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Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts

BUREAU OF COMMUNICATIONS, ARTS AND REGIONAL RESEARCH

Impacts of closing the Digital Divide for First Nations Australians

A social and economic analysis

October 2026



The Department acknowledges the traditional owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures and to their Elders both past and present.
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1. Introduction

Recommendation 29 of the First Nations Digital Inclusion Roadmap requests an economic analysis of the digital divide for First Nations Australians. Currently there is limited research on the direct impacts on First Nations Australians from closing the digital divide. This document presents the evidence available and information gaps as well as potential next steps for the analysis.

In 2024, the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group (the Advisory Group) published a First Nations Digital Inclusion Roadmap (the Roadmap), designed to guide digital inclusion beyond 2026 (First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group, 2024). The report outlines 30 recommendations addressing core aspects of digital inclusion with a view to achieving Closing the Gap Target 17, including consideration of access and availability, affordability, digital ability, information news and media, data and governance and advocacy. Digital inclusion and Target 17 are critical enablers of other Closing the Gap targets (see Table 3).

Recommendation 29 of the Roadmap requests the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts (the department) conduct an economic analysis of the digital divide for First Nations Australians. The recommendation outlines:

> **While the Advisory Group has welcomed the announcements in the 2024-25 Federal Budget around digital inclusion, further analysis on the social return on investment for funding towards First Nations digital inclusion would provide greater insight into how to close the digital divide. This, in turn, would provide another source of evidence for policy development for First Nations digital inclusion, and would ensure that efforts are being directed effectively.**
> First Nations Digital Inclusion Roadmap, 2024

The department's Bureau of Communications, Arts and Regional Research (BCARR) proposed to undertake foundational research, examining publicly available research to identify the types of impacts which could be achieved by closing the digital divide. This research would inform a literature review or meta-analysis style document, which could be leveraged by any future potential work to deliver quantitative analysis and modelling. This approach was endorsed by the Advisory Group in October 2025.

This report details the findings and analysis resulting from this foundational analysis. It synthesises evidence to identify the potential impacts of closing the digital divide for First Nations Australians and assesses whether these impacts are sufficiently evidenced to support future quantification or modelling of impacts.

Balancing cultural perspectives with quantifiable data

This paper reviews existing research that offers insights into closing the digital gap. The project team has endeavoured to draw on available Indigenous data, however many of the estimates and impacts available in the literature are not specific to First Nations Australians. As a result, some important benefits of closing the digital gap—like stronger community ties or passing on cultural knowledge—sit outside what standard economic frameworks can capture, and are unlikely to be fully reflected in any potential modelling estimates. Additionally, the authors of this research are non-First Nations people and unable to analyse data from this perspective. It is recommended any future work be First Nations-led and informed by community perspectives, cultural context and Indigenous data governance. Recognising the holistic value, sociocultural data and examples have been included when available.

2. Digital inclusion – the current state of play

Digital technologies can play an essential role in fostering social and cultural connection including through strengthening community ties, overcoming geographic isolation and supporting cultural expression. They have become a central part of modern life; they are essential for connecting to family and friends, preserving cultural ties, and accessing information, employment, markets and services.

2.1 What is digital inclusion?

Digital inclusion refers to equitable access to digital opportunities and reflects the extent to which people can engage with these opportunities. In the First Nations Digital Inclusion Plan that the Roadmap builds on, digital inclusion is described as ensuring that all Australians can access, afford and benefit from digital technology and the associated socio-economic opportunities (National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2023).

Recent research on the digital inclusion of First Nations Australians has framed this concept similarly – adding that access should be reliable, safe and affordable – and that digital inclusion means having 'the skills, confidence, and opportunities needed to participate fully in social, cultural and economic life' (Featherstone, et al., 2025). Further, for First Nations Australians specifically, digital inclusion 'is more than connectivity. It is about exercising informed decision-making, cultural agency, and self-determination in a rapidly transforming digital world …'.

Within this context, the internet can be considered a human right that is a means of participation in economic, social and cultural life (United Nations, 2021). Internet use at home has become nearly universal—in 2025, just 1% of Australian adults did not have an internet connection at home (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2026).[1] For First Nations Australians, home internet access rates have increased but remain lower than the rest of the population. The proportion of First Nations households with any form of home internet improved from 67% in 2010 to 96% in 2022 (BCARR, 2025).[2]

Inequality in the access and use of digital technologies represents a digital divide in Australia. Digital exclusion can lead people to fall behind in their ability to access information, opportunities, services, and to stay connected and contribute economically and socially.

The Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan Discussion Paper outlines multiple dimensions to digital inclusion which contribute towards the Roadmap's goal of digital inclusion for First Nations Australians (NIAA, 2021):

- Availability: all communities have the connectivity they need,
- Access: all communities have the devices needed to get online,
- Affordability: all First Nations people can afford reliable internet services whether fixed line or mobile,
- Ability: all First Nations people have the skills to be online safely and effectively.

Together, these elements indicate the extent of a person's digital inclusion, and it is improving digital inclusion that will help bridge the digital divide. This paper focuses on digital inclusion and its impacts to help understand why and how important it is to close the digital divide between First Nations Australians and the rest of the population.

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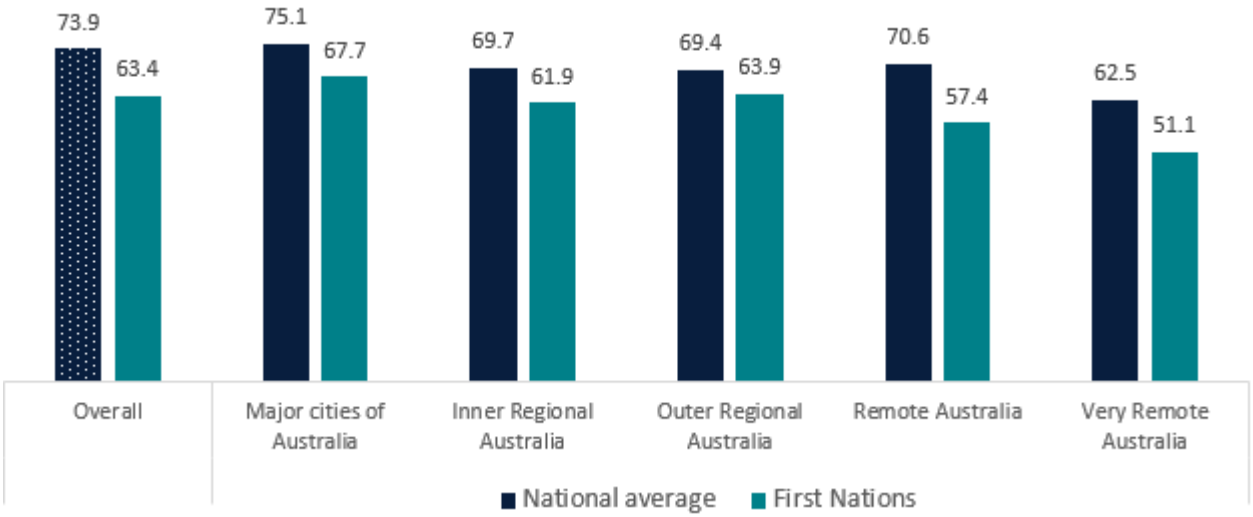
[1] The ACMA's annual consumer surveys leverage the Social Research Centre's probability-based *Life in Australia* online panel and received a total of 5,990 respondents at June 2025 (including both First Nations Australians and Non-First Nations Australians).

[2] The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey data underrepresent the Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population as the survey does not sample remote and very remote areas, where 9.4% of the Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples live.

2.2 The size of the digital divide

Data from the latest Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII)[3] showed that First Nations Australians were digitally excluded at twice the rate (41%) of other Australians (20%). The ADII found a 10.5-point gap between the national average and First Nations average in 2024 (Figure 1). For all Australians, digital inclusion is lower outside of urban areas. However, the digital gap for First Nations Australians appears to widen in more remote areas – shown by the 13.2-point gap in remote Australia compared to the 7.4-point gap in major cities.

