Measuring Digital Inclusion **for First Nations Australians**

Counting on Connectivity

Tracking progress towards Closing the Gap Target 17

2025



Connectivity Is...

Connection • ***Communication*** • ***Continuity***

Connectivity is more than access to technology. It is about how we stay connected to one another, to Country, and to culture in an ever-changing digital world.

Connection *speaks to the relationships that sustain and enrich us, to family, community, language, and Country. Digital connection, when grounded in culture, extends these relationships beyond distance and time, allowing our stories and voices to travel and be heard.*

Communication *is how we share knowledge and care for each other. For First Nations people, communication has always been layered, through song, story, dance, and visual design. In the digital age, this continues through new and existing platforms that amplify our ways of speaking, listening, and creating.*

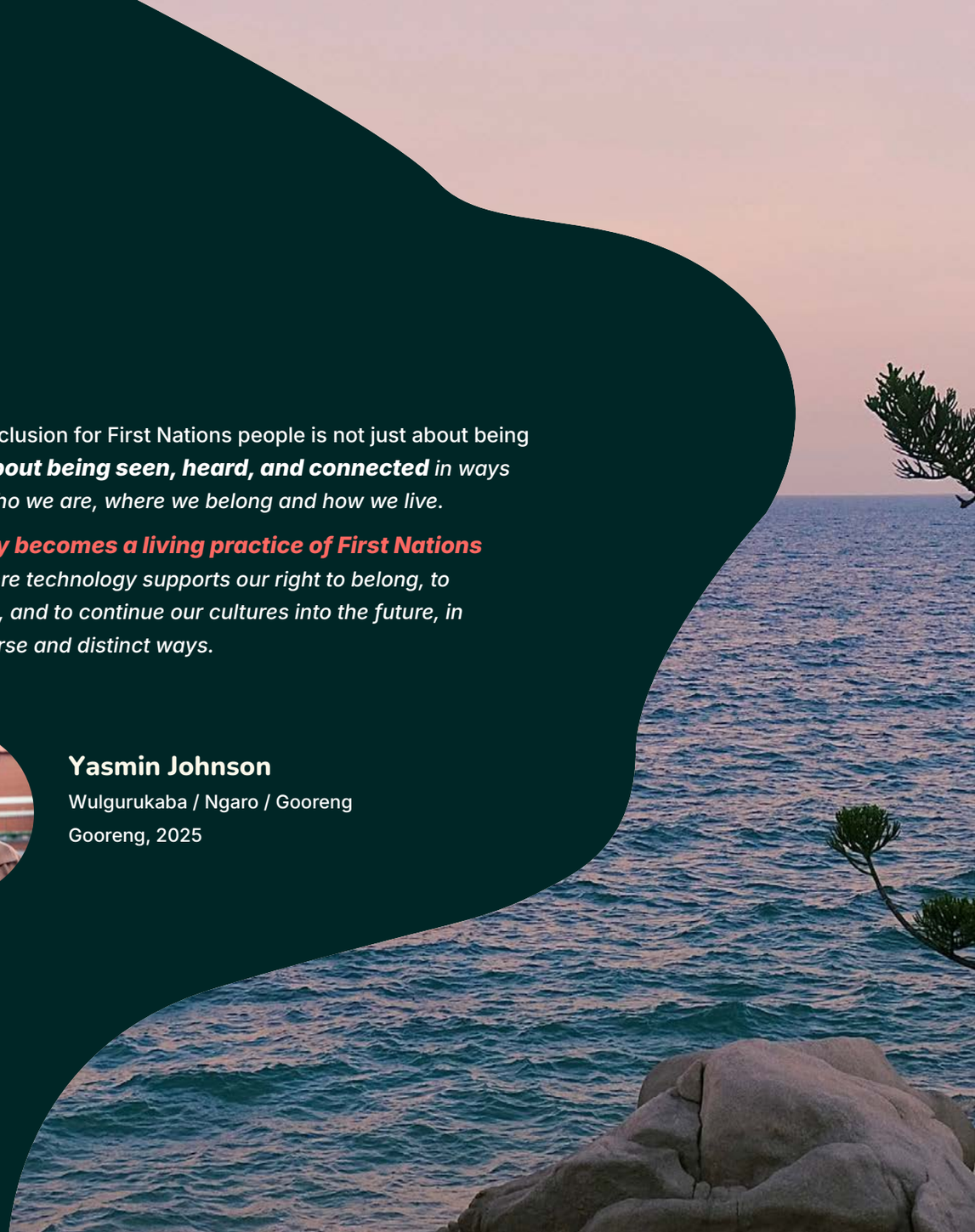
Continuity *ensures that our identities, languages, and cultural knowledge are carried forward. Through digital inclusion, we reclaim space in the online world to embed our sovereignty, share our stories, and strengthen the pathways for the next generation.*

True digital inclusion for First Nations people is not just about being online, ***it's about being seen, heard, and connected*** *in ways that reflect who we are, where we belong and how we live.*

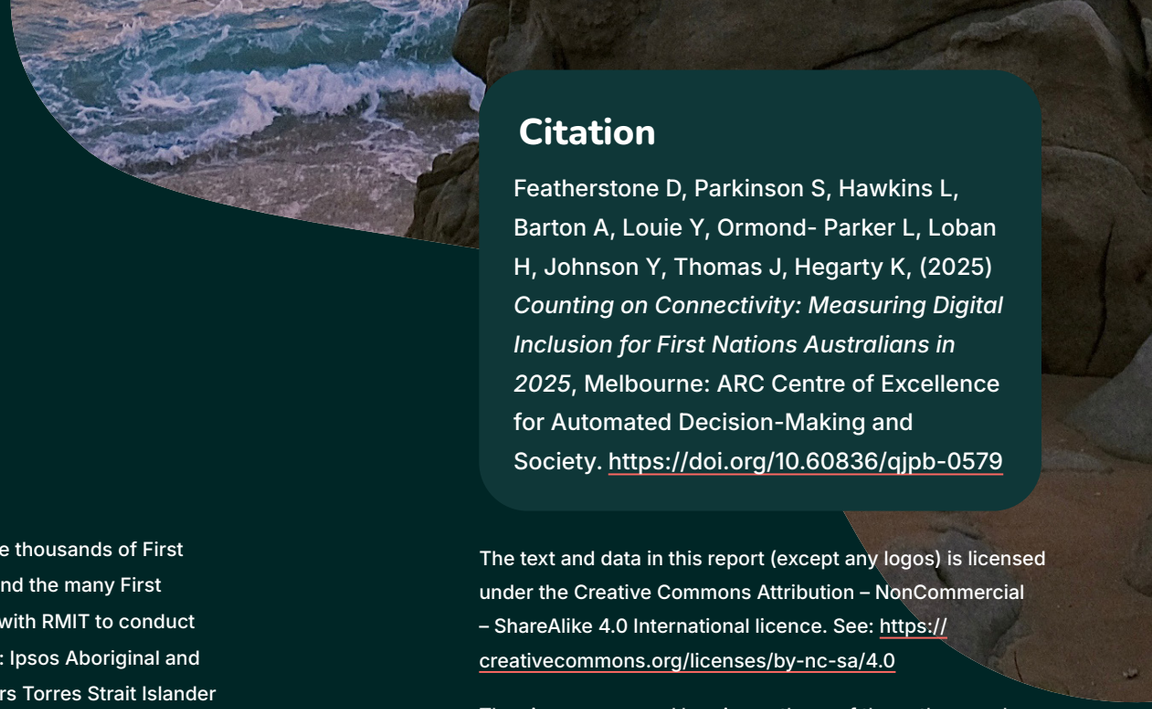
Connectivity becomes a living practice of First Nations agency*, where technology supports our right to belong, to communicate, and to continue our cultures into the future, in creative, diverse and distinct ways.*



Yasmin Johnson
Wulgurukaba / Ngaro / Gooreng Gooreng, 2025



We acknowledge First Nations people as the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout the lands and waters across Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all First Nations colleagues and communities.



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Stakeholders

The research team would like to thank the many people and organisations who have supported this research and contributed to this initial report. A special thanks to the First Nations Digital Inclusion Programs team at DITRDCSA, including Peter Lee, Kylie Westaway and James Macek, as well as Dr Natalie Peters Jones and the FNDIAG Secretariat team, the Closing the Gap Reporting team at the Productivity Commission, and other agencies engaged during project development. Thanks also to former Minister for Communications the Hon Michelle Rowland MP and current Minister for Communications and Sport the Hon Anika Wells MP for ongoing support.

Research Partners

This research would not have been possible without the thousands of First Nations Australians who participated in the research, and the many First Nations organisations and researchers who partnered with RMIT to conduct surveys. These research partner organisations include: Ipsos Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Unit; 10 regional partners Torres Strait Islander Media Association, Aboriginal Resource and Development Service, Myuma Ltd, Ngulingah/Lismore Local Aboriginal Land Council, Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa (KJ), Wayne Bynder, Wilya Ajjul Janta AC, Larrkardi Radio (6DBY), Port Lincoln Aboriginal Community Council; and 11 *Mapping the Digital Gap* remote community partners. We also acknowledge industry partner Social Research Centre for the data processing and Dassier for the Dashboard design.

Research Ethics

The *Measuring Digital Inclusion for First Nations Australians* project has received Ethics approval from the Human Research Ethics Committees of RMIT University (#28091) and Swinburne University (#8485). The *Mapping the Digital Gap* project also has RMIT Ethics approval (Phase1 #24155 / Phase 2 #28005). The ADII has Ethics approval through Swinburne University (#4585).

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Message from Minister Wells



The Hon Anika Wells MP
Minister for Communications/
Minister for Sport

I am pleased to introduce the inaugural *Measuring Digital Inclusion for First Nations Australians* report and online dashboard.

This project, funded by the Australian Government, represents an important step forward in our shared efforts to close the digital gap.

Digital inclusion is vital for access to education, employment, health care, government services and staying connected with family, culture and community. For too long, First Nations Australians, particularly in regional and remote areas, have faced significant barriers to digital access, affordability and skills.

By providing dedicated measures on Access, Affordability and Digital Ability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, this project delivers a practical and enduring tool to track progress towards Closing the Gap Target 17. It also empowers First Nations communities and organisations to explore the data and use it in ways that reflect their own priorities.

I commend the research partners and all contributors for their commitment to this important work.



Message from First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group



Dr Dot West OAM
Co-Chair



Professor Lyndon Ormond-Parker
Co-Chair

We are pleased to welcome this first report of the *Measuring Digital Inclusion for First Nations Australians* research project.

When the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group was established in January 2023 to advise the Australian Government on Closing the Gap Target 17, we identified a critical lack of data to monitor progress toward equal levels of digital inclusion for First Nations peoples. This formed a key recommendation in our Initial Report and was subsequently funded through a $68 million package of measures announced in the May 2024 Federal Budget.

We are proud to see how rapidly the research team has worked to measure digital inclusion for First Nations Australians across the country — from cities to regional towns and remote communities.

This national effort has been underpinned by strong First Nations leadership and participation, with FNDIAG providing ongoing guidance as the project's advisory group.

This data will help First Nations communities and organisations in their planning and advocacy and support our group's efforts to highlight priority actions for government and industry. Ultimately it will help our efforts to close the digital gap.



Message from Authors

This landmark work provides the first dedicated and robust measure to enable tracking of progress towards Closing the Gap Target 17 – equal levels of digital inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This project amplifies the strengths, voices, and digital aspirations of First Nations Australians from diverse communities and cultural contexts across the nation, while shining a light on the scale and nature of the digital gap relative to other Australians. It highlights areas where access and opportunity can be strengthened, while recognising the creativity, adaptability, and community leadership that is already driving digital transformation.

Our shared goal is to equip First Nations communities, organisations, and leaders with knowledge, data, and tools that enhance partnership with government and industry to ensure digital inclusion is achieved in ways that reflect community priorities and cultural strengths.

We extend our sincere thanks to the Australian Government for supporting this important work, and to the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group for its visionary leadership and advocacy.

We particularly acknowledge our First Nations Research Lead, Associate Professor Heron Loban, and Project Manager, Alison Barton, for their stewardship, and our research partner, the Ipsos Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Unit, for their exceptional work conducting almost 2,000 surveys across the country under challenging conditions.

We greatly appreciate the contributions of local partner organisations in ten regional towns, whose trusted community relationships were central to this project's success. We also recognise our dedicated team at RMIT University and Swinburne University of Technology who, together with project partners, continue to champion this important work.

By combining newly gathered survey data with findings from the *Australian Digital Inclusion Index* and *Mapping the Digital Gap* projects, this report provides the most comprehensive national picture yet of digital inclusion for First Nations Australians, across major cities, regional centres, and remote communities.

A second report in mid-2027 will track progress and highlight emerging strengths in digital capability and participation over time.

This research reflects a shared commitment to digital equity, opportunity, and self-determination. Digital inclusion is a foundation for community wellbeing, empowerment, and intergenerational strength as digital technologies become increasingly central to education, employment, health, and cultural connection. Together, we are building a future where First Nations Australians can connect, create, and thrive on their own terms, ensuring that no one is left behind in Australia's digital landscape.

Measuring Digital Inclusion for First Nations Australians
Research team

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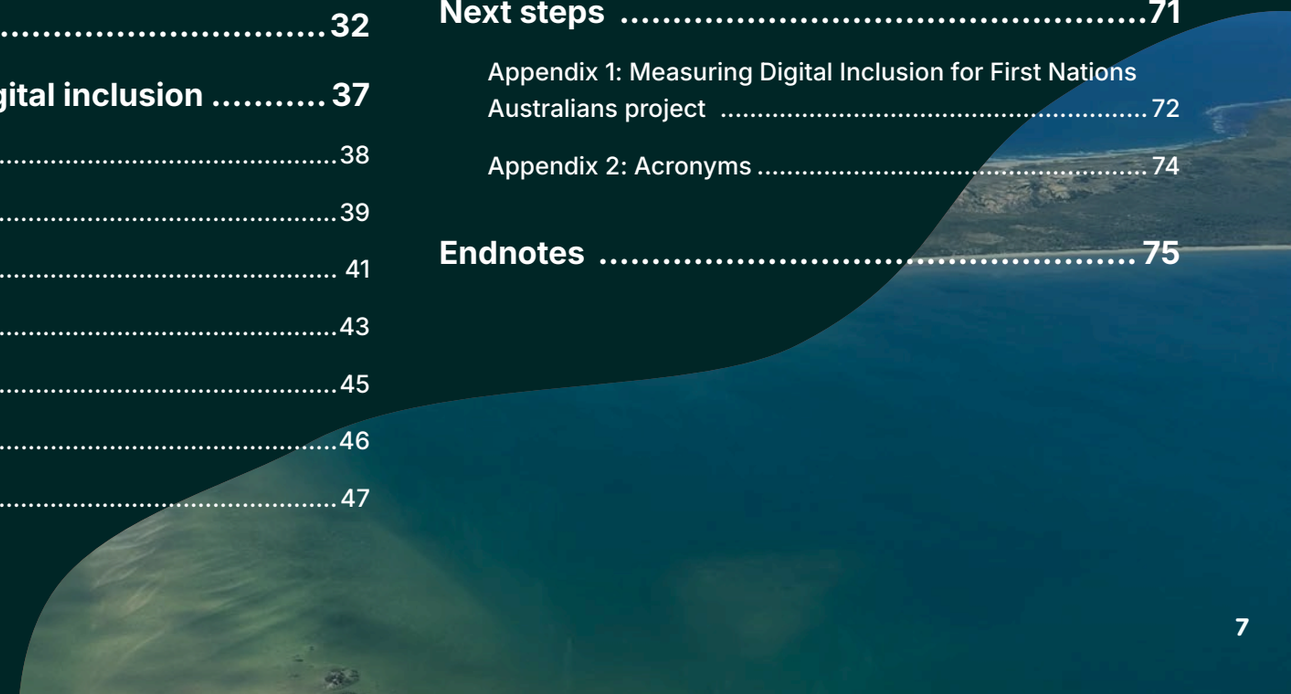
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What is digital inclusion?

Digital inclusion means having reliable, safe and affordable access to the internet and digital technologies, along with the skills, confidence, and opportunities needed to participate fully in social, cultural, and economic life.

For First Nations Australians, digital inclusion is more than connectivity. It is about exercising informed decision-making, cultural agency, and self-determination in a rapidly transforming digital world. Being digitally included ensures individuals, families, and communities can:

- **Make informed choices** based on accurate information;
- **Maintain strong connections to culture**, language, and Country; and
- **Participate safely and confidently** in online education, health, employment, and community life.

First Nations people are highly digitally engaged, with 92% of First Nations people using the internet in the last week.

Despite the high rates of internet use, **41% of First Nations people remain digitally excluded** due to systemic inequities in access, affordability, and digital skills. The rate of digital exclusion is about double the rate faced by non-First Nations people (20%), with exclusion rates much higher across remote and very remote regions of Australia.[1]

For First Nations people, digital inclusion and access to inclusive, culturally safe services **is deeply connected to broader wellbeing.**

In an increasingly digital world, access to reliable, affordable connectivity and devices, and the confidence to engage online can influence opportunities across income, health, education, employment, and housing.

Digital inclusion is shaped by a range of socio-economic, cultural, and geographic factors. Working in partnership with First Nations people to overcome structural and systemic barriers is key to achieving digital equity and confidence across communities.

As digital technologies shape how people connect, learn, work, and engage with essential services, digital inclusion has become a foundation for wellbeing and opportunity. It enables people to connect with family and community, strengthen language and cultural identity, and make empowered decisions about their lives.

Closing the Gap target 17

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap has 19 national socio-economic outcomes and 17 targets. This includes:

Outcome 17

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives.

Outcome 17 is fundamental to self-determination and full participation in Australian society. For First Nations communities, informed decision-making extends beyond individual consent. It also involves collective processes grounded in cultural protocols, relationships, and respect.

Strengthening digital inclusion therefore supports both individual empowerment and community control over how information, data, and technology are accessed, used and shared, ensuring digital futures are built by and for First Nations people.

Target 17 sets out a specific goal:

Target 17

By 2026, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equal levels of digital inclusion.

While significant progress is being made towards Target 17, a digital inclusion gap remains between First Nations Australians and other Australians. Many First Nations people, particularly those living in remote and very remote communities and homelands, face ongoing challenges in accessing affordable, reliable connectivity, suitable devices, and culturally relevant opportunities to strengthen digital skills.

Achieving Target 17 will require sustained partnership, investment and culturally grounded approaches that centre First Nations leadership, support community-led solutions, and build on existing strengths in innovation, resilience and digital capacity across the country.

The four Priority Reforms are key to accelerating progress on Closing the Gap

The success of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, including all 19 socio-economic targets, rests on implementing the Priority Reforms. These are:

1. Formal partnerships and shared decision-making
2. Building the community-controlled sector
3. Transforming government organisations
4. Shared access to data and information at a regional level.

These priority reforms are embedded in the methodology and purpose of this research.

How Target 17 supports other outcomes

Outcome 17 supports other Closing the Gap outcomes

As outlined in the *First Nations Digital Inclusion Roadmap: 2026 and Beyond*, Outcome 17 must be understood within the broader Closing the Gap framework. Digital inclusion acts as an enabler for achieving other Closing the Gap outcomes, supporting progress in health and wellbeing, education, employment, housing, justice, and the preservation of language and culture.

"Given the unique position of Target 17 as a factor underpinning many of the other Targets and Outcomes, it is essential that action on First Nations digital inclusion is taken now and sustained into the future for there to be genuine progress towards achieving all of the Closing the Gap targets."[5]

Figure 1. Target 17 is a critical enabler for many of the other Closing the Gap targets (Source: First Nations Digital Advisory Group 2024)



Why this project was needed

Until now, there has been no comprehensive and reliable national data to measure digital inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to track progress on Target 17.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has not collected internet-use data in the national Census since 2016, and no other national survey has provided regular, comparable data on digital access, skills, and usage.

As a result, when signing the National Partnership Agreement, the Parties agreed to rely on dated 2014-15 data from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey to report on Target 17 (which is reflected in the Productivity Commission's Closing the Gap dashboard). The data has since been updated to report 2022-23 internet-use data, when it became available.

However, this update did not include comparative data for other Australians, **making it impossible to accurately measure the digital gap**.

The 2023 *Australian Digital Inclusion Index* (ADII) report found a **national digital inclusion gap of 7.5 points between First Nations and other Australians**, widening to 24.4 points in remote areas and 25.3 in very remote regions. This has been used as a supporting indicator. However, the sample size was limited, particularly in urban and regional areas. Broader sampling was required to fully understand the nature and scale of the digital gap nationally and identify where programs and funding should be directed.

In response, the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group recommended **a new national pilot study** in its *Initial Report* to provide a robust and accurate measure of Target 17. As part of a suite of budget measures aimed at improving First Nations digital inclusion in the 2024-25 Budget, the Australian Government funded expansion of the ADII's national collection to improve First Nations digital inclusion data.

A consultation paper on the budget measures outlined these benefits for the community:

> **"The creation of an Index of First Nations digital inclusion will provide a robust measure of the digital inclusion gap and develop an understanding of our current state and progress towards closing the gap. The data will also be publicly available to assist governments, organisations and First Nations providers in policy decision making and evaluating current and future digital inclusion initiatives."**



Context

Since the ADII began in 2016, Australia has seen steady progress in digital inclusion across the three key dimensions of Access, Digital Ability, and Affordability. Digital engagement accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic as Australians embraced remote work, online education, and digital platforms for connection, creativity, and daily life.

The rapid rate of change has continued with improvements in communication services via the National Broadband Network (NBN), 5G mobile rollout, and the introduction of Starlink satellite broadband services in remote and regional Australia.

> Technology is a big part of everyone's lives these days. Everything is done on a computer, laptop [or] mobile devices now ... The world's evolving with technology (survey comment)

> Internet is essential for our family, we use it everyday (survey comment)

There have also been improvements in digital and mobile technologies, apps and services. Together with the rise in use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), we have seen major impacts on work, service delivery, information search and creative application.



However, these technologies have uneven levels of access, affordability and uptake based on geography and demography. For example, over half of the 1506 remote First Nations communities and homelands do not have mobile coverage, with one in seven having no internet access.[6]

Clearly, not all Australians are on the same digital journey, with digital exclusion an ongoing challenge. This is the case for many First Nations Australians, particularly the elderly, people with disability, and those experiencing social and economic disadvantage.

In 2025, the ADII found that 20% of Australians are considered digitally 'Excluded' or 'Highly Excluded' nationally, meaning that millions of people face significant barriers to digital inclusion and are missing out on opportunities and services in an increasingly digital world.

For First Nations Australians, the rate of exclusion is double the national rate with 41% considered 'Excluded' or 'Highly Excluded'.

About the project

The ***Measuring Digital Inclusion for First Nations Australians*** project commenced in early 2025. The project aims to accurately measure progress on **Closing the Gap Target 17 (CTG17)** from 2025-27 by capturing a detailed national picture of digital inclusion and media use among First Nations Australians in comparison to other Australians.

The study includes extensive surveys with First Nations people aged 18 years and over, living across remote, regional, and urban communities throughout Australia. It adapts the Australian Internet Usage Survey, used by the ADII, to measure digital inclusion across three key dimensions of Access, Affordability and Digital Ability. The adapted survey includes questions about use of media and information services and non-digital communication.



Heron Loban and Lyndon Ormond-Parker in Nhulunbuy with co-researchers Adrian Schmidt Muanm, William Gumbula, and Zowie Bromot from Yolngu Radio/ ARDS

First Nations leadership and governance

Led by First Nations researchers within the ADII team and partner organisations, with advisory role by the *First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group*, ensuring cultural authority and accountability.

National surveys

Each survey round engages 2,800-3,500 First Nations participants, ensuring relevance across remote, regional, and urban contexts.

Community partnerships

Local First Nations organisations and co-researchers play a central role in delivering face-to-face surveys, strengthening cultural protocols and community ownership of the research process.

Shared knowledge

Detailed results are shared through a dedicated First Nations Digital Inclusion Dashboard on the ADII website.

Indigenous data governance

Data collection, management, and access align with Priority Reform Four of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty.

Access

Opportunities to gain a reliable internet connection and use various digital devices, along with frequency of online access and data use.

Affordability

The share of a household's monthly income needed to buy an adequate internet and mobile service bundle tailored to its composition and remoteness.

Digital Ability

The skills and confidence to use digital tools and applications safely and effectively.

Media and Information

Use of broadcast and digital media services to access news, information and relevant First Nations content.

About the project

Scope

The following key measures under Outcome 17 are addressed by this project:

- **Levels of digital inclusion** (by Access, Affordability and Digital Ability) among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as compared with other Australians
- Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **households accessing the internet**
- Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **people accessing the internet**
- **Frequency of internet access** at home in last 12 months
- Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people using **internet to access government services** for private purposes

Our research also provides data on use of media and information services by First Nations Australians, although there is no comparative data for other Australians. The scope does not include data collection on indicators relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the media, audience growth, portrayal in mainstream media and content diversity.

This data is collected by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) and available on the Closing the Gap dashboard.

Other projects

The project integrates data from the ADII and the *Mapping the Digital Gap* projects to create a comprehensive national picture of digital inclusion for First Nations Australians.



Mapping the Digital Gap co-researcher Djamika Ganambarr counducting survey with Gawumala Gumana in Gäŋgaŋ, NT

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index

The ADII is a national survey using the Australian Internet Usage Survey (AIUS) to investigate who uses the internet, how Australians benefit from the internet and what barriers exist to its connection and use.

The ADII is funded by Telstra and undertaken biennially by RMIT University and Swinburne University of Technology. Index scores ranging from 0 to 100 are derived from the survey results, with higher scores indicating greater levels of digital inclusion. ADII scores are relative, enabling comparison across demographic groups and geographic areas and remoteness categories – major cities, outer regional, remote and very remote.

Results are published on the ADII website, with interactive dashboards, enabling users to explore the data for their own purposes.

Mapping the Digital Gap

In 2021, Telstra funded the ADII research team to undertake a separate four-year longitudinal study of digital inclusion and media use in remote First Nations communities in partnership with local First Nations organisations.

The first phase of the *Mapping the Digital Gap* project involved working with over 30 community co-researchers to undertake over 2000 surveys and 350 interviews in 12 communities between 2022 and 2024. Detailed annual reports were provided for each community, including collated data and analysis and a proposed digital inclusion plan to support local planning and advocacy. Results from 2022 were used to establish a dedicated First Nations dashboard on the ADII website in 2023 and enabled the first measure of First Nations digital inclusion by remoteness categories.

A second phase of *Mapping the Digital Gap*, being conducted in 10 First Nations communities from 2025-28, will contribute remote data to measure Target 17.

Data collection

In 2024–25, **more than 2,800 surveys were completed with First Nations people across urban, regional and remote areas**. By comparing results with over 3000 surveys collected for the ADII, we have derived an accurate national measure of First Nations digital inclusion and the scale and nature of the digital gap for the first time.

3,065 Respondents to the Australian Internet Usage Survey in 2024, including a small sample of First Nations respondents.

807 First Nations survey respondents in remote and very remote communities through the *Mapping the Digital Gap* project.

1,998 First Nations survey respondents across urban, regional and some remote areas through the *Measuring Digital Inclusion for First Nations Australians project*.

An additional **729** surveys were carried out in 10 regional sites through partnerships with local First Nations organisations. These results will be released in a dedicated report in March 2026. A **second full survey round in 2026–27** will begin to track changes in digital inclusion and media use over time.

