



FIRST NATIONS
DIGITAL INCLUSION
ADVISORY GROUP

First Nations Digital Inclusion Roadmap: Progress Report 2026





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Executive Summary

Over 2026, the Advisory Group has undertaken a comprehensive analysis of progress towards the recommendations in the First Nations Digital Inclusion Roadmap: 2026 and Beyond (Roadmap), which the Advisory Group and Australian Government launched in late 2024.

Throughout 2025, the Advisory Group heard firsthand from community members how our work has supported positive outcomes in communities, including the activation of community Wi-Fi in 23 remote communities by NBN Co, and the introduction of a bespoke prepaid community plan by Telstra to support affordability in 97 remote communities.

We have continued to advocate for place-based solutions, including engagement with regional and remote communities in Queensland (QLD), the Northern Territory (NT) and Western Australia (WA), and have established the *First Nations Telecommunications Working Group* to strengthen industry collaboration and accountability for Target 17.

We have also engaged both state and territory ministers and government representatives to better understand the work underway in each jurisdiction to support Target 17. More broadly, we have contributed to several government priorities, such as the introduction of Digital ID and the introduction of age assurance for social media, to help ensure the potential impact of these processes on First Nations Australians was recognised and understood.

We acknowledge that the Australian Government's investment of \$68 million to support First Nations digital inclusion, as well as an additional \$12 million for the First Nations broadcasting sector, will have a positive and ongoing impact for First Nations Australians. We have also noted efforts by states and territories to support digital literacy programs for First Nations Australians, as well as ongoing investment in connectivity solutions in remote communities.

These measures, along with Australian Government programs such as the Regional Connectivity Program, the Mobile Black Spot Program, the introduction of the Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation (UOMO), and improvements to consumer protections and regulation, have been good starting points.

However, data gathered through the RMIT University's *'Counting on Connectivity'* Report and the ADII's National Survey clearly shows that more needs to be done. We know that around 41 per cent of First Nations Australians are still considered to be excluded or highly excluded, which is more than double the rate for other Australians (20 per cent). This means that they are unable to realise the benefits of being online, including having the same opportunity to access services, information, and social connection as other Australians.

Based on progress to date and our understanding of where more effort may be needed, the report has identified several priorities for future action, including:

- additional investment in First Nations digital inclusion programs
- ensuring access to free-to-air television services
- supporting affordability
- the sustainability of the First Nations media and broadcasting sector
- placing First Nations digital inclusion at the centre of policy and regulatory reforms.

While the Advisory Group has noted the uptake of progress in pursuit of Target 17, we remain concerned that the Target will not be met without greater intervention, including ensuring that programs are funded in the longer term. A key focus of the approach moving forward needs to be ensuring that existing programs, such as First Nations Community Wi-Fi program, the Network of

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Digital Mentors, and the First Nations Digital Support Hub, can continue to deliver outcomes for communities beyond 2027-2028.

Having noted the imminent timeframe for Target 17, we are also pleased to see the establishment of a Target 17 Refresh Working Group, which will be co-chaired by the Australian Government and the Coalition of Peaks. The refresh provides an opportunity to consider whether the current timeframe and measures remain appropriate in this context. It also provides an opportunity to ensure the target remains meaningful, measurable, and aligned with Outcome 17 into the future.

We hope this report is useful in outlining key achievements by government and industry to date. However, as this report sets out, achieving Outcome 17 and its Target will require significant ongoing investment by governments in partnership with industry and those communities where the digital gap is most pronounced. The most effective approaches will be those which reflect local priorities and are based on direct engagement with communities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dot West'.

Ms Dot West OAM

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lyndon Ormond-Parker'.

Professor Lyndon Ormond-Parker



About the Advisory Group

The First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group has been established to provide advice on options to address barriers to digital inclusion, as part of the Australian Government's commitment to Target 17 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Target 17 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap aims for equal levels of digital inclusion for First Nations people by 2026, and supports Outcome 17, which is focussed on ensuring First Nations people can access information and services to make informed decisions about their own lives. The Advisory Group has been and will continue to work in partnership with First Nations people and communities.

In October 2023, the Advisory Group launched its initial report, which informed a range of measures funded by the Australian Government in the 2023-24 Budget, and in December 2024, it launched the First Nations Digital Inclusion Roadmap.

The Advisory Group's advice has consistently prioritised the following elements:

- investing in infrastructure so that all communities have equitable access to connectivity
- ensuring that First Nations people can afford reliable internet services whether fixed line, satellite or mobile
- supporting all First Nations people to have the skills to access the internet safely and effectively
- enhancing the sustainability of the First Nations media and broadcasting sector.

Key principles in our work

The Advisory Group has operated from a set of five core principles which are outlined below.

The importance of place-based approaches: this means partnering with First Nations communities for both the design and implementation of any program to ensure their unique needs, aspirations and environment are considered.

Centring First Nations consumer preferences: centring the unique preferences of First Nations consumers at both the community and individual level, e.g. acknowledging the preference for prepaid mobile plans over post-paid lock-in contracts.

Adopting a technology-agnostic approach to long-term recommendations and solutions: focusing on general approaches to policy and program design, rather than specific contemporary technical solutions to ensure the recommendations keep up with the rapidly changing pace of the communications landscape.

First Nations representation: the Advisory Group supports First Nations representation at the executive decision-making level in alignment with Priority Reform Three in the National Agreement.

Moving from Closing the Gap to innovation and excellence: this means fostering an empowered First Nations communications and digital technology sector by providing opportunities for enhancing technical skills, innovation and development within communities.

Since the establishment of the Advisory Group, there has been increased momentum and visibility of First Nations digital inclusion as a policy priority for both government and industry. There has been some progress against the Advisory Group's recommendations, however, there is still much more to do to achieve Target 17, including improving alignment and collaboration. Noting that Target 17's

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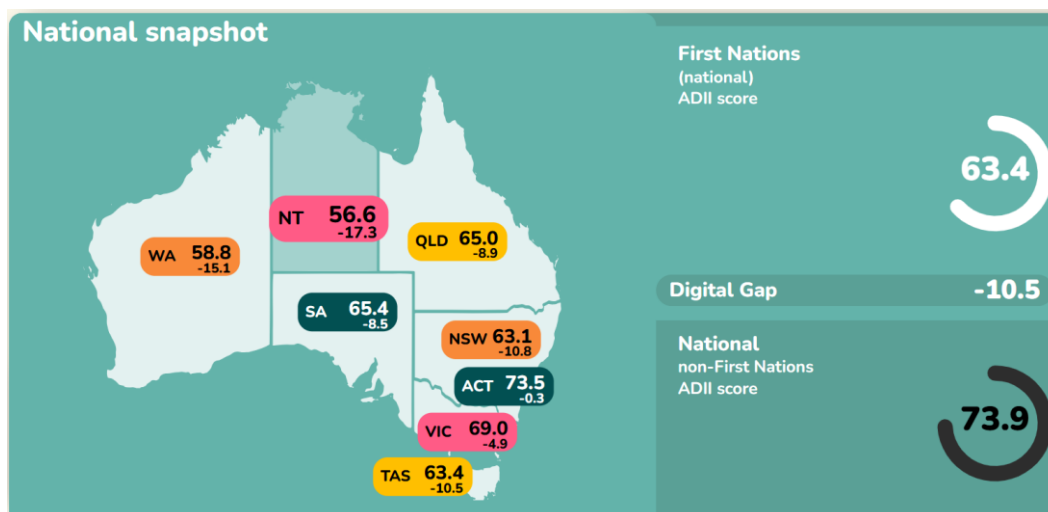
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timeframe is this year, 2026, it will also be necessary to consider the ongoing scope and governance of this Target in the medium to long term.