Figure 1. Total index scores in the ADII, 2024



Source: ADII 2025.
Note: The 'Overall' figure reports the digital inclusion gap between First Nations and non-First Nations Australians. While all data by remoteness compares the First Nations ADII score to the National Average (which includes First Nations Australians).

The 2025 ADII contains a larger sample of First Nations Australians which allows for more detailed insights into their digital inclusion across three dimensions: Access, Affordability[4] and Digital Ability. Between 2022 and 2024, digital ability improved for First Nations Australians (from an index score of 60.7 to 68.6) while digital access scores remained relatively unchanged (an improvement of 0.3 points).[5]

How location influences digital inclusion

Digital inclusion varies for First Nations Australians based on a range of factors including age, education level, employment status and geography. Location matters because digital inclusion gaps widen in remote areas. First Nations people represent a higher proportion of the remote population (where the digital divide is wider) than the non-remote population. This highlights the need to analyse digital inclusion data through a regional and remote lens – as remoteness increases, the digital gap widens. Though location is a key driver of digital inclusion, First Nations communities each experience digital inclusion (and exclusion) across each of the measures of access, affordability and digital ability in different ways (Featherstone, et al., 2025). Overall however, the majority of First Nations Australians live in non-remote areas (Table 1). The 2022-23 NATSIHS survey[6] indicates that non-remote First Nations people were more likely to be using the internet every day (85.3%) compared to those in remote areas (60.8%).

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[3] The 2025 ADII draws on data collected in 2024 and included a boosted First Nations sample (of approximately 2,800 First Nations Australians).
[4] In 2025, the affordability dimension was revised and is not comparable with previous versions of the ADII.
[5] The 2024 data for the overall ADII index and Affordability index are not comparable to previous years.
[6] This data is based on a survey of 4,900 households across Australia between August 2022 and March 2024.

Table 1. Distribution of First Nations population by remoteness level, 2021 Census and 2025 ADII

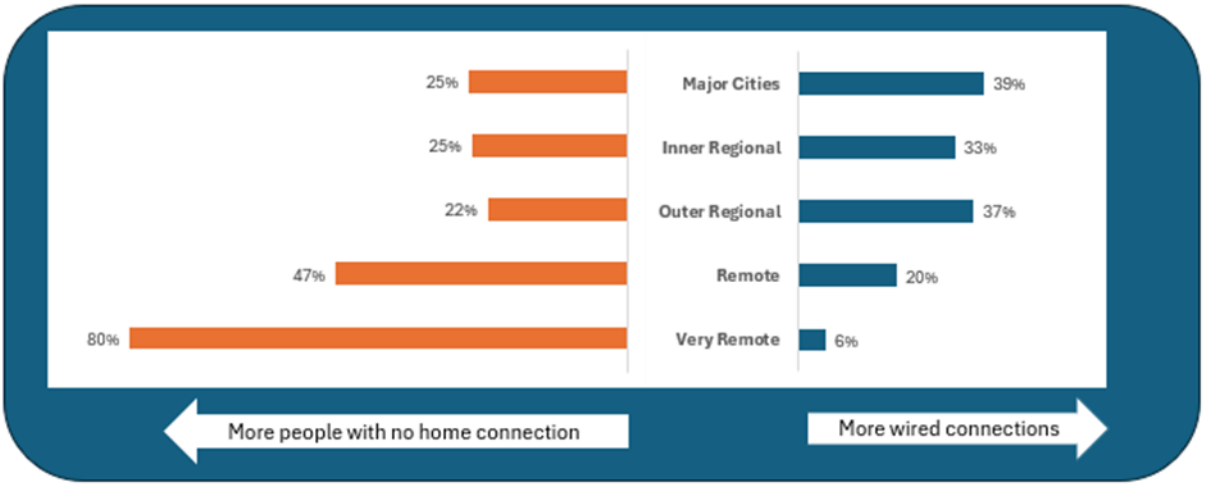
Remoteness Level	First Nations population	Total population	First Nations proportion of locality (%)	Digital inclusion gap
Major Cities	334,259	18,315,048	1.8%	-6.2
Inner Regional	203,876	4,535,738	4.5%	-12.0
Outer Regional	150,118	2,049,015	7.3%	-10.0
Remote	44,072	287,367	15.3%	-16.5
Very Remote	74,135	182,689	40.6%	-22.8

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022, ADII 2025.
Note: Population from 2021 Census. ADII data from 2025 release.

Different locations face different digital challenges. In outer-suburban contexts such as Western Sydney, where services are generally available, a key gap is device availability and suitability to support everyday study, work and family needs (Dastyari, Sullivan, Itaoui, & Hourigan, 2025). By contrast, in regional and remote locations, challenges are more likely to centre on availability and reliability of connections, compounded by limited provider choice (BlaQ, 2025). Affordability is a challenge in all locations, but in remote areas it can be harder to overcome because higher costs are combined with fewer technologies and fewer providers when services are poor or unavailable.

The ADII highlights the access challenges by location. The data shows that in very remote areas, 80% of First Nations households were without a home connection, while only 6% had a fixed-line connection (Figure 2). This highlights that a home connection is one aspect of improved access, but the connection type and quality also matter.

Figure 2. Type of home internet connection – No connection or wired connection, by remoteness

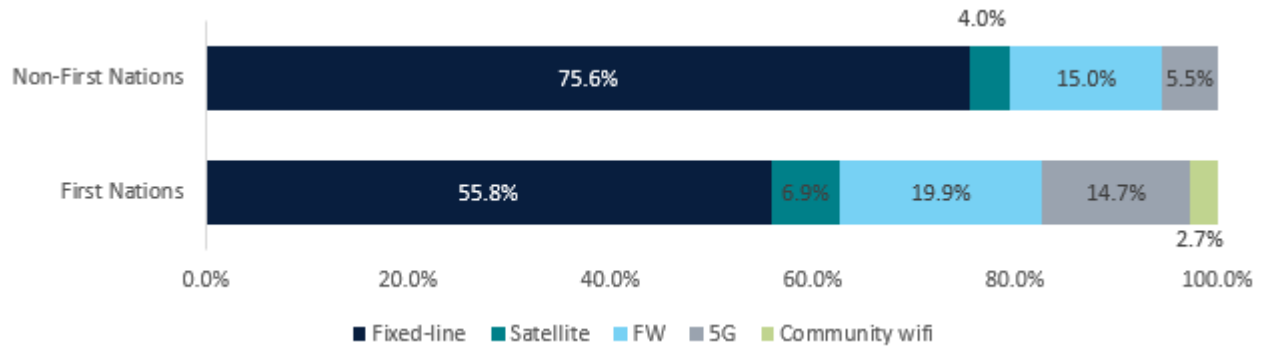


Source: ADII 2024 dashboard, BCARR calculations.
Note: Data for First Nations people only. Wired connection includes NBN Wired, ADSL and Cable.

Among households that have an internet connection, differences in how people connect are clear. Figure 3 shows that non-First Nations households are more likely to have a fixed-line home connection (NBN or non-NBN), while First Nations households often rely on mobile, fixed wireless, satellite, or community Wi-Fi. These

patterns reflect geographic factors—such as fixed-line services are more available in metropolitan areas—as well as affordability and coverage issues.

Figure 3. Home connection type for those with a connection, 2024



Source: ADII 2024, BCARR calculations.
Note: Fixed-line includes NBN wired, ADSL and cable.

3. Potential impacts of closing the digital divide for First Nations Australians

A review of the literature has identified that impacts from closing the digital divide can be both positive (benefits) and negative (disbenefits or costs). These impacts for First Nations Australians have been analysed according to the five themes of the *Measuring What Matters* wellbeing framework[7]—Prosperous, Healthy, Secure, Sustainable, and Cohesive.

The impacts of closing the digital divide can be analysed from a macro or a micro perspective. A macro perspective examines economy-wide impacts, such as changes to gross domestic product or shifts in the composition of the labour market. A micro perspective focuses on the impacts experienced by individuals, households and communities, such as changes to personal or household incomes, health or wellbeing. This analysis takes a micro focus, which enables analysis of the specific costs and benefits to First Nations individuals which may result from becoming digitally included. For the purposes of this analysis, impacts have been analysed in isolation, and do not take into account other factors which may influence outcomes for First Nations Australians.

