Connecting *all* Tasmanians

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Digital technology is part of daily life in Tasmania. It is used to find a job, study, do banking and shopping, access information and services, and stay connected with family, friends and the wider community.

Those who can't afford digital technology or who don't have the skills and knowledge to effectively use it are increasingly facing real disadvantage.

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Taking up the challenge of digital inclusion

Tasmania has a number of challenges to overcome if it is to make digital technology affordable and accessible to everyone.

- At least one-third of Tasmanians live on a low income, therefore the cost of internet and mobile phone services can be difficult to afford.
- Tasmania has high rates of disability and so needs strategies to provide people with access to assistive technology and training on how to use it.
- Tasmania also has the highest proportion of people aged over 65 – a population group with the lowest rates of digital technology use. This means devices and training must be designed to suit the needs of older people.
- Half of all Tasmanians are functionally illiterate (49%) and more than half functionally innumerate (58%) – a key barrier that must influence decision-making about education and training, mobile phone and internet payment structures, and the way in which services are provided by government and other organisations.

How digital technology is being used

We asked 750 Tasmanians on low incomes how they used digital technology. The survey showed that:

- Only one quarter had used free Wi-Fi. This may be due to limited access and a lack of understanding about how Wi-Fi works.
- 59% had used their computer to search for government information. However when contacting government services, many preferred to do so in person (25%) or by landline telephone (27%). In particular, older Tasmanians were more likely to go in person.
- Only around one-third had used a computer to access community organisations. Most preferred to use a phone to make contact.
- Overwhelmingly, Tasmanians on low incomes booked medical appointments by landline telephone.
- The internet was a key resource for health information.
- 63% had used the internet for banking and bill payment, but 23% still did their banking and paid their bills in person.
- Only 7% had used the internet for grocery shopping.

- 31% had communicated with family and friends via a mobile or smartphone and 18% had used their personal computer. The preference was to use a landline telephone (45%).
- Compared with the general population, Tasmanians on low incomes were less likely to be engaged in social media, but Facebook, Twitter and other social networking platforms were still reasonably popular.
- Social media use is associated with educational level. 51% of those with a post-school qualification had used social media, compared with 30% of those who had not finished year 10.
- 52% had used the internet or mobile phone to listen to music, watch videos or play games.
- 8% had gambled online.
- People over 65 were least likely to be regularly users of a personal computer, tablet or smartphone.
- 70% of the job-seekers surveyed had used their personal computer to assist with job hunting.

Making it a reality

The State Government can:

Establish a Digital Inclusion Strategy for Tasmania which could include:

- the development of digital inclusion initiatives through government, community and private partnerships;
- building on the work of the state's Online Access Centres to promote digital literacy and provide training and technical support, including offering free Wi-Fi;
- moving all Tasmanian Government phone numbers to 1800 numbers so calls from mobile phones are free;
- ensuring all Tasmanian Government websites meet the national Web Content Accessibility Guidelines to Level AA; and
- continuing to offer a range of contact options, including landlines and reception staff to people who use Government services.

The Australian Government can:

- include digital training as part of its commitment to the Digital First Strategy and the national rollout of the NBN;
- ensure that all Australian Government websites meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines to Level AA;
- have the Department of Communications continue and expand initiatives for older Australians such as Broadband for Seniors, Internet Safety for Seniors and the My Aged Care website;
- ensure the National Disability Insurance Agency's price list for services includes training on how to use assistive technology (for people with disabilities, carers and support workers), and costs associated with using and maintaining this technology; and
- move all Government phone numbers to 1800 numbers so calls from mobile phones are free.

Telecommunications industry

In Australia, Telstra is responsible for fulfilling the Universal Service Obligation (USO) to ensure everyone has reasonable access on an equitable basis to standard telephone services and payphones. However, the telecommunications industry has changed substantially since the USO was established and should now be reviewed to take into account mobile and digital technology.