Current State of Play

The first report of the Measuring Digital Inclusion for First Nations Australians project, released in November 2025, showed that while First Nations Australians are highly digitally engaged, this engagement is not spread evenly across the First Nations population. The table below shows the gap between First Nations Australians and other Australians across each state and territory, as well as a national gap of 10.5.



Digital inclusion worsens with remoteness, with the gap widening from 6.2 in major cities to 22.8 in very remote Australia. Digital inclusion for First Nations Australians also varies widely based on 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:

- Elders (gap of 32.3 compared with 6.7 for 18-34 age group)
- people living with disability (17.1 compared with 8.5 for those without disability)
- people who speak a First Nations language at home (18.7 compared with 9.4 for those who speak only English at home)
- those on income support (17.4 compared with 2.8 for those not reliant on income support).

Affordability is a key driver of the digital inclusion gap with a national average gap of 13.3. This is consistently high across all geographic locations with a gap of 12.4 in major cities, 15.7 in inner regional and 15.8 in remote Australia. It is important to note, however, that affordability scores in the 2025 ADII are not comparable to previous years, as the methodology has changed to better reflect the diversity of household size and makeup, connectivity options and costs, and different contexts across metropolitan, regional and remote Australia.

In contrast, the Digital Ability gap is much lower overall than the other elements, with the 18-34 age group scoring 5.0 points above the national average and those in major cities scoring 1.6 above the average. However, the Digital Ability gap increases significantly with age, with a 20.7 gap for those aged 55-64, 32.4 for those 65-74, and 44.1 for Elders aged 75 and over.

The report also shows how First Nations Australians use the internet, with 86 per cent of respondents using entertainment services online in the last six months. The most popular sources of news and information are Facebook (48 per cent daily), other social media (38 per cent), commercial television

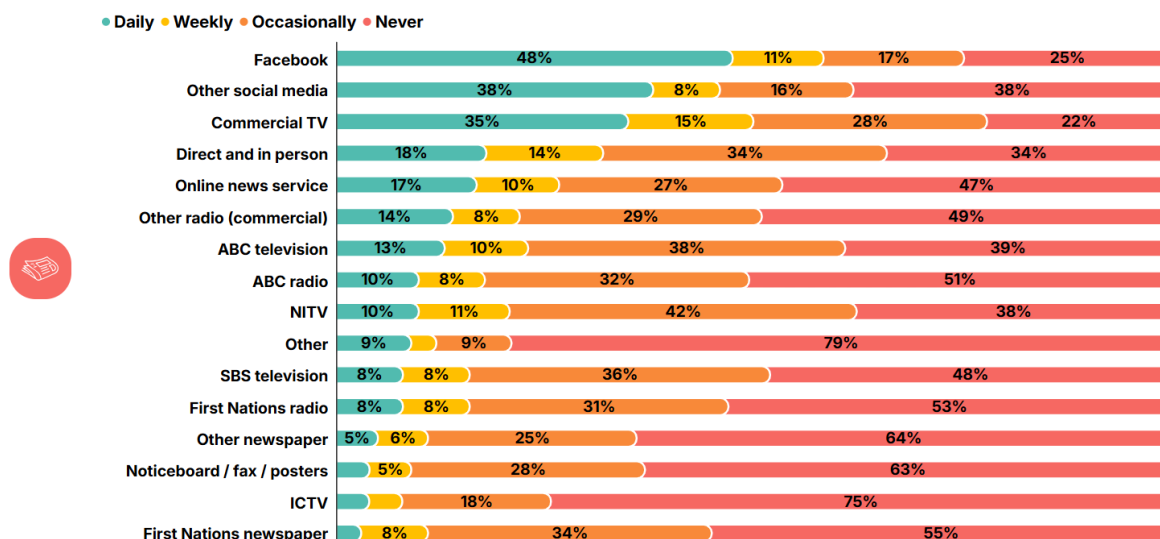
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(35 per cent), direct and in-person communication (18 per cent daily) and ABC TV (12 per cent). 70 per cent also use streaming services weekly for television and video content.

Sources of news and information



Momentum towards Target 17

Since the publication of the Roadmap in 2024, the Advisory Group has engaged closely with industry, government and First Nations organisations to advocate for our recommendations. We are pleased to see support for our work, as well as a strong commitment to First Nations digital inclusion more generally. We appreciate our advice has been sought by areas across government, including the Department of Finance, the Department of Industry, Science and Resources, the National Indigenous Australians Agency, and the 2024 Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee.

We recognise growing momentum within the telecommunications sector for Target 17, including the participation of representatives from across the sector in our workshops and as members of the First Nations Telecommunications Working Group (FNTWG). This has included members from NBN Co, Telstra, Optus, TPG, Vocus, BAI, the Australian Telecommunications Alliance (ATA), the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO), and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC). The FNTWG provides a mechanism for industry collaboration and accountability, and we look forward to receiving its initial advice later this year.

The telecommunications sector has continued to support improved access to connectivity across Australia. We understand there was strong interest in the First Nations Community Wi-Fi Program and look forward to seeing projects delivered under this program across 2026. We would also like to call out the strong engagement of NBN Co in this space, with the activation of community Wi-Fi in 23 remote communities across 2024–25.

NBN Co reached the connection allocation for their School Student Broadband Initiative (SSBI), providing free internet to 30,000 families, including around 500 services set aside for First Nations families. This included targeted activities to support take up in First Nations communities such as Palm Island and in the Torres Strait, further enabling connectivity for digitally excluded First Nations children and families. We also recognise Telstra's responsiveness to the affordability issue in First Nations communities, and its introduction of a bespoke prepaid plan which offers improved value for money for high data users.