3.1 Prosperous

> A society that has a dynamic, strong economy, invests in people's skills and education, and provides broad opportunities for employment and well-paid, secure jobs (The Treasury, 2024).

Benefits

Increased employment

Improving digital inclusion could support better access to jobs and workforce participation for First Nations Australians. Digital connectivity can open up access to job search information and opportunities, build skills and education and expand options to engage online with colleagues and the workplace. Reliability and quality are important features of connectivity to realise these benefits effectively.

Employment impacts associated with improved digital inclusion include gaining employment, changing careers and accessing volunteering opportunities (Good Things Australia, 2024). Organisations such as West Australian geospatial consultancy Winyama have fostered positive outcomes in this area, helping upskill and employ First Nations Australians in digital technology roles, and prioritising support and collaboration with other First Nations businesses to achieve job creation, along with economic empowerment, cultural preservation and community development (Winyama, 2026).

Further, these types of outcomes could help address identified barriers to employment such as the relative lack of access to high-quality and relevant training (NIAA, Employment, 2025), and mismatch between educational qualifications and job opportunities (CSIRO, 2025).

There is a negative relationship between remoteness, employment and labour force participation for First Nations Australians (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2025a)(Figure 4). Increased digital inclusion could improve access to employment opportunities for First Nations Australians, through expanding the possibilities in working from anywhere, enabling businesses to access new markets, and facilitating online training and education. It could give more power and options to First Nations job seekers facing challenges of

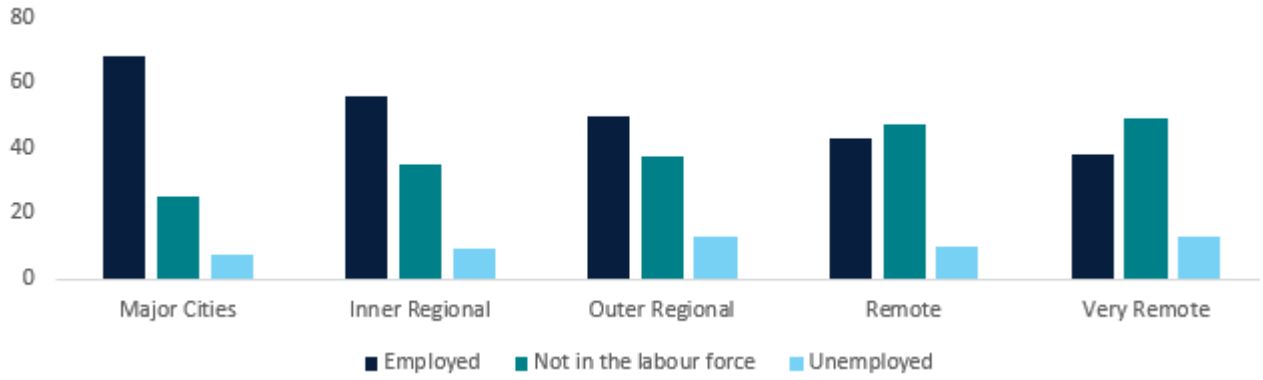
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[7] Treasury (2024). The framework has been developed with a view to informing policy development and evaluation and can be used in areas of policy that require cross-government collaboration to improve Australians lives.

geography—digital platforms enhance job seekers' ability to search for jobs, apply for jobs, and to keep looking for jobs for longer (Brookings, 2025). The Healthy Country AI and Digital Impact Program is one example showcasing how training in the use digital technologies is enabling First Nations Australians to access employment on Country, while supporting engagement with traditional knowledge and cultural practices alongside use of digital technologies such as drones and camera traps to manage natural resources and deliver environmental, cultural, social and economic development outcomes. (CSIRO, 2023) (NIAA, Indigenous Rangers Program, 2026)

However, there are many drivers which contribute towards Australian's participation in the labour force, including retirement, long term health conditions, caring responsibilities and study (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2025a). It is therefore unclear to what degree increased digital inclusion may impact upon participation rates for First Nations Australians.[8]

Figure 4. First Nations labour force status by remoteness, 2022-23 (%)



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2025a.
Note: Labour force status by remoteness, First Nations people aged 15–64, 2022–23.

CSIRO analysis of job advertisement data found there can be a substantial mismatch in the skills and positions employers are looking to fill in a particular geographic location, and the availability of First Nations workers with those skills in that location (CSIRO, 2025).

Digital platforms can help overcome barriers like these by better connecting workers with employers. For example, tools like CSIRO's Indigenous Jobs Map can provide insights for employers to better target Indigenous recruitment strategies; while for employees they can expand the information available and help identify locations and industries where employers are seeking First Nations workers and the qualifications they require.

More broadly, improving digital inclusion could position First Nations job seekers to benefit from the growing demand for jobs that require digital skills—an estimated 87% of jobs in Australia require digital literacy skills at 2021 (Australian Government, 2021), and analysis of job advertisement data has found that data and digital skills are among the fastest emerging skills in the economy. Of note is that the growing demand for digital and data skills has been shown to be impacting a range of occupations, not just ICT occupations (NSC, 2022).

Higher incomes

Strengthening digital skills and abilities has the potential to lead to positive income-related benefits, with First Nations Australians standing to benefit in this area where digital inclusion is improved (Cebr, 2025; Garcia-Lazaro et al, 2025). Organisations such as Goanna Education—an Indigenous-led education and training provider—have helped to provide pathways into ICT-related education and career opportunities for First

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[8] This could be a component of any potential further analysis, which could for instance focus on modelling the socio-economic impacts of closing the gap.

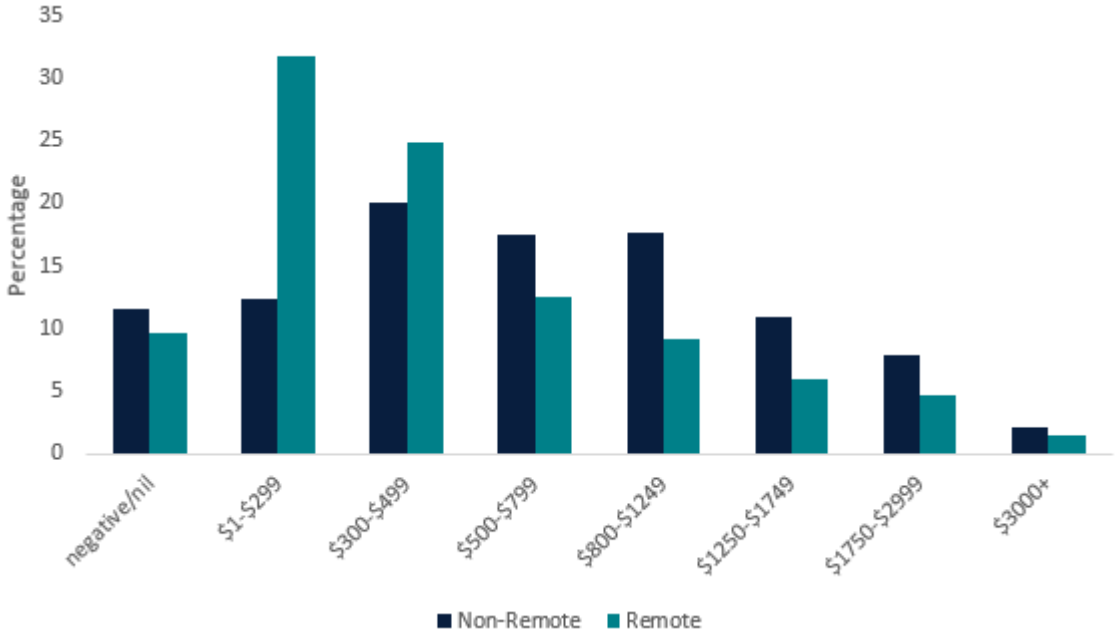
Nations Australians, seeking to support economic development in communities and helping young First Nations Australians to 'learn on country and earn on country' (National Indigenous Times, 2023).