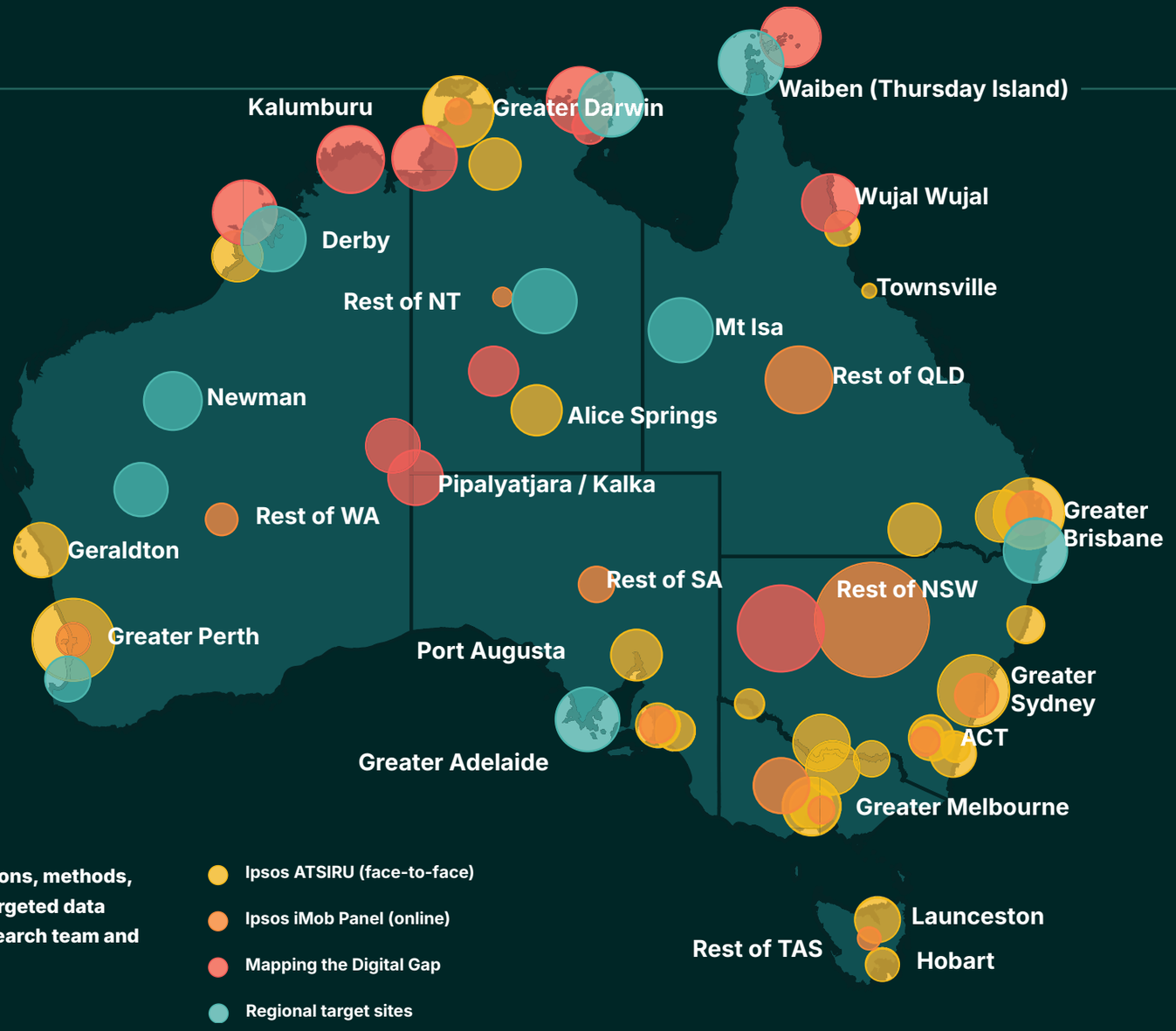


Figure 2. Locations, methods, and amount of targeted data collection by research team and partners.[2]

First Nations Data Dashboard

The new First Nations dashboard on the ADII website provides the data collected through the Measuring Digital Inclusion for First Nations Australians project across seven pages:

- **First Nations (key findings)**
- **Access**
- **Affordability**
- **Digital Ability**
- **Media Use**
- **Internet Use**
- **Remote Communities**

The new First Nations dashboard enables users to access, analyse and download data in **accordance with Closing the Gap Priority Reform 4** and our commitment to Indigenous Data Governance.

Data is presented visually with charts and maps to make it easy to understand and analyse within the dashboard. Each interactive tile on the page presents different elements of the data.

Figure 3. Screenshot of First Nations Digital Inclusion Dashboard home page

Explore by state

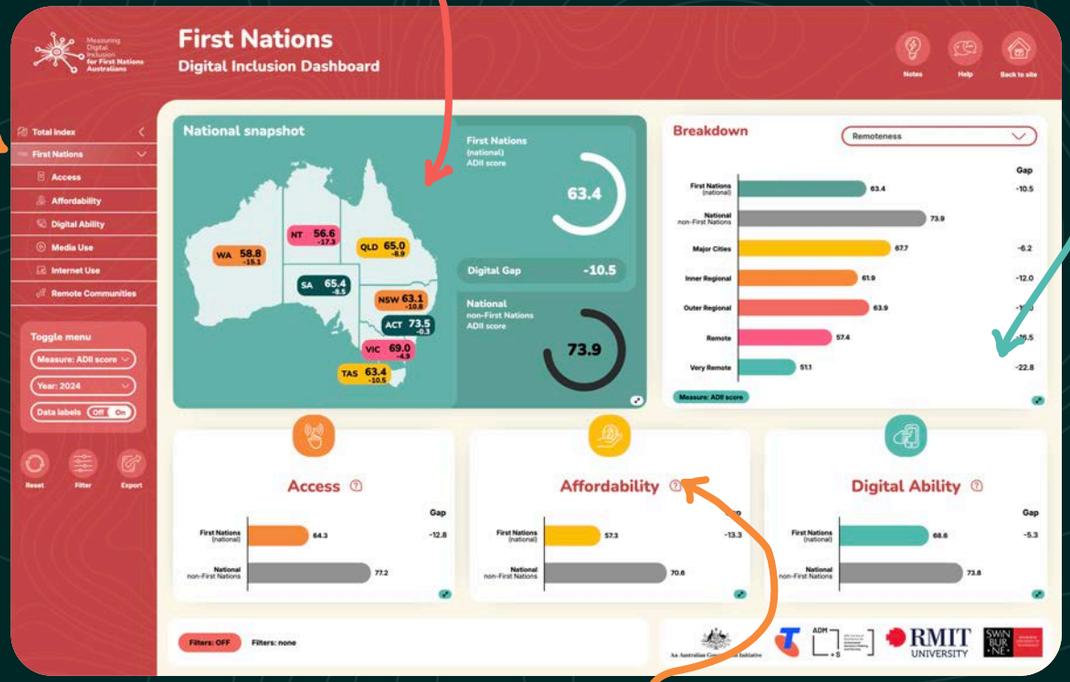
Exploration of the national map on the front page is possible by state and Remoteness / Indigenous Regions within each state.[7]

Expand for more information

The tiles can be expanded to full screen for better visibility of the information.

Link to national dashboard

First Nations data can also be accessed from other dashboards throughout the main ADII dashboard, enabling comparison against other demographic groups.



Filtering

Data used to generate charts can be filtered within a tile or for all tiles on a page using the Toggle Menu and Filter icons on the left side.

This enables finely detailed analysis of the data by remoteness (capital cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote, very remote) and for different demographic groups, down to individual age groups or household types.

Survey information

More information is available, including survey information, by hovering over the ? button in each tile.

Snapshot of First Nations digital inclusion

First Nations Australians are highly digitally engaged.

However, this engagement is not spread evenly across the First Nations population.



92% used the internet

in the last week and 96% within the last six months



96% own or share a mobile phone



93% use social media

to keep in touch with family and friends



92% used online banking

in the last six months



86% used online government services

in the last six months



18-34 year olds have high Digital Ability

with a Digital Ability score of **78.8**, 5.0 points above the non-First Nations average of **73.8**

The digital inclusion gap

10.5

Digital Inclusion

63.4 First Nations national

73.9 National non-First Nations

12.8

Access

64.3 First Nations national

77.2 National non-First Nations

13.3

Affordability

57.3 First Nations national

70.6 National non-First Nations

5.3

Digital Ability

68.6 First Nations national

73.8 National non-First Nations

Some gap figures may not add up due to rounding (+/- 0.1 variation)

First Nations Australians are digitally excluded at double the rate of other Australians

Nearly a quarter of First Nations Australians (23%) are considered Highly Excluded with over two in five (41%) rated as Excluded or Highly Excluded.

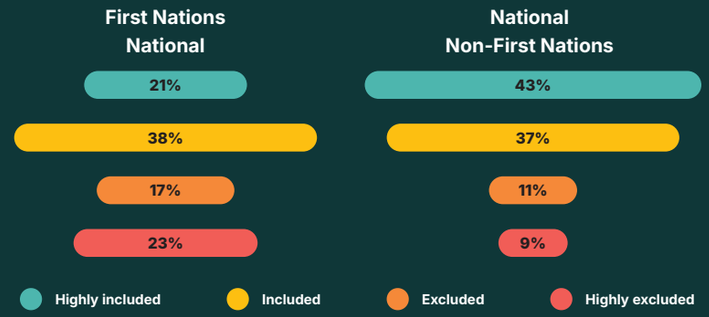


Figure 4. Exclusion scores for First Nations national average and non-First Nations average

Being digitally excluded means one is less able to access, afford or use digital technologies to meet everyday needs and pursue their aspirations. It means missing out on critical services, communication and opportunities.

The digital inclusion gap

The digital gap increases significantly with remoteness

from 6.2 in major cities to 22.8 in very remote Australia, more than double the national average gap of 10.5. Access to reliable connectivity varies widely in remote and regional areas.

6.2	Major Cities
22.8	Very Remote Australia

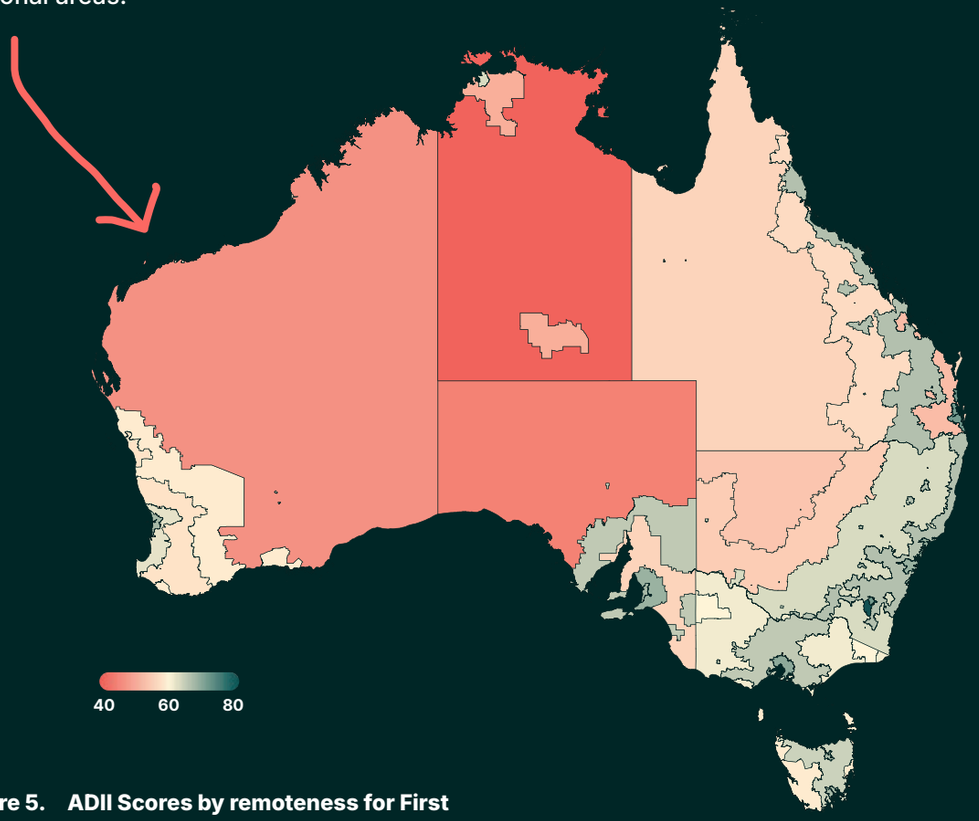


Figure 5. ADII Scores by remoteness for First Nations Australians[3]

Digital inclusion varies widely among First Nations Australians

based on where they live, their socio-economic and housing situation, age, education, health and employment status. The digital gap, relative to the non-First Nations average, is particularly significant for:

32.3	**Elders 75 and over** Compared with **6.7** for 18-34 age group
21.1	**People excluded from the education system** **11.9**-point difference between those who completed secondary school and those who did not, and nearly a **20**-point difference relative to those who had completed a bachelor degree
18.7	**People who speak a First Nations language at home** Compared with 9.4 for those who speak only English at home
17.4	**People on income support** Compared with 2.8 for those not reliant on income support
17.1	**People with disability** Compared with **8.5** for those without disability
15.3	**Gender** The gap for First Nations males is 5.3 greater than for females (**8.0**)

States and Territories

The digital gap is spread evenly across most states, however those with a larger remote population have much lower averages.

There is variation in digital inclusion between states, largely related to the proportion of people living in remote and very remote areas. The gaps are greatest in Northern Territory (NT) (average score is 56.6, a 17.3 gap), Western Australia (WA) (avg. 58.8, 15.1 gap), and New South Wales (NSW) (avg. 63.1, 10.8 gap).

The **Access gap** is the primary factor in NT (25.0) and WA (21.8). Across all jurisdictions, inner-metropolitan areas score highly, while remote and very remote areas record the lowest scores.

Across the country, the **Digital Ability gap** is greatest for those living in NT (18.3), especially regional NT (27.6), and in very remote areas (17.0).

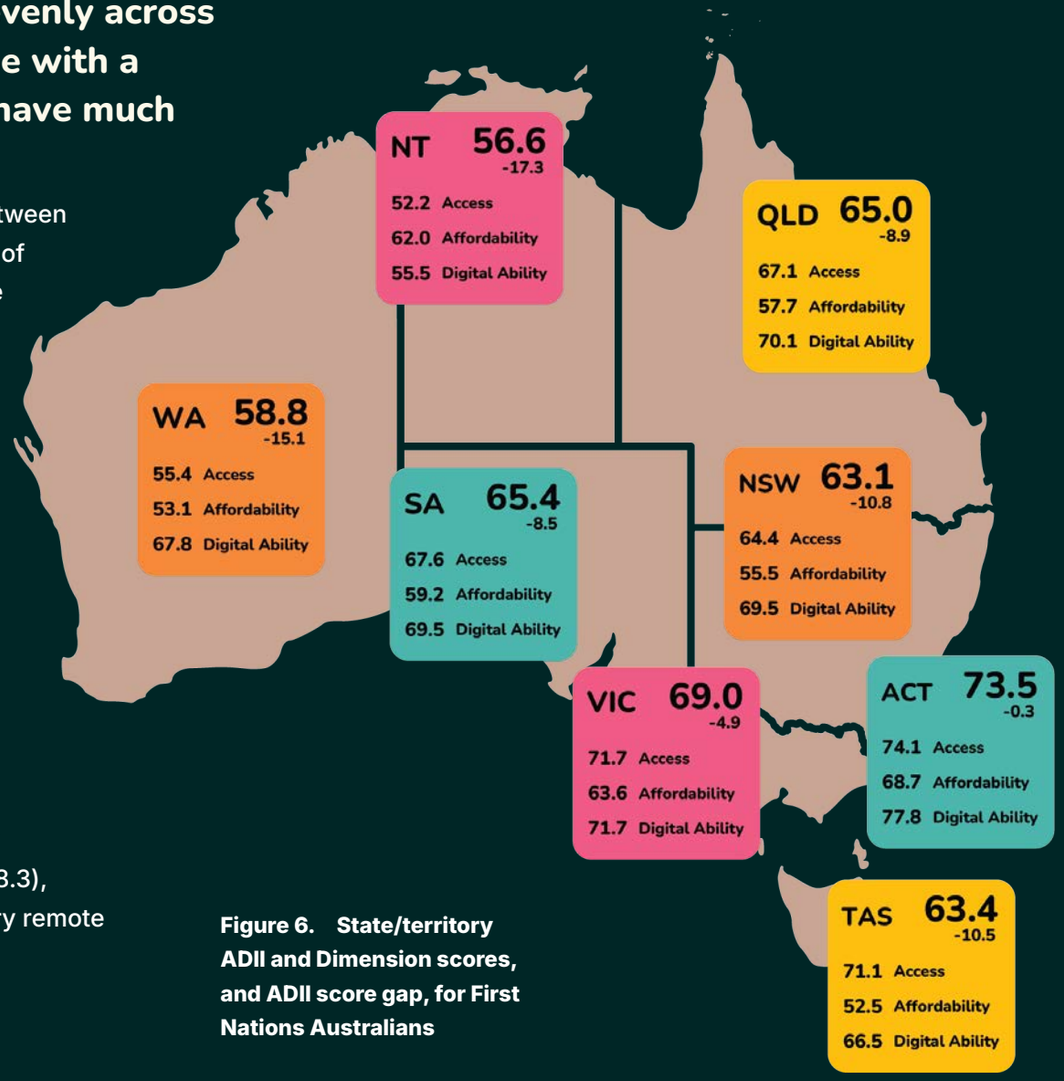
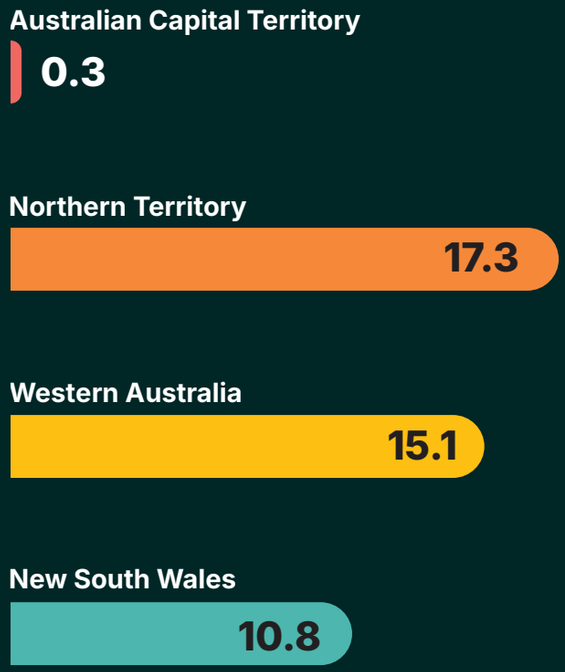


Figure 6. State/territory ADII and Dimension scores, and ADII score gap, for First Nations Australians

State gaps at a glance

Figure 7. First Nations state/territory digital inclusion gaps against national non-First Nations score



Affordability

Of the three key dimensions used to measure digital inclusion—Access, Affordability and Digital Ability—**the key contributor to the digital gap is Affordability with a national average gap of 13.3.** This is consistently high across all remoteness zones, with a gap of 12.4 in major cities, 15.7 in inner regional and 15.7 in remote Australia.

The ADII has changed the way Affordability is measured to better reflect the diversity of household size and makeup, connectivity options and costs, and different contexts across urban, regional and remote Australia. Because of these changes, **Affordability scores in the 2025 ADII are not directly comparable to previous years, and the total ADII scores are not comparable.**

With high cost of living and lower than average incomes, Affordability is a key contributor to digital exclusion.

The overall gap in Affordability between First Nations Australians and other Australians is 13.3. However, the gap is much higher for Elders aged 75 and over (29.2), those experiencing unemployment (28.2), people in single person households (27.3), public housing residents (22.4), people who did not complete secondary school (22.4), those on income support (22.4) and people with disability (20.1). Cost of living pressures leave many households under-connected even where networks are available.

Affordability factors limit household broadband uptake, computer access and drive high reliance on pre-paid mobile as a primary means of internet access.

This in turn limits the types of applications and services that can be used.

Affordability gap at a glance

Figure 8. First Nations affordability gap against National non-First Nations score



Access

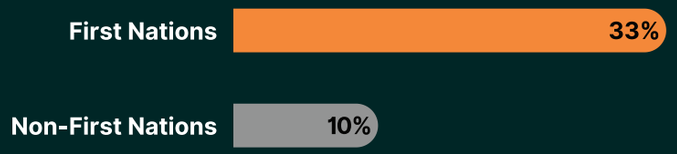
The gap in Access is also high at 12.8 nationally (64.3 compared to 77.2 for other Australians).

The Access measure primarily refers to use of online services and devices, but is impacted by availability of services. As such, the Access gap varies significantly with remoteness, increasing from 7.8 in major cities to 39.9 in very remote areas. Single person households have very low Access scores (gap of 22.2) and multi-family or group households also have a significant Access gap (15.8).

First Nations households are both unconnected and under-connected at greater rates.

33% of First Nations households **have no fixed broadband service** compared with 11% for other Australians. Household connectivity ranges from 74% in major cities and 75% in outer regional areas to 19% in very remote.

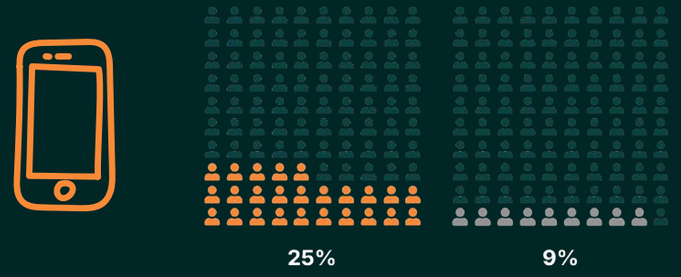
Figure 9. % of people who have no fixed broadband service at home



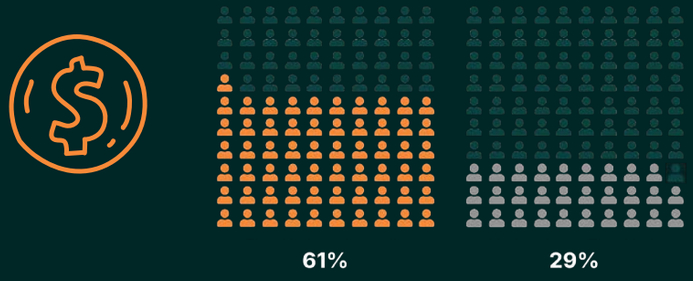
There is high reliance on mobile services as a primary means of internet access.

A quarter (25%) of First Nations Australians rely on **mobile as their only connection**, compared with 9% for other Australians.

Figure 10. % of people who are mobile only, and % of people who use pre-paid mobile only

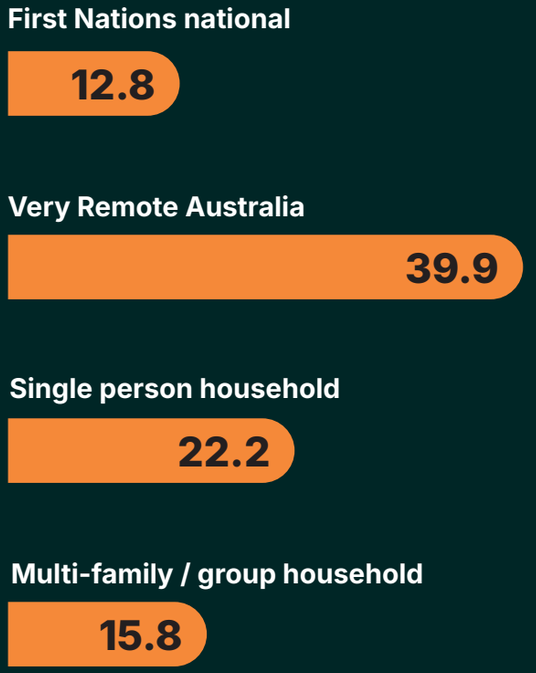


First Nations Australians access **pre-paid mobile at double the national average** (61% compared with 29%), impacting on data cost and usage.



Access gap at a glance

Figure 11. First Nations Access gap against National non-First Nations score



Digital Ability

The Digital Ability gap is much lower overall than other Dimensions (-5.3)

The 18-34 age group scores 5.0 points above the national average and those in major cities score 1.6 points above the average.

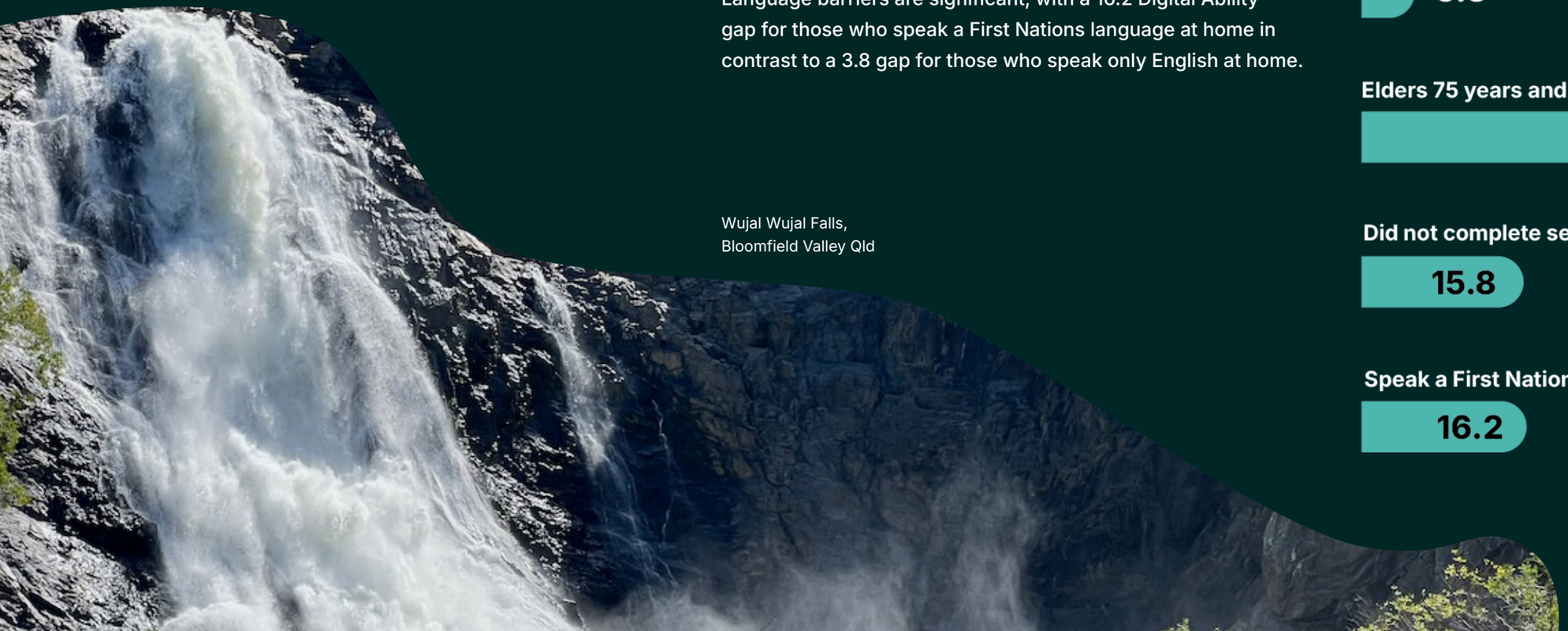
There was a **7.9 increase** in Digital Ability score for First Nations Australians from 2022 (60.7) to 2024 (68.6).

Significant gaps persist for age groups, education, employment, and language use

The Digital Ability gap increases significantly with age, with a 20.7 gap for those aged 55-64, and 32.4 for those 65-74 and 44.1 for Elders aged 75 and over.

There are also large gaps for those who did not complete secondary school (15.8) and those not in the labour force (16.9).

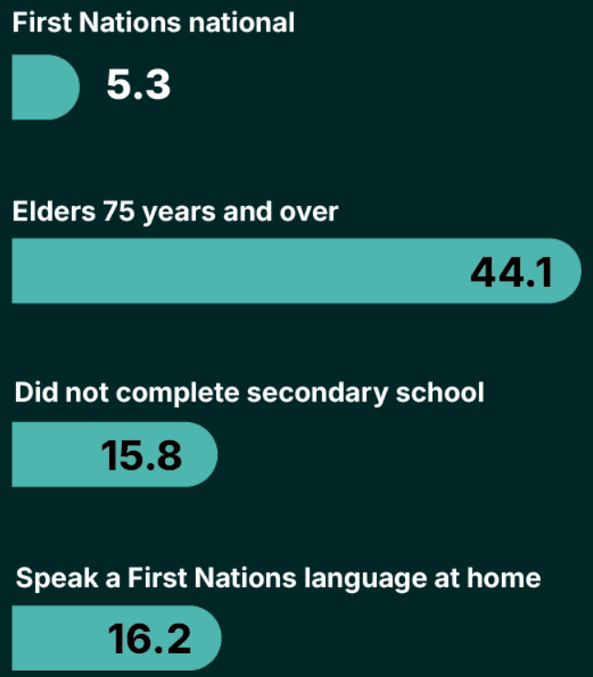
Language barriers are significant, with a 16.2 Digital Ability gap for those who speak a First Nations language at home in contrast to a 3.8 gap for those who speak only English at home.