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The Advisory Group has also noted the effort made by all levels of government in ensuring greater access for First Nations Australians, and the strong engagement with our work by states and territories, including through the Data and Digital Ministers Meeting (DDMM) Digital Inclusion Working Group. We are pleased to see that some jurisdictions have introduced programs to support improved access to connectivity, particularly in regional and remote areas. The digital service centres supported by the Queensland Government are a great example of how this investment can deliver community-wide benefits and is a model which should be adopted more broadly.

We have appreciated the leadership role of the Australian Government in supporting our work, including \$68 million for First Nations digital inclusion programs that has enabled connectivity for 53 additional remote communities and \$12 million in additional funding for the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program (IBMP). The Australian Government has also undertaken several reviews at the national level which relate to our work, and which could lead to tangible outcomes for First Nations people and communities. We look forward to seeing the outcomes of these reviews, as well as continued engagement on key reforms such as UOMO.

The Advisory Group also wishes to recognise the efforts made by not-for-profit organisations, such as WorkVentures, Good Things Australia and Good360 Australia, for their collaborative effort through the newly established National Device Bank. A product of NBN Co's Low Income and Digital Inclusion Forum (LIDIF) and supported by Telstra, the National Device Bank directly relates to Recommendation 14 of the Roadmap, as does WorkVentures' partnership with the Australian Government to develop Tech Reuse for Good Charter. We commend their work, and hope that stakeholders work with them to ensure that future-proofed devices find a second life in community.

Finally, we would like to note the value all our stakeholders have provided through their participation in our events and their collaboration with each other. We have seen executive members of industry and government become active participants in the pursuit of Target 17, sharing information, tools, resources, and best-practice strategies with each other. We would also like to commend the strong advocacy by the Coalition of Peaks for the inclusion of this Target in the National Agreement, as well as on Closing the Gap Targets and Priority Reforms more broadly.

Identifying and addressing gaps

The Advisory Group has noted that while there have been ongoing efforts to achieve Target 17 by 2026, there are still significant and outstanding gaps that must be addressed. These gaps are impacting on progress towards Target 17 and on the ability of many First Nations Australians to access the information and services they need to make informed decisions about their lives. We understand that there are around 600 communities who lack basic connectivity and who, with each day, are getting left further behind the rest of Australia in terms of their online participation.

As outlined above, in many regional and remote First Nations communities, lack of connectivity is compounded by a continuing lack of access to free-to-air television, because of the cascading failures of VAST, including the high cost of replacement set-top boxes, outdated technical support, and difficulty in activating smart cards.

We are concerned that without direct government and industry intervention, the situation in regional and remote First Nations communities will continue to deteriorate and will undermine any broader progress towards supporting access to information and news. While we understand the current issues with VAST are complex, this system is fundamental to ensuring access to free-to-air information, news and entertainment for those outside of traditional broadcasting areas.

While governments and the telecommunications sector are actively addressing access to connectivity, such as through the deployment of free community Wi-Fi, we draw attention to the reality that hundreds of communities, town camps and homelands still lack reliable access to connectivity. This is



compounded by the reality in some communities where, even with fibre available, people cannot afford to access it. This results in low take up rates and a continued reliance on prepaid mobile services.

The measures in place to address affordability, such as the Telephone Allowance, are not adequate for today's telecommunications costs. Further, while community Wi-Fi supports access in specific communities, it will not 'shift the dial' on affordability more generally unless it is deployed in every community. We note that while there is strong support for our recommendation on prepaid broadband, it continues to be offered by just two retailers across Australia, which means most First Nations consumers cannot access this as an option. We also understand that the SSBI has reached its cap of 30,000, and so no new families will be able to sign up.

On prepaid more generally, we also have observed that there continues to be a significant difference between data costs on prepaid and post-paid plans, and that regulatory frameworks still tend to provide more protection to post-paid consumers than those on prepaid services. Even if this inequity is addressed, it will be necessary to ensure First Nations Australians are aware of their rights as consumers and how to seek redress if those rights are breached.

This should involve working in partnership with First Nations media and broadcasters to ensure information is targeted, culturally appropriate, and reaches the intended audience. Engagement with the providers of the First Nations Digital Support Hub and Network of Digital Mentors, once established, will be an important element of ensuring a collaborative approach on this matter.

Progress on digital literacy is difficult to assess. While we note some delays with the delivery of the First Nations Digital Support Hub and a Network of Digital Mentors, we are pleased to see grant opportunities for these programs have recently opened. We note, however, that there continues to be a lack of alignment across governments and the telecommunications sector on digital literacy programs.

We are increasingly concerned that without more action in this space, the benefits of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, will not be shared with First Nations Australians and may lead to the widening of the digital divide. Without increased digital skills and awareness, online harms and scams will also continue to disproportionately impact on First Nations Australians.

Key Recommendations for 2026

The Advisory Group has identified five top priorities for 2026. These recommendations speak to issues that, if resolved, would provide a significant boost towards achieving Target 17.

- 1) **Additional investment in First Nations digital inclusion programs:** the Advisory Group continues to strongly advocate for the use of corporate fines to target support for First Nations digital inclusion, so that First Nations Australians are less vulnerable to unconscionable conduct by telecommunications providers in the future. The use of the recent \$100 million fine imposed on Optus by the Federal Court would help set a new precedent for Closing the Gap.
- 2) **Ensure access to free-to-air television services:** as discussed above, VAST is at a breaking point. The complexity of current issues has left over 60 per cent of those surveyed in some communities without free-to-air television services. Funding is needed to provide terrestrial rebroadcasting, particularly in larger communities, as well as a program to repair, maintain and replace ageing infrastructure and set-top boxes.
- 3) **Support for affordability:** the School Student Broadband Initiative (SSBI) is an accessible, positive example of how government can support improved affordability for families with students, including First Nations students. However, while it provides targeted support for some First Nations families, future iterations need to be delivered in parallel to the deployment of free,

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accessible Wi-Fi programs, as well as the introduction of prepaid broadband products which are designed to meet the needs of First Nations Australians, in concert with improved affordability of prepaid mobile services, relative to postpaid.

- 4) **Sustainability of the First Nations media and broadcasting sector:** the First Nations media and broadcasting sector is key in ensuring First Nations people can access locally relevant information and continued connection with culture and community. While the one-off funding of \$12m over 3 years as part of the IBMP was welcomed by the sector, to ensure sustainability into the future more recurrent funding is required.
- 5) **Place First Nations digital inclusion at the centre of policy and regulatory reforms:** processes such as the UOMO, universal services reform and the review of the Telecommunications Consumer Protection Code, provide an unprecedented opportunity to address connectivity gaps, support improved consumer safeguards, and ensure the benefits of new technologies, such as Low-Earth Orbit Satellites (LEOSats) can be shared. Target and Outcome 17 need to be embedded in the design and delivery of new policies, programs and regulation.