The previous section noted that digital skills can create opportunities for new jobs; they can also support and provide opportunities for progression in existing employment (King's Trust Group, 2024). These are outcomes that can achieve a positive impact on income levels. Further, having a workforce with positive levels of digital literacy has the potential to deliver productivity gains to firms, who can in turn reward employees with higher wages (Brookings, 2025). Strengthening digital skills among First Nations job seekers and communities represents a step towards closing the digital divide.

Improving the level of digital inclusion could also allow access to the resources and training needed to upskill, without having to relocate (refer to the *Improved opportunities to sustain connection to Country* section). It could also support increased opportunities to gain employment in roles that command higher incomes—also without necessarily having to relocate.

AIHW analysis of ABS Census of Population and Housing data shows that the personal income of a large share of First Nations Australians living in remote areas falls into lower income brackets, relative to First Nations Australians in non-remote areas (see Figure 5). More than 41% of First Nations Australians living in remote areas reported gross weekly income of less than $300 per week in 2021, approximately double the rate for First Nations Australians living in a non-remote area, at 23.9% (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2025b). Meanwhile, First Nations Australians in non-remote areas were more likely than those in remote areas to earn higher incomes, with higher representation across all income brackets above $500 per week.

Figure 5. Personal income by remoteness – First Nations Australians aged 15 years and over



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2025b.

Research commissioned by NBN Co found that nearly one in five network customers have increased their income through the ability to work remotely using the NBN, through a variety of ways including accessing a higher paying job, starting a new business / taking on a 'side hustle', or increasing their paid workload. Depending on the way in which an NBN user managed to boost their income, average reported increase in take home pay could be as high as $12,000 annually (Accenture, 2024). It is possible that similar connectivity-related opportunities for higher incomes could occur for First Nations communities from closing the digital divide.

Improved access to financial services

Recognising that face-to-face and voice communication will also continue to play a role in supporting Australians vulnerable to digital exclusion, as noted in the Roadmap, the internet and digital technologies can enhance the options and flexibility available to access banking and financial services. Financial services have increasingly moved online or to digital channels. It has become vital to have access to digital technologies to access these banking and financial services—more than 99% of customer-bank interactions occur via digital channels as at 2025 (ABA, 2025). Supporting the wider availability of these technologies and tools, and the ability to use them, could benefit First Nations communities both in terms of the improved level of digital inclusion, along with the flow-on improved access to financial products, services and opportunities. This improvement in access could be particularly impactful for rural and remote communities.

While expanded choice and flexibility are themselves potential benefits for First Nations Australians, they are also part of a broader range of financial-related potential benefits of digital inclusion. The World Bank has indicated the importance of digital inclusion in supporting financial inclusion, stating:

> **Digital financial services offer numerous benefits, such as the ability to make daily savings deposits using local agents, manage loan disbursements and repayments using an app, and purchase pay-as-you-go renewable electricity directly from a phone. These services are not just convenient but are integral to making finance more accessible and affordable.**
>
> **(World Bank, 2025)**

For First Nations Australians, improved access to, and use of, digital tools and the financial services they facilitate could help address financial security-related challenges, acknowledging this can bring its own set of issues such as the increasing prevalence of online scams and fraud, discussed later. These challenges can be substantial, as highlighted in research (Centre for Social Impact, 2019) which found:[9]

- almost 50% of First Nations peoples are in severe financial stress (compared to 11% of the general population)
- 10% are financially secure
- 52% have no savings
- 75% struggle to access financial services
- 25% use fringe credit such as payday loans
- 38% have no insurance.

Enhancing access to digital financial services has been shown to deliver a range of benefits that are relevant to potentially directly addressing some of these challenges. For instance, in a synthesis of relevant literature the Global Poverty Lab (Global Poverty Lab, 2025) has shown that:

- mobile money and banking can support financial security, increased savings and increased subjective wellbeing,
- digitised payments can support increased financial wellbeing, enhanced financial control, increased savings and improved technological literacy
- digital credit can improve subjective welfare, enhance resilience (e.g. ability to deal with financial shocks) and improve perceived financial wellbeing.

Other research has found potential benefits to also include reduced transaction costs (e.g. lower costs to transfer money), removal of barriers to savings and payments, and the opportunity to access a wider range of

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[9] This research drew on responses collected from 620 First Nations Australians in 2018, weighted to be representative of the First Nations Australians population aged 18 or over.

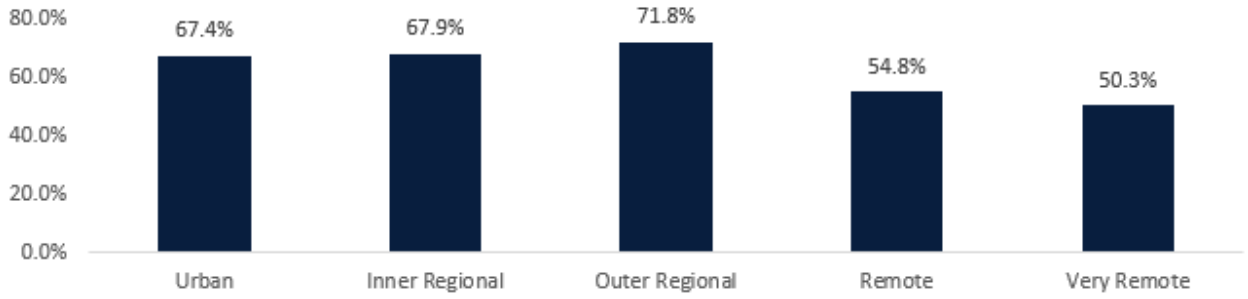
information and resources, in turn supporting the opportunity to exploit financial support options that might not otherwise have been available (Good Things Foundation, 2025).

Improved access to education

Improved digital inclusion for First Nations Australians has the potential to increase opportunities for access to education. Education plays a vital role in improving health and wellbeing outcomes—higher levels of education have been linked with improved health and wellbeing, health literacy, income, employment, better working conditions and a range of other social benefits (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2025b).

As with other impacts described in this report, there is evidence that people in more remote areas are less likely to be studying online (Figure 6). Increasing the availability of technology and enhancing skills and abilities associated with its use can in turn support the potential to achieve positive impacts such as to employment or income, through upskilling, or gaining needed qualifications.

Figure 6. Proportion of First Nations people who used digital services for learning, by remoteness, 2024 (%)



Source: Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2025b.

Digital tools used have been shown to enhance a range of learning areas, including language and literacy development. A positive example is the development of a smartphone game designed to help sustain the Nyiyaparli language spoken in remote north-western Australia. With only eight fluent speakers of the language, the aim is that Nyiyaparli Widi provides a way to promote the language amongst younger generations of First Nations Australians and keep the language alive. Nyiyaparli Widi has won five awards in the Anthem Awards, an international forum that recognises social impact projects (ABC, 2025). Multimedia platforms more broadly such as digital storytelling tools and podcasting can boost comprehension, vocabulary and collaborative learning (OECD, 2025). Digital connectivity can also have a broader impact on First Nations' cultural connection (see *Cohesive* section for further discussion).

Improving digital inclusion levels, including through better access to technology, may support cultural learning activities—some positive examples given in a discussion of the benefits of education technology include exploring media of Country, speaking with Elders from remote communities or sharing creative storytelling with community (see also *Improved social connection* and *Improved sense of belonging and culture* sections). It can offer more culturally-relevant resources to First Nations students but also support students from all cultural backgrounds to gain a deeper understanding of Indigenous knowledge, histories and cultures (AITSL, 2024).