Wujal Wujal Falls,
Bloomfield Valley Qld

Digital Ability gap at a glance

Figure 12. First Nations Digital Ability gap against National non-First Nations score



Media and information

Media and information services, including via First Nations broadcasting and media providers, are also an important element of Outcome 17 in supporting informed decision making.

While not used in developing Index scores, our survey includes questions on access and use of media, news and information services. This includes broadcast media, online and face-to-face communications as modes of information sharing.

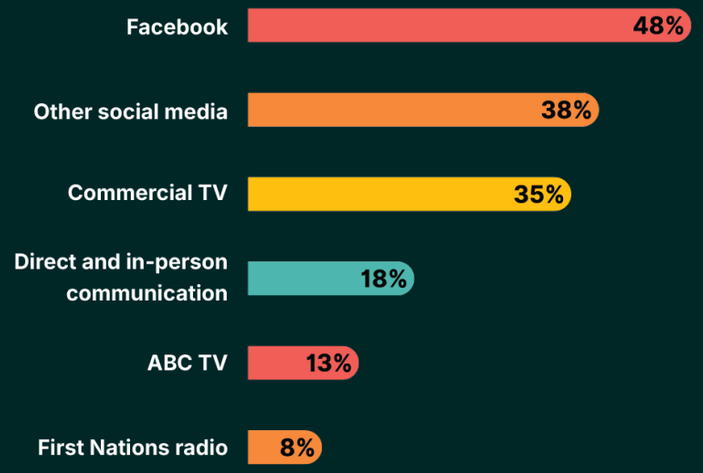
Access to online media content is a primary use of the internet, with 86% of respondents using entertainment services online in the last six months.



Most popular sources of news and information

are Facebook (48% daily), other social media (38%) and commercial TV (35%), direct and in-person communication (18% daily) and ABC TV (13%). First Nations radio services also provide a trusted source of locally relevant news (8% daily).

Figure 13. Means of accessing news and information for First Nations Australians



Media and information at a glance

18% listened to First Nations radio weekly

10% daily

67% access radio via car radio

20.1% via home radio, 15.3% online

61% of remote households do not have TV services working

Source: *Mapping the Digital Gap*

59% get emergency information via Facebook

49% via text message, 43% via commercial TV

70% use streaming services weekly

for TV and video content (61% via YouTube, 56% via commercial TV)

Summary

Digital inclusion is a dynamic and evolving journey.

Its three core dimensions—Access, Affordability and Digital Ability—are deeply interconnected and shaped by changes in technology, markets, policy, and people's everyday lives.

Along with reliable access to relevant media and information services, **digital inclusion is essential for informed decision-making**, connections to culture and community, and participation in education, employment, and social life for First Nations Australians.

The findings of this project clearly demonstrated the **strong links between Outcome 17 and other Closing the Gap outcomes**, showing how digital inclusion underpins progress in health and well-being, education, employment, housing, justice, and the preservation of language and culture.

The research identified key barriers to full digital participation while also **highlighting the strengths, resilience, and aspirations of First Nations communities.** Having a baseline measure of the scale and nature of the digital gap relative to other Australians provides an opportunity to inform initiatives to help make progress towards Target 17 and help close the digital gap.

States / Territories Analysis

Digital inclusion varies between and within states and territories, and between capital cities and regional and remote areas

This section explores the drivers of digital inclusion and exclusion on a state-by-state basis

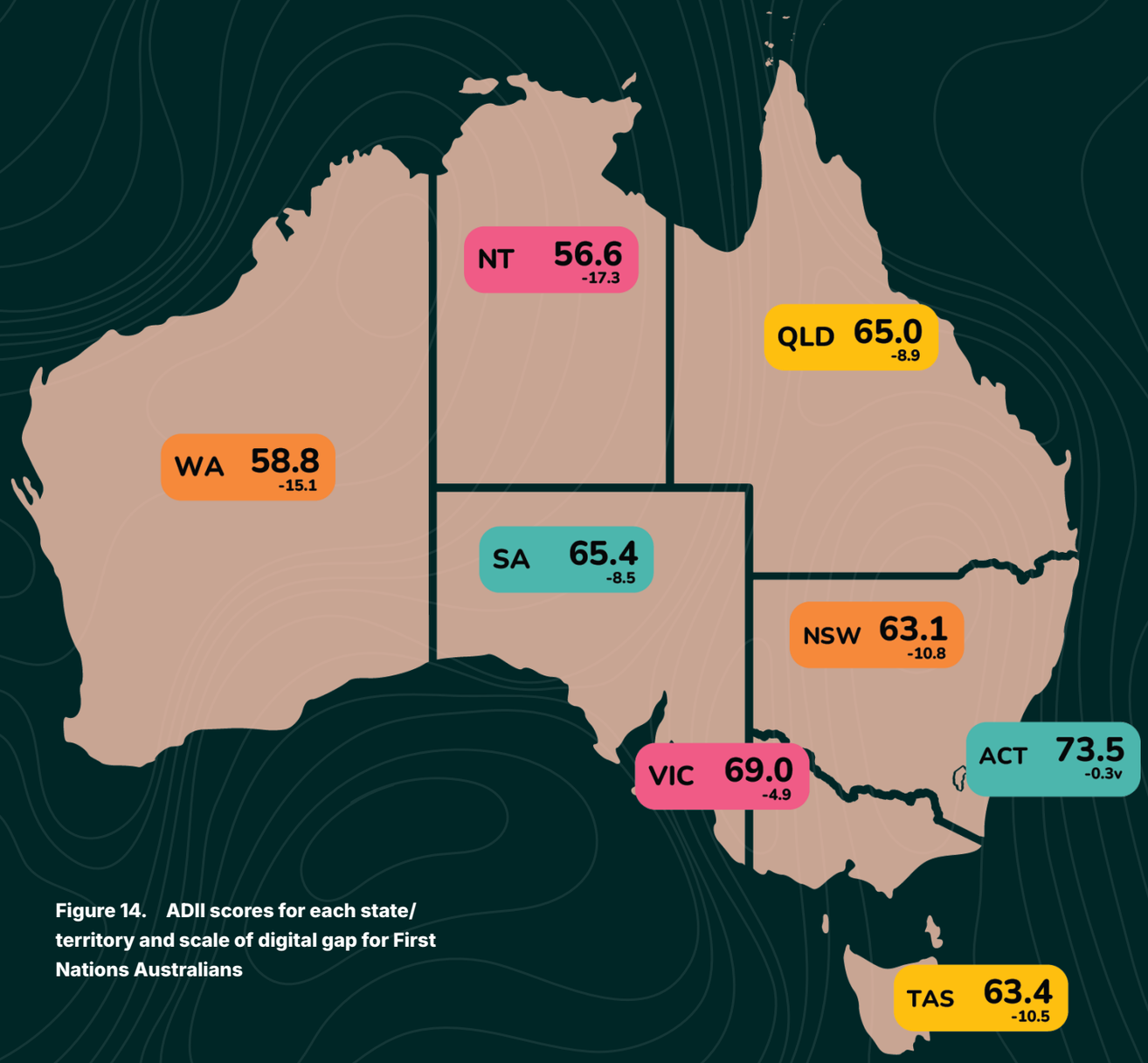


Figure 14. ADII scores for each state/ territory and scale of digital gap for First Nations Australians

States / Territories analysis

Digital inclusion scores for First Nations Australians vary across states and territories nationally, with the highest score in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) (73.5). The next highest scores are in Victoria (VIC) (69.0), followed by South Australia (SA) (65.4), Queensland (QLD) (65.0), Tasmania (TAS) (63.4) and New South Wales (NSW) (63.1). This aligns closely with population distribution by remoteness, with ACT, SA, VIC and NSW having the highest proportion of people living in cities.

The lowest digital inclusion rates are found in the NT (56.6) and WA (58.8), **the states with the greatest proportion of First Nations people living in remote and very remote areas**. The 2021 census showed the NT has 74% of its First Nations population living in remote and very remote areas, WA has 36% and QLD has 14%, whereas NSW has 2.4%. QLD has 25% living in outer regional and TAS has 48%.[8] The Index scores indicate a strong correlation between digital inclusion and remoteness, mostly shown in Access and Affordability scores (detailed overleaf).



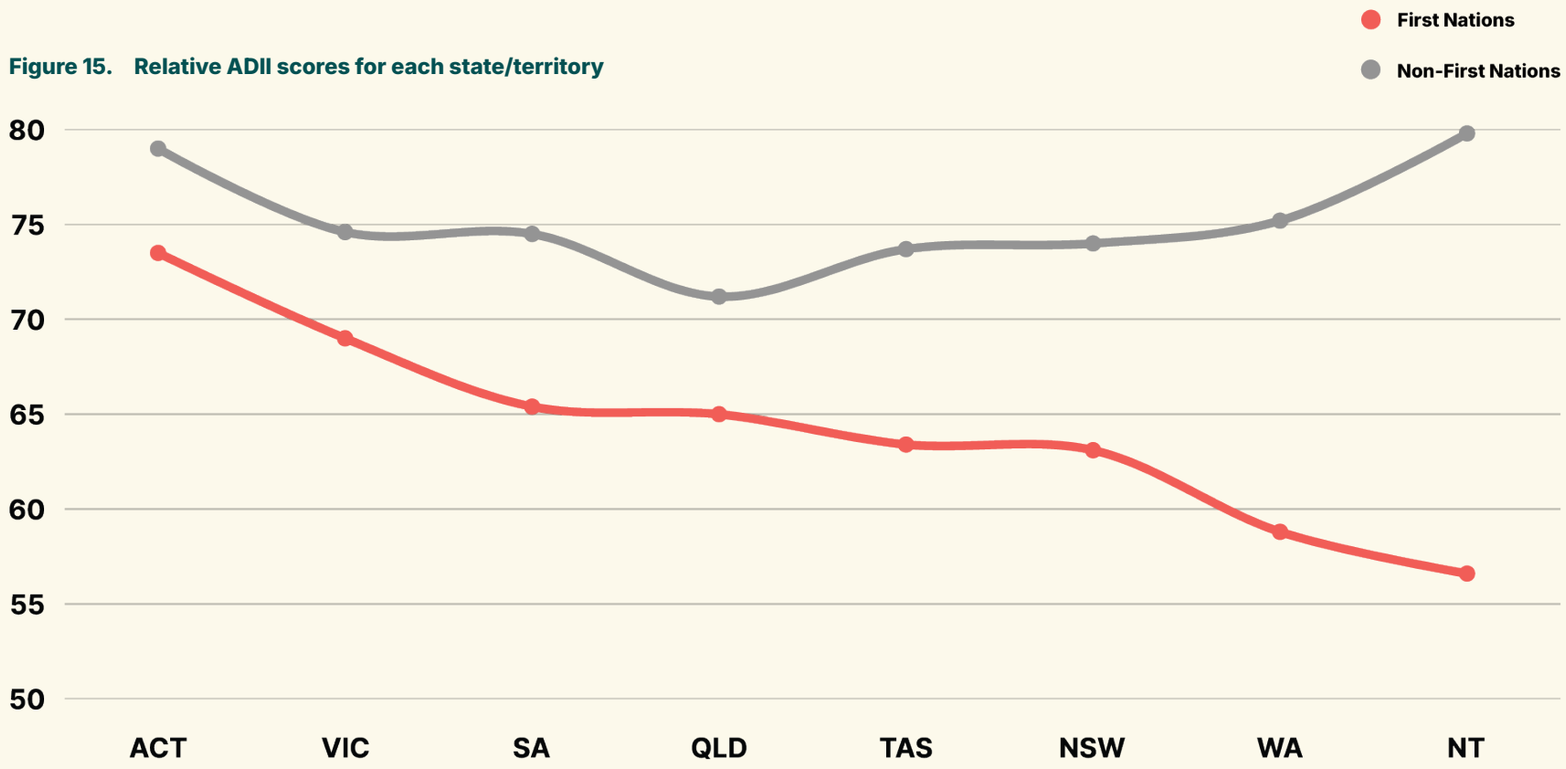
The relative digital gap varies widely between states and territories

First Nations people living in NT have the largest digital inclusion gap relative to non-First Nations NT residents (23.2), followed by those living in WA (16.4).

The relative gap for First Nations people living in NSW (10.9) and TAS (10.3) is similar to the national average but reduces in SA (9.0) and QLD (6.2), with the smallest relative gap in ACT (5.5) and VIC (5.6) (see Figure 15 below).

Again, the variations largely reflect the proportion of First Nations people living in remote and very remote areas, where there is reduced availability of communications infrastructure and services and typically typically lower levels of employment and socio-economic outcomes.

Figure 15. Relative ADII scores for each state/territory



States / Territories analysis

National variations become clearer when cities and rest of state scores are separated

The digital inclusion gap widens with remoteness for all Australians, however, Figure 16 indicates how remoteness disproportionately impacts First Nations Australians relative to other Australians in most states. For example, in Greater Brisbane there is a small relative gap of 3.9, with a widening to 7.5 in the rest of QLD. The relative gaps are more pronounced in NT, with a relative gap of 18.3 in Greater Darwin widening to 27.9 in the rest of NT. In Greater Adelaide, the First Nations average is 0.5 of a point higher than their non-First Nations counterparts, mostly due to high Digital Ability scores. However, the relative gap in the rest of SA is 12.5.

The one outlier is NSW where the First Nations Digital Inclusion score in Greater Sydney is 61.4, a gap of 14.7 below that of other Australians in the same location. Whereas the First Nations average in the rest of NSW is 63.8, 2.4 points higher than the Greater Sydney score and only 6.5 below the non-First Nations average. This difference is largely due to very low Affordability scores, with a score of only 50.8 for respondents in Greater Sydney compared with 57.4 in the rest of NSW, pointing to socio-economic challenges for many First Nations households in Sydney.

This aligns with findings in the recent First Nations Digital Inclusion in Western Sydney report which highlighted "the significant impact that issues of affordability have on the levels of digital inclusion amongst Indigenous individuals in Western Sydney."[9] Other ADII research undertaken in Western Sydney LGAs found that approximately 40% of residents spend more than 5% of household income to access a quality internet bundle.[10]

For more detailed analysis of First Nations digital inclusion across NSW, see also *'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Digital Inclusion in NSW: Baseline Evaluation' and Roadmap (July 2025)*, conducted by Nous Group for BlaQ Aboriginal Corporation and NSW Department of Customer Service. This report states:

"[R]ecognising internet access as a right, including connectivity and the provision of necessary devices, is fundamental."

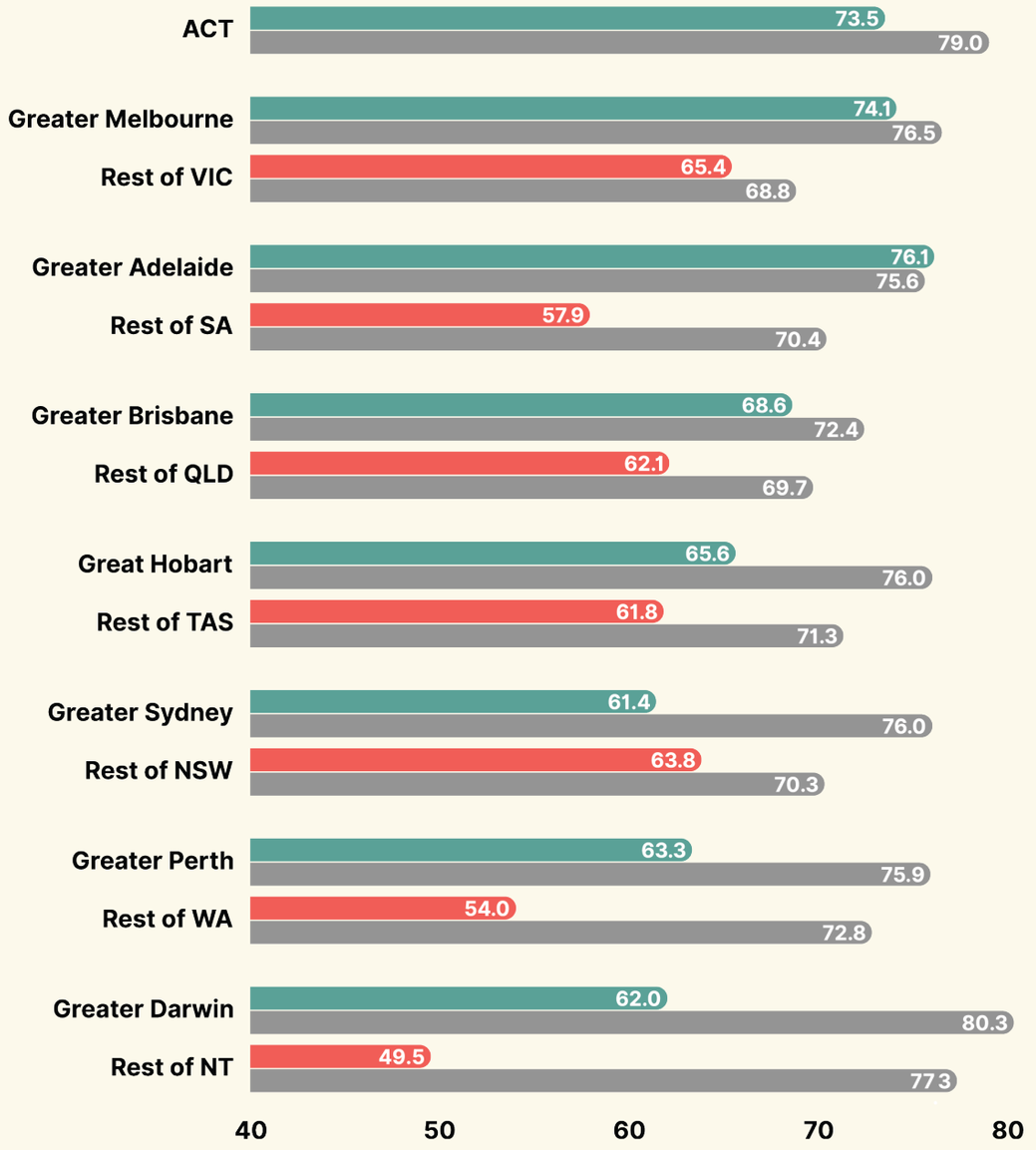


Figure 16. Relative ADII scores for capital cities and regional/ remote areas for each state/territory (ACT combined)

States / Territories analysis

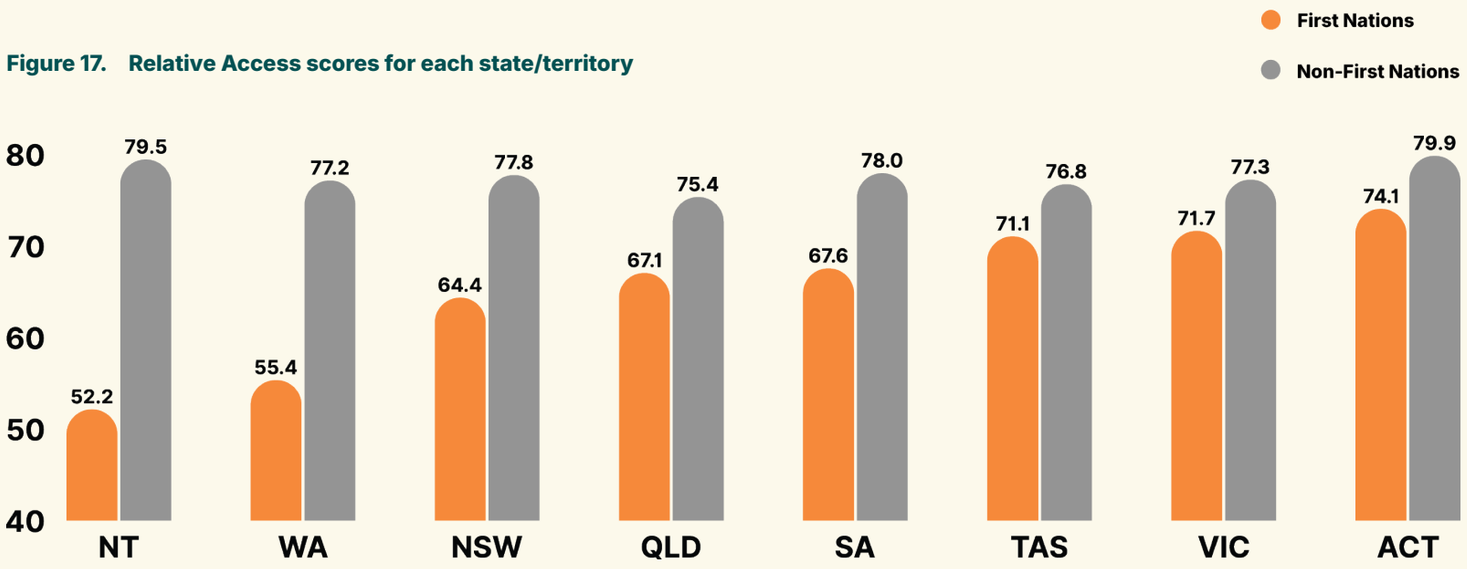
Access scores vary significantly across the country, affected by availability of services and proportion of mobile-only users

Access is a measure of internet connectivity and use of devices, along with frequency of online access. Scores are higher for households with a fixed broadband service, unlimited data and computer access than those reliant on pre-paid mobile and low data allowances. Availability of services is a factor. While NBN Sky Muster or Starlink are both options in regional and remote areas, affordability challenges restrict uptake of post-paid broadband services among low-income households.

While 63% of First Nations households have mobile and fixed connection, this is 23% lower than other Australians households. This can create a large Access gap relative to non-First Nations households that take up fixed broadband services.

Access scores for First Nations Australians were highest in ACT (74.1), VIC (71.7) and TAS (71.1), with the lowest scores in NT (52.2) and WA (55.4). This compares with the non-First Nations average of 77.2, with less than 5-point variations between states.

Figure 17. Relative Access scores for each state/territory



Digital Ability scores vary widely between states and territories, particularly those with higher remote populations

The variation in Digital Ability scores can be seen most clearly in a 50-point difference between First Nations people living in inner regional ACT (88.0) and those in very remote NT (38.0). This points to the impact of remoteness and associated socio-economic factors on Digital Ability.

Compared with the national non-First Nations average of 73.8, the Digital Ability gap is the lowest for those living in ACT (3.9 above non-First Nations national average) and highest in NT (18.4 below). The relative gap between NT residents living in Darwin and those outside of Darwin is 16.3, with a national gap for this cohort of 27.6. The national gap for WA residents living outside of Perth is 11.8. Whereas In Adelaide, First Nations people scored 4.4 points higher than the non-First Nations average.

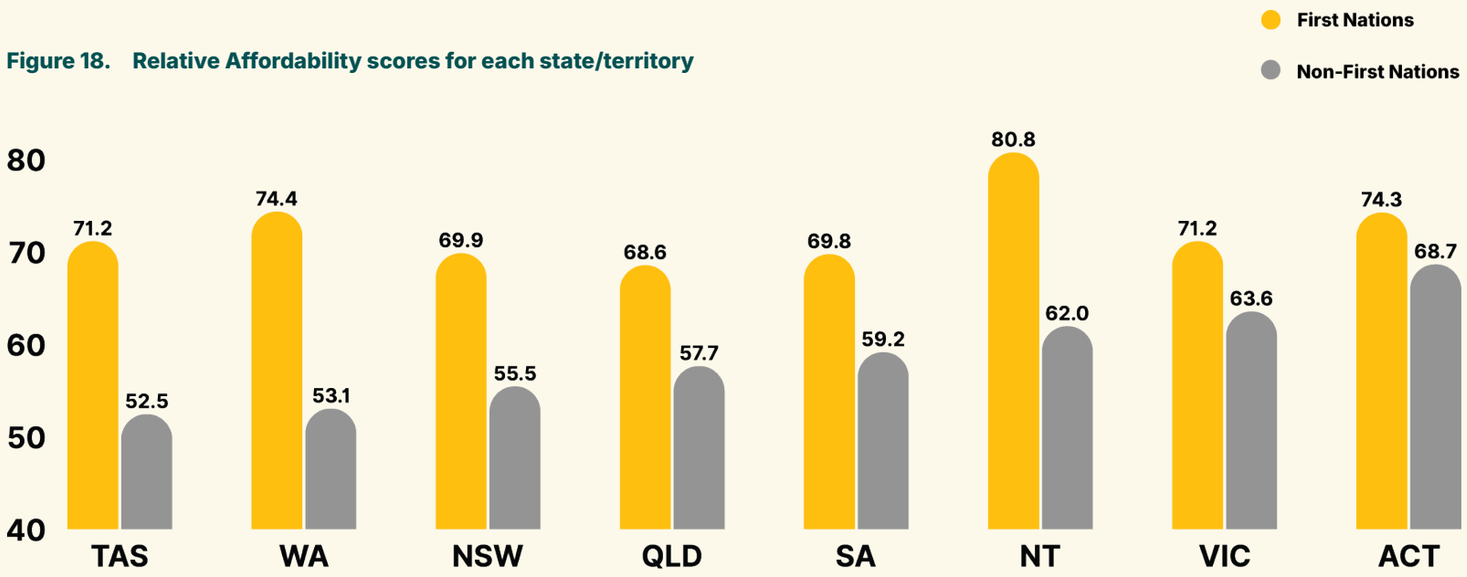
This points to the need for more targeted programs to support digital ability across the country, with the greatest need in outer regional, remote and very remote areas. It also highlights the lack of access to computers to develop keyboard skills and confidence with applications used in workplaces, creative applications and higher learning tools. Some existing state and territory government programs to advance Closing the Gap Target 17 are outlined on page 31.

States / Territories analysis

Affordability is a persistent barrier to digital inclusion in most states and territories, increasing for low-income and remote households

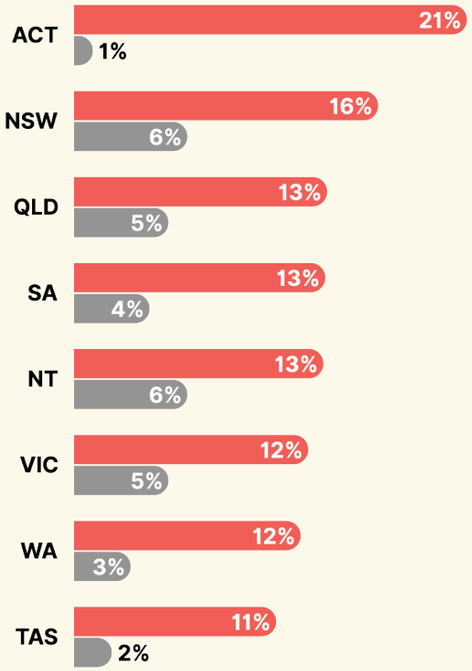
The Affordability gap varies between states from 1.9 in ACT to 18.1 in Tasmania. Compared with the national average of 70.6 for other Australians, there are significant Affordability gaps in WA (17.5), NSW (15.1), QLD (12.9) and SA (11.4). (See Figure 18 below).

Figure 18. Relative Affordability scores for each state/territory



With connectivity a high priority among First Nations Australians, **many people cut back on essential household costs, such as food or bills**, to afford personal or household internet access. Across the country, the rates of First Nations people saying they often or always cut back varied between 11% to 21%. This included one in five (21%) in the ACT and one in six (16%) in NSW. This reflects wide variations in income distribution within these states.[11]

Figure 19. Relative rates of often or always cutting back on essentials to pay for internet by state/territory



Affordability challenges increase with remoteness, with the lowest scores nationally in outer regional SA (49) and very remote Tasmania, WA, VIC and NT all scoring 50. The highest Affordability score was in inner regional ACT (78), 7.5 points above the average for other Australians. This wide variation in Affordability closely aligns to the other dimensions of Access and Digital Ability, showing the strong linkage between all three.