Telstra can:
- expand the mobile programs provided under the Access for Everyone program;
- promote the Hardship Team so all community organisations and people working with low-income or disadvantaged communities are aware of these initiatives;
- promote the Telstra EasyCall Phone and Telstra Easy Touch Discovery phones for people with disabilities and older people; and
- implement the free phone 18/1800 numbers from mobile phones at no charge as mandated by ACMA.
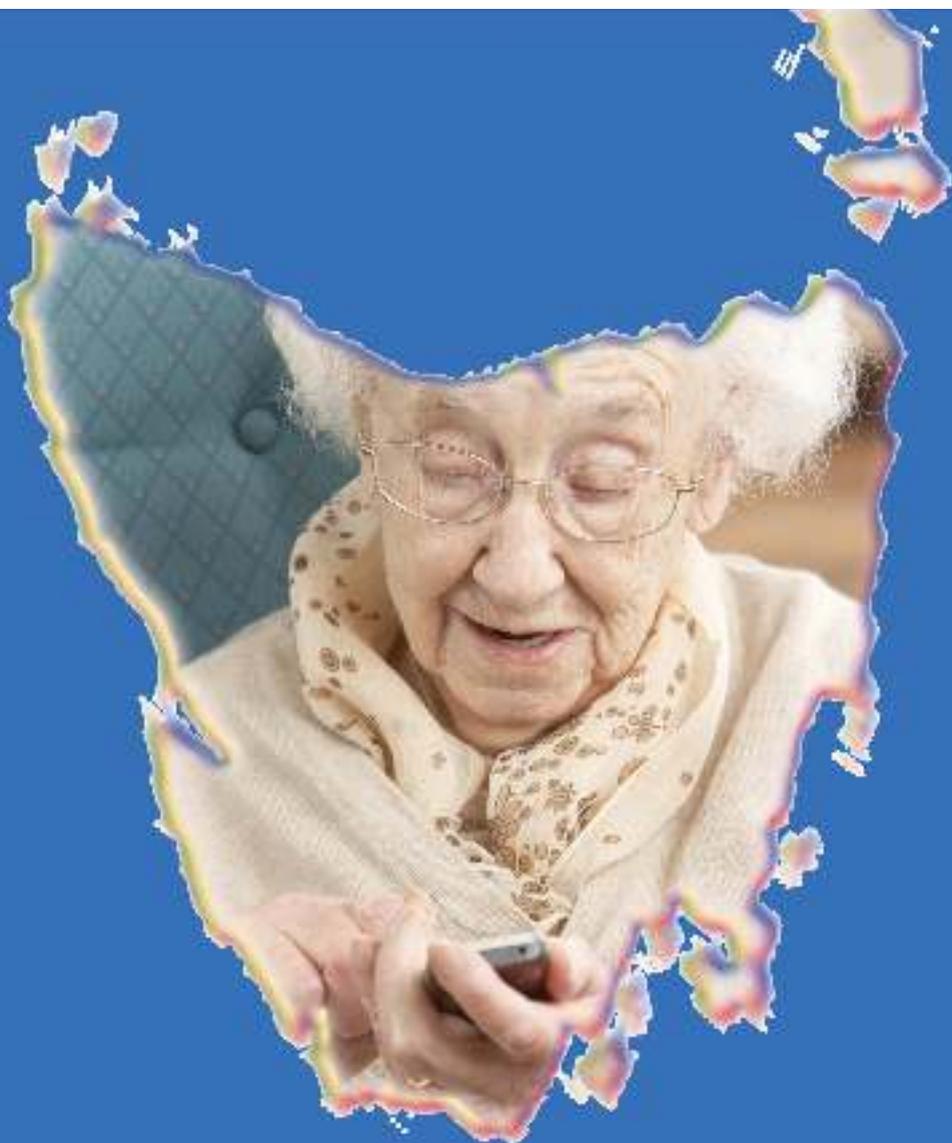
All communication providers are encouraged to:
- develop low-income internet plans
- develop low-income smartphone plans

Community service organisations can:

- support clients by teaching them how to use digital technologies;
- provide training for people who would benefit from the use of assistive technology;
- make sure their web site meets the Australian Government Web Content Accessibility Guidelines to Level AA;
- offer 1800 phone numbers so calls are free from mobile phones; and
- tell clients about the availability of free phone apps that help keep track of the credit left on mobile and internet services.

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