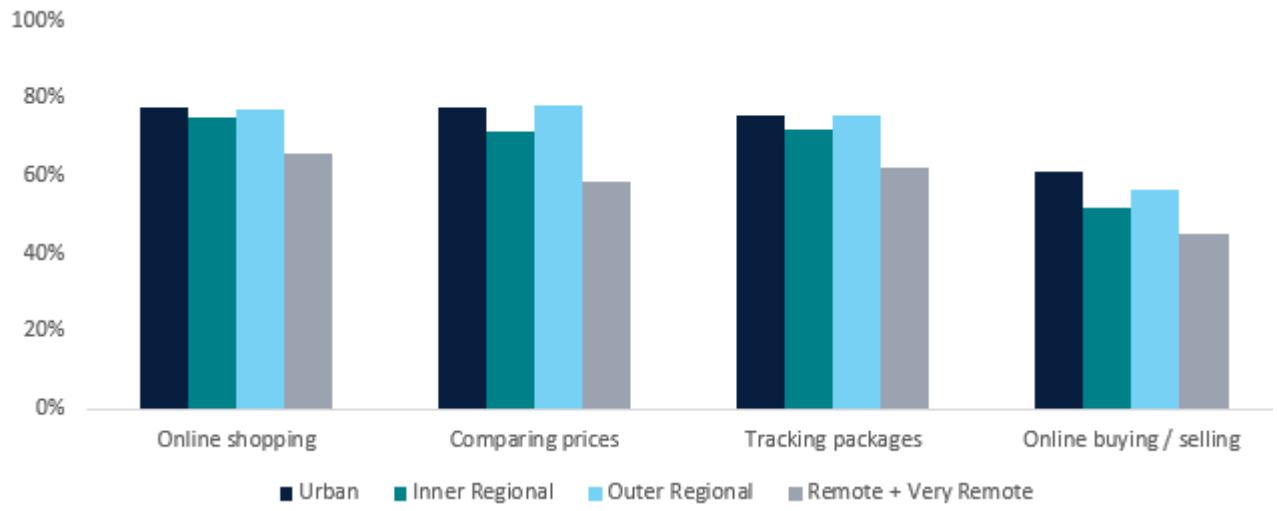
CSIRO analysis found education to be the key pathway to highly skilled and well-paid employment, with a bachelor's degree being most highly sought after by recruiters—required in 22.5% of Indigenous-focused job ads (CSIRO, 2023).

Improved access to goods

Improved digital inclusion offers broader access to online shopping, improving affordability and choice. Research by The Good Things Foundation found that enhanced choice and affordability facilitated by a higher share of online purchases could see an average household gaining an additional 1% in buying power for online purchases. When considering who may be realising these benefits, the ADII shows that e-commerce activities

are more common in urbanised areas (Figure 7). While delivery of goods is also reliant on shipping to remote and very remote areas, there is still increased choice, however the cost benefits could be offset by the costs of delivery.

Figure 7. Access to additional information online for First Nations people, by remoteness, 2024



Source: ADII 2024 – First Nations Dashboard.
Note: Remote and very remote data presented as an aggregate.

Time savings from accessing services online

Accessing administrative and other services and information online presents not only travel time savings to users (see *Reduced travel time*), but also time efficiencies compared to having an in-person discussion or phone call (Good Things Australia, 2024). The 2022-23 NATSIHS survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024a) found that remote First Nations people reported an approximately 15 percentage point lower rate of usage of the internet for online shopping, paying bills or accessing health information and government services than First Nations Australians in non-remote areas. As remote areas are typically further from these services, online alternatives have the greatest potential to improve service delivery efficiency in these areas, where digital literacy and access facilitate use (and users opt to do so). An audit of Australia's myGov platform found the public's interaction with government agencies is significantly faster when conducted online, taking an average of approximately 3 minutes compared to 45 minutes for a face-to-face services transaction (myGov User Audit Expert Panel, 2023).

3.2 Healthy

A society in which people feel well and are in good physical and mental health, can access services when they need, and have the information they require to take action to improve their health (The Treasury, 2024).

Benefits

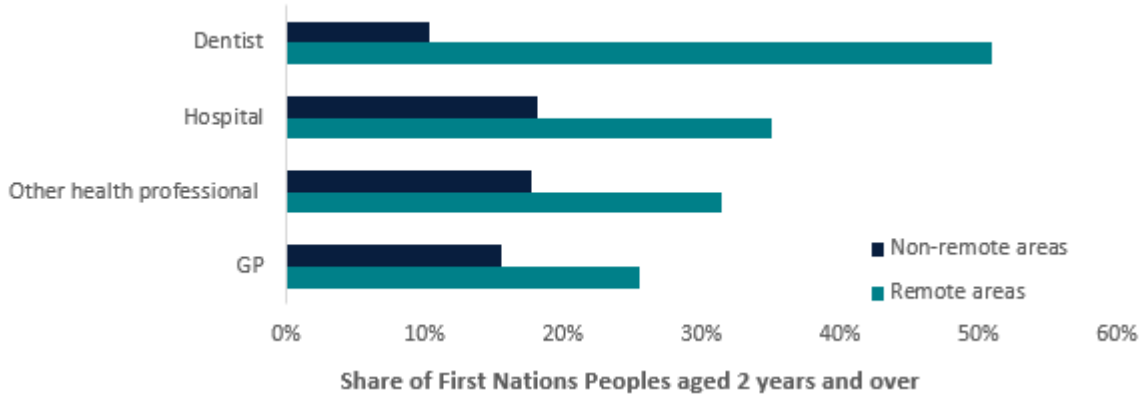
Improved access to health services

Closing the digital divide has the potential to improve access to health care services, through increased access to telehealth services (Good Things Australia, 2024). Telehealth services include appointments with health care professionals through phone, video conferencing or other communication technologies (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2025b).

In 2024-25, 22.5% of Australians aged 15 years and over had seen a health practitioner via telehealth in the last 12 months (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2025b). The majority of those who had used a telehealth service (82.2%) had seen a General Practitioner (GP), 17.7% had seen a medical specialist and 12.5% had seen a mental health professional via telehealth. Use of telehealth services was more common for persons living in inner regional Australia than major cities or outer regional and remote areas. People who attended at least 2 telehealth appointments in the last year were also more likely than other cohorts to have used electronic prescriptions (Australian Digital Health Agency, 2023).[10] Research relating to adoption of electronic prescriptions found populations with high digital health literacy and with smart phones and reliable internet access were amongst the main groups who had benefited from the introduction of electronic prescriptions, with access, technical difficulties and low digital literacy amongst the key barriers in Australia.

Increased access to the internet, and digital literacy, has the potential to improve access to health care services for First Nations Australians. Among other factors (such as cost, waiting times and deciding not to seek care), transport, distance and availability of services within the area contribute to First Nations peoples not seeking medical assistance when needed, as outlined in Figure 8 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024a). First Nations peoples may also decide not to see a GP for other reasons. Though not specifically noted as a reason for not seeking medical assistance, approximately 19.7% of First Nations Australians indicated their GP rarely or never respected their culture, traditions, customs and beliefs. It's possible this is also a factor in decisions relating to seeking care.

Figure 8. First Nations Australians who needed to, but did not see, a medical professional on at least one occasion within the last 12 months, % of population aged 2 years and over, by remoteness, 2022-23



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2024a.

Where these services can reasonably be sought via telehealth appointments, there is potential for an improvement in First Nations peoples' health outcomes as a result of increased access, and potentially earlier medical attention or ailments—though this has yet to be conclusively demonstrated in literature (Good Things Australia, 2024). In a 2024 survey, 68% of surveyed First Nations Australians indicated they had access to fast internet and had used telehealth or online information, resources or records found the internet had positively impacted their health outcomes (Accenture, 2024).[11] Further, 74% indicated that having access to high-speed internet had had a positive impact on their satisfaction with life, including 35% of First Nations Australians who reported a 'strong' positive impact (compared to 25% of the overall survey sample).

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[10] This data is based on a survey of 369 prescribers, 429 dispensers and 1,104 customers who responded to an online survey in April and May of 2023.

[11] Based on a survey of 1,500 NBN users, including 92 First Nations Australians.

Improved access to health information

First Nations Australians who become digitally included may have greater access to information regarding health and wellbeing online. First Nations children were more likely than Australian children overall[12] (including First Nations and non-First Nations children) to use the internet to look for health information (eSafety Commissioner, 2023). When considering accessing health information by location, people in urban and regional areas were more likely to access this information online than those in remote areas (Australian Digital Inclusion Index, 2025a). However, there is currently limited evidence to suggest increased health promotion on social media flows through to behavioural changes (and health impacts) (Hefler et al. , Aug 2019).