States / Territories analysis

Examples of actions by states and territories to address Target 17

All state and territory governments are signatories to the National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap, with active efforts nationally to address Target 17. There is national collaboration through the Data and Digital Ministers Meeting to improve online government services delivery, with a Digital Inclusion Working Group set up to focus on Target 17.

Improving availability of telecommunications infrastructure and mobile services has been a key focus of most states and territories over the last decade, particularly in remote and regional locations where market failure limits industry investment. This has included collaboration and co-investment with the Australian Government's Mobile Black Spots Program and Regional Connectivity Program.

There have also been a range of targeted programs for remote communities, particularly in WA, NT, QLD and NSW.[12] Some examples of State-led initiatives are outlined here

See the First Nations Resources page on the ADII website for links to these strategies and roadmaps. Other Australian Government and industry projects are outlined in the next section.

NSW

NSW Government's Closing the Gap and Policy team, working with **BlaQ Corporation, led a NSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Digital Inclusion Evaluation study and Roadmap**, completed 2025.

QLD

State Library of QLD established the Digital and You suite of First Nations digital inclusion projects: Growing Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs), Digital Ideas catalogue, Regional Digital Development, an app and resources. The IKCs, operated by 13 Indigenous Shire Councils, play a key role in providing IT access, library facilities, a learning space and digital mentor support.

NT

NT Government co-invested with industry and Australian Government to expand communications in homelands, town camps and minor communities using small-cell mobile and Wi-Fi hotspots.

WA

WA Government pioneered **community-wide Wi-Fi mesh networks providing in-house broadband and VoIP services** to address household access and affordability barriers in remote communities. It also supports Community Resource Centres across regional and remote WA, providing IT access, services and support. WA also has a Digital Inclusion Accord and network,[13] building on its 2018 Digital Inclusion Blueprint.

Availability of communications and media services

Availability of communications services differs from Access, as measured by the ADII

The Access dimension of digital inclusion is a measure of individual usage of mobile and internet services and devices, not the range of services available. Clearly, availability of reliable and affordable services is a critical first step in enabling internet usage, particularly in remote communities and homelands, or outside of towns, where services are limited or poor quality.[14]

This research project does not include an audit of communications and media services in First Nations communities across the country. However, this section provides a summary of which services are available, infrastructure programs to address existing gaps, and where to find more information.



Availability of communications and media services

Telecommunications infrastructure and service options vary widely between urban, regional and remote areas

Urban and regional consumers typically have a range of service options to choose from, including NBN plans from retail service providers and pre-paid or post-paid plans from several network operators. However, many small towns, communities and homelands in remote and very remote Australia have no mobile coverage or are limited to a single provider. **Of the 1505 remote communities and homelands, roughly 796 have no mobile service currently (2024 data).** Most small homelands are reliant on a single public phone, with many having no reliable means of telephone or internet communication.

Communications infrastructure has been a key focus of government investment

Since the privatisation of Telstra in the 1990s, the Australian Government has provided funding to expand communications infrastructure to areas where there is market failure. A key program has been the Universal Service Obligation, a long-term contract with Telstra, to ensure access to voice and emergency services where people live across the country. There has also been significant investment in the National Broadband Network since 2008, aimed at ensuring equitable and affordable access to fixed broadband services nationally.

There has been a focus on expanding mobile coverage in regional and remote Australia through the Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP) and Regional Connectivity Program (RCP). In remote communities, RCP funding has supported more targeted solutions such as satellite small cell mobile services, community-wide Wi-Fi networks and microwave backhaul services. States and Territories have also invested in mobile services and other key infrastructure to address identified needs (see States/ Territories section). The *2024 Regional Telecommunications Review: Connecting communities, reaching every region* provides a good overview of policy and program developments to improve connectivity for regional, rural and remote communities, with recommendations for areas of further need.

The MBSP and RCP programs have helped to improve mobile connectivity in remote communities over the last decade. The RCP has also funded substantial regional upgrades to improve backhaul capacity, including the East Arnhem Fibre Upgrade, Torres Strait Islands upgrade to NBN fixed wireless delivery, Telstra microwave network and mobile upgrades in the Utopia region of NT, and NBN fibre to the premises upgrade in Yirrkala NT. Round 3 of the RCP allocated $15 million to solutions in central Australians locations.

As part of the 2024-25 Budget measure to address Closing the Gap Target 17, the Australian Government committed $40million to providing community-wide Wi-Fi networks in remote communities to provide affordable access to online services, digital literacy, education and training opportunities. NBN Co have implemented the first phase of this program, installing Wi-Fi mesh networks in 23 remote communities in the Northern Territory, South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia.[15] A second contestable phase of the First Nations Community Wi-Fi Program will see additional communities receive Wi-Fi mesh networks in the coming year.[16] The *Mapping the Digital Gap* research project has documented the uptake and impact of Wi-Fi mesh networks installed in case study sites under previous programs, with several other sites included in the NBN rollout in the last year.[17]

In recent years, following the devastating impact of floods, fires and cyclones that left regions without adequate communications, there has been focus on funding more resilient communications services and improving reliability of Triple Zero services. This proves to be an ongoing issue, with news in September 2025 of a Triple Zero outage resulting in four deaths.[18] In many remote communities, network or power outages are a relatively common occurrence, especially during wet season in northern Australia.

Efforts are underway by the Australian Government to modernise the Universal Service regime to include data services as well as voice and emergency services, with alternate voice service trials conducted in 2023. A proposed Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation (UOMO), announced in February 2025, aims to ensure all mobile providers support direct-to-device voice and text services via LEO satellite to enable access to emergency services in areas without mobile coverage.[19] The UOMO is due to begin in 2027, however it is unclear whether this will apply to pre-paid plans and all devices.

Availability of communications and media services

Fixed broadband is available nationally but take-up by First Nations households reduces with remoteness

The National Broadband Network provides broadband services nationally through a range of technology options depending on remoteness–fixed line to 91% of households via fibre to the premises (FTTP), fibre to the node (FTTN), fixed wireless (5% coverage) or Sky Muster satellite (3% coverage). Low Earth Orbit satellite services, such as Starlink, are also available throughout regional and remote Australia, with Amazon's Project Kuiper becoming available to households from 2026. NBN Co has announced plans to offer satellite services using Kuiper backhaul in 2026.[20]

Currently, most household broadband options are only available as a post-paid service. This limits uptake by many First Nations households due to affordability challenges, as evidenced in the low rates of fixed broadband in remote (53%) and very remote areas (19%), relative to major cities (73%). Pre-paid fixed broadband options are needed to address these issues, with unlimited data limits or shaped services to avoid excess data costs.

Mapping availability of communications services has been a challenge

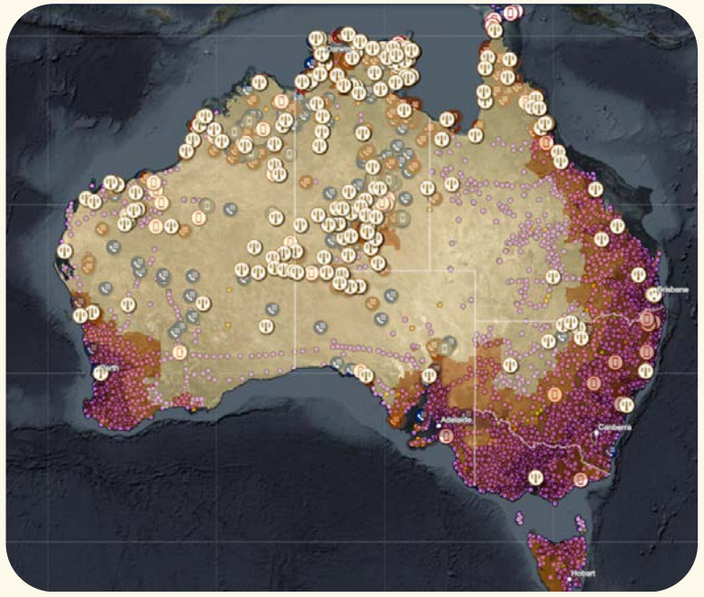
Previously, a challenge has been the lack of public visibility of where communications services are available in remote and outer regional Australia, with this information held by telecommunications companies and government agencies. This data is needed to identify service gaps and prioritise infrastructure funding to ensure broadband access for all Australians.

Based on an early recommendation of the FNDIAG in 2023, DITRDCSA collated available data on a dedicated First Nations Connectivity Mapping Tool. This interactive map (Figure 20) provides switchable data layers showing location of mobile services, public phones, Wi-Fi and First Nations broadcast services in communities and towns across remote and regional Australia. Data available on the map includes:

1506	discrete remote/very remote First Nations communities and homelands
23	NBN community-wide Wi-Fi mesh networks (completed in 2024-25 as part of the 2024 Budget measures) + 4 pilot sites
132	NBN Wi-Fi hotspots in 177 remote communities, under Communities in Isolation program
301	Wi-Fi enabled satellite telephones providing public voice and internet services across homelands, managed by NIAA
229	Community Telephones providing public voice services in remote Indigenous communities, managed by NIAA
25	Wi-fi hubs providing public internet services, managed by NIAA

Other programs currently being rolled out to improve internet access in remote First Nations communities include a Digital Connectivity Program providing Wi-Fi access and digital support in 25 NT sites (Department of Social Services), rollout of small cell mobile services in 22 small communities and homelands (NTG/Telstra partnership), and an Australian Government program to provide free community-wide Wi-Fi networks in more remote communities (to be announced in late 2025).

Figure 20. First Nation Connectivity Mapping Tool



Availability of communications and media services

Connectivity and reliability issues impact many First Nations consumers

Mobile services have been upgraded across the country as part of the 3G switch-off in 2024, with 5G services now available in many regional towns and remote communities. However, there are still connectivity and reliability issues. The *Mapping the Digital Gap* research has documented many cases of extended outage in remote communities, impacting on health and safety, food security with stores unable to operate, and service delivery by local agencies.

News stories of network outages due to power outages or network failure, connectivity issues within and between towns, and the impact of Triple Zero outages are common in the news. [21] The latest annual report from the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, outlined increased complaints about network connection issues in 2024/25 compared to the previous year.

Survey responses by many respondents living in outer regional and remote areas described poor or no coverage, service quality and reliability issues, challenges in signing up for services, and paying high costs due to lack of alternate providers. These factors constrain mobile and internet usage, which in turn impact on Access scores.



Free-to-air television services are not available in many remote households

Access to free-to-air television is considered a basic right, however availability of television services in remote communities is limited, with many households unable to access free-to-air broadcasts via the VAST satellite system. The *Mapping the Digital Gap* research found that **61% of remote First Nations households** reported their TV service was not working, most often due to failure of the VAST set top box or satellite equipment. The high cost of replacement set top boxes and technical support, and difficulty in activating smart cards, has left many households without free-to-air television services.

This reduces access to essential news, emergency information, and cultural and community content, further widening the media inclusion gap for remote First Nations communities. It also increases reliance on mobile or internet services to access media content, adding to household costs. There were many survey comments from remote respondents asking for TV services to be working again.

A working group set up in 2023 undertook an audit of equipment failure and options of upgrading VAST satellite equipment or installing digital TV broadcast facilities in remote communities.[22] With failure rates increasing annually,[23] the First Nations Digital Inclusion Roadmap includes Recommendation 5, which calls for reliable access to free-to-air television services for remote First Nations households.[24]

Availability of communications and media services

First Nations media services provide an essential and trusted information service

Australia is a signatory to the UN Declaration to the Rights of Indigenous Peoples[25] which includes Article 16:

Indigenous peoples have the right to establish their own media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-Indigenous media without discrimination.

States shall take effective measures to ensure that State-owned media duly reflect indigenous cultural diversity. States, without prejudice to ensuring full freedom of expression, should encourage privately owned media to adequately reflect indigenous cultural diversity.

As mainstream media outlets are reducing in diversity across Australia, and with many now behind paywalls or only available online, First Nations media organisations provide an essential and locally relevant service for their communities. These services provide trusted and culturally appropriate news and information, providing positive representation and an alternate to misinformation, bias and racism in some mainstream and online media.[26]

Outcome 17 includes indicators related to participation, reach and content delivery by First Nations media services. While our research does not measure these indicators, we strongly support calls by peak body, First Nations Media Australia, for a well-resourced First Nations media industry[27] with expanded coverage to unserved and under-served areas.[28]

First Nations radio programming began on ABC and community radio stations in the 1970s with a dedicated First Nations media sector developing since the early 1980s. Today, there are more than 230 radio broadcast sites coordinated through 35 licensed organisations, reaching about 320,000 First Nations people (approximately 48% of the First Nations population). The radio sector includes 157 FM radio stations, four AM stations, 13 radio networks shared via VAST satellite, and five metropolitan services broadcasting via DAB+ and FM. The FNMA website has a map showing the locations of these services (Figure 21 below).

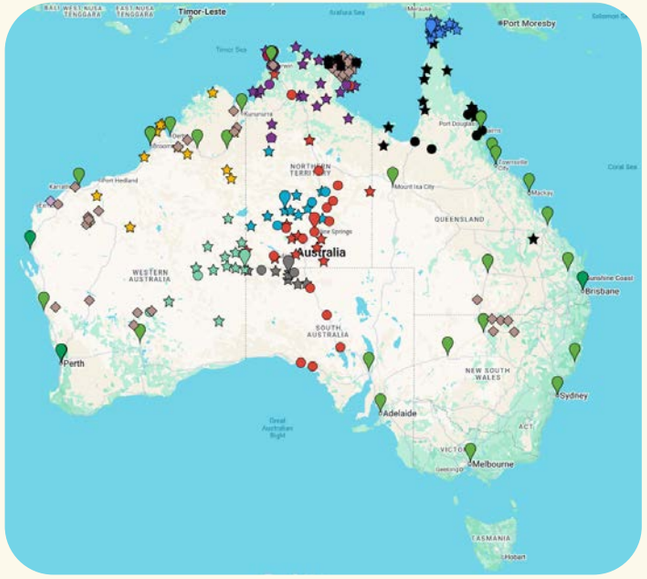


Figure 21. Map of locations of First Nations radio services.[4]

In addition, there is a national free-to-air TV service, NITV, a satellite-delivered TV service (ICTV) and three local narrowcast TV services (Goolarri TV in Broome, Larrakia TV in Darwin and ICTV in Alice Springs and Broome). The First Nations media sector also includes a national print newspaper, Koori Mail, and several online news services, as well as First Nations radio programming on community radio stations nationally.

A 2021 report outlined that the First Nations broadcasting and media sector includes 53 organisations responsible for 214 community broadcasting licenced transmission sites across remote, regional and urban Australia.[29] This includes over 120 Remote Indigenous Broadcasting Services supported by eight remote Indigenous media organisations. The report described how First Nations media delivery has expanded beyond traditional broadcasting modes into use of social media, streaming services, mobile applications and online communications to reach widespread and digitally connected audiences.



Wilcannia River
Radio broadcaster

Key factors affecting digital inclusion

Digital inclusion outcomes for First Nations Australians are shaped by a range of interconnected geographic and demographic factors.

This section explores the most influential factors. Together, these insights highlight how location, life stage, and social context shape opportunities for digital connections, capability, and participation across communities.

Understanding these factors helps identify where digital gaps persist, which are priority areas for digital inclusion programs, as well as where community strengths and opportunities for innovation are emerging.



Charlie Bloomfield,
Wujal Wujal

Remoteness

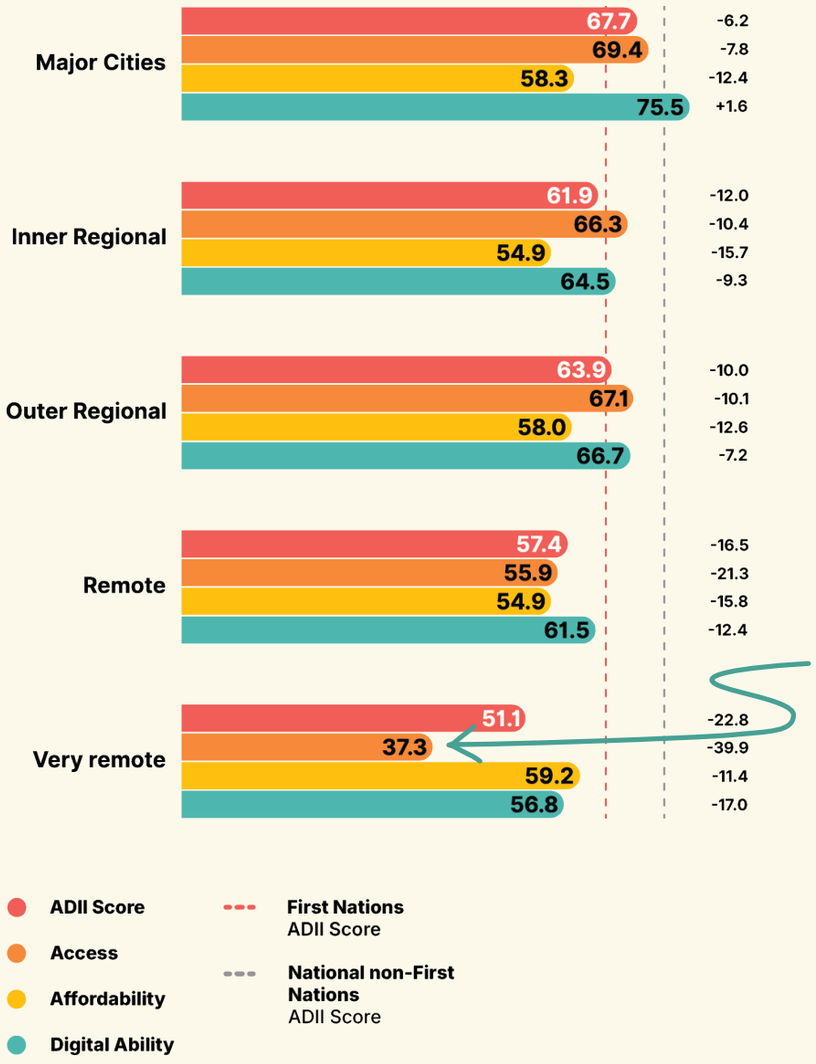
Remoteness shapes digital inclusion

The five remoteness categories—**major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote**—are based on distance to services.

The further from service centres, the fewer connectivity options and the higher the likelihood of poorer quality and speed of services. Costs are higher and living remotely means less support and fewer resources to develop and maintain confidence with digital technologies and the skills to use them effectively. Remoteness creates a "double jeopardy of digital disadvantage".[30] These digital inequalities also reflect and reinforce inequalities in education, employment, health and housing.

The digital gap between First Nations and the average for other Australians increases with remoteness. Nationally, the gap is 10.5. In major cities, it is 6.2. In very remote areas, it increases to 22.8.

Figure 22. Variations in ADII and Dimensions by remoteness for First Nations Australians, with ADII Score gap



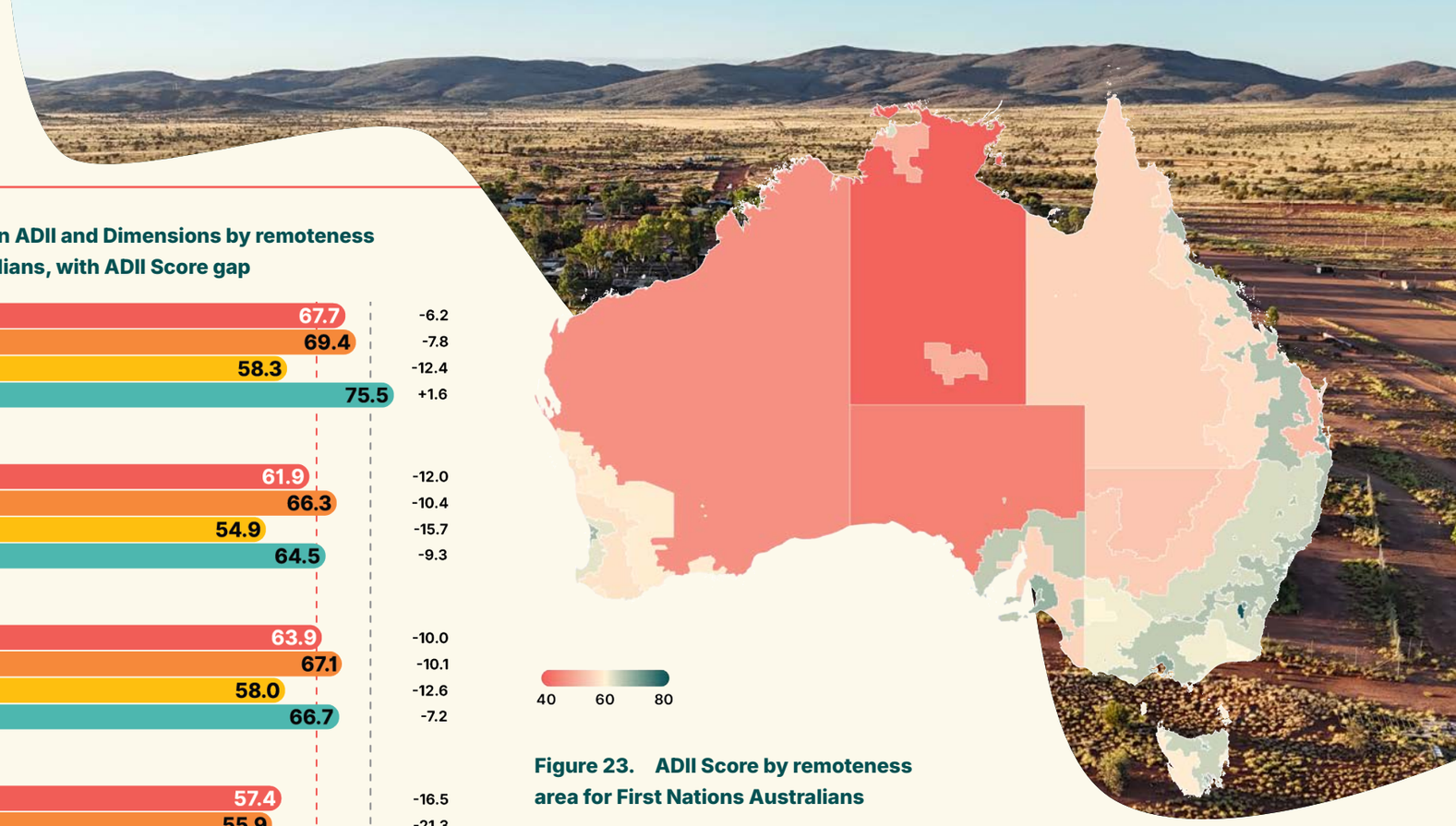


Figure 23. ADII Score by remoteness area for First Nations Australians

Remoteness amplifies the Access gap

The further from services, the less reliable the connection, the slower the speeds, the tighter the data limits and the fewer devices people can use.

First Nations people in remote and very remote areas rely primarily on mobile services for connectivity, with low fixed broadband uptake in remote and very remote areas, and 47% and 81% respectively having no household broadband service. With limited opportunities for access inside the home, many rely on internet access outside the home.

Age

Age plays a significant role in shaping digital inclusion for First Nations Australians, with wide variations between young people and Elders

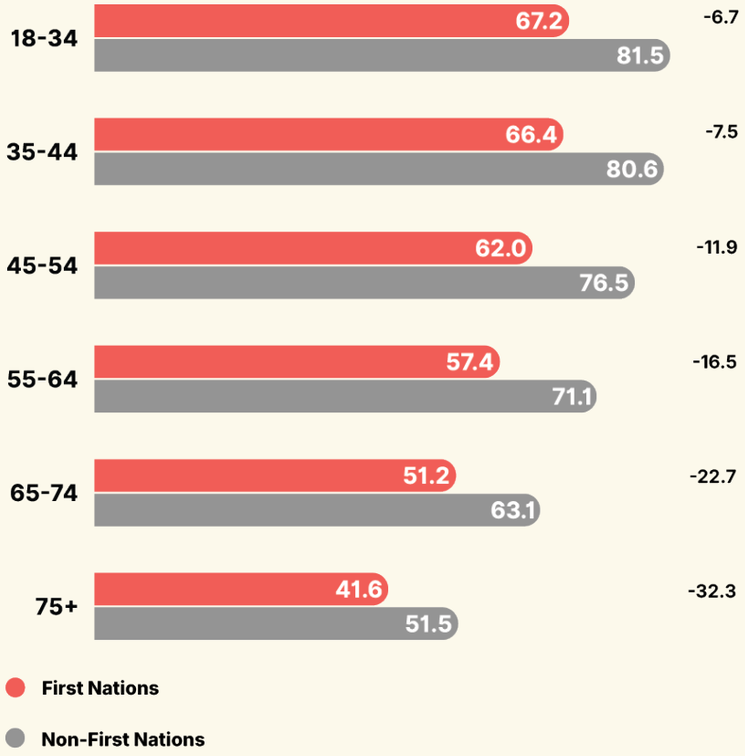
While younger people are mostly active and confident internet-users, many older people face major barriers to getting online.[31] These differences highlight the need for age-specific approaches to improving digital access, affordability, skills and trust.

The overall digital inclusion gap between First Nations and other Australians widens with age, from 6.7 points for people aged 18-34 to 32.3 points for those aged 75 and over (see Figure 24). This is largely due to lower scores in Digital Ability, limited access to working devices or connections, and high costs relative to income.



Irrunytju Community Resource Centre, operated by Ngaanyatjarra Media

Figure 24. ADII and gap scores by age group



I need help from my grandchildren to use the online services like banking. (Survey comment)

Younger First Nations Australians are highly connected.

Almost all aged 18 to 34 (96%) have used the internet in the past six months, and most go online every day using a mobile phone. Many use the internet constantly throughout the day to access social media, entertainment and online services. Younger adults also have the highest rates of smartphone ownership (over 90%) and are the most likely to have 5G connections. However, they also experience affordability pressures, with around 45% saying they have had to cut back on other essentials such as food or bills to afford internet access.

For middle-aged people (35–54), internet use remains high, but affordability and household needs can create challenges. These age groups are often supporting families and sharing devices across several household members. Only a small number of First Nations households (about 4%) say they have enough devices for everyone's needs, compared with 14% of other Australians. Middle-aged First Nations Australians are also more likely to rely on mobile-only internet connections, which can be expensive and limit access to data-intensive activities such as video calls or streaming.

Age

The digital gap grows wider among older age groups.

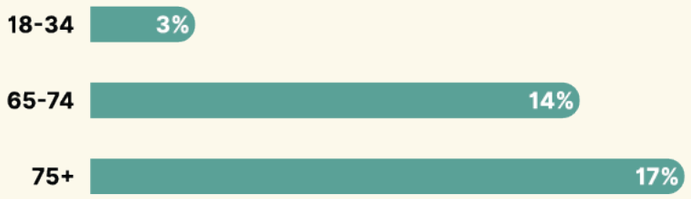
People aged 55 and over are much less likely to have reliable access to the internet or suitable digital devices. Only two-thirds of those aged 75 and over own a smartphone and computer ownership is much lower than the national average. Internet use also declines with age: while most young adults are online daily, only 77% of those aged 75 and over use the internet at least once a day. For many Elders, digital technology is not seen as a priority or something that fits easily into their daily lives. Over one-third of older First Nations Australians said that using the internet was “not a priority” for them.



Confidence, skills and trust in using online services are also lower among older users.

Only 3% of young adults report feeling unsure about using the internet, compared with 14% of those aged 65–74 and 17% of those 75 and over. Many Elders also worry about online scams, privacy, and offensive content, which can discourage them from using digital devices and decrease trust in online services. High levels of Elder fraud within families are also a disincentive to using online banking.[32]

Figure 25. Feels unsure about using the internet, First Nations



I don’t want to use internet, people might scam me or steal my knowledge (Survey comment)

For younger First Nations Australians, the main barriers are **affordability and access to reliable, affordable data**.