Progress Report

Progress to date



Access and Availability

Recommendation 1

Increase funding for connectivity and broadcasting infrastructure in areas where industry co-investment is not feasible

Progress to date

Recommendation 1 has seen a positive response by the Australian Government and some states and territories, with the deployment of multiple programs providing connectivity solutions in community. For example, as of 29 July 2025, 23 remote communities have active connectivity services under the NBN Community Wi-Fi Program.

The operation of these services is funded until 2028. We also note the outcomes under the contestable First Nations Connectivity Wi-Fi Program, which will enable further connectivity for 53 additional remote communities. As of 30 June 2026, four communities have had their free Wi-Fi services activated – Umoona in South Australia, and Beagle Bay, and Warburton and Pandanus Park in Western Australia. Finally, we note the prioritised funding for remote communities under Round 3 of the Regional Connectivity Program, which resulted in around 30 per cent of funding going to projects which will benefit First Nations communities (compared to a target of around 15 per cent).

While a handful of jurisdictions have begun to deploy place-based solutions, such as WA's \$85 million Regional Telecommunications Project (RTP) or the NT's Rebuilding the Economy strategy, the lack of dedicated funding has undermined wider-scale deployment. While we note the potential benefits of the introduction of the UOMO, it is our view that emerging technologies such as LEOSats and direct-to-device (D2D) handsets will still be complementary to broader investment in connectivity and broadcasting infrastructure, particularly in remote and very remote areas.

CASE STUDY: Digital Inclusion in Fitzroy Crossing

Investment in Digital Inclusion in Fitzroy Crossing, including NBN Co Community Wi-Fi and Digital Champions, has led to several tangible benefits for the community.

Where Fitzroy Crossing previously suffered from a lack of access with 'spotty' phone reception and NBN SkyMuster, the NBN Community Wi-Fi program has installed connections to those in the area. This has bolstered the offerings of the Night Space run by Marra Worra Worra (MWW) Aboriginal Corporation.

NBN Co notes that these benefits are being experienced in many of the communities, such as Galiwin'ku, that have received a free Wi-Fi solution.



Next steps

The Advisory Group will continue to advocate for this recommendation through bilateral engagement with jurisdictions and via the DDMM Digital Inclusion Working Group (DIWG), as well as direct engagement with the Australian Government.

Recommendation 2 and 3

Increase co-location and shared infrastructure in the telecommunications and broadcasting sector

Increase the sharing of mobile network infrastructure by telecommunications providers in regional and remote locations

Progress to date

This recommendation is a key priority for the First Nations Telecommunications Working Group (FNTWG) and we understand that there are ongoing discussions between Telstra and NBN Co on infrastructure-sharing arrangements in specific remote communities. We look forward to hearing the outcomes of these discussions shortly.

We are pleased to see some progress by governments on this recommendation, including investment by the New South Wales (NSW) Government in active sharing mobile solutions in Brewarrina and Wilcannia. This place-based approach, developed through a partnership between OneWiFi and Pivotal, will enable other carriers to access and deliver 4G and 5G mobile services through an innovative shared model, and will bring more mobile competition and consumer choice into these communities.

More generally, we note the role that Australian Government programs, such as the Mobile Black Spot Program and the Regional Connectivity Program, can play in further encouraging infrastructure sharing, noting this needs to be embedded in programs as early as possible in their design and delivery.

Next steps

The Advisory Group has asked the FNTWG to investigate barriers to this recommendation and how they can be addressed.

The Advisory Group calls on governments to embed active sharing of infrastructure in program design and delivery frameworks, as well as their procurement rules.

Incentivising active sharing remains a key challenge in program design. Passive sharing and co-location are more viable in areas that are considered more commercially attractive – Active sharing is heavily undersubscribed across various Australian Government telecommunications programs.

Jurisdictional stakeholder, Advisory Group workshop



Recommendation 4

Investigate options for increased spectrum availability for First Nations broadcasting and telecommunications

Progress to date

We are pleased to see that the ACMA is undertaking preliminary work on the merits of place-based licensing, including how it can provide access to spectrum that is not being used by incumbent licensees (such as Telstra, Optus and TPG), while noting there has been some engagement with this recommendation from the telecommunications sector.

We understand the ACMA's work will explore whether mechanisms to better use unused spectrum could improve coverage and connectivity outcomes for rural and remote First Nations communities. We look forward to the outcomes of this process, as well as further progress on the ACMA's community broadcasting licence allocation plan.

Next steps

The Advisory Group encourages the ACMA to continue exploring place-based licensing to understand its feasibility and potential use, and to develop more detail about how it might operate.

"[We have] been advocating for spectrum license renewal conditions to include obligations to provide mobile connectivity to remote and First Nations Communities, including participating in RCP/MBSP ... For localities where spectrum is not being used (i.e. black spots), [the Government] should facilitate activation of unused spectrum at active sharing sites."

Industry stakeholder, Advisory Group workshop

Recommendation 5

Ensure access to free-to-air television services

Progress to date

The Advisory Group notes the strong interest across government and industry on this recommendation and the need to address issues with VAST. We are pleased to see this is a priority issue for DDMM, as part of its broader interest in First Nations digital inclusion. Imparja Television and Outback Internet have collaborated to deliver a low-cost retransmission model by leveraging existing Remote Indigenous Broadcasting Services (RIBS) infrastructure and facilities. However, we note that while the trial undertaken by Imparja provides a useful first step, more action is required to address the worsening situation with VAST in many communities. The Mapping the Digital Gap research found that 61 per cent of households in remote communities did not have working VAST TV or emergency broadcasting services in 2024, up from 50 per cent in 2022.

We understand that the Australian Government is considering the outcomes of the Remote and Regional Television Transmission and Reception Audit. While we understand the complexity of the current issues with VAST, we call on all governments to take action to address these issues, particularly in remote and very remote First Nations communities. This is fundamental to ensuring access to information, news and entertainment.

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Next steps

The Advisory Group will engage with Imparja on its trial of local broadcast retransmission to understand the impact, including costs and options to scale.

In areas where VAST set-top boxes remain functional, we call on Optus to make their Optus-10 and Optus D3 satellites more accessible through the removal of SMART Card renewal requirements.

The Advisory Group calls for greater engagement by all ministers with DDMM on VAST, as well as First Nations digital inclusion more generally, to help encourage the Australian Government, states and territories to do more in this space.

CASE STUDY: Digital broadcasting in Mantamaru

The Mantamaru Community has invested BHP Social Investment funds in upgrading its free-to-air rebroadcasting capabilities, in partnership with Outback Internet.

This was in response to the failure of VAST in the community, with individual VAST dishes and decoders becoming obsolete as units failed, gear getting lost as people moved between houses, resulting in people being left without a service.