Disbenefits and costs

Risk of worsened mental health

There is potential for increased use of digital technologies to increase exposure to other negative content and experiences online (refer to the *Increased exposure to* cyber-racism and *Exposure to cyber security risks* sections for more details), which can negatively impact on the mental health of First Nations peoples. In the year to November 2022, approximately 70% of adult Australians had at least one negative experience online. First Nations Australian adults were more likely than the broader population to have had a negative experience online (at 86%) (eSafety Commissioner, 2022). In a similar study in 2019, the majority of adults (60%) indicated they did not experience ill effects following their negative experiences online, but 25% experienced mental or emotional distress as a result (and this was more prominent for First Nations Australians, of whom 38% experienced distress as a result) (eSafety Commissioner, 2019).[13]

Mental health impacts both adults and children. First Nations children, aged 8 to 17 years, experienced online hate and online bullying at higher rates than average. First Nations children were also more likely to experience impacts to their mental health because of their most recent negative experience online (Figure 9). This suggests that increased access to digital technologies, where it results in increased exposure to negative experiences online, may disproportionately result in increased mental health concerns for First Nations children. However, survey findings indicate that most First Nations parents are aware of the content their children are exposed to and talk to their children about what to do if something bothers or upsets them online (eSafety Commissioner, 2023).[14]

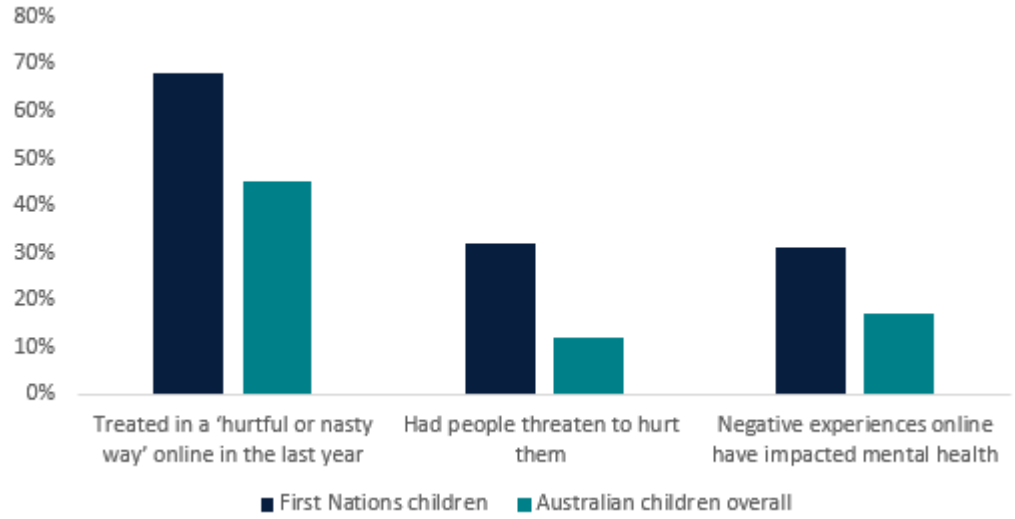
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[12]The eSafety Commissioner's report refers to the entire sample of Australian children as 'Australian children overall' (including both First Nations and non-First Nations children). In this document, any references to 'Australian children overall' take this same meaning. This means the comparison point available to First Nations children is the national rate, rather than the rate for non-First Nations Australians.

[13] Based on a survey of 3,700 Australian adults aged 18 to 65 years in the 12 months to August 2019, from online consumer panels and weighted to Australian Bureau of Statistics population data.

[14] Based on a survey of 223 First Nations children and their parent or caregiver. Data for First Nations children was compared to data for all Australian children, which was based on a survey of 3,651 children in 2021.

Figure 9. First Nations and overall Australian children's experiences online, %



Source: eSafety Commissioner 2023.
Note: Mental health impact data relates to the consequence of most recent negative experience. Australian children overall includes First Nations children and non-First Nations children.

Misinformation and disinformation

Increased use of social media, which may result from closing the digital divide, has the potential to increase the number of First Nations Australians encountering misinformation and disinformation.[15] In the first 6 months of 2025, more than 70% of Australian adults who used digital platforms indicated they had encountered misinformation – primarily on Facebook and X (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2025).

It is likely that rates of exposure to misinformation, as identified by users themselves, are underrepresenting the actual rate of exposure to misinformation by Australians online. In a study conducted by the OECD, Australian respondents were able to correctly identify information as either true or false on a fictitious social media website 60% of the time (in-line with the OECD average), but were amongst the most confident in their perception of their ability to recognise false and misleading content online (at 90% compared to the average of approximately 70%) (OECD, 2024). The study found confidence increased with education and income level, but those who were not confident in their own ability to perceive misleading information were as good at identifying content as those who were confident. AI generated content can also make it more difficult for users to identify misinformation (ADMS+, 2025).

In the first 6 months of 2025, the most prevalent topics of misinformation Australians had identified related to groups in society (such as ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, gender or race) (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2025). It's possible that increased digital inclusion, where it leads to increased use of digital platforms, could result in increased exposure to misinformation and cyber-racism which could negatively impact on First Nations users.

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[15] Misinformation refers to the dissemination of false or misleading content (without actively fabricating this information) with no intent to cause harm, whilst disinformation refers to the purposeful dissemination of false, misleading or deceptive information which has been actively fabricated and circulated with an intent to cause harm (OECD, n.d).

3.3 Secure

A society where people live peacefully, feel safe, have financial security and access to housing (The Treasury, 2024).

Benefits

Improved access to information in an emergency

The ability to communicate and access information in an emergency is vital for all Australians. There is evidence of vulnerability in communications for First Nations Australians in remote areas where this ability can be particularly important, such as in regions where wet season flooding and cyclones are common (ADMS+, 2025).

In-person sharing of emergency information is a key way in which First Nations Australians communicate and learn emergency information (ADMS+, 2025). Digital channels offer an important alternative for people to access, understand and act on emergency information during disasters. For instance, in an emergency, people may need access to critical information about where to go, or how to act, and digital technologies can help to facilitate this. In the 2020 bushfires in Australia, Facebook demonstrated how social media can play an impactful role, through "creating awareness, building momentum, engaging the public, connecting communities, raising funds and supporting emergency services through the platform's crisis response tools" (Paper+Spark, 2020).

Online platforms can also bring risks and negative impacts in times of emergency, from people engaging in dangerous behaviour to document their experience of an emergency (UNSW, 2025), to the spread of dis- and misinformation (ABC, 2020).

Navigating information delivered on digital channels requires digital skills—to determine reliable information sources and to connect with friends and family and be able to contact emergency services. Digital literacy and media literacy are important capabilities to support identification of fake news and to help avoid misinformation that can spread (Good Things Foundation, 2025).

Further, potential impacts from improved digital inclusion relate to more than the initial response—effective use of digital technologies can help in recovery and rebuilding efforts in a variety of ways (Melbourne School of Government, 2022), including in fostering community resilience and in ensuring that all members of society have equitable opportunities to recover.

Disbenefits and costs

Exposure to cyber security risks

International research highlights a potential disbenefit associated with closing the digital divide is the risk of a greater number of persons becoming victims of cyber security incidents (New Zealand Institute of Economic Research, 2022). For some First Nations persons, this risk is significant. Some First Nations communities have decided against using the internet due to concerns about cyber safety and the potential impact on cultural and social cohesion, alongside other concerns, such as ongoing costs (Featherstone D. , 2020). These concerns are reflected in recent data in which a significant share of First Nations persons, aged 15 years and older, who had not used the internet in the past 3 months indicated they did not want or need to use the internet (Table 2).