For older people, the barriers are more often **confidence, training, and having trusted local support**.

Together, these differences show that improving digital inclusion requires different solutions for different age groups, from affordable data plans and devices for young people to culturally appropriate digital skills support for Elders.

The *Mapping the Digital Gap* research has found a **positive trend in digital inclusion among Elders** over its three years (2022–24), with increased online engagement leading to notable improvements in Digital Ability. The same trend has been seen across the national population with Digital Ability for Australians aged 75 and over rising from 23.3 in 2023 to 41.9 in 2025. It is hoped that with appropriate support programs in place, this trend will continue.

Bridging the generational digital divide will ensure that people of all ages can connect, learn and take part in online life.

Education

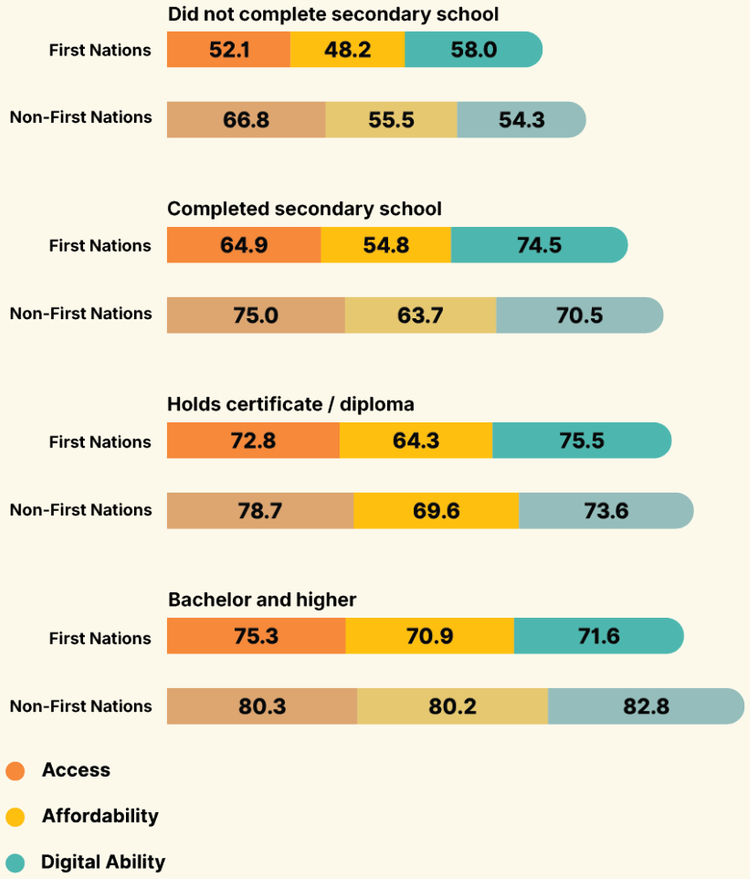
Digital inclusion closely aligns to education levels with large gaps for those without secondary education, but Digital Ability levels are high for those with secondary or higher qualifications

First Nations people who did not complete secondary school have a digital inclusion gap of 21.1, with high levels of disparity across all dimensions: 25.1 gap in Access, 22.4 in Affordability and 15.9 in Digital Ability. In contrast, those with a bachelor's degree and above have minimal gaps for Access (1.9), Affordability (-0.3), and Digital Ability (2.2). This points to strong alignment between Outcome 17 and Outcomes 5–7 for Year 12 attainment, education pathways and youth engagement. This is clearly seen in Figure 26.

According to the ABS, 39% of First Nations people aged 20 and over had Year 12 as their highest year of school and almost half (46%) completed a non-school education qualification.[33] This means that over half of the First Nations population face these disparities.

While digital gaps tend to narrow with higher education, respondents with a bachelor's degree or above had a gap of 9.3 relative to their non-First Nations counterparts (70.9 compared with 80.2). Even though 99% of this group use the internet daily and consider the internet a priority, they face high relative gaps in Digital Ability (11.2) and Affordability (9.3).

Figure 26. ADII dimensions by education attainment and First Nations status



Digital Ability scores are closely aligned to education attainment. We found that First Nations Australians who have completed secondary school or a post-school qualification (Certificate or Diploma) had higher Digital Ability scores than the average for other Australians by 0.7 and 1.7 respectively (scores of 74.5 and 75.5).

Affordability remains a constant barrier for First Nations people at all education levels, particularly for those who have not been able to access higher schooling. For those without secondary schooling, one in seven (15%) stated the internet is too expensive for them, compared to 8% among tertiary-educated people. Nearly half (44%) of First Nations people who did not complete secondary school and (43%) who completed secondary school said they had made sacrifices or cut back on essential household costs to afford internet access.

Access to the internet and digital devices further reflects education-related inequalities. Around 6% of those who did not complete secondary school stated that they do not have convenient access to the internet. This was only 3% for those with a bachelor's degree or above. For those with access, nearly one in eight (12%) stated that the internet connection is too slow or unreliable, with higher rates among



Education

Despite these barriers and challenges, First Nations people demonstrate regular internet usage. 98% of those with a bachelor degree use the internet daily, with 95% daily use by for those who had completed secondary school and 96% for those with a certificate or diploma. Even those internet users who had not completed secondary education reported high daily use of 89%.

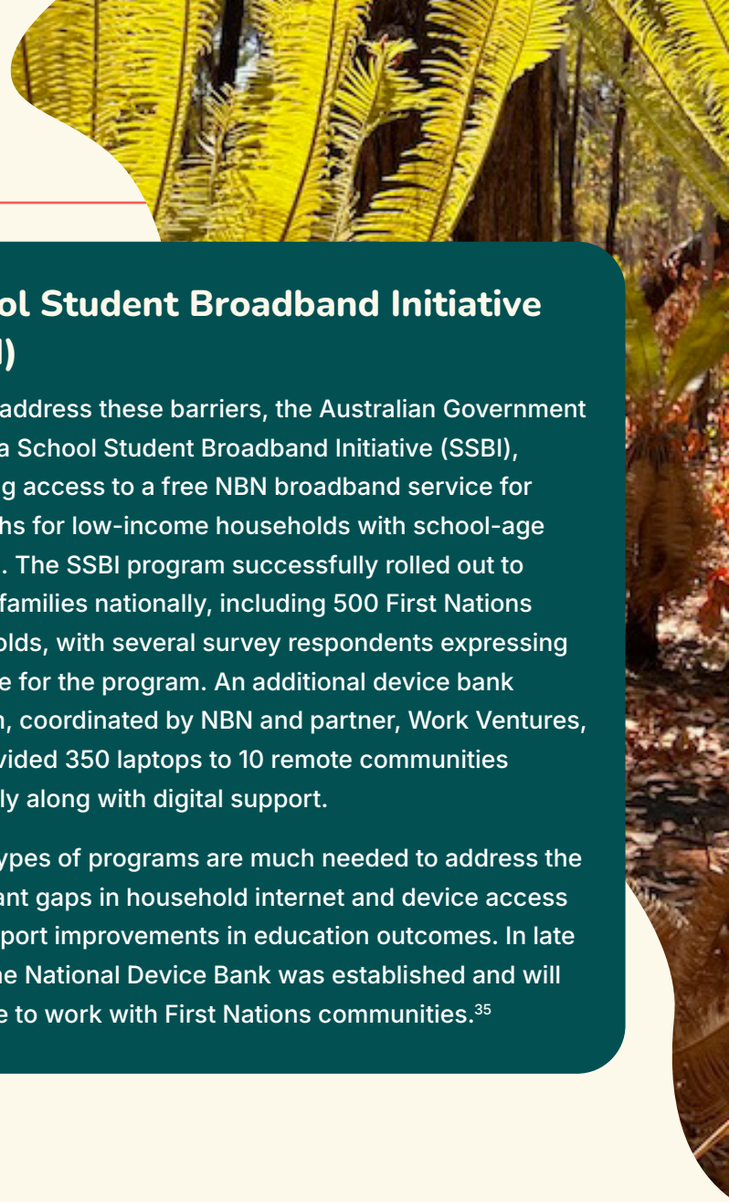
Access to devices is a challenge for all cohorts. Smartphones are the primary means of internet access for First Nations people who did not complete secondary school (87%), those who completed year 12 (91%) and those who completed a certificate or diploma (96%). Only 18% of First Nations people who did not complete secondary school reported using a laptop, about two-fifths of their non-First Nations counterparts (46%) with a similar pattern for tablet use (21% vs 43%). The low use of computers or laptops restricts complex digital tasks.

For those with a certificate or diploma, 55% used a laptop and 40% used a computer. For those with a bachelor's degree or above, 62% used a laptop and 43% a computer. However, these rates are much lower than their non-First Nations counterparts, with 82% using a laptop and 49% a computer, pointing to a gap in device access even among the most highly educated.

Lack of home internet and devices can impact on schooling outcomes. While this study does not collect data for under 18 years olds, there is evidence that the lack of household internet access impacts schooling outcomes. A 2021 report by World Vision and the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation found that almost one in four Indigenous households had no internet access, which particularly impacted schooling engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic when most schooling moved to online delivery.[34] A survey participant from our research, employed as an Aboriginal Islander Education Officer in a public high school, highlighted the lack of home internet access and laptops for many Aboriginal students, making it difficult to access homework and complete assignments at home. Another said:

> 'Internet should be free to all people with children in school … Indigenous children should be given access to free devices for education [with learning programs] combining traditional Indigenous knowledge with western technological learning.' (survey comment)

Education attainment is closely linked to digital inclusion for First Nations people, but structural and systemic barriers persist. Even highly educated First Nations individuals face Affordability and Digital Ability gaps relative to their non-First Nations peers. Addressing these issues requires targeted responses that go beyond infrastructure, with more focus on affordability, access to suitable and affordable devices, and culturally relevant support.



School Student Broadband Initiative (SSBI)

To help address these barriers, the Australian Government funded a School Student Broadband Initiative (SSBI), providing access to a free NBN broadband service for 12 months for low-income households with school-age children. The SSBI program successfully rolled out to 30,000 families nationally, including 500 First Nations households, with several survey respondents expressing gratitude for the program. An additional device bank program, coordinated by NBN and partner, Work Ventures, has provided 350 laptops to 10 remote communities nationally along with digital support.

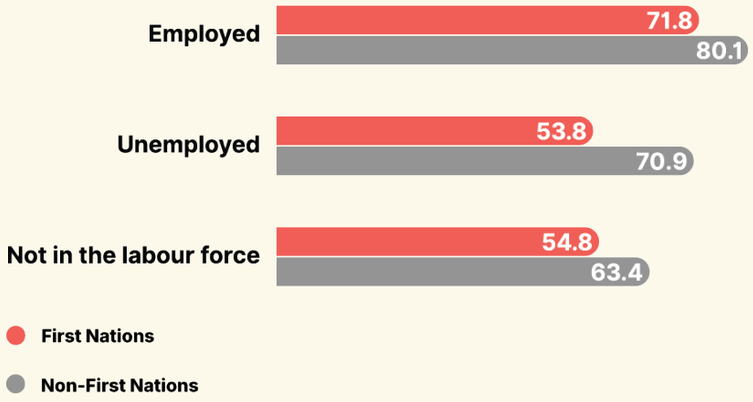
These types of programs are much needed to address the significant gaps in household internet and device access and support improvements in education outcomes. In late 2025, the National Device Bank was established and will continue to work with First Nations communities.[35]

Employment

Digital inclusion levels vary significantly with economic participation, with large gaps for First Nations people not in employment

The digital inclusion gap is highest for those who are unemployed (20.1) and not in the labour force (19.1), compared to a much smaller gap for those in employment either full-time or part-time (2.1). The 18-point difference between those who are employed and unemployed highlights a strong link between **economic participation (CTG Outcome 8) and digital inclusion (Outcome 17).**

Figure 27. Relative ADII scores by employment status



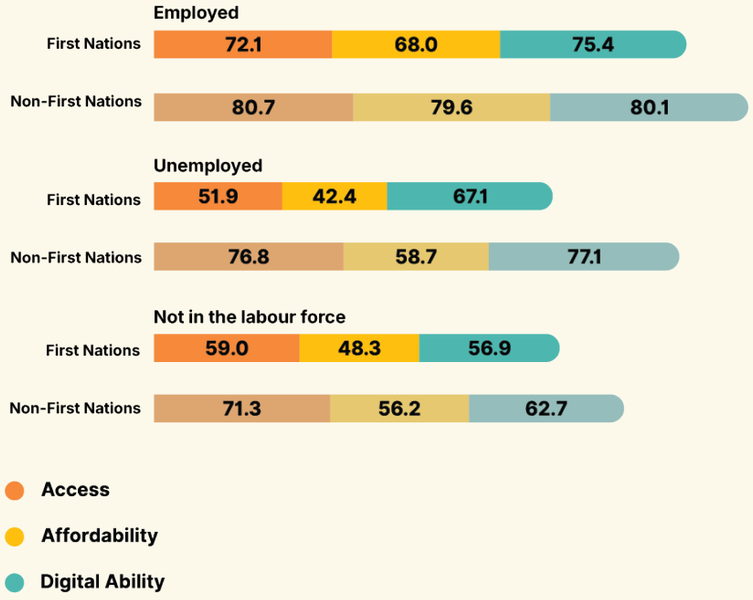
Employment among First Nations Australians is strongly influenced by both location and education. In 2022–23, 57% of First Nations Australians aged 25–64 were employed, with employment rising from just 25% for those with year 9 or below to 94% for those with a bachelor's degree or higher. However, location has a significant impact with employment rates dropping to 43% in remote areas and 38% in very remote areas.[36] These lower employment levels closely align digital inclusion gaps of 16.5 and 22.8 percentage points, respectively.

Despite higher levels of school completion, employment and income outcomes for many First Nations people living in remote and very remote areas remain limited, especially for First Nations language speakers.[37] While First Nations males generally have higher full-time employment rates than females, this does not lead to higher digital inclusion levels (see Gender section). This underscores structural barriers that continue to limit digital inclusion, even when employment or education levels are higher.

Nevertheless, those who are employed have marginally higher Digital Ability scores (75.4) than the non-First Nations average (73.8), **demonstrating that First Nations people are highly digitally skilled given the right opportunities.** Employment-related enablers include access to reliable connectivity and digital technologies within workplaces; skills development through on-the-job training and regular use of digital applications; and improved affordability and home access options based on income. Several survey respondents noted that having a mobile phone provided by employers reduced household costs for both devices and data use.

Among the unemployed, the biggest gaps are in Affordability (28.2) and Access (25.3), and a comparatively smaller Digital Ability gap at 6.7 (see Figure 28 below). Those who are not in the labour force face similarly significant gaps in Affordability (22.3) and Access (18.2), but a much higher Digital Ability gap (16.9). The relative Digital Inclusion gap between First Nations Australians and other Australians who are unemployed remains notable at 17.1, mostly due to gaps in Access (24.9) and Affordability (16.3). The relative gap is lower for those not in the labour force (8.6) and those in employment (8.3).

Figure 28. Relative ADII scores by employment status



Employment

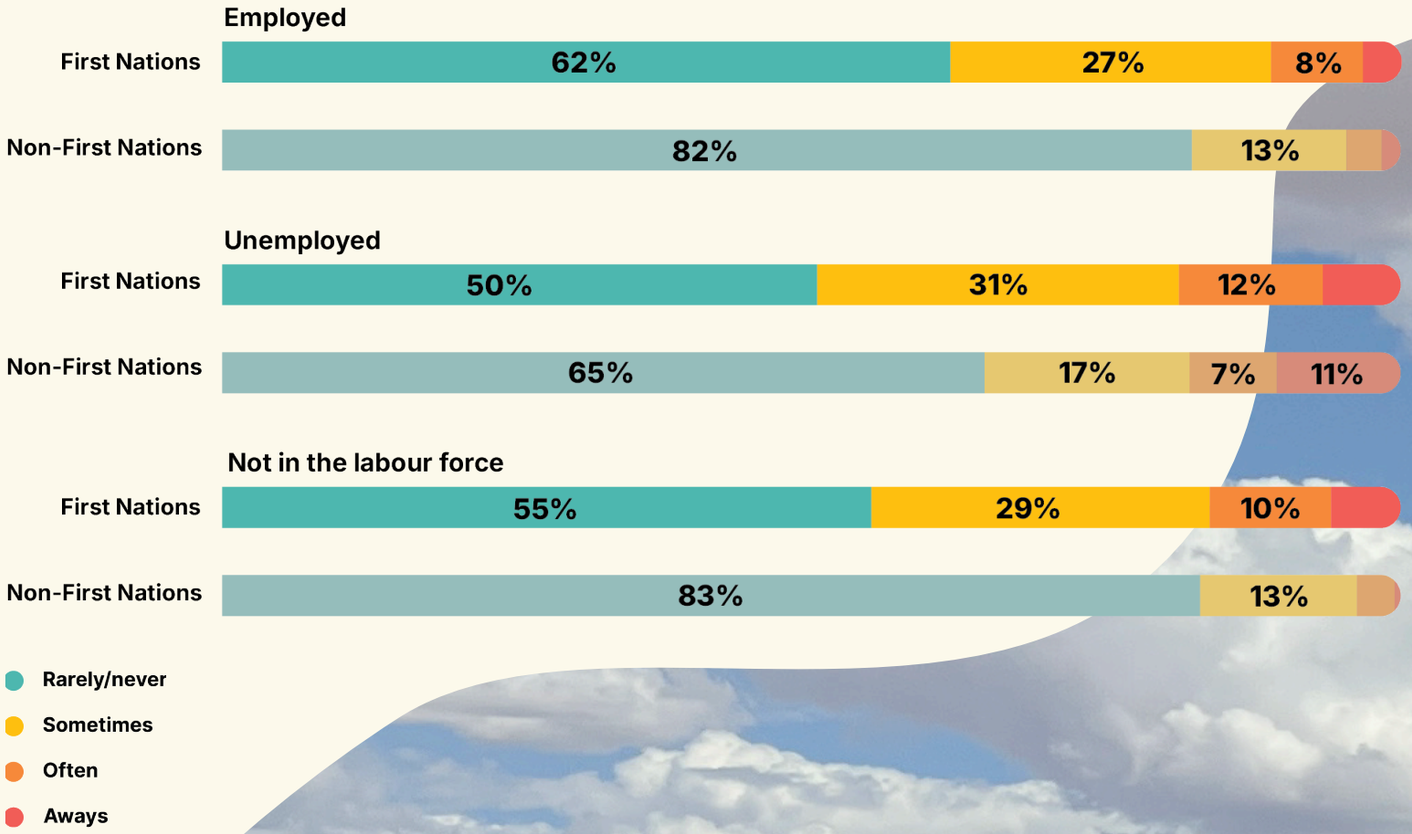
Affordability is a persistent barrier for First Nations people regardless of employment status.

For First Nations people in employment there is a relative Affordability gap of 11.6 indicating underlying barriers relating to choice of pre-paid service. Twice as many First Nations Australians in employment (38%) stated they had cut back on essential household costs to afford internet access than their non-First Nations counterparts (18%). This rate was much higher for those who were unemployed (50%) and those not in the labour force (45%). This shows high levels of financial hardship among these groups, making it difficult to buy devices and have ongoing access to online services that are increasingly essential in daily life.



Sign in Wilcannia Centrelink office

Figure 29. Regularity of cutting back or sacrificing essential household costs in order to afford personal or houshold internet access by First Nations status



Disability



The digital gap is nearly double for First Nations people with disability, limiting equitable access to education, health, services and employment

Nationally, there is a gap of 9.6 points for non-First Nations Australians with disability (64.3) compared to the national average (73.6). **This gap increases two-fold to 17.1 for First Nations people with disability (56.8).**

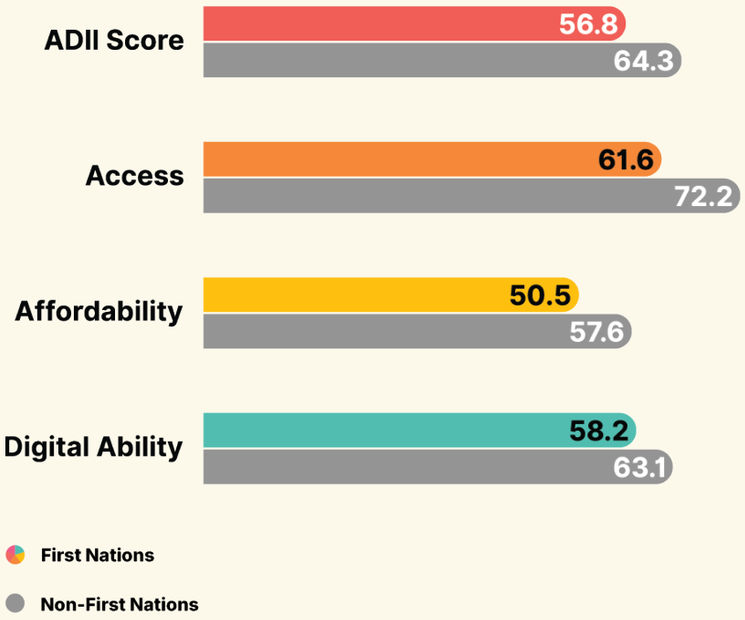
The 2022–23 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey reported that **37% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had disability**, including 7% with a severe or profound core activity limitation.[38] Different disability types—physical, sensory, cognitive and intellectual—can shape how people access, navigate and benefit from digital technologies. This underscores the need for accessible design, effective assistive technologies, and culturally safe, co-designed support to strengthen digital inclusion.

First Nations people with disability face major barriers across all three dimensions, with an Affordability gap of 20.1, Digital Ability gap of 15.6 and an Access gap of 15.5. Notably, the Access gap is three times greater than for non-First Nations people with disability (5.1).

> I have a disability so I need a device that makes it easy to use (survey comment)

> [Being on the pension and having] a disability, it's hard to have equipment to help me with making my life a bit easier and to afford all the bills you have with everyday living. (survey comment)

Figure 30. ADII Dimension scores for First Nations and non-First Nations people with disability



First Nations individuals with disability experience wider gaps than other Australians with disability

With the relative gap in Access at 10.6, Affordability at 7.1 and Digital Ability at 4.9 (see Figure 30). This reflects deep and intersecting barriers across all dimensions, highlighting the need for targeted and inclusive digital strategies for First Nations people with disability.

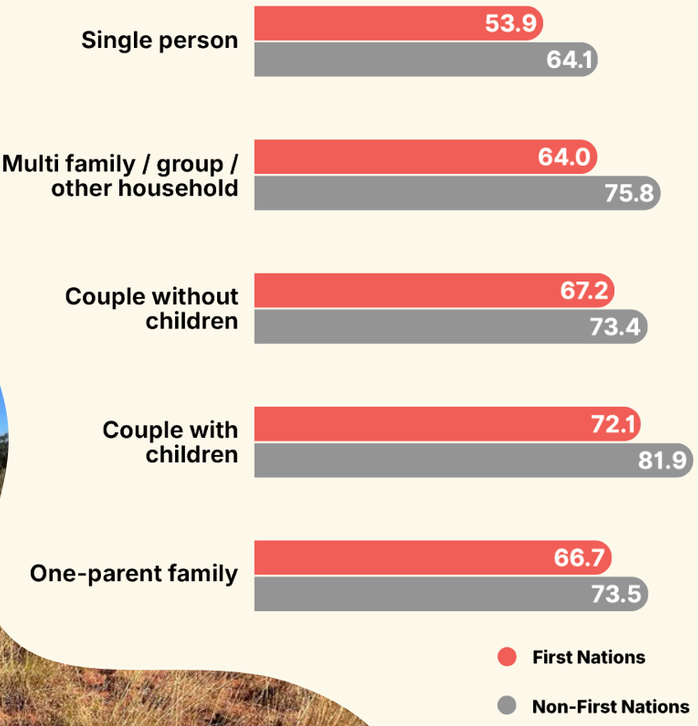
> I live in an aged care facility with poor Wi-Fi access in the rooms. I have dementia and only have a non-smart mobile phone and cannot afford the larger devices designed for people with dementia. This would allow me to talk to my family independently. (survey comment)

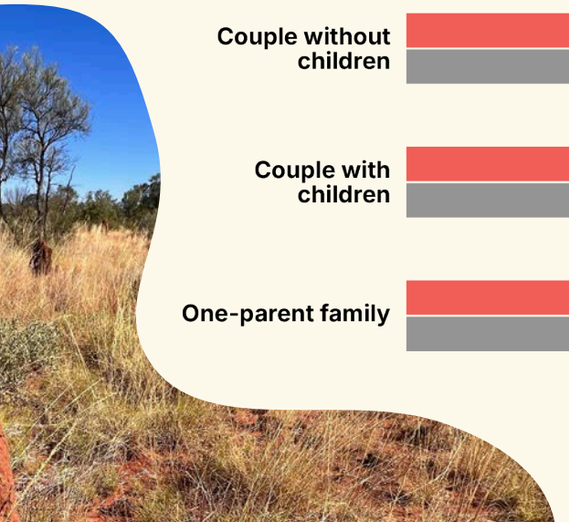
Household context

The digital gap is greatest for large and multi-family households as well as for those living on their own

Digital inclusion varies widely with housing arrangements. The digital inclusion gap is 20.0 for First Nations people in single-person households (ADII score 53.9), with a gap of 9.9 for multi-family or group households (64.0).

Figure 31. Relative ADII scores by household type and First Nations status





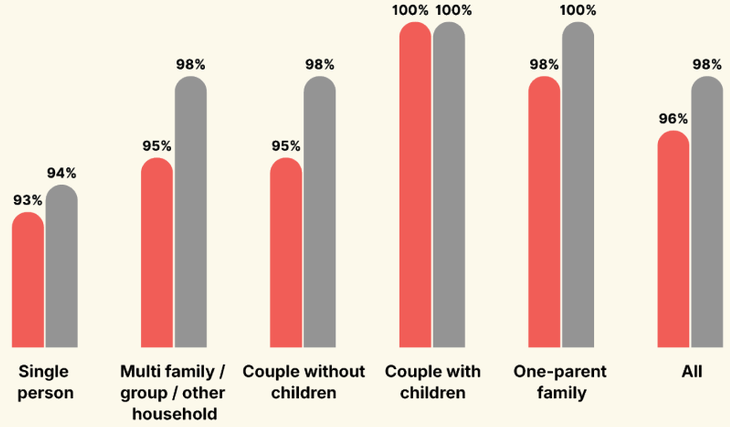
The smallest gap is for households made up of a **couple with children** at 1.8 (score 72.1), which have consistently low gaps across all dimensions—3.2 in Access, 2.1 in Affordability and 0.1 in Digital Ability, indicating relatively strong digital inclusion. In comparison, single-person households, which include a high proportion of Elders in aged care facilities, face very large gaps across all dimensions—22.2 in Access, 10.4 in Digital Ability and 27.3 in Affordability.

One-parent families also have a digital gap of 7.2, primarily due to high levels of financial hardship with an Affordability gap of 15.4 limiting full digital participation. Despite this, they have a high average Digital Ability score (74.3), 0.5 points above the average for other Australians.

For First Nations people, home is more than just a place for people to live but an important place to connect and share resources within the family, highlighting that "the home is a basic requirement of participation and citizenship in a digital society".[39]

Public housing renters face the largest overall digital inclusion gap (18.8), with the greatest disparities in Affordability (22.4) and Access (22.2). Those in "Other" housing arrangements such as boarding, temporary or homeless situations also experience a high gap (15.0), driven by low Access (20.8) and Affordability (18.1). While their Digital Ability gap (6.0) is smaller than for public housing residents (11.9), the relative disadvantage across all dimensions is greatest, reflecting severe digital exclusion.

Figure 32. Households that have used the internet in the past 6 months by First Nations status



First Nations people who own their homes outright still face a notable gap (12.0), largely due to lower Digital Ability (14.5) and Affordability (13.5) scores. By contrast, those paying off a mortgage have the highest levels of digital inclusion, scoring 3.9 points above other Australians overall and higher across all dimensions. This suggests that housing security through ownership supports better digital outcomes.