Pictured is a TV rebroadcast antenna being installed on the broadcast tower in Mantamaru. The community has highlighted the importance of reliable TV as enabling connection, culture and everyday life.



This is about more than channels: free-to-air sport and children's programming matter in remote communities. Sport on TV brings families together, builds pride and social cohesion, and keeps people connected to national moments. Children's and educational broadcasts support learning, language development, and safe screen habits, particularly where digital access can be limited. Services like NITV, ABC and ICTV are especially important in the bush."

-Thomas Williams, CEO, Ngaanyatjarra Council

Recommendation 6

Improve the resilience of communications and broadcasting infrastructure, including the resilience of power supplies

Progress to date

We are pleased to see the Australian Government introduce changes to the Low Impact Facilities Determination, which will help improve mobile and fixed line connectivity, with a particular focus on regional areas. The changes will also improve the resilience of telecommunications facilities, whilst helping to reduce their energy consumption.

While this recommendation has remained an active point of discussion at our workshops, it would be useful to have greater clarity on other work which may be underway across states and territories to



address power resilience, other than contributions to Australian Government programs such as the Mobile Network Hardening Program or Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters (STAND) program.

The Advisory Group recognises that these initiatives will help ensure general resilience of networks, however, the apparent lack of dedicated network resilience projects in most jurisdictions continues to have an ongoing impact on First Nations digital inclusion, particularly in areas subject to extreme weather conditions. We have consistently heard from First Nations people and communities that power interruptions are a key driver of outages, which then has a flow-on impact to many aspects of life in those communities, including public safety and access to Triple Zero.

Next steps

The Advisory Group will advocate for further effort from the Australian Government, states and territories through bilateral engagement and the DDMM DIWG.

The Advisory Group will raise this recommendation in the context of broader work on Target 9b, as well as the First Nations Clean Energy Network.

Recommendation 7 and 26

Establish a program for place-based technicians for communications and broadcasting infrastructure repair, installation and maintenance

Encourage and support on-country employment and development

Progress to date

Recommendation 7 has seen a positive response from the telecommunications sector, with a strong interest in building on existing efforts such as NBN Co's Digital Champions and similar measures by Telstra, BAI, and other providers. We also note the engagement of First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) on this recommendation as it relates to the First Nations broadcasting sector.

In collaboration with the ATA, the FNTWG has established a dedicated subgroup to explore the concept of a shared pool of industry technicians in remote First Nations communities. We look forward to receiving further advice from the FNTWG in its interim report, which it will deliver in mid-2026.

There is further work to do on this recommendation across government. For example, support for technicians in either the telecommunications or broadcasting sector has not been identified as a high priority by governments, which means there is limited scope or opportunity to leverage programs such as the Remote Jobs and Economic Development (RJED) Program, the Indigenous Skills and Employment Program (ISEP), or through Vocational Training and Employment Centres (VTECs). It would also be good to embed place-based approaches in broader First Nations employment and training programs underway in states and territories.

Next steps

The Advisory Group will continue to develop possible options for deployment of a place-based technician program through the FNTWG.

The Advisory Group will also engage with governments on options to leverage existing skills and training programs.



CASE STUDY: Cherbourg's First Nations Digital Service Centre

The Cherbourg First Nations Service Centre (pictured, with co-chair Dot West and Advisory Group member Che Cockatoo-Collins) has created between 25 and 30 jobs as part of a three-year pilot program, designed to boost the digital economy and economic development of Queensland First Nations communities.

Through digital skills training and employment opportunities. Staff receive on-the-job training while achieving a Certificate III in Business qualification through TAFE Queensland.



The success of the Digital Service Centre model in Cherbourg can provide other communities with a basis for developing their own innovative solutions.

The Digital Service Centre demonstrates how place-based solutions, delivered in consultation with community, provide culturally appropriate opportunities for improving digital inclusion.

Recommendation 8

Expand community Wi-Fi networks to more underserved communities

Progress to date

There has been a positive uptake of Recommendation 8 across government. Place-based solutions, such as WA's Regional Telecommunications Project, NT's Rebuilding the Economy strategy, and Victoria's Connecting Victoria strategy, are actively providing connectivity to digitally excluded First Nations Australians. We note the proactive engagement of states and territories in this space, including funding for the deployment of community Wi-Fi in First Nations communities.

We are also pleased with the Australian Government's investment in free community Wi-Fi. This has resulted in NBN Co activating free community Wi-Fi in 23 communities to date, with a further 53 to come online through the First Nations Community Wi-Fi Program. Direct feedback from community leaders has suggested that communities with activated services have seen an increase in school attendance, a decrease in crime, and increased ability for people to stay in their community to access services including Centrelink.

Progress is steady, and the Advisory Group calls on all levels of government to continue the expansion and deployment of community Wi-Fi networks. The Advisory Group notes that while activated communities are benefitting, there are still hundreds of First Nations communities, outstations, town camps, and homelands that are still precluded from accessing the benefits of being digitally included.

Next steps

Throughout 2026, the Advisory Group will continue to advocate for the expansion of dedicated First Nations community Wi-Fi programs at all levels of government.

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The Advisory Group will also engage with NBN Co to encourage them to consider how to add in-house access options as part of the community Wi-Fi services in the activated 23 communities.

Progress to date Affordability

Recommendation 9 and 13

Trial a subsidised model of household connectivity in remote areas

Increase and expand funding for in-home connectivity for low-income First Nations households

Progress to date

The slow progress in the adoption of Low Earth Orbit Satellites (LEOSats) has impacted on delivery of this recommendation. Currently, there is little competition in the LEOSats market, although this will change in the short to medium term, due to key developments such as NBN Co's partnership with Amazon Kuiper, or Pivotal's partnership with Eutelsat OneWeb.

As telecommunications providers expand their LEOSat offerings, it is critical that consideration be given to pricing structures which will support take up by First Nations Australians, including subsidies for their use by key organisations in underserved communities, as well as options such as prepaid or low-cost post-paid plans. We understand NBN Co is currently considering a prepaid pilot in a small number of remote communities and look forward to receiving further updates from NBN Co on this matter shortly.

A program such as the SSBI provides a model on which a subsidised product could be offered. We commend the Australian Government and NBN Co for the positive outcomes of SSBI, which has seen around 30,000 families with school-aged children receive an NBN service for free. We note that NBN Co is considering future options for SSBI families and will continue to engage with NBN Co as the path forward is confirmed.

Next steps

The Advisory Group will continue to advocate for affordable access to LEOSats through future consultations on implementation of the UOMO and the LEOSats Working Group, as appropriate.

The Advisory Group calls on governments to secure funding for a First Nations-specific program like SSBI, that would help support progress on this recommendation.

The Advisory Group seeks strengthened engagement by the Australian Government, state and territory Ministers, through the DDMM, to support increased investment for subsidised or free connectivity for First Nations Australians.