Table 2. Personal use of the internet, % of First Nations persons aged 15 years and over, 2022-23

Personal use of the internet	Non-remote areas	Remote areas	Total
Has personally used the internet in the last 3 months	90.9	74.9	88.3
Has not personally used the internet in the last 3 months	9.1	25.4	11.7
Has personally used the internet but not in the last 3 months	1.3	1.8	1.3
Has never personally used the internet	7.8	23.6	10.3
Reason(s) did not personally use the internet in the last 3 months:			
Cost	12.1	7.7	10.0
No access to a computer or mobile technology	#24.7	19.0	22.6
Lack of appropriate training/support from others/assistive technology	22.5	17.2	20.3
Lack of confidence/knowledge in accessing the internet	29.7	18.6	26.0
Internet services not available/of too poor quality for use in local area	4.3	7.3	4.7
Did not want/need to use the internet	#44.4	45.6	45.8
Other reasons (including privacy or security concerns, no time, and other)	12.5	8.8	11.7

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2024a.
Note: # proportion has high margin of error and should be used with caution.

First Nations children are much more likely than the national average for children to have experienced (and identified) compromised online security (eSafety Commissioner, 2023). The eSafety report found:

- Over half of First Nations children had experienced at least one form of compromised security in the past year.
- First Nations children were three times more likely than all Australian children (including First Nations children) to:
  - have experienced online fraud,
  - have been impersonated online,
  - have discovered that their personal information had been misused, or
  - had their location tracked.

It is possible that higher rates of digital literacy amongst First Nations children makes them more able to identify incidents of cyber security than their peers, but it is also possible that First Nations Children are a targeted cohort (eSafety Commissioner, 2023).

Scams

Scams are one of many cyber security concerns associated with increased internet use, though they are not isolated to the online world. In 2024, Australians reported losing over $2.0 billion to scams, across a broad range of scams including, but not limited to, investment, romance, remote access and phishing scams (National Anti-Scam Centre, 2025). Of the scams reported to Scamwatch,[16] approximately 80% of victims who reported losing money were contacted via social media, email, the internet or mobile apps. The remaining 20% were contacted in person, via text message or via a phone call.

Though anyone can find themselves the victim of a scam, some communities and demographics are at greater risk of becoming victims than others. In 2024, 4,254 First Nations Australians reported a scam to Scamwatch (1.7% of total reports), reporting a total $6.5 million in losses (representing 2% of total losses reported to Scamwatch) (National Anti-Scam Centre, 2025). Though most First Nations people were approached by scammers using offline methods (phone calls), financial loss was most commonly reported for social media scams in the year. Lower levels of digital inclusion and literacy can also make cohorts within the First Nations population more vulnerable to being the target of a scam or misinformation than others within the broader community, including the mis-selling of products and services which may not necessarily suit their needs.

Targeted training could assist in protecting internet users from cyber security issues. Studies have found that participants in program to improve digital ability (including awareness of cyber security) reported improved skills for staying safer online after undertaking training (Good Things Australia, 2024).

3.4 Sustainable

A society that sustainably uses natural and financial resources, protects and repairs the environment and builds resilience to combat challenges (The Treasury, 2024).

Benefits

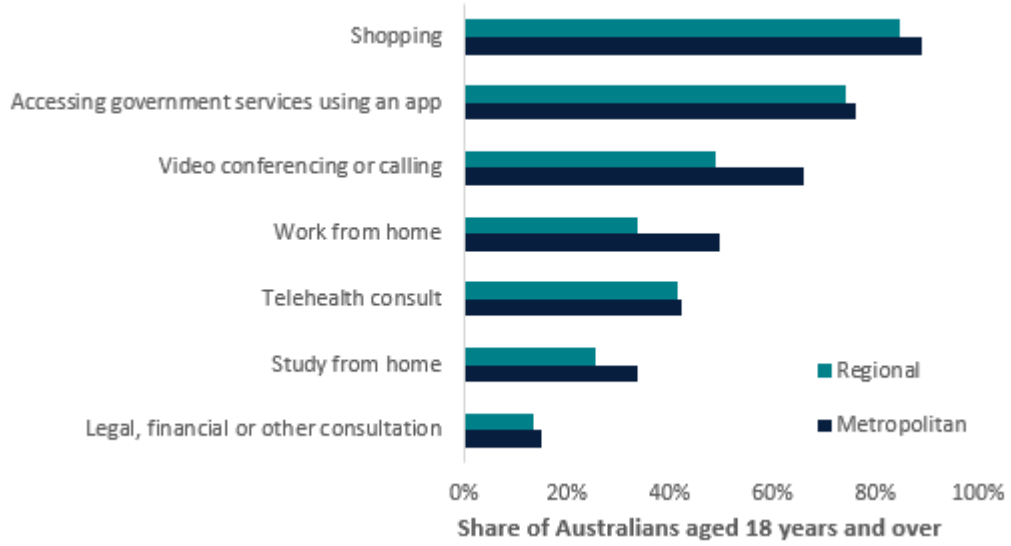
Reduced travel time

Australians undertake a broad range of activities online which would otherwise be conducted in person, as demonstrated in Figure 10. In addition to the benefits to users of accessing these services (as discussed earlier), accessing services online can reduce the need for users to travel (Good Things Australia, 2024; Accenture, 2024). Reduced travel can save time and costs to users and benefit the environment through reduced vehicle emissions.

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[16] Australians can report scams to a range of agencies, including Scamwatch, ReportCyber, IDCARE, Australian Financial Crimes Exchange (AFCX), and Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC). Scamwatch reported scams represented 47.4% of all scam reports and 12.9% of reported losses.

Figure 10. Activities performed online (selection), June 2025



Source: ACMA 2026.

A prime example of an activity which reduces travel time is remote working. Working from home rates increased significantly during the COVID pandemic, with rates of working from home reaching their highest ever levels in 2020 and 2021. Though working from home rates have since eased, approximately 36% of Australians usually worked from home in August 2024 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024b).[17] A range of factors contribute to a person's ability to work from home, including their occupation, industry and access to the internet. The 2022-23 NATSIHS found that around half (51.3%) of First Nations people aged over 15 years had used the internet for work in the last three months (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024a).

Increased adoption of working from home arrangements has reduced the average worker's commuting times. Though travel to work times had been increasing before COVID, reaching a peak of approximately 4.6 hours, on average per week in 2019. Travel times dropped off considerably during the COVID period and in 2023 remained lower than pre-COVID levels at an average of 3.8 hours per week (The University of Melbourne, 2025).[18] Potentially due to their location of residence (e.g., rural or remote areas), First Nations Australians aged over 15 years are more likely than non-First Nations Australians to use a vehicle to access their place of work, with approximately two-thirds using a car, truck, motorbike, scooter to get to work, compared to 58% of non-First Nations Australians (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024). An additional 4% used public transport. Each of these forms of travel to work contribute to emissions, which could potentially be reduced if work from home arrangements were further adopted. In a 2024 study, almost two-thirds of First Nations Australians indicated that having fast internet had allowed them to work, study and access other services online, helping them to reduce their emissions in the 2023 financial year, compared to 85% of the total survey sample (Accenture, 2024).

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[17] Based on a subset of the Australian Labour Force Survey, which targets approximately 25,660 Australian households.

[18] The HILDA data reflects approximately 8,928 households across Australia, but excludes those living in remote and sparsely populated areas.

3.5 Cohesive

A society that supports connections with family, friends and the community, values diversity, and promotes belonging and culture (The Treasury, 2024).

Benefits

Improved social connection

Social connection has been linked to improved health and wellbeing—research has identified it can lower the risk of serious health problems, foster mental health, and prevent early death; it can also strengthen the social fabric, through making a contribution to healthier, safer and more prosperous communities (Ending Loneliness Together, 2023).