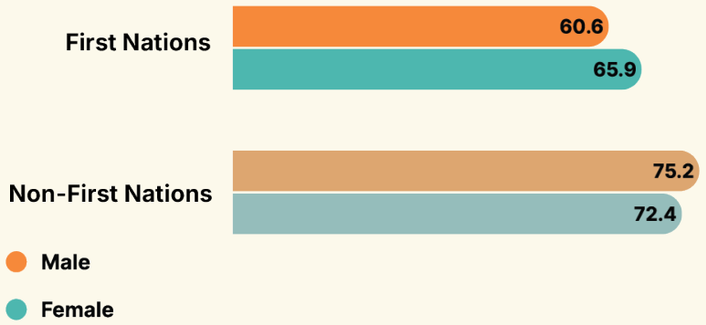
Across all housing types, Affordability and Access remain the most persistent barriers, especially for those in insecure housing or homelessness. People experiencing homelessness are often mobile-only users on pre-paid services, a known marker of digital exclusion.[40] With one in five (20%) First Nations people experiencing homelessness including those living in severely crowded homes,[41] further research on housing and digital inclusion is needed.

Gender

First Nations females have higher levels of digital inclusion than males, with the trend consistent across all dimensions

Our study found an average score of 65.9 for First Nations females, 5.3 points higher than the average for males (60.6).[42] This is opposite to the trend for other Australians, where males have slightly higher digital inclusion scores than females (75.2 compared with 72.4).

Figure 33. ADII Score by gender



The First Nations gender gap crosses all dimensions, with the largest gap in Access (7.0 points) and Digital Ability (6.1 points), with a smaller difference in Affordability (2.6 points).

The Digital Ability gap aligns to trends in education attainment, with more First Nations females having completed Year 12 than males (41.1% compared with 36%) and more than twice as likely to be studying at universities or other higher education institutions (68% compared with 32%).[43]

Figure 34 below shows a large relative digital gap between First Nations and non-First Nations males (14.6), with the largest gaps in Access (17.2) and Affordability (16.6). The relative gap for females is much smaller (6.5), with a low gap of 0.5 in Digital Ability, but higher gaps in Affordability (10.2) and Access (8.6).

Figure 34. Dimension scores by gender

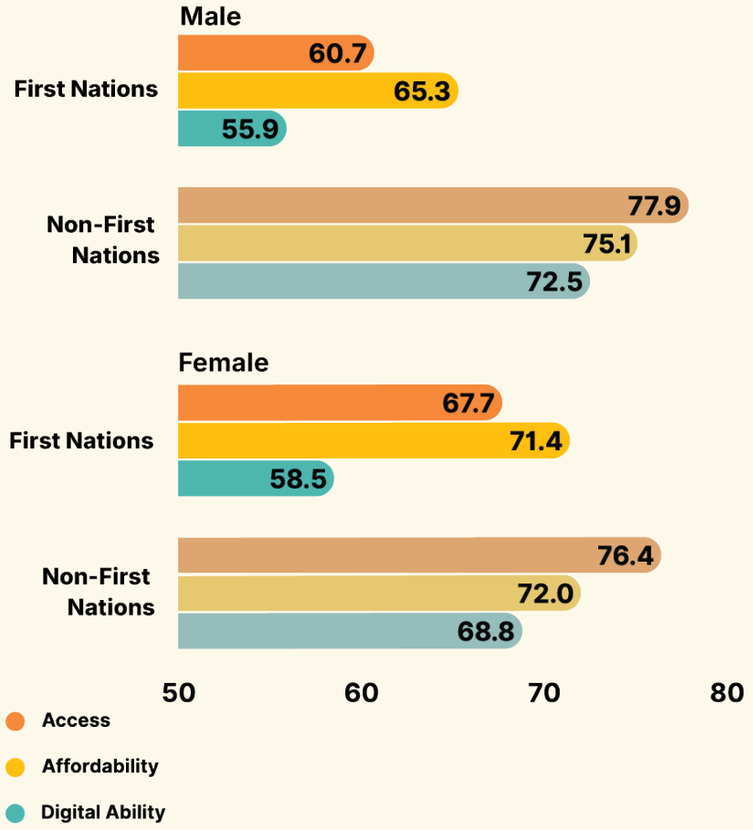
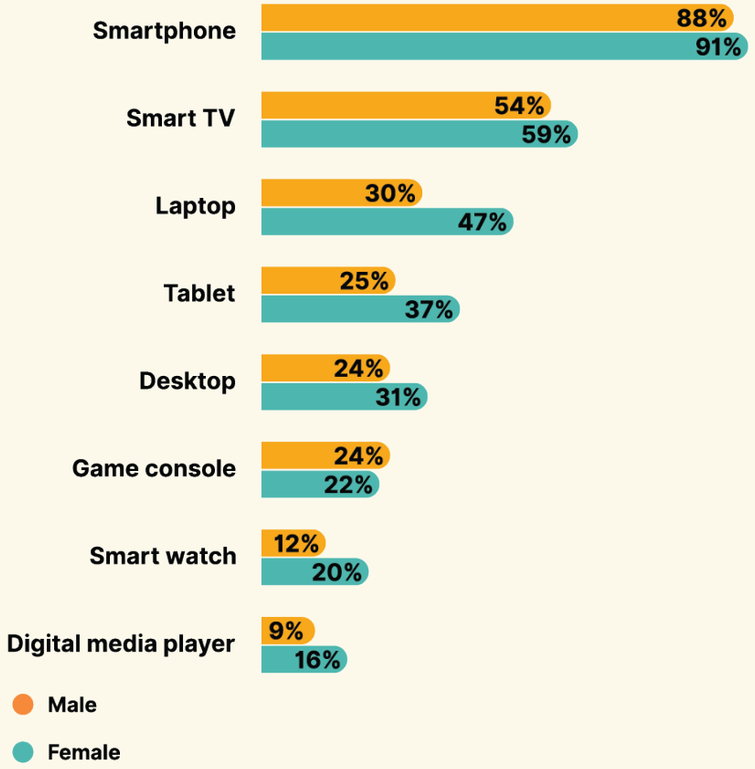


Figure 35. Device use by gender, First Nations



There is also a higher rate of digital device-use among First Nations females compared with males, especially laptops (47% vs 30%), tablets (37% vs 25%) and desktop computers (31% vs 24%), which are important for developing and maintaining a broad set of digital skills. First Nations males have slightly higher use of game consoles (24% vs 22%).

Access

The Access gap is largely due to high rates of mobile-only users and reliance on pre-paid services

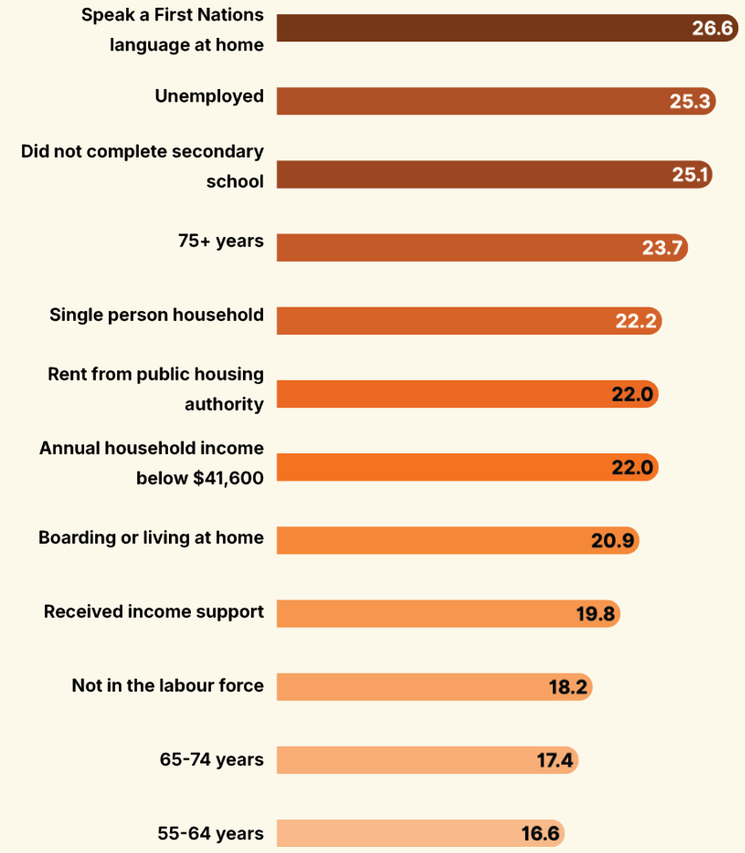


Mobile tower at Netallie Trig
near Wilcannia NSW

Access

The average Access score for First Nations Australians is 64.3, a gap of 12.8 compared with other Australians (77.2).

Figure 36. Top 12 Access gaps by demographic group, First Nations



However, as shown in Figure 36, there are significantly higher Access gaps for First Nations people who speak their first language at home, those who are unemployed or did not complete secondary school, Elders, single-person households and other low-income households. Clearly, there is strong alignment to other key factors already discussed including remoteness, age, education, employment and housing situation.

First Nations Australians are both unconnected and under-connected at greater rates

Having access to both a mobile and fixed household connection is a prerequisite for digital inclusion, however many First Nations households remain remain "under-connected",[44] with mobile-only access and inconsistent or inadequate connectivity.

67% of First Nations Australians have access to fixed home broadband, 22% below the rate of other Australians (89%). 8% have no connection at all, compared to 2% for other Australians.

For many, a pre-paid mobile service is their only mode of access. 25% of First Nations Australians rely on mobile as their only connection. In comparison, 10% of other Australians rely only on a mobile connection. Mobile-only connection limits the ability to effectively access education, work, healthcare and some government services online.

67% of First Nations Australians have home broadband access

22% below non-First Nations rate (89%)

Rates of **under-connectedness** and **un-connectedness** are much higher in remote areas. 38% of First Nations Australians in remote areas have a mobile connection only. Another 9% have no connection at all. In very remote communities, 62% of First Nations people have a mobile-only connection. This access is most likely to be via a pre-paid service. Another 18% have no connection at all and rely on shared devices. People who speak a First Nations language at home are twice as likely to be mobile-only than those who do not (42% compared with 23%) or have no mobile connectivity at all (13% compared with 7%).

> We need more accessibility to access internet in remote communities (survey comment)



Access



94% use the internet at least daily

98% of people aged 18–34 use the internet at least once a day (77% for those aged 75 and over)

Despite inadequate access for many, First Nations Australians are regular internet users. Nationally, 94% report constant to daily use.[45] The daily use rate is 84% in remote settings but reduces to 73% in very remote areas, where 12% reported frequent (weekly) use. This means First Nations Australians are frequent users but rely on inadequate connections, usually only via a pre-paid mobile service.

There is inequity in the types of fixed broadband and mobile services used by First Nations households

First Nations households are more likely to have NBN Fixed wireless (19%) and Sky Muster (4%) than other Australians (13% and 2% respectively) but are 9% less likely to have NBN wired connection (FTTN or FTTP). For First Nations households with an NBN service, a higher percentage are on a basic NBN25 plan (17%) than a premium NBN 100 plan (12%), with higher uptake of high-speed plans (100Mbps and above) by First Nations households in major cities (23%).[46] Being on legacy plans can result in paying for excess data use, thereby increasing internet costs for households with high usage.

With much faster NBN plans now available for households with FTTP and fixed wireless, there is increasing divergence with speed and capacity available via Sky Muster. Reduced costs for NBN fixed broadband plans is being welcome by Australian households but may result in an increased Affordability gap for those without home broadband services.[47]

There is also growing disparity in speed and quality of 5G mobile services compared with 4G, increasing the Access divide between major cities, inner regional locations and more remote areas.

> Internet needs to be more here in the bush. Yes, we have 5G but it is not great ... Sometimes we have it but other times it is up and down. (survey comment)

First Nations Australians rely on pre-paid mobile services much more than post-paid

Our survey found that 96% of First Nations Australians own or shared a mobile phone. For other Australians the rate is 99%.

61% of First Nations mobile users have pre-paid plans

This is double the national average (29%)

Pre-paid use is even more prevalent in remote First Nations communities. Over three quarter of remote First Nations consumers (76%) have a pre-paid plan and nearly all in very remote communities (93%).

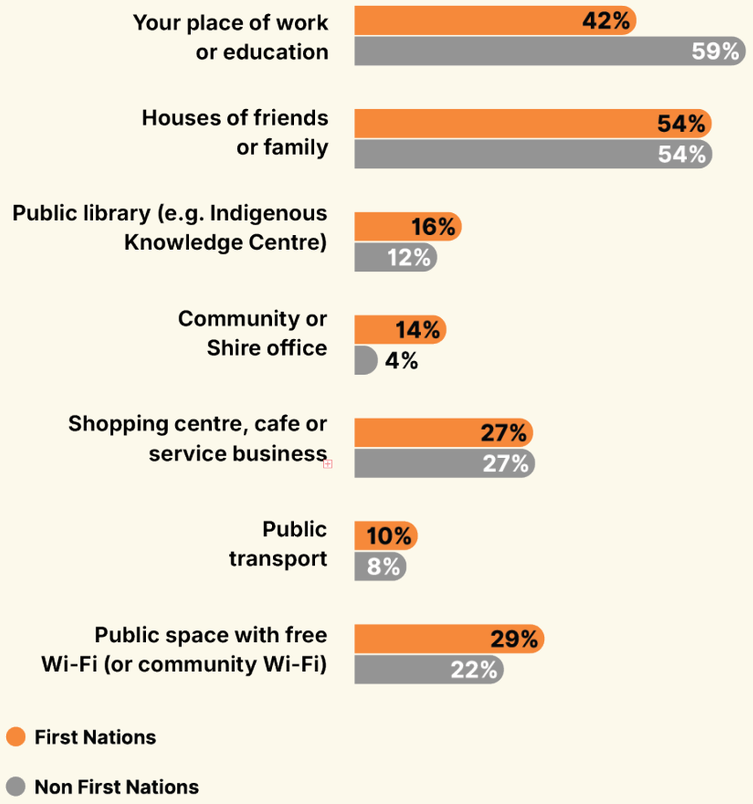
However, pre-paid data can run out quickly, cutting people off from family, work and essential services without warning. Data costs more per gigabyte and doesn't provide the same consistency of access or support as post-paid. This makes staying connected harder and more stressful in locations where connectivity can be slow and unreliable.

Access

Internet access may be via Wi-Fi or public or shared facilities

There is high use of internet in locations outside of home by First Nations Australians relative to other Australians, as shown in Figure 37 below.

Figure 37. Use of internet outside of home in the past six months



29% accessed internet via free public Wi-Fi in the past 6 months

4% do not have convenient access to the internet

(9% in very remote areas)

With relatively low levels of broadband and computers in many First Nations households, there is high use of internet at households of family or friends (54%), place of work or education (42%), shopping centres (27%) libraries (16%) and service centres (14%). Public Wi-Fi hotspots or community-wide Wi-Fi networks are also well-used (29%), especially in remote and very remote communities with limited or no mobile service, or when pre-paid credit has run out.

> Provide devices for all youth to complete homework [and] better-equip students for the day-to-day challenges and need for computer literacy in today's world
> (survey comment)



Affordability

Affordability is the biggest contributor to the digital gap for First Nations Australians, impacting households across the nation



Affordability

Affordability is the most significant gap among the three dimensions.

The average Affordability score for First Nations Australians is 57.3, a gap of 13.3 points below the average for other Australians (70.6).

Having access to communications is highly valued by First Nations Australians. However, high costs of mobile and internet access and devices is a barrier to digital inclusion for many households with financial hardship an increasing issue amidst the cost-of-living crisis. This disproportionately affects low-income households that often sacrifice or cut back on food and other essentials to pay for mobile and internet services. One survey respondent commented that they would spend approximately 40% of their income on connectivity despite being on a low income.

A high reliance on pre-paid mobile services by many First Nations consumers results in **higher costs for less data** and greater risk of disconnection periods between payment cycles. This, combined with low household incomes, compounds disadvantage and limits participation in online opportunities and reliable access to critical services.

> The internet is way too expensive ... We struggle to pay for it yet it is a necessity (survey comment)

Affordability gaps affect households across all remoteness zones

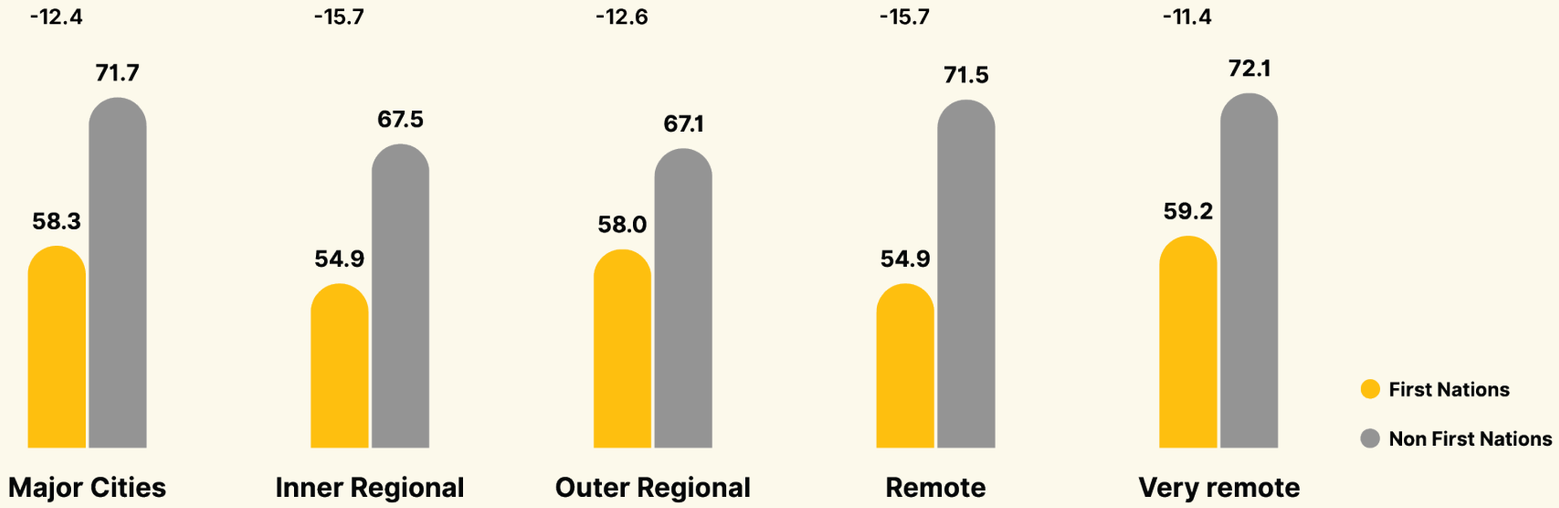
We found the Affordability gap was greatest for those living in inner regional (15.7) and remote areas (15.7), with slightly lower gaps in outer regional (12.6) and very remote areas (11.4). Notably, there is also a large gap of 12.4 in major cities, making Affordability the most significant barrier to digital inclusion for First Nations households in cities.

The relative gaps compared with non-First Nations households within the same remoteness areas range from 9.2 in outer regional to 16.6 in remote areas. This indicates that Affordability is a consistently greater challenge for First Nations households regardless of location and types of services available.

How we measure Affordability has changed

The Affordability measure is based on the share of a household's monthly income needed to buy an adequate internet bundle tailored to its composition and remoteness. The ADII updated its model for measuring Affordability to account for different contexts and household types and sizes, enabling a better understanding of how Affordability impacts digital inclusion across the geographic and demographic spectrum. The 2025 ADII report provides details of expenditure calculations by different household types (Appendix A).

Figure 38. Affordability scores by remoteness



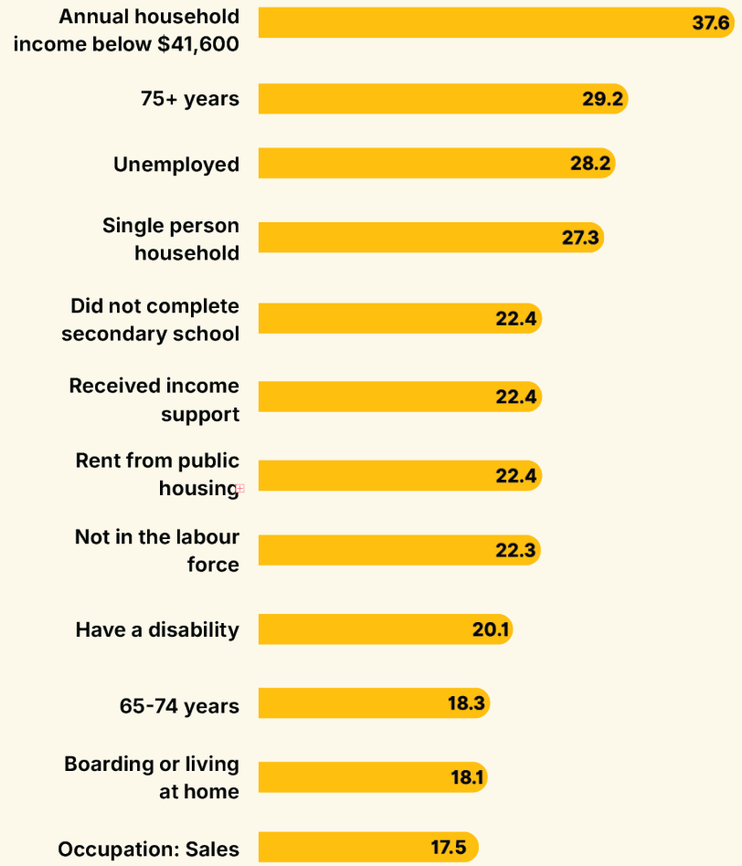
Affordability

The demographic groups most impacted by affordability are low-income households, Elders, unemployed and those excluded from the education system

While affordability challenges affect most First Nations households, the greatest impact is felt by those in the lowest income quartile with annual household income below $41,600 (gap of 37.6) and those aged 75 or over (29.2). Other low-income groups also have large Affordability gaps, including those unemployed (28.2), on income support (22.4) or not in the labour force (22.3). There are also large gaps for those living in single-person households (27.3), those in public housing (22.4) and those who did not complete secondary school (22.4).

> The cost of living is just out of control. I just can't afford [costs for] everyday living. Plus, I have to go away all the time as I have breast cancer [and have to pay for fuel], doctors, accommodation ... Sometimes we don't eat (survey comment)

Figure 39. Affordability gap by demographic, First Nations



Cost of living is a critical issue, with many First Nations households sacrificing food and other essential to afford internet costs

Increases in the **cost of living** are impacting low-income households nationally, with First Nations households disproportionately impacted. As outlined previously, this is especially the case in regional and remote Australia where freight costs have driven prices higher resulting in a high proportion of people having to sacrifice on food and other essentials to afford internet.

Our survey found that 42% of First Nations Australians cut back on essential household costs in the last six months to afford internet expenses, with 9% often cutting back and 5% always cutting back. 52% of those living in remote areas had cut back on essentials and 53% in very remote communities, with 6% always cutting back in both zones.

42% **cut back on essential household costs**

to pay for internet in the last six months

38% **had compromised on internet speed and/or data due to cost**

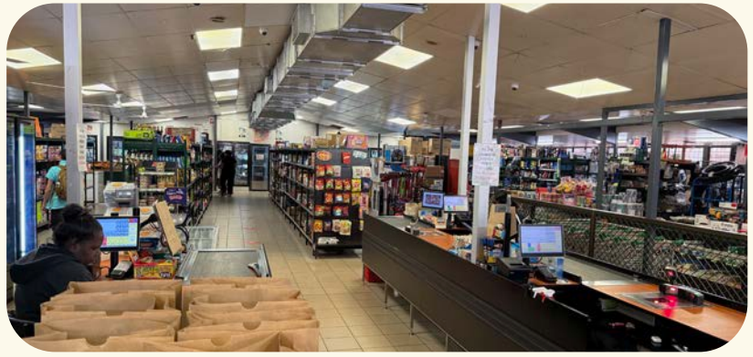
in last 6 months

Affordability

Case Study: Cost of living in remote communities

The cost-of-living crisis is disproportionately affecting remote First Nations communities. The ABC found that households in Aurukun, Cape York are paying $1000 for a weekly shop.[48] Staying connected to mobile and internet services becomes a luxury in this reality. Investment in community-led digital inclusion initiatives is more critical than ever.

The 2024 *Mapping the Digital Gap* report found that affordability was a primary contributor to digital exclusion. In 2024, 70% of remote First Nations Australians had recently sacrificed or cut back on essential costs including food in order to pay for mobile and internet usage with 20% often or always cutting back.



The sharing economy is an important element of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures still practiced with families and communities today. Household expenses are often shared in multi-family households, with food, bills and other costs split across multiple income earners. One survey comment described how this occurred within their household, saying that it would be difficult to survive if costs were not shared.

> Need more money just to live and pay the bills. Not enough money to go around. Just can't buy food and pay bills, pay rent (survey comment)

> Internet is a luxury that I cannot afford within my budget at the moment, so I use Wi-Fi paid for by others or hotspot from my prepaid phone (survey comment)

> Our payments are very low and the cost of living is off the Richter scale. [We] live on noodles and pasta and rice if that at times. The rent in private houses is just wrong. Have to get other people to live with you so you can eat and pay the bills (survey comment)

20% **would need to pay more than 10% of household income**

to access internet services that meet household needs

Higher income households have high digital inclusion scores

Digital inclusion is closely aligned to household income. For First Nations households with annual incomes between $78,000 and $104,000 (Quintile 3), the Affordability scores was 73.8, 3.2 above the non-First Nations average. The overall Digital Inclusion score for this group was 72.7, a small gap of 1.2 below the national average.

For those households in Quintile 4 (up to $182,000 annual income), the Affordability score of 87.7 was 17.1 points above the average for other Australians and the total Digital Inclusion score was 5.9 above. Quintile 5 residents had an Affordability score 28.0 points above the non-First Nations average and a Digital Inclusion score 13.0 above.

This shows the clear link of household income to digital inclusion. Addressing Affordability challenges is therefore key to overcoming digital inequity.

Affordability

Regular replacement of devices is also a cost burden, with many going without devices as a result

Numerous survey respondents left a comment about being without a mobile phone due to the high cost of replacement. The cost of buying or replacing digital devices, particularly mobile phones, can be a critical barrier to continuous digital access. While not part of the Affordability measure, device costs can be a major household expense with most household members, including children, wanting an individual phone.

The *Mapping the Digital Gap* research found that 3 in 5 households had fewer devices than required to be digitally included. There is high turnover of mobile phones in remote communities, largely due to sharing of devices and damage to screens, with a lack of repair options available and no protective cases sold in stores. High cost of computers and laptops, combined with limited availability and support in remote areas also inhibit computer use.

12% **listed costs of internet access as a key barrier to digital engagement**



Mobile phones for sale in Wilcannia supermarket

I desperately need a new mobile phone, but they are prohibitively expensive (survey comment)

The cost of devices prevents upgrades when I need them (survey comment)

Some good programs are underway but more focused effort is needed to address the Affordability gap

Sustaining affordability remains a critical challenge, particularly in the context of rising cost-of-living pressures. Addressing affordability will require ongoing collaboration between government, telecommunications providers and First Nations organisations to ensure essential communications services remain accessible to those most at risk of digital exclusion.

Wi-Fi	23 Community wide Wi-Fi programs in remote communities
	Wi-Fi hotspots providing free internet access
	Pilot of NBN pre-paid household broadband plan underway
Data	Telstra Community Pre-paid Mobile Plan available in remote communities and towns[49]
Devices	NBN/Work Ventures Plus National Device Bank



Digital Ability

While the gap in Digital Ability is the lowest among the three dimensions, it has increased slightly since 2023, but not at the same rate as non-First Nations Australians. This trend may continue without dedicated effort to improve Digital Ability for target groups



Digital Ability

The Digital Ability gap between First Nations and other Australians is 5.3 points nationally, up slightly from 4.3 in 2023

Digital Ability scores for First Nations Australians have risen from 60.7 in 2023 to 68.6 in 2025, a positive sign of improved digital skills along with increased access and engagement with online services. However, Digital Ability rates for other Australians also increased in the same timeframe from 65.0 to 73.8.