Recommendation 10 and 14

Future proof handset devices used by First Nations consumers

Establish a national device bank

Progress to date

The Advisory Group would like to highlight the work of the National Device Bank, led by WorkVentures, Good Things Australia and Good360 Australia, with support from NBN Co and Telstra. The newly

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established device bank supplies refurbished, future-proofed technology to low-income and digitally excluded First Nations Australians. The First Nations Device Bank Trial as of November 2025 distributed 477 devices to over 20 communities and provided digital coaching to 103 recipients.

We are pleased to see that telecommunications providers, as well as states and territories, have arrangements in place for device donation. It is important that these broad efforts are aligned to ensure communities are not missing out, and that they are delivered in partnership with, or led by, First Nations organisations.

We are aware independent trials have been undertaken by the Australian Government to help inform whether LEOSats can deliver high-quality fixed voice services in regional and remote areas. We understand trial data showed good LEOSat performance across key service quality metrics, and indicated that weather and climate conditions generally did not impact performance.

While efforts underway across industry, government and the not-for-profit sector provide a strong starting point for this recommendation, we urge all parties to consider how their programs can be adapted to include D2D handsets in the future. We note that a lack of affordable devices has led to a significant number of outdated handsets in community, some of which may not be able to access D2D technology when the UOMO comes into effect. We also note that the provision of rugged cases with donated devices would help keep them from being damaged and prevent incurring additional costs to repair or replace devices, which is particularly important in remote areas where screen repair is not available.

Next steps

The Advisory Group will engage with stakeholders through the National Device Bank to direct devices to remote First Nations communities, as well as through the Tech Reuse for Good Charter Steering Committee, of which the Advisory Group is a member. The Advisory Group will similarly encourage further action through the FNTWG.

The Advisory Group calls on governments and industry to undertake an analysis of handsets currently on the market / in use to understand which are already D2D capable, to help inform future regulatory standards for handsets for sale in Australia. The Advisory Group will work with the department to ensure the results of LEOSat trials are considered as part of the Australian Government's work on modernising the delivery of universal services.

During the implementation of the UOMO, it would be useful to include a focus on affordable D2D mobile devices, including with options for prepaid device plans. The Advisory Group will write to Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) on this matter.

Recommendation 11

Continue to provide non-digital modes of service delivery

Progress to date

Over 2025, the Advisory Group has seen a positive response to Recommendation 11 and commends the ongoing commitment to alternative modes of service delivery from all levels of government. The Advisory Group notes that the Australian Government, as well as many states and territories, have committed to providing non-digital service delivery through a variety of avenues, including physical offices and telephone support.

We are pleased to see the Australian Government's ongoing engagement with the banking sector, including the moratorium on branch closures for two and half years, as well as commitments to Bank@Post. We are keen to see similar commitments from telecommunications providers. It is also

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encouraging to see the initial outcomes of a pilot to support non-digital forms of ID verification to support First Nations Australians accessing Digital ID, although we do remain concerned at the potential impact the increasing use of Digital ID will have on already digitally excluded First Nations Australians.

In our view, progressing this recommendation requires not just an ongoing commitment to non-digital forms of service delivery but also targeted activities to raise visibility of those non-digital options. This will help ensure First Nations Australians are aware of their options for accessing services and can do so confidently and effectively.

Next Steps

The Advisory Group will advocate for greater non-digital support through the FNTWG – this includes advocating for wider adoption of First Nations-focused programs and resources, including telephone support, translations into local languages, and awareness raising of these resources through First Nations media campaigns.

Recommendation 12

Provide unmetered access to gov.au domains, First Nations news services and a potential future First Nations domain

Progress to date

The Advisory Group is yet to see progress on Recommendation 12. For First Nations Australians who have limited data allowances, providing unmetered access to gov.au domains will mean that they will not have to 'ration' their finite data to access online government services, such as Centrelink or Medicare.

The Advisory Group urges all governments to work with telecommunications providers to explore a joined-up approach to providing unmetered access to government websites and First Nations news streaming services.

Next steps

Over 2026, the Advisory Group will advocate for unmetered access to gov.au domains and First Nations news services through the FNTWG.

Recommendation 15

Encourage telecommunications providers to offer prepaid broadband to First Nations consumers

Progress to date

There has been limited progress on this recommendation. With 99 per cent of mobile users surveyed in 2024 using pre-paid services, and households spending an average \$280 per month on data, the cost of mobile data remains a major concern in communities. The Advisory Group notes Anglicare Australia's submission to the 2024 Regional Telecommunications Review:



The people in regional and rural communities that are impacted by digital exclusion are often also battling financial insecurity. Analysis of income support data published by the Department of Social Services shows that people in regional and rural Australia are disproportionately represented in receiving income support payments.

Just over one in four Australians live in regional or rural communities. Yet, 42 percent of those on the JobSeeker payment, 43 percent of Age Pension recipients and 47 percent of people receiving the Parenting Payment live in regional or rural Australia.

Anglicare Australia

The Advisory Group recognises the work of telecommunications providers such as Launtel and Exetel, who provide customers with prepaid options for broadband services, however, we understand that these services are not available on SkyMuster, which limits their availability in some remote areas. More generally, we understand concerns about risks/uncertainty of a prepaid model is precluding other providers from offering prepaid broadband services.

We also understand there is strong ongoing interest in prepaid broadband from NBN Co's LIDIF and encourage these discussions to continue.

Next steps

The Advisory Group will continue to advocate for prepaid broadband through the FNTWG, using the Launtel and TPG prepaid services as examples of functional products currently on the market.

More generally, we encourage NBN Co to consider pausing or further reducing charges for service reactivation, which we have heard can be an impediment to telecommunications providers offering prepaid.

Recommendation 16

Establish a Donate Your Data scheme for First Nations Australians

Progress to date

We commend Optus for its partnership with The Smith Family, which helps close the digital divide by providing eligible students and families with a free Optus Prepaid service with data, calls and text, as well as the opportunity to receive additional data that is donated by Optus customers.

We note that despite strong support for this recommendation from stakeholders, data donation does not seem to be more widespread in the telecommunications sector.

Next steps

The Advisory Group will continue to advocate for a Donate your Data scheme through the FNTWG, using the Optus scheme as an example of an effective model.



Progress to date Digital Ability

Recommendation 17, 18 and 19

Provide more funding for digital mentor programs

Provide digital training and support for target groups of First Nations Australians

Provide more funding for the First Nations Digital Support Hub

Progress to date

The Advisory Group understands the complexities of the First Nations Digital Support Hub and the Network of Digital Mentors and appreciate the Australian Government's commitment to delivering them as soon as possible.

More generally, we note that governments and telecommunications providers are delivering measures related to digital literacy, such as the Community Champions program in WA, and the Deadly Digital Communities program in QLD.

