Government digital inclusion programs

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A snapshot of innovative programs designed to enhance citizen online engagement, provide opportunities and remove barriers for all.

Introduction

As digital technologies are expanding the way Australians connect, learn and do business, Governments across Australia recognise that access to the digital economy is not equal. To ensure that data, devices, skills and capacity to participate are spread across regions and populations, each jurisdiction has developed their own suite of digital inclusion programs to enhance engagement, provide opportunities and remove barriers for all.

These programs are designed to address some or all of the key priority areas of inclusion including connectivity and access; affordability; digital skills and ability; and design. The following case studies provide a snapshot of the diversity and innovation in program design and delivery across all jurisdictions to enhance digital inclusion.

The Australian Capital Territory Government elected not to include a case study.

Tasmania

The Digital Ready for Daily Life program focusses on increasing the digital capability of Tasmania's most vulnerable citizens so they can more fully participate in all areas of life, taking advantage of the opportunities that technology provides.

Digital Ready for Daily Life works with cohorts that have known challenges with low levels of functional literacy, lack of confidence in using technology, lack of access to both devices and data which impacts on the ability to reach vulnerable participants. The program has met these challenges through partnerships with NGOs such as The Smith Family and Council of the Ageing Tasmania, using social media to connect and educate, and holding pop-up clinics and mentoring sessions in libraries, shopping centres, Neighbourhood Houses and online.

Increasing confidence and supporting learning through doing is a key part of the program, using mentors and ambassadors to build trust and grow capacity.

Victoria

The Connecting Victoria program is promoting digital inclusion for businesses and communities through more reliable, better-value broadband and improved mobile coverage, including in popular shopping streets, business parks and where people live.

Mobile connectivity plays a critical role in the lives of Victorians, providing access to healthcare, education, flexible working and emergency information and services. Victoria is fast-tracking the delivery of improved mobile services to better connect Victorians living and working in more than 1,200 suburbs and towns across the state.

Victoria in partnership with five telecommunications providers is delivering 1,108 mobile infrastructure projects that will benefit people at home, at work, and when they're out and about. This will include building by 2026, 309 new mobile towers, upgrading 492 towers to 5G, adapting 170 towers so they can be used by multiple telecommunications providers, and making 137 towers more resilient during natural disasters. Around 2.4 million premises across 23,500 square kilometres will also get increased coverage and improved service quality. More than 700 of the projects will be delivered in regional and rural locations.

New South Wales

The NSW Tech Savvy Seniors program is a statewide program that addresses digital inclusion for older people to increase participation, increase confidence in using technology, increase capacity to use online services and resources, and reduce social isolation through digital connectivity. The program is offered in partnership with Telstra with training undertaken through libraries and community colleges.

Training is offered from beginner to advanced levels on the use of digital devices, apps, online shopping, social media and cyber safety. The fun and hands on style of training builds confidence and peer-to-peer support as well as creating a point of social connection for participants.

The Tech Savvy Seniors program offers training in a number of languages and is commencing a program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders. While COVID has temporarily reduced the face-to-face component, online sessions have been used for continuity of program access. Evaluation of the program has consistently shown high levels of satisfaction, participation and skills transfer with a strong demand for additional training and further expansion into regional and remote areas.

Queensland

The Deadly Digital Communities Program is an initiative of the State Library of Queensland and Telstra in partnership with local government through their Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs) and public library services. It is a community-based digital technology skills training program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities across Queensland with the aim to unlock new possibilities and opportunities through digital literacy.

The Deadly Digital Communities program acknowledges the benefits of a whole-of-community program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples when generations come together to share culture, knowledge and learn new digital skills in a strengths-based way.

The program ensures that content is tailored to specific communities and their ways of being, knowing and doing, teaching basic digital skills like emailing, using social media to stay connected, accessing government services online and utilising technology to record oral histories and significant cultural events. The success of this program is due to understanding the need for co-design with community, respect for learning styles and using local partnerships.

Western Australia

The Youth Digital Inclusion Project was developed in response to COVID-19 to support access to government and community services for vulnerable young people aged 16–24 across WA. As many services for young people moved online, clients who relied on these critical services were unable to access the technology allowing them to connect.

The solution provided young people in need with a refurbished device and 6 months of internet data access for free. Devices included smartphones, desktop PCs, laptops and tablets. Through a grant partnership with YACWA, eligible community organisations could apply on behalf of their clients with the requirement that recipients would complete two follow-up surveys across a six-month period.

Around 300 devices were distributed during the program. Qualitative feedback from the program survey evaluation demonstrated that many participants had additionally used the devices to re-connect with the community organisations that auspiced them and had further used the technology to look for work, and engage with online learning and education. Importantly, the devices had been essential for accessing telehealth mental health services, connecting with family and friends, reducing isolation and increasing feelings of safety in uncertain times.

South Australia

'being digital' is a statewide initiative delivered through public libraries offering all adult South Australian's the opportunity for digital access and to participate fully in the digital world. With a network of 144 libraries across the state, the program builds digital literacy skills through focussing on digital basics such as cyber security and being safe online to digital device usage fundamentals.

A dedicated portal on the South Australian libraries webpage hosts a significant amount of beginners activities, guides and webinars to help people learn at their own pace in areas of need and interest in their digital learning journey. The interactive online material is complimented with in person, group and one-on-one sessions at libraries where available.

Content for the libraries home page is syndicated from the national Be Connected Program and the eSafety Commissioner, leveraging existing quality training resources. Monthly key themes are identified on the website to make it easy for library staff to curate a targeted program for community members to develop skills and confidence to connect with today's digital world.

Northern Territory

Cyber Smart for Seniors Information Sessions provide face to face learning to increase cyber security awareness among older Territorians. The program aims to increase awareness of online scams and cyber security risks and equip participants with practical guidance on how to protect themselves online and secure devices.

The free sessions are delivered face-to-face, include hands-on technical tips and connect the seniors community to discuss and share cyber security and digital technology experiences. The sessions build digital skills and confidence in recognising threats like phishing, and in applying cyber smart practices across online shopping, secure passwords, multi-factor authentication, back-ups, updates and using social media safely.

Cyber Smart for Seniors is delivered by the Department of Corporate and Digital Development in partnership with organisations including NT Police Cyber Crime, the Darwin Joint Cyber Security Centre Outreach Service, the Australian Information Security Association, and the Council of the Ageing Northern Territory. Other seniors community groups also take advantage of the program.

The sessions are well attended and positively received by the seniors community, with the success of the initiative due to key partnerships with sector and community groups.

National

Be Connected is a joint initiative between the Australian Government Department of Social Services and the eSafety Commissioner to increase the confidence, digital skills and online safety of older Australians, with over 1.3 million learners accessing the program to date.

The Be Connected website is a one-stop shop with more than 150 free online courses made up of over 500 engaging learning activities including translated resources, interactive practice areas, webinars, podcasts and quick reads.

The Good Things Foundation manage grants to a range of community organisations to deliver free one-on-one and group sessions, and loan digital devices to older Australians. There are over 3,700 Be Connected network partners across Australia which include a wide range of community organisations, aged care providers, libraries, cultural diversity groups, disability support organisations and men's sheds.

The program's success is due to the quality of the learning resources and strong partnerships with diverse community organisations across Australia.