As a result, the Digital Ability gap for First Nations people has increased slightly from 4.3 to 5.3. This trend may continue without dedicated effort to improve digital ability for target groups outlined to the right.

Digital ability is measured across six skill areas

Digital ability goes beyond just knowing how to use a device but refers to an individual's capacity to engage safely and effectively with the online world. Beyond technical skills, it involves confidence and literacy in using online services and digital applications, from basic functions like downloading files or browsing the internet, to more complex activities such as creating, editing and sharing online content, communicating socially and accessing essential services. For First Nations Australians, having digital skills and confidence in using digital technologies ensures full and fair participation in an increasingly digital society.[50]

The Australian Internet User Survey asks question relating to six skill areas: **basic operational, advanced operational, information search, social skills, creative skills and smart technology skills**. The overall Digital Ability score is derived from scores across all six.

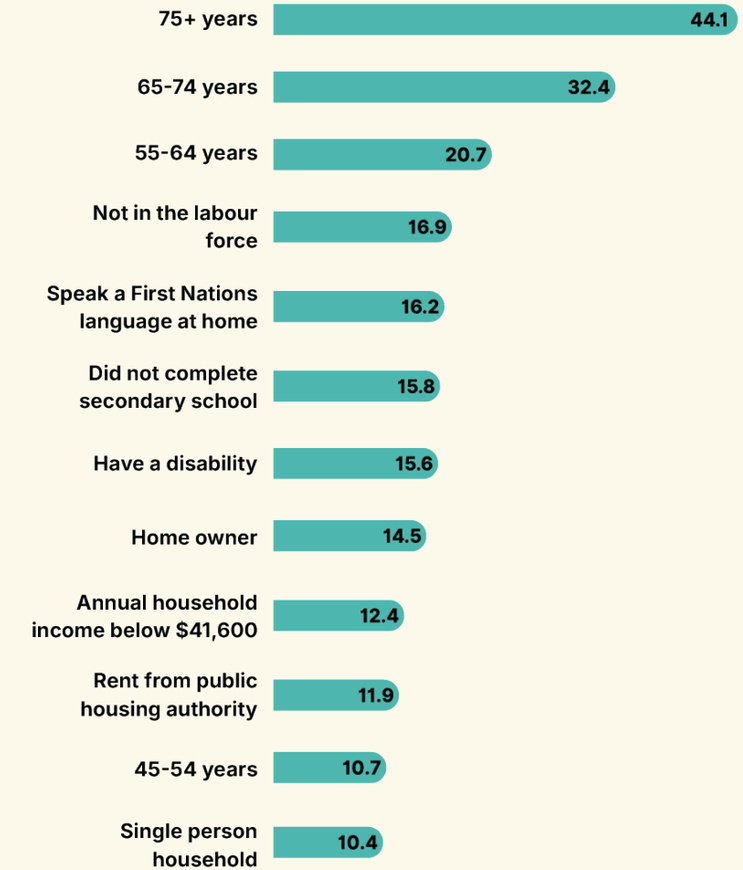
The Digital Ability gap is greatest for Elders, those out of the labour force and language speakers

First Nations young people are highly engaged online. Carlson and Frazer (2021) describe how young people "have taken to online platforms to convey their Indigeneity, strengthen kinship connections, build communities, find partners, express creativity and humour, share cultural knowledge, mobilise for justice, seek and give care, and facilitate 'Sorry Business' and other cultural practices".[51]

However, there is a very significant Digital Ability gap for Elders. As shown in Figure 40, this gap is 20.7 for the 55–64 age range, increasing to a huge 44.1 for those aged 75 and older. There is also close correlation between age and those out of the labour force, with this cohort having a gap of 16.9.

The other First Nations groups with low Digital Ability scores are those who speak a First Nations language at home (gap of 16.2), those who did not complete secondary school (gap of 15.8) and people with disability (gap of 15.6).

Figure 40. Demographic groups with highest gap in Digital Ability scores, First Nations



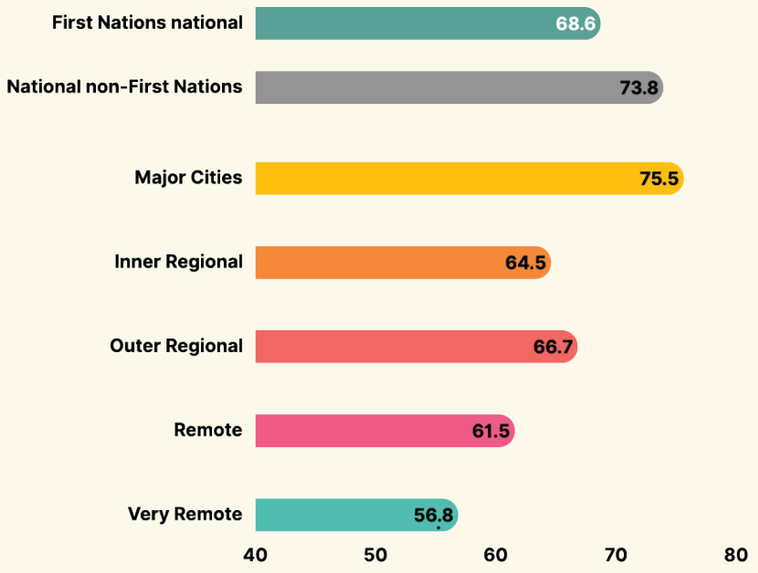
44.1 gap in Digital Ability for Elders aged 75 and over

Digital Ability

Digital Ability levels decrease significantly with remoteness

Figure 41 below shows the reduction in Digital Ability score with remoteness, from 75.5 in major cities (1.7 above the non-First Nations average of 73.8) down to 61.5 in remote areas and 56.8 in very remote areas. This is a gap of 17.0 below the national non-First Nations average.

Figure 41. Digital Ability scores by remoteness for First Nations Australians, with comparison to First Nations National and National non-First Nations scores



18.7 **difference in Digital Ability scores between major cities (75.5) and very remote areas (56.8)**

Remoteness compounds barriers to building and maintaining digital skills. Limited and unreliable connectivity make it harder to develop confidence in using online tools and applications. Mobile-only access restricts the range of devices and services people can use, with low household computer ownership and limited public access computers and support reducing opportunities to gain confidence across more advanced digital tasks. These structural constraints drive persistent gaps in Digital Ability for First Nations Australians, especially in remote settings.

Additionally, most remote and very remote communities have no dedicated digital support or mentor role available. This results in high demand on existing service providers for support in using online services and digital technologies. With limited training options, there is high reliance by Elders on younger family members for digital support in using services such as online banking, which can create privacy challenges. The *Mapping the Digital Gap* research has identified high incidence of Elder fraud because of their reliance on family members to help with online banking.

Education, employment and socio-economic factors shape Digital Ability levels

As outlined in the Key Factors section, Digital Ability is closely aligned to education levels, employment and other demographic factors. Education plays a key role, with those completing secondary school having scores close to the national non-First Nations average and 4.1 higher than other Australians in the same group, while there is a 15.8 gap to the non-First Nations average for those who did not complete secondary school. This points to the strong link between CTG Outcome 17 and Outcomes 3 to 7 relating to education and training pathways, plus the potential for digital skills development to help improve multiple targets.

Employment status shows similar patterns: the gap is 6.7 for the unemployed and 16.9 for people not in the labour force, compared with 1.6 above the national non-First Nations average for employed people. Housing and household context also influence skills, with high gaps for those in public housing (11.9), people boarding or living at home (6.0), single-person households (10.4) and multi-family or group households (6.4). The gap is much lower for homeowners and private renters (3.1). Language adds an extra barrier, with those who speak a First Nations language at home having a 16.2 gap.

Digital Ability

There is high use of online banking, government services and shopping, but lower use for online learning and health services

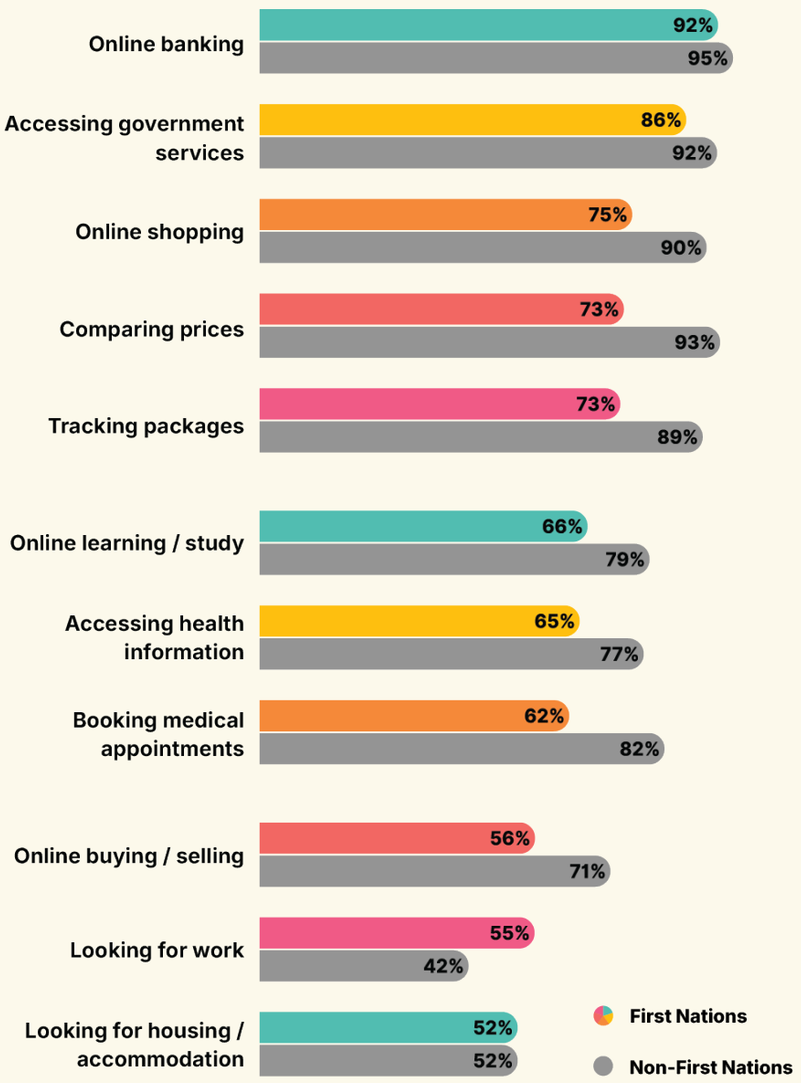
Most First Nations people are engaging with online services, with 86% accessing a government service such as myGov or Centrelink in the last six months, compared with 92% for other Australians. Online banking has the highest rate with 92% usage, close to the rate among other Australians (95%). Online shopping is also becoming increasingly popular (75%, compared with 90% for other Australians), providing an opportunity to save money on items such as clothes, household goods and toys.

There is relatively low use of online learning or study (66%). 65% of respondents said they access health information online and 62% booked a medical appointment online (82% and 77% respectively for other Australians). However, more First Nations people looked for work online (55%) than other Australians (42%), with equal rates looking for housing and accommodation online (52%).

86% **accessed a government service (e.g. myGov, Centrelink)**

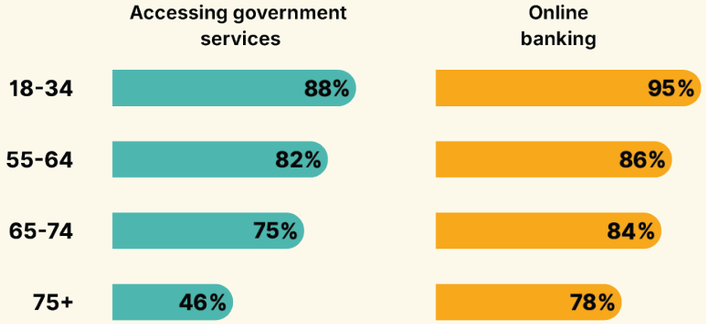
in the last 6 months

Figure 42. Use of online services in the last six months



As expected, use of online services reduces with age. While there is 92% of government service use among the 35–44 age group, this drops to 75% for the 65–74 age group and 46% for those 75 and over. Online banking is used by 95–96% among the 18–34 and 35–44 age groups, but it reduces to 78% for Elders 75 and over.

Figure 43. Use of online services in the last six months, by age, First Nations



This points to the need for targeted, culturally safe support for Elders to build confidence and trust in use of online services and to navigate challenges with finding identification, setting up email addresses and navigating difficulties with two-factor authentication. As recommended in the First Nations Digital Inclusion Roadmap, the expanded funding of local digital mentor support and dedicated digital facilities in remote and outer regional areas is critical to building engagement with online services.

Digital Ability

Online safety concerns impact digital engagement and trust

Online safety concerns reduce digital engagement for First Nations people.

Fear of scams, phishing and identity theft discourages transactions and account creation.

Experiences of online racism, bias and misinformation also erode trust in platforms and information and become barriers to engagement for low users or non-users.

Use of online service navigation is hampered when identification is hard to find or renew, blocking access to accounts and benefits.

Low use of email creates further barriers because many systems still rely on two-factor authentication via email; people without email access or passwords are locked out, do not see verification windows or abandon tasks.

Concern about privacy and scams

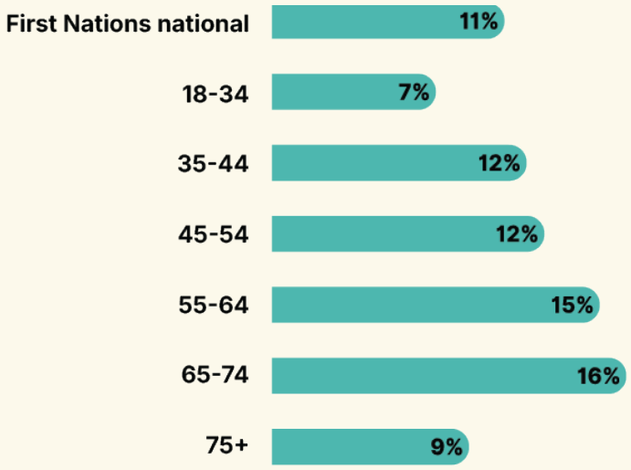


Figure 44. Responses to 'Why do you not use the internet more often / at all?', 'I am concerned about privacy or scams' by age, First Nations

Use of online games is also seen as a pathway to increased use of online gambling, with a recent news story describing an emerging issue of scam gambling sites, or 'scambling'—taking people's money but not paying out on winnings.[52]

Together these risks and hurdles limit confidence, reduce uptake and widen the Digital Ability gap.

> 'I do like to use the internet but the fear of knowing what a scam/fraudulent activity is makes me less inclined to use it. At my age learning and accepting the new methods of using different platforms gives me angst (survey comment)

> I get on the internet, but I am not very confident. I have been hacked so many times it is not funny. People target me, and I can't stop them from hacking me (survey comment)

Digital Ability

GenAI tools are being used, but they may bring new risks and amplify existing gaps

A 2025 Productivity Commission report claims that emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) "could transform the global economy and speed up productivity growth."[53] However, some have argued that GenAI also brings greater risks of social, cultural and environmental harms, including perpetuating systemic racism and bias already experienced by many First Nations Australians.[54]

GenAI may amplify existing variations in Digital Ability, with effective use reliant on existing digital skills and trust in engaging with new technologies. Lower-ability users risk more harm from AI-driven scams, misinformation and inauthentic content, potentially reducing confidence to engage further. Without targeted AI literacy support and safe, low-cost access, GenAI risks deepening current digital inequalities for First Nations communities.

37% **used generative AI tools in last six months**

Our survey found that over a third of First Nations people (37%) had used a GenAI tool in the last 6 months, only 9% lower than other Australians (46%). The highest use is among the 18–34 age group (42%) and 35-44 age group (40%), with decreasing use by up to 64 years old (30%).

While mistrust of Gen AI tools may limit adoption for some, affordability could also be a factor, with premium features and apps often requiring subscriptions. However, our survey found that 23% of First Nations Australians had paid to use a GenAI tool compared with only 14% for other Australians, demonstrating a level of interest.



Some existing programs seeking to bridge the Digital Ability gap

Digital Mentors	Australian Government funding of a First Nations Digital Mentors network and Digital Support Hub project from 2026[55]
Training	NBN Local staff provide digital skills and scam awareness in remote communities
Workshops	State Library of Queensland's 'Digital and You' digital skills workshop program through IKC network in 22 First Nations councils and the Regional Digital Development Officer network to support local needs
Online	NBN Digital Capability Tool and Resources
	Office of e-Safety has developed a dedicated cyber-safety resources page for First Nations people with some resources in language

Media and information

Access to media and information services is an important component of Outcome 17, contributing to informed decision-making and community participation for First Nations Australians.



IKC staff member Shinane Doughboy in the Wujal Wujal Indigenous Knowledge Centre

Media and information

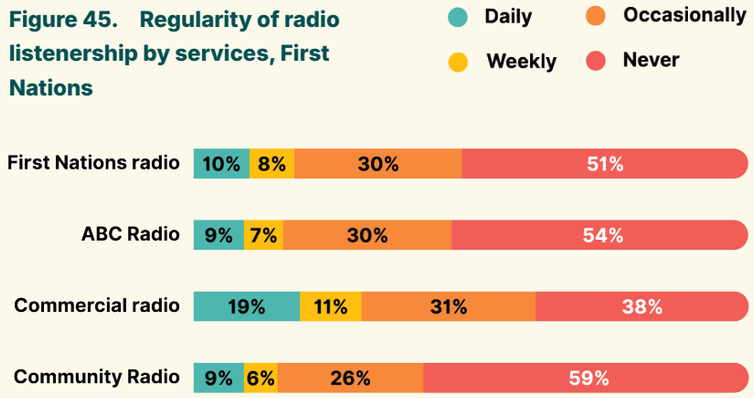
Access to media and information services is an important component of Outcome 17, contributing to informed decision-making and community participation for First Nations Australians. While not part of the Index scoring, these services, particularly First Nations broadcasting and local information networks, play a vital role in ensuring that people can access reliable, relevant and culturally appropriate news and information.

Access to online media and entertainment content is widespread, with 86% of survey respondents having used entertainment services online in the previous six months. Watching movies and television content online is almost universal (92%), illustrating how mobile and internet-based media have become central to daily life. However, patterns of use vary by age, income and remoteness, reflecting both digital access and infrastructure differences.

Across platforms, Facebook (48% daily) and other social media (38%) are now the most common sources of news and information, followed by commercial television (35%), direct and in-person communication (18%) and ABC TV (13%). First Nations radio services remain an important and trusted source of local information (8% daily), especially in remote areas.

> We want our own music and videos and stories on the radio and TV
> (Pipalyatjara resident, SA)

Figure 45. Regularity of radio listenership by services, First Nations



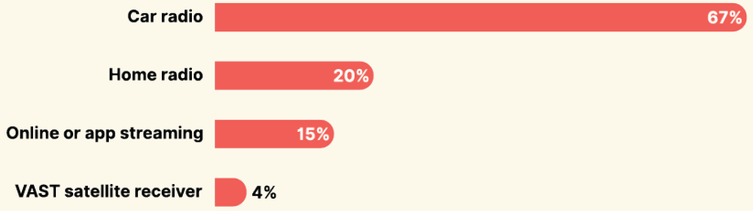
Radio Use

Radio continues to be an important medium for First Nations audiences. Nationally, 81% of respondents listen to radio at least sometimes, with only 19% saying they never do. First Nations radio services attract 18% weekly listeners (10% daily), with strongest engagement in remote (36%) and very remote areas (27%). Listenership is notably higher among people who speak a First Nations language at home (33%), people with disability (26%), and Elders aged 65–74 (17%).

Although First Nations radio services are estimated to reach around 47%[56] of the First Nations population through broadcast transmission, streaming has expanded access for those outside coverage areas. As a result, our survey found that only 8% of respondents reported that no local First Nations radio service was available.

ABC Radio reaches 16% weekly and 9% daily listeners, strongest among Elders (25% for age groups 65–74), those living in remote areas (25%) and people with disability (26%). Commercial radio has the highest overall reach (11% weekly; 19% daily), driven by availability in major cities and regional areas, but listenership drops sharply with remoteness (14% in very remote areas). Community radio, which often carries First Nations programs in the absence of dedicated stations, has 6% weekly and 9% daily listenership, with the highest use in remote regions (25%).

Figure 46. Mode of radio listenership, First Nations



In terms of listening platforms, the car radio remains dominant (67%), followed by home radios (20%), online or app streaming (15%) and VAST satellite receivers (4%). Car radios are particularly important for working-age adults and families, with use peaking among those employed (77%) and in households with children (79%).

Home radio listening is most common among Elders (44% for those 75 and over). Streaming via phone or computer remains low overall (15% and 4%, respectively), and podcast listening

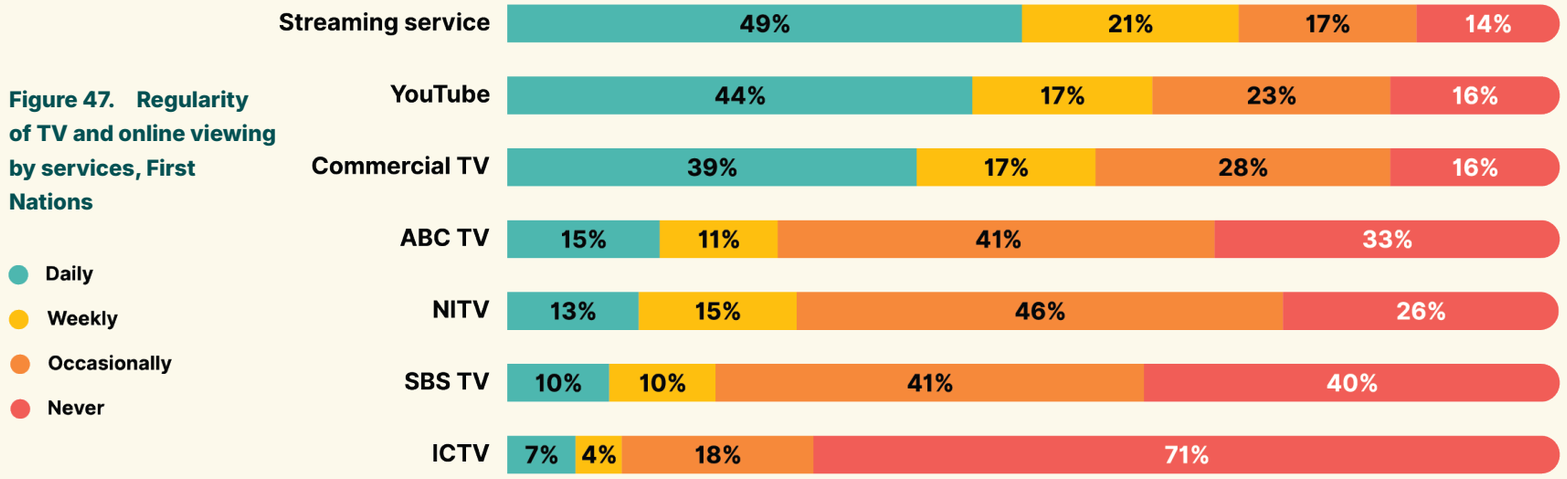
Media and information

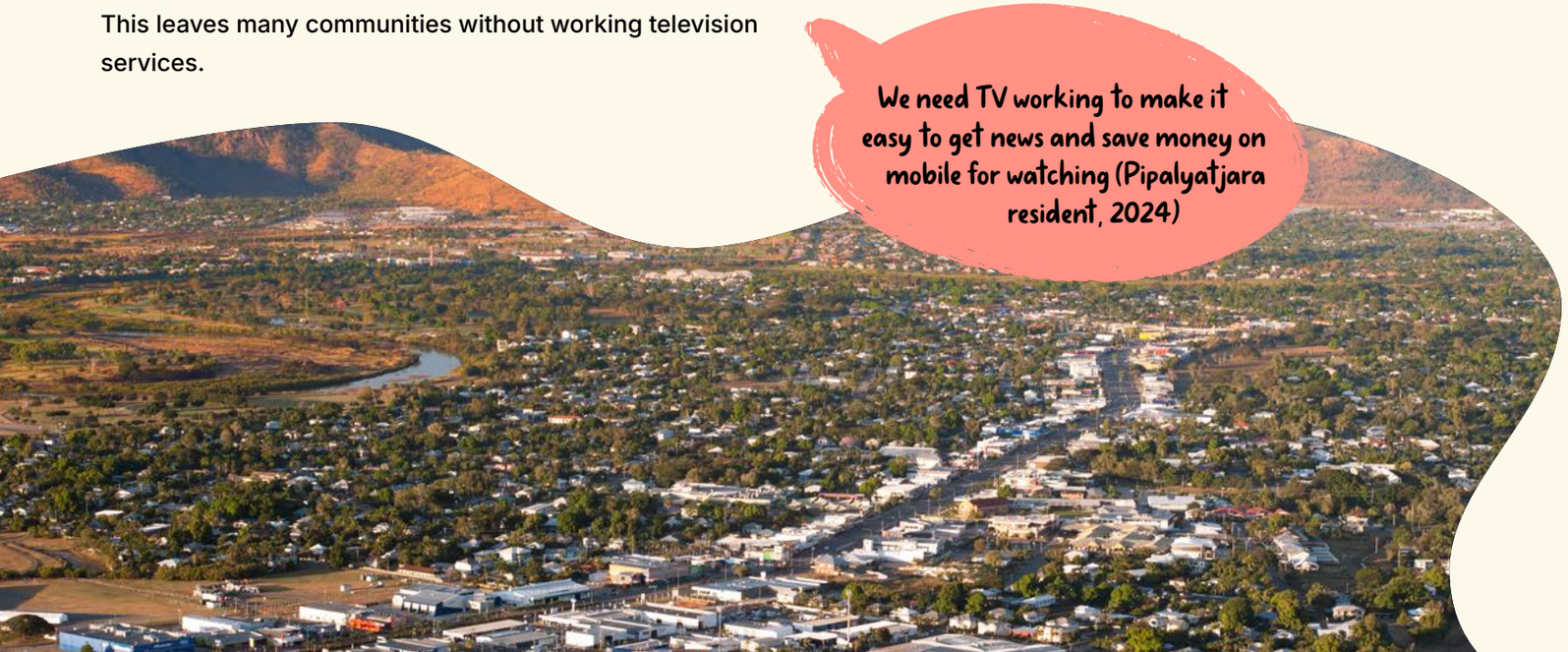
Television and Online Viewing

Television remains a widely used and trusted medium among First Nations audiences, with only 8% of respondents reporting they never watch TV. Viewing is highest among older adults and pensioners, and lowest in very remote areas (11% never watch), partly due to technical and affordability barriers.

Free-to-air broadcast TV via antenna is accessed by 44% of households, while 20% rely on VAST satellite services. In remote areas, where terrestrial broadcast coverage is limited, VAST is the main delivery system (40%). However, the *Mapping the Digital Gap* 2024 study found that about 61% of very remote households had non-functional VAST receivers mainly due to equipment failure and the cost of replacement. This leaves many communities without working television services.

Figure 47. Regularity of TV and online viewing by services, First Nations





Viewing of online media content has surpassed broadcast television, with 49% using streaming services daily and 44% for YouTube. Streaming use is highest among adults aged 18–34 (around 49%), higher-income households (64-51%) and families with children (58%).

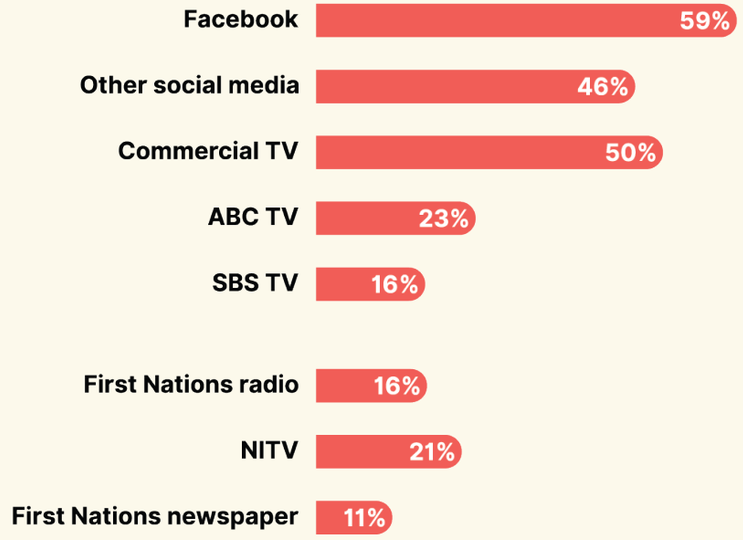
Commercial television stations are the most popular among free-to-air television services, with 39% watching daily, followed by ABC TV (15% daily), NITV (13%) and SBS (10%). Despite being primarily available as a VAST satellite service in remote areas, Indigenous Community Television (ICTV) has relatively high viewership at 6% daily.