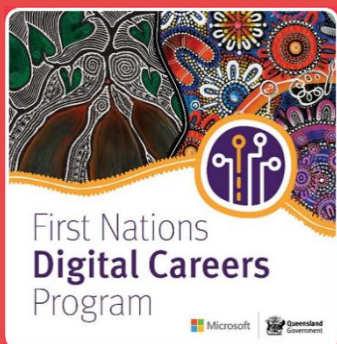
It is important these measures are aligned and resources are being leveraged effectively to deliver maximum outcomes within the funding envelope available. The DDMM DIWG provides a mechanism for this kind of collaboration, as do NBN Co's LIDIF and Telstra's Consumer Roundtable.

Next Steps

The Advisory Group will continue to engage with the Australian Government on design and delivery of the First Nations digital inclusion programs.

We call on all levels of government to provide additional funding for digital literacy programs, including ongoing funding for both the First Nations Digital Support Hub and the Network of Digital Mentors.

CASE STUDY: First Nations Digital Careers Program



The First Nations Digital Careers Program, piloted in 2022 and now in its fourth year, supports placements each year for First Nations individuals.

Established by the Queensland Government in partnership with Microsoft, the program provides paid employment with a government or industry organisation while completing study in a nominated digital course, with study options catered to a range of interests and skill levels.

Program graduates receive a nationally recognised Certificate in Information Technology upon completion, on-the-job training to gain real-world experience and skills, mentoring and support, and real job opportunities after finishing their traineeship.

With over 30 graduates achieving a Cert III or IV in IT, and 28 graduates securing permanent full-time employment, the First Nations Digital Careers Program highlights the impact of delivering culturally appropriate opportunities for improving digital inclusion.



Recommendation 20

Provide place-based cyber-safety initiatives

Progress to date

The Advisory Group notes limited progress on this recommendation and believes ongoing investment is required to help keep vulnerable cohorts of First Nations Australians, such as those living with disability and Elders, safe online.

We are pleased to see the publication of new online safety materials by the eSafety Commissioner, *Safer Together* (for children from 5 to 12 years old) and *Leaving Deadly Digital Footprints* (for young people 13 to 16 years old); however, these are part of a national information campaign rather than place-based initiatives. Similarly, other regulators such as the ACMA and the ACCC are increasingly aware of the risks of online harms to First Nations Australians, however, information is relatively general rather than specific to community.

The apparent lack of broader place-based cyber-safety initiatives means that First Nations people are still at higher risk of harms such as scams, online gambling, and technology-assisted abuse such as cyber-bullying. As outlined above, there may be scope for this kind of place-based support through the Network of Digital Mentors.

Next steps

The Advisory Group will continue to advocate for place-based initiatives in our engagement with states, territories and regulatory bodies.

The Advisory Group will engage with the e-Safety Commissioner on the need for place-based initiatives as part of future funding / programs to support online safety more generally.

The Advisory Group will engage with the Australian Government as it develops the Digital Duty of Care.



Progress to date

Information, News, and Media

Recommendation 21

Provide funding for First Nations radio services in areas where they are not present

Progress to date

The Advisory Group's discussions with industry stakeholders have noted a strong appetite for expansion into areas where services are not present. We understand that the ACMA is considering community broadcasting licence allocation planning and look forward to the outcomes of this process.

Next steps

The Advisory Group will engage with the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) and the ACMA to find a way forward on this recommendation.

Recommendation 22

Use First Nations media to raise awareness of programs and initiatives

Progress to date

The Advisory Group believes more can be done by governments and the telecommunications sector to engage with the First Nations media and broadcasting sector. We were pleased with the decision to include First Nations media in the national information campaign on social media age assurance and hope to see this model adopted for future government advertising. We note, however, that a mandatory requirement to use First Nations media is not included in the whole-of-government advertising framework.

In almost every forum the Advisory Group has attended, we have been disheartened to learn that visibility of products and services to support First Nations digital inclusion is notably quite low across First Nations communities. This needs to be addressed to ensure the benefits of these policies and programs are delivered where they are needed most. This recommendation, if actioned, would also help support the sustainability of the First Nations media and broadcasting sector in the future.

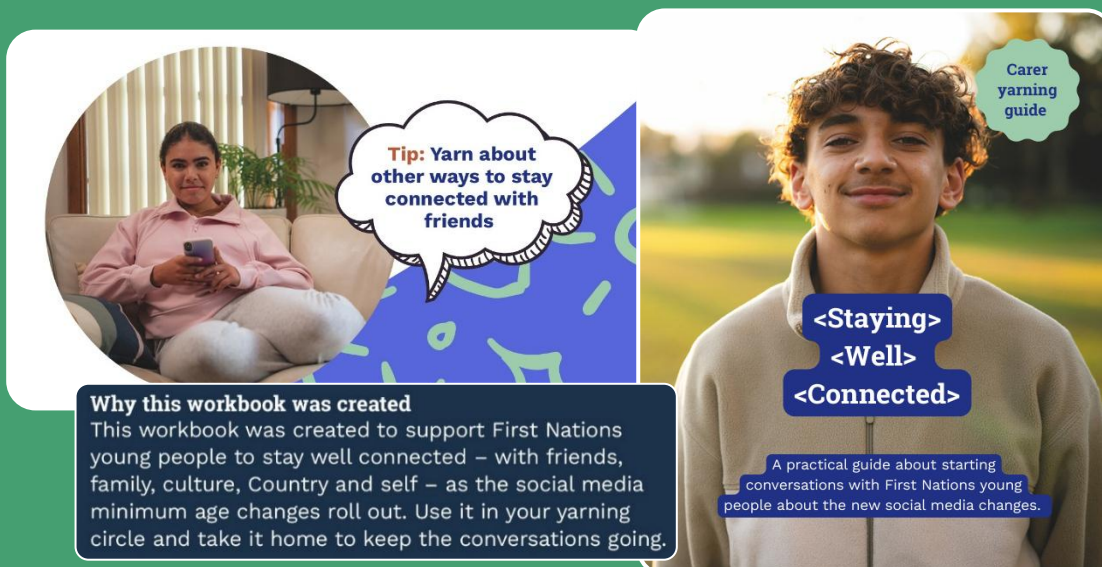
Next steps

The Advisory Group will engage with the FNTWG to promote the uptake of First Nations Media by telecommunications providers.

The Advisory Group will also engage with Universal McCann and governments on options for a regulated First Nations media spend for government advertising campaigns.



CASE STUDY: 33creative & <Staying> <Well> <Connected>



To support the *Social Media Minimum Age Campaign*, The Department (Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts) engaged 33 Creative, a First Nations specialist agency, to develop resources to help First Nations parents and young people prepare for the introduction of the Social Media Minimum Age legislation. The Staying Well Connected guides were co-designed with First Nations kids, parents, and carers from Gimuy, Queensland.

