community organisations and libraries. The courses are relaxed, informative and designed to build digital confidence.
 - [Be Connected Network \(Good Things Foundation\)](#): an Australian Government initiative to increase the confidence, skills and online safety of older Australians.
- [Good Things Foundation](#): builds capacity in community organisations through specialised training packages, grants and program support, and works with partners in government and business to develop programs that make a real impact in people's lives.
- For consumer rights information regarding internet, mobile, home phone, etc. [ACCAN](#) helps consumers decide how to choose for example an appropriate internet plan, connecting/using NBN, etc. It can be a helpful service for CMOs to refer consumers to if they are not so digitally literate.
- Mental Health Coordinating Council provides free beginner courses for HASI and CLS consumers: *Digital Skills for Living*. This course is aimed at consumers who would benefit from learning how to use smartphones and digital technology in their daily lives. It assists consumers wanting to improve their basic IT skills. The workshops are free and facilitated various locations. For more information contact MHCC Learning & Development via email training@mhcc.org.au or phone 02 9060 9626 # 106.