Media and information

News and Information Sources

Patterns of news consumption show both continuity and transition. Social media has become the dominant news source, with 48% using Facebook at least weekly and 46% using other social media platforms such as TikTok or Instagram. Commercial TV remains influential (50% weekly), especially among retirees and people with disability, while ABC TV (23% at least weekly) and SBS TV (16%) maintain strong trust and audience loyalty among Elders and homeowners. While online news sources are being used by some (%), paywalls on many mainstream news and sports services limits online access by First Nations people.

Figure 48. Use of services to access news and information at least weekly, First Nations



> I think there should be cheaper ways of accessing news stories, because subscription prevents me from signing up for news and sports or anything (survey comment)

First Nations media outlets play a crucial role in representing Indigenous perspectives. First Nations radio is used weekly by 16% of respondents, with strongest engagement in remote areas (29%). NITV reaches one in five respondents weekly (21%), with equal use across all demographic groups and particularly high viewing among Elders (up to 33% for ages 65–74) and people with disability (27%).

ICTV, though available mainly via VAST or online, has strong remote audiences (18% weekly). First Nations print media such as Koori Mail are also widely read (11% weekly), especially by Elders and First Nations language speakers (19%).

> We want to see the media going in Pipalyatjara. I did that work for a long time to keep the culture and language strong. (Pipalyatjara resident, SA)

Direct and in-person communication remains a vital channel for community news (32% weekly). Local noticeboards, posters and community networks complement broadcast and online channels, demonstrating the importance of hybrid information systems that blend digital and face-to-face communication.



Noticeboard in Shire office in Wadeye

Media and information

Emergency Information Access

Access to timely emergency information remains a key challenge in remote and regional communities where infrastructure and service reliability vary. The most common sources of emergency information are Facebook (59%), text message alerts (49%), commercial TV (43%) and direct, in-person communication (42%). The reliance on interpersonal networks is particularly high in remote (54%) and very remote areas (76%), where mobile coverage, radio reception and power supply may be unreliable.

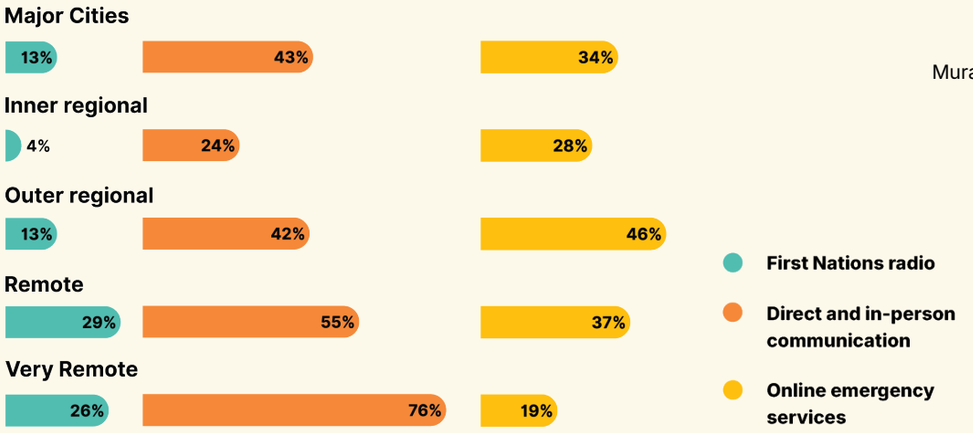
Radio continues to be an essential emergency channel, with First Nations radio cited by 13% overall as a primary source of emergency information and in remote regions it doubled to 30%. ABC Radio (20%) and ABC TV (23%) are also significant for Elders and regional audiences, reinforcing their national role in public safety broadcasting.

Online emergency services are used by one-third of respondents (33%) while one-fifth (21%) used online news services. However, access decreases sharply with remoteness. with 19% using online emergency services and 11% accessing online news in very remote areas. Use of these digital sources is higher among employed and higher-income respondents, those with tertiary qualifications, and households with children. Newspapers, community noticeboards and posters remain important supplementary channels in areas with poor digital access.

Figure 49. Use of services to access emergency information, First Nations



Figure 50. Use of services to access emergency information, by remoteness, First Nations



The data shows a dynamic and evolving media environment for First Nations Australians.

Social media and online streaming are now central to daily information and entertainment. While traditional and community-based media particularly First Nations radio and television continue to play a critical role in maintaining local communication, cultural expression and emergency preparedness.

Hybrid systems that combine digital, broadcast and face-to-face channels remain essential for ensuring equitable access to information across all across all regions and communities.



Mural in Tennant Creek, NT

Recent activities to address Target 17



First Nations peak organisations

First Nations peak agencies played a role in advocating for Target 17, including First Nations Media Australia, the Coalition of Peaks and NAACCHO, with continuing advocacy for First Nations leadership and involvement in program delivery. Numerous agencies have led work on Indigenous Data Governance and Sovereignty, including AIATSIS, Maiam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Network and the Lowitja Institute along with institutional and research partners such as the Australian Research Data Commons. This research aims to provide the evidence base and data to support First Nations led initiatives to address Target 17 at national, regional and community levels.

Australian Government

The introduction of Closing the Gap Target 17 in 2020 has led to range of policy and program efforts. This included the establishment of a First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group by the former Minister for Communications, the Hon Michelle Rowland MP, in 2022. Since then, the Advisory Group and supporting Expert Panel have provided First Nations representation and leadership towards addressing Target 17.

The group's initial report released in October 2023 provided a series of high-priority recommendations. Based on these recommendations, the Australian Government committed $68 million of Budget measures in 2024-25.[57] Building on this initial investment FNDIAG released a Roadmap for future action over the next five years in December 2024. This Roadmap has been widely endorsed, including by the 2024 Regional Telecommunications Review and the Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance.[58]

Prior to this, the National Indigenous Australian Agency led the consultation and development of the First Nations Digital Inclusion Plan completed in 2021, in response to a key recommendation in the 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review.[59] This Plan outlined action areas against four key pillars—Access, Affordability, Digital Ability, Media and Broadcasting—as well as the need for improved data collection. It included a summary of current activities by government, industry and community sector at that time.

This Plan was developed in the context of the Government's Digital Transformation Policy, which sought to expand online service delivery by 2025. To achieve this, the Data and Digital Ministers Meeting made recommendations for improved digital literacy to ensure all Australians could reliably and confidently access online services.

State/Territory Governments

All States and Territory governments are signatories to the NPA on Closing the Gap and have developed state-based plans to address Closing the Gap Target 17. While telecommunications is primarily a federal and industry responsibly, all states have focused efforts on improving telecommunications access in remote and regional areas to support service delivery and social and economic development. The states and territories with large numbers of First Nations communities and homelands (WA, NT, QLD, SA and NSW) have undertaken audits and developed targeted strategies to improve telecommunications and digital access in these sites.



Warakurna community access computer room, run by Ngaanyatjarra Media centre

NSW has been proactive in commissioning dedicated Closing the Gap research, with a Baseline Evaluation Report and Roadmap completed in 2025. As previously outlined, State Library of Queensland have developed a suite of digital inclusion programs, building upon existing capacity of its Indigenous Knowledge Centre network with 13 local councils. WA Government is also revitalising its network of Community Resource Centres to provide digital resources and support in rural and remote sites across the State. These initiatives provide a solid basis for a more comprehensive national approach to addressing access, affordability and digital ability challenges for remote and regional First Nations people. However, more is needed to address the needs or urban First Nations people, with this research identifying affordability and limited access to computer facilities and digital support as key priorities.

Recent activities to address Target 17

Industry

NBN played an active role during the COVID-19 pandemic in rolling out Wi-Fi hotspots to provide basic internet access in over 110 remote communities under its Communities in Isolation project. It also began a trial of community-wide Wi-Fi mesh in four communities, which led to the Commonwealth funding a dedicated First Nations Community Free Wi-Fi Program in 23 communities.



NBN Sky Muster dishes for community Wi-Fi network, Warakurna community WA

Industry efforts also played an important role in closing the digital gap, particularly in remote Australia, with NBN developing a range of programs during the COVID-19 restrictions including Wi-Fi hotspots across the country, establishing the community Wi-Fi program, the digital capability checklist, establishing the NBN local network to drive digital capability and engagement, and the NBN Low Income and Digital Inclusion Forum.

Telstra invested significantly in improved mobile services in remote Australia particularly through co- investment with the Mobile Black spots program and Regional Connectivity Program and state and territory co-investment. Telstra also invested in the ADII and subsequently the *Mapping the Digital Gap* research in 21 remote communities since 2021.

The introduction of targeted strategies by the Australian government in the 2024 budget has led to a range of other organisations contributing to closing the gap including Activ8me, Easyweb Digital, OneWi-Fi and Pivotel. These organisations are now playing a role through a range of programs to expand communications access via Wi-Fi networks.



Wi-Fi repeater and VoIP phone in house in Kalumburu WA

Non-government organisations

Peak telecommunications consumer body ACCAN, has played an active role in advocating for improved communications and digital inclusion for First Nations Australians over many years. ACCAN commissioned the Remote Indigenous Communications Review in 2020 to document existing communications programs and identify outstanding needs in remote First Nations communities. This was undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic, which rapidly transformed the rate of digital transformation however also exposed the significant digital gaps for many First Nations people and communities.

Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance, Good Things Foundation and other national peak organisations have also supported First Nations consumers and digital inclusion research and initiatives.

While much has been achieved in recent years, the research findings show that more work is needed. *The First Nations Digital Inclusion Roadmap* outlines a range of initiatives that can continue the crucial work of closing the digital gap for First Nations Australians.

Next steps

Ongoing measurement of First Nations digital inclusion is essential to understanding and addressing the gap identified under Closing the Gap Target 17. The current findings offer a valuable snapshot of where progress is being made and where significant barriers remain.

Continued data collection and analysis over time will reveal the trajectory of change, providing the evidence base needed to guide First Nations-led initiatives and coordinated policy responses by government, industry, and communities.

Regional Target Sites Report

Based on 729 surveys undertaken in 2025 with First Nations organisations in ten target regional sites, a dedicated report and dashboard page will be released in early 2026.

Dashboard feedback

Prior to this release, feedback will be invited on the First Nations Digital Inclusion Dashboard and website to refine usability and presentation. Stakeholders will also have opportunities to request tailored information sheets specific to their regions or sectors.

Complementary evidence

The *Mapping the Digital Gap 2025 Outcomes Report* will be released on 3 December 2025, with remaining Phase 1 community update reports published by early 2026. Phase 2 continues across nine sites in 2026-2027, adding place-base case studies and qualitative insights to guide more targeted, locally led approaches in regions where the digital gap remains widest.

Longitudinal tracking

The next national data collection will occur in 2026, with a second report and updated dashboard planned for mid-2027. These releases will show trends over time, highlight where interventions are working, and identify areas requiring renewed effort. Evidence from this program will directly inform the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group and its Roadmap, as well as targeted measures by communities, government, and industry partners.

Priority focus areas

Evidence from this project will directly inform the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group and its Roadmap recommendations, along with targeted measures by communities, governments and industry partners. We will seek to assess the impact of selected initiatives, with case studies included in our second report in 2027. Initial priority focus areas are:

- **Sustaining affordability amid cost-of-living pressures** through coordinated policy and industry action
- **Strengthening digital capabilities and online safety**, especially for mobile-only users and people in regional, remote, and very remote areas
- **Refining measurement to capture automated systems and artificial intelligence**, ensuring benefits are realised while risks are mitigated
- **Investing in resilient, locally appropriate infrastructure** as services, learning, and employment move increasingly online.

Next steps

Equitable access remains a pressing priority, particularly in regional, remote and very remote areas. Achieving digital inclusion for all First Nations people requires renewed commitment across government, industry, education, and community sectors.

As service delivery, employment, and education shift online, investment is resilient infrastructure, affordable connectivity, and local access options must be a shared national responsibility.

Technological change is accelerating. Rising reliance on automated and online systems including AI makes digital capability and confidence essential. These tools can widen participation but may also deepen inequalities. Our measurement will keep evolving so that indicators capture emerging realities and risks.

Programs that build skills and online safety remain vital. While many communities, schools, and organisations are responding, evidence shows that greater investment and collaboration is still needed.

With First Nations leadership and cross-sector collaborations, Australia can make measurable progress toward equitable digital participation in every community.



Appendix 1: Measuring Digital Inclusion for First Nations Australians project

Objectives

The objectives of the Measuring Digital Inclusion for First Nations Australians project are to: accurately measure progress on digital inclusion and media use among First Nations Australians nationally relative to other Australians (Closing the Gap Target 17); track changes in digital inclusion and media use in 2024–25 and 2026–27; ensure First Nations leadership, governance and partnership in all aspect of the project; and ensure data collection and access align with Closing the Gap Priority Reform 4 and principles of Indigenous data sovereignty. The project will provide the first robust, comparative measure of digital inclusion for First Nations Australians across all regions, enabling accurate reporting on progress toward CTG17 and informing future policy and program design.

First Nations research principles, leadership and governance

This project is guided by the core values and principles outlined in:

- NHMRC Guidelines for 'Ethical Conduct in Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Communities' (2018)
- AIATSIS (2021) Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research with four key principles: Indigenous self-determination; Indigenous leadership; impact and value; sustainability and accountability
- principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty (Kukutai and Taylor 2016), in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008)
- the FAIR and CARE data principles, supporting Indigenous data governance and community control of information.

Methodology

This project builds upon the existing methodologies of survey data collection by ADII and *Mapping the Digital Gap* projects. The survey tool is an expanded version of the Australian Internet Usage Survey (AIUS) with additional questions on media and information services relevant to align with Outcome 17 indicators. First Nations leadership and governance is a key element of the project through the oversight of First Nations team members (see below) and the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group as steering committee. The Methodology is outlined in more detail in the Project Plan (admscentre.org.au/measuring-digital-inclusion-for-first-nations-australians).

Data collection

Primary data collection is being undertaken in two tranches–the first in 2024/25 and the second in 2026/27–to begin a time series to measure CTG17. First Nations company Ipsos' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Unit (ATSIRU) were contracted to collect 2000 national surveys in each using tested research methods, a mix of face-to-face surveys using a national co-researcher network and an existing iMob panel to recruit participants. Participants are remunerated for their time.

In addition, 807 surveys were undertaken in partnership with local organisations and co-researchers in 11 remote and very remote communities under the *Mapping the Digital Gap* project to ensure a geographically representative First Nations sample. The ADII project team also undertook face to face data collection in 10 targeted regional towns in 2025 in partnership with local First Nations organisations. The results of this collection were not ready for inclusion in the 2025 report and will be reported separately in early 2026. The second round of targeted regional site data collection will contribute to the second CTG17 report and dashboard update in mid-2027.

Data management and governance

All research activities are conducted under approved Human Research Ethics protocols through RMIT University, ensuring culturally appropriate, safe and respectful engagement with First Nations participants and communities. We abide by Indigenous data governance principles in all aspects of data collection, analysis, management and access. Survey participation is voluntary and based on informed consent, with participants' privacy protected through de-identification and secure data storage.

Survey results from this project are de-identified, merged and weighted with ADII and *Mapping the Digital Gap* results to generate comparative Index scores, between First Nations Australians and other Australians, by ADII dimension, geography and demographic groups. Small area estimates

Appendix 1: *Measuring Digital Inclusion for First Nations Australians* project

processing enables disaggregated regional results for Indigenous Regions (using ABS zoning) across the country.

All results are publicly available on a new First Nations dashboard on the ADII website, designed for easy access by First Nations communities, organisations, peak bodies and individuals in accordance with Priority Reform 4. Data files are downloadable from the ADII website. The ADII dashboard and website have been developed and maintained by partner organisation Dassier, with a dedicated First Nations interactive dashboard and website section built for this project. Design work for the project logo and icons have been undertaken by First Nations graphic design company Ingeous Studios.

ADII and Mapping the Digital Gap linkage

Comparability of data collected relies on national ADII data collection, undertaken by ADM+S and funded by Telstra. This includes 3065 surveys collected in 2024 by ADII partner Social Research Centre, with the 2024 ADII report and dashboard launched on 5 November 2025.

The Telstra-funded *Mapping the Digital Gap* project is a supplementary ADII project to undertake place-based qualitative and quantitative research in remote and very remote First Nations communities. communities and towns over 2022 to 2024. Telstra funded a second phase of the project, to visit a further 8-10 communities from 2025 to 2027.

The twelve participating communities were chosen in consultation with First Nations community leaders and community-controlled organisations. The research team has partnered with local or regional agencies for each research site to ensure the project adheres to local policies and cultural protocols, has community trust and engagement and provides tangible research outcomes to the community.

More detail can be found in the *Mapping the Digital Gap* Background Paper.

The research team

The ADII team, comprised of members from RMIT and Swinburne Universities, has worked at the forefront of digital inclusion research and initiatives since 2016 with expertise in culturally appropriate engagement with First Nations communities.

This project has built upon the existing team from the ADII and *Mapping the Digital Gap* projects—see profiles at mappingthedigitalgap.com.au/about/#team—with dedicated First Nations leadership from Principal Research Fellow, Dr Heron Loban, and Project Manager, Alison Barton. The ADII data collection, weighting and Small Area Estimate modelling derived from the research team's index scores is carried out by the Social Research Centre.



Appendix 2: Acronyms

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Commission
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACCAN	Australian Communications Consumer Action Network
ADII	Australian Digital Inclusion Index
ADM+S	ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision Making and Society
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AIUS	Australian Internet Users Survey (developed by the ADII team with funding from Telstra)
AM	Amplitude modulation (radio broadcast mode)
ARC	Australian Research Council
CTG	Closing the Gap
DAB+	Digital audio broadcasting (radio broadcast mode)
DITRDCSA	Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts
DSS	Department of Social Services
FM	Frequency modulation (radio broadcast mode)
FNDIAG	First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group
FNMA	First Nations Media Australia
FTTP	Fibre to the premises
FTTN	Fibre to the node
GenAI	Generative artificial intelligence
ICTV	Indigenous Community Television
IKC	Indigenous Knowledge Centre
LEO	Low earth orbit (satellites)
LOTE	Language Other Than English
NATSIHS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey
NATSISS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey
NBN	National Broadband Network
NIAA	National Indigenous Australians Agency
NITV	National Indigenous Television service
NPA	National Partnership Agreement (on Closing the Gap)
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
NTG	Northern Territory Government
PC	Productivity Commission
RIBS	Remote Indigenous Broadcasting Service
RIMO	Remote Indigenous media organisation
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University
SA	South Australia
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
STAND	Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters program
TV	Television
UOMO	Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation
VAST	Viewer Access Satellite Television
WA	Western Australia

Endnotes

1 Thomas, J., McCosker, A., Parkinson, S., Hegarty, K., Featherstone, D., Kennedy, J., Ormond-Parker, L., Morrison, K., Rea, H, & Ganley, L. *Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: 2025 Australian Digital Inclusion Index*. Melbourne: ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society, RMIT University, Swinburne University of Technology, and Telstra.

2 For an interactive version of this graphic including all locations and survey completions, please visit https://www.admscentre.org.au/measuring-digital-inclusion-for-first-nations-australians

3 Australian Centre for Housing Research. (2023). *Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+)*. University of Adelaide. https://able.adelaide.edu.au/housing-research/data-gateway/aria

4 Source: FNMA website: https://firstnationsmedia.org.au/our-industry/radio-services

5 First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group. (2024). *First Nations digital inclusion roadmap: 2026 and beyond*. Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts: p.27 https://apo.org.au/node/329283

6 Source: Geospatial Services Section, DITRDCSA

7 Indigenous Regions are large geographic areas built from whole Indigenous Areas and based on historical boundaries. The larger population of Indigenous Regions enables highly detailed analysis. There are 59 Indigenous Regions covering the whole of Australia without gaps or overlaps. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/australian-statistical-geography-standard-asgs-edition-3/jul2021-jun2026/indigenous-structure/indigenous-regions

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9 Dastyari, A., Sullivan, C., Itaoui, R., Hourigan, A. 2024. *First Nations Digital Inclusion in Western Sydney*. Whitlam Institute and Centre for Western Sydney. https://doi.org/10.26183/tp9e-jj77

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11 Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *New Census insights on income in Australia using administrative data*. https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/new-census-insights-income-australia-using-administrative-data

12 See below resources for examples of state-based programs:

Featherstone, D. (2020). *Remote Indigenous communications review*. Australian Communications Consumer Action Network. https://apo.org.au/node/311117 and;

National Indigenous Australians Agency. (2023). *First Nations Digital Inclusion Plan (2023-26)*. National Indigenous Australians Agency: Appendix. https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/first-nations-digital-inclusion-plan-2023-26

13 Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS). (2023). *WA Digital Inclusion Project (Project Overview)*. https://www.wacoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/WA-Digital-Inclusion-Project-Factsheet-July-2022.pdf

14 The *First Nations Digital Inclusion Roadmap: 2026 and beyond* provides details on expanding this digital inclusion component to include availability of services, products, media and information.

15 https://www.nbnco.com.au/corporate-information/media-centre/media-statements/digital-champions-empower-remote-first-nations-communities

16 https://ministers.pmc.gov.au/mccarthy/2025/grants-available-boost-first-nations-digital-inclusion

Endnotes

17 See case study on page 45 of: Featherstone, D., Ormond-Parker, L., Parkinson, S., Hegarty, K., Hawkins, L., Thomas, J., Kennedy, J., Valenta, L., & Ganley, L. (2024). *Mapping the digital gap: 2024 outcomes report*. https://apo.org.au/node/329174

18 https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-09-23/timeline-on-optus-triple-0-outage-what-we-know/105805890

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20 Cain, A. (2025). *Satellites key to Australia's digital backbone*. Australian Financial Review (Online). https://www.afr.com/companies/telecommunications/satellites-key-to-australia-s-digital-backbone-20250819-p5mo0t

21 https://theconversation.com/some-major-australian-towns-still-have-poor-phone-reception-its-threatening-public-safety-267009

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27 FNMA Call for Action 2 is for increased sector funding. First Nations media and broadcasting services receives $20 million annual funding through the National Indigenous Australians Agency and roughly $2 million in grant funding through the Community Broadcasting Foundation. Following the Community Broadcasting Sector Review (2024), NIAA have provided $12million funding to supplement IBMS over three years for infrastructure and digital upgrades and related training.

28 The FNDIAG Roadmap recommendation 21 calls for expanded First Nations radio services to Adelaide, Canberra, Hobart and unserved or under-served regional centres. This aligns with FNMA Call for Action 3: https://firstnationsmedia.org.au/sites/default/files/files/2018%20Calls%20for%20Action/3.%20Live%20and%20Local%20Program-CFA-2018%20Updated.pdf

29 Watson, H. (2021). *Renewing a vital Indigenous voice and community asset–The Indigenous broadcasting and media sector*. Hugh Watson Consulting.

30 Park, S. (2017). Digital inequalities in rural Australia: A double jeopardy of remoteness and social exclusion. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 54, 399-407. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2015.12.018

31 Anthony, M., Julie, T., Christine, C., & et al. (2021). *Improving the digital inclusion of older Australians: the social impact of Be Connected*. https://apo.org.au/node/305919

32 Featherstone et al 2024: 45

33 Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *Education Statistics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*. ABS. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/education-statistics-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/2021

34 World Vision Australia, & Australian Literacy Numeracy Foundation. (2021). *Connecting on Country*. https://apo.org.au/node/311450

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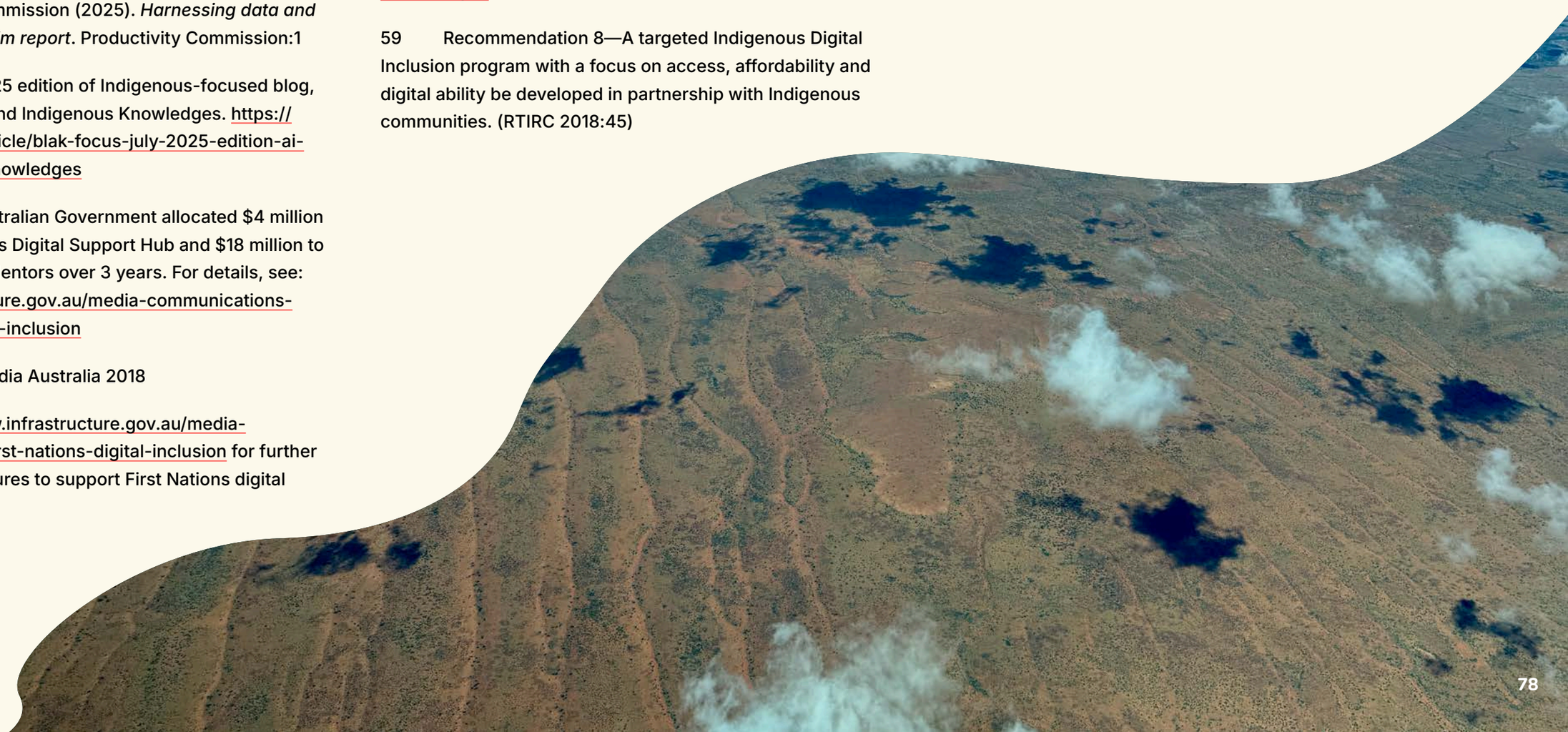
55 In 2025, the Australian Government allocated $4 million towards the First Nations Digital Support Hub and $18 million to the Network of Digital Mentors over 3 years. For details, see: https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-communications-arts/first-nations-digital-inclusion

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Website

digitalinclusionindex.org.au

Dashboard

dashboard.digitalinclusionindex.org.au/FirstNations/Home

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