The guides use storytelling, case studies and interactive activities to highlight positive online behaviours, in a culturally safe and relevant context. 33Creative have approached the messaging through the lens of community connection, using strategies like in-person events at the Koori Knockout, and online strategies like The Staying Well Connected vodcast with Luke Carroll, Joe Williams, and Jarin Baigen, published on the eSafety website.

The team from 33 Creative engaged with parents and young people at the Koori Knockout, highlighting the efficacy of culturally sensitive approaches:

- >600 total engagements with teenagers across two days.
- 300 structured one-to-one yarns with kids aged 12-15.
- 300 'boundary cards' (self-declared ways of reducing screentime) completed.
- 750/750 printed resources distributed.

As part of the campaign, 33Creative distributed a resource kit containing the parent/carer yarning guide, the student workbook, a sticker, and two A5 mini posters to 65 First Nations-majority schools Australia-wide.



Progress to date Data

Recommendation 23 & 24

Commit to data sovereignty in government and industry programs which impact First Nations communities and organisations

Establish data sharing arrangements between governments and telecommunications providers

Progress to date

While there has been a positive response to these recommendations (which align with Priority Reform 4 in the National Agreement), we note that progress has been limited, with very few programs to date embedding data sovereignty in their design, and limited sharing of data across governments.

The approach by RMIT in the design of the Measuring Data for First Nations Australians project is commendable, as is NSW Government's partnership with BlaQ ACCO, whereby data is held and owned by First Nations people. We also understand that the NT Government is leading a project on data sharing within the DDMM DIWG.

The launch of the First Nations Data Mapping Tool is also a positive step forward. This mapping tool will allow First Nations communities and councils to explore and understand connectivity data from a geographic perspective.

However, the Mapping Tool is quite technical to use, and we remain concerned that the data available on it may not be accessible to people with limited technical skills (or who have limited pre-paid data available). It is also unclear the extent to which states and territories are sharing data for inclusion on the Mapping Tool.

Next steps

The Advisory Group will engage with the telecommunications sector through the FNTWG to support greater data sovereignty for First Nations individuals.

The Advisory Group will engage through the DDMM to advocate for data sovereignty as an element of broader data sharing between states, territories and the Australian Government.

Licensed carriers are required to submit coverage maps to the ACCC annually, however, data-sets/maps are not standardised and are only point-in-time, making comparisons difficult with no option for consumers to understand real-time connectivity.

Jurisdictional stakeholder, Advisory Group workshop



Progress to date



Governance and Advocacy

Recommendation 25

Strengthen governance arrangements for Target 17 to support continued improvement of First Nations digital inclusion

Progress to date

This recommendation will be considered as part of the Target 17 refresh.

Next steps

The Advisory Group will work with government and the Coalition of Peaks as part of the refresh process. The Advisory Group will continue to engage with the NIAA and the Coalition of Peaks regarding a Formal Policy Partnership and a review of the indicators for Target 17.

Recommendation 27

Reallocate funds from fines to media and telecommunications companies for breaching regulatory codes

Progress to date

The Advisory Group welcomes the interest across government in acting on this recommendation, and we note that it has also been strongly supported by states and territories. While we understand the complexity of the advised approach outlined in this recommendation, we would reiterate that support for First Nations digital inclusion will help ensure First Nations Australians are less vulnerable to this kind of conduct in the future.

Next steps

The Advisory Group will continue to engage with Optus, the ACCC, and the department to advocate for the reallocation of the Optus fine.

Recommendation 28

Establish a fair pricing regime for telecommunications and IT services

Progress to date

The 2024 Regional Telecommunications Review found that:

Affordability remains a significant barrier to accessing appropriate telecommunications services throughout regional, rural and remote Australia and particularly in remote First Nations communities.

Technological transitions, such as the shift from 3G to 4G, may impose significant financial burdens on rural and remote residents.



The affordability challenge extends beyond monthly service fees to include essential equipment costs, such as routers, antennas, and mobile phone repeaters.

The Advisory Group acknowledges that some progress is being made towards creating a fairer pricing regime for consumers. We have welcomed the Australian Government's efforts to support the NBN Community Wi-Fi program which is already having a positive impact on those communities chosen to be connected under this scheme.

We also welcome the greater equity of service which will be delivered through the UOMO, which will require MNOs to provide equitable and fair coverage to all Australians. We note, however, that UOMO will only be implemented from 2027, which is outside the current timeframe for Target 17 of 2026.

We also recognise and welcome Telstra's introduction of the Pre-Paid Community Mobile plan, which provides free calls and SMS messages, and 25GB of data for 14 days, which allows First Nations communities access to a dedicated product that recognises the needs of remote and very remote First Nations communities.

The Advisory Group believes that more can be done on pricing generally to ensure that the relatively high cost of getting and staying connected in remote and very remote areas is considered.

Next steps

The Advisory Group will closely monitor the development and application of the UOMO and provide advice to government as necessary.

We will also ask the FNTWG to explore pricing regimes as part of their consideration of affordability more broadly.

Recommendation 29

Conduct an economic analysis of the digital divide for First Nations Australians, including costs to close the gap and the cost of inaction

Progress to date

The Advisory Group is glad to note the strong uptake of this recommendation by the Australian Government, through the department's Bureau of Communications, Arts and Regional Research (BCARR). BCARR has recently delivered its 'Phase 1' economic analysis of the digital divide, which has drawn from recently released datasets from both the ADII and RMIT's Measuring Digital Inclusion for First Nations Australians project, as well as the Mapping the Digital Gap project.

The report draws clear connections between the benefits of digital inclusion and increased health, security, economic prosperity and social sustainability. The report also notes, however, that there remains considerable information and data gaps which would need to be closed before further quantitative economic analysis could be undertaken.

Next steps

The Advisory Group looks forward to further research, building on the above report, that would provide insight to government on the true costs involved with the digital gap.



Recommendation 30

Improve First Nations representation across the telecommunications sector

Progress to date

To date, the Advisory Group has seen little progress on this recommendation from across the telecommunications sector. We note that the role of First Nations advocates within Telstra and NBN Co (Ms Lauren Ganley and Mr Che Cockatoo-Collins) has helped ensure First Nations perspectives are considered with those organisations, and we encourage other providers to consider establishing similar roles.

We also acknowledge that some providers are actively seeking to recruit First Nations Australians into trainee roles, however, we believe that First Nations representation at more senior levels is critical as well. We have engaged with Optus on this recommendation, as part of its broader response to the Federal Court matter regarding its unconscionable conduct.

Next steps

Throughout 2026, the Advisory Group will advocate for First Nations representation in the telecommunications sector through the FNTWG.