Connection is particularly important to First Nations communities. Describing a First Nations context, the Counting on Connectivity report states:

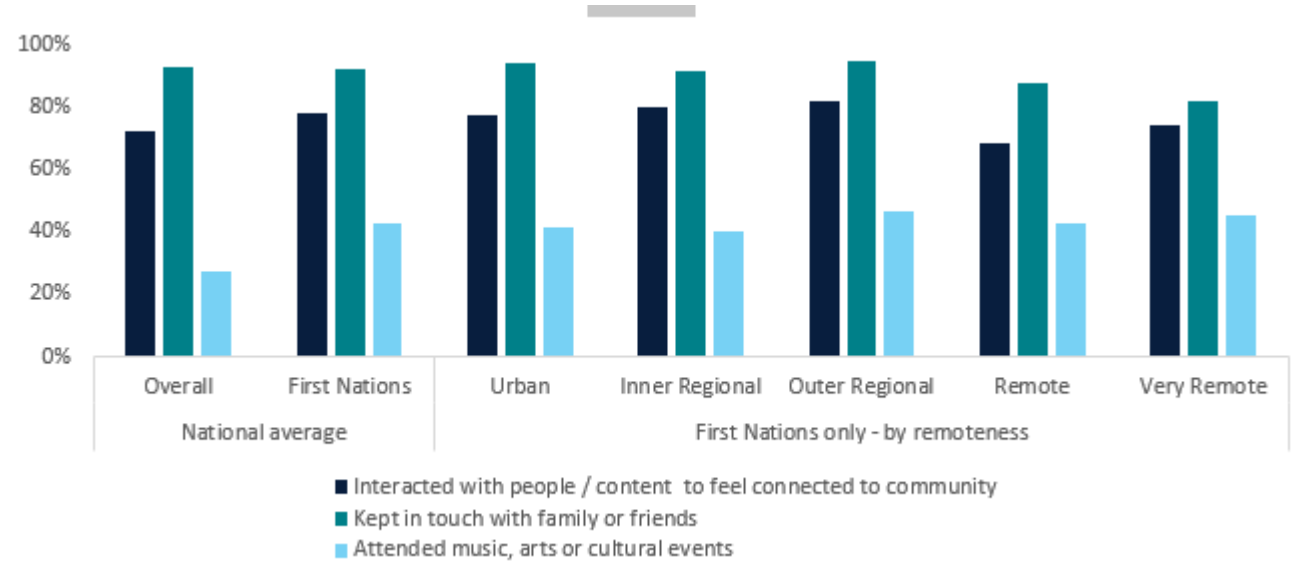
> **Connection speaks to the relationships that sustain and enrich us, to family, community, language, and Country. Digital connection, where grounded in culture, extends these relationships beyond distance and time, allowing our stories and voices to travel and be heard. (Featherstone, et al., 2025)**

This is an area where improved digital inclusion can potentially make a positive contribution to outcomes for First Nations Australians. Through enabling contact with family, friends, communities and others, digital technologies can expand networks, strengthen existing relationships, and foster connection. Research commissioned by NBN Co found that use of their network by First Nations Australians had a positive impact for the majority of users – 80% of those First Nations NBN users who used the network to connect with family, friends and others, or who access news or community information online via the NBN, reported the NBN network positively impacted their social and community connectedness (Accenture, 2024).

The Good Things Foundation has described the internet as a 'lifeline' for maintaining social connections, stating that when people are digitally included, they can more easily stay in touch with friends, family and their community, reducing loneliness and isolation (Good Things Foundation, 2024). Use of social media is one way in which they can do so. Acknowledging there can be positive and negative aspects to increased social media use, it has been found to promote sharing of interests, a sense of belonging and reduced isolation. Further, participants in digital training provided by The Good Things Foundation identified connecting more with family, friends, or community, and starting a new social activity online, as important drivers in undertaking the training.

First Nations peoples use the internet for social activities, regardless of location (Australian Digital Inclusion Index, 2025b). First Nations people using the internet reported feeling connected to community and keeping in touch with friends or family at rates similar to the national average (Figure 11). When considering attending online cultural events, First Nations internet users were more likely than the average Australian internet user to attend online cultural events.

Figure 11. Use of internet for social and cultural activities



Source: ADII 2024.
Note: Values refer to the proportion of internet users that participated in the activity. Overall average includes First Nations and non-First Nations Australians.

Improved sense of belonging and culture

Connection to Country and community are central to First Nations peoples' wellbeing.

> **For Indigenous Australians, health is not just the physical wellbeing of the individual but the 'social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community', and is based on connections to country, culture, community, family, spirit and physical and mental health.**
>
> National Indigenous Australians Agency, undated (based on Dudgeon et al. 2014; Gee et al. 2014; Parker & Milroy 2014; Social Health Reference Group 2004)

There is potential for closing the digital divide to assist in strengthening First Nations peoples' feelings of belonging and culture. First Nations peoples can demonstrate and connect with their Indigenous identities online, particularly through their use of social media (Rice, 2016). Platforms such as YouTube and Facebook provide First Nations Australians with an opportunity to share their own stories, share content in their own language, challenge stereotypes and transmit intergenerational knowledge. Through the ability to upload one's own content, First Nations Australians have control over their own storytelling, and the power to present themselves and their identities in their own way. First Nations children are more likely than Australian children overall (including First Nations and non-First Nations children) to use the internet for cultural expression, with 37% posting their own video or music content within the last year (compared to 19% of children overall) and 35% posting story or blog content in the same timeframe (compared to 16% overall) (eSafety Commissioner, 2023).

Use of social media by First Nations peoples can also have broader cultural benefits. Social media has been identified by some users as providing 'clear and valuable avenues for political activism' with a view to highlighting Indigenous issues (Kennedy, 2020). This political engagement and activism can be seen to be flowing through to younger generations, with much higher online civic engagement from First Nations children than the overall child population (including First Nations children)[19] (eSafety Commissioner, 2023).

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[19] The survey and analysis contained in this document pre-date the introduction of the Social Media Minimum Age obligation.

Almost one-third of First Nations children discussed social and political problems with others online at least weekly, compared to 13% of children overall.

Improved opportunities to sustain connection to Country

Connection to Country and community are often central to the wellbeing of First Nations Australians (refer to the earlier section, *Improved sense of belonging and culture*). Location is an important component of this connection.

Ties to location can relate to living on Country, which can be deeply significant—Reconciliation Australia notes that First Nations Australians 'have deep responsibilities, developed over 40,000 years, to live on and care for their traditional Countries' (Reconciliation Australia, 2015).

Improving digital inclusion could bring more opportunities to sustain connection to Country, including through facilitating opportunities for people particularly from regional or remote areas to undertake activity on country, that they otherwise might have had to relocate for, for example to take up an employment opportunity. Or where the tools and resources are available, an individual who is away from their Country may be able to use these tools and resources to engage while they are away.

That there are potential tangible benefits from sustaining connection is clear—research has identified that First Nations Australians who lived on their traditional Country were more likely to self-assess their own health as excellent/very good or good (78%) than those who were not allowed to visit their traditional Country (48%) (AIHW/NIAA, 2019).[20]

Improved access to media

Media plays an essential role in keeping the public informed with a range of viewpoints, providing choice to consumers in content and platform, and in holding governments and private sector entities to account (Environment and Communication References Committee, 2021). First Nations media organisations play a crucial role in communicating information of relevance to First Nations Australians, to First Nations Australians. In some remote areas, First Nations broadcasters are the only source of information for communities, especially in language (First Nations Media Australia, 2023). In some areas First Nations media options are lacking, even in major centres—there are three capital cities in Australia that don't have a First Nations radio service (Canberra, Hobart and Adelaide) (First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group, 2024).

Access to media services is also vital for First Nations communities, particularly in the context of the ongoing shift towards the online delivery of communications and media services. In the 6 months to June 2025, 94% of Australian adults used the internet to access news and information (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2026). In 2025, more than a quarter of Australians (26%) used social media as their primary source of accessing news (News and Media Research Centre, 2025).

Bridging the digital divide can enhance First Nations Australians access to media services, opening a broader quantity and diversity of options. This in turn can support wider availability, and via an expanded range of platforms, of linguistically and culturally appropriate information, services, news and entertainment.

These services provide benefits to First Nations communities and are also essential to Australia's democracy. It is considered that high-quality, professionally produced local news and information increases civic engagement, community cohesion, and government accountability (APH, 2023). Media services can also offer a means of archiving and preserving aspects of First Nations language and culture, supporting the availability of material into the future and helping strengthen identity and culture (First Nations Media Australia, Language and Culture), with examples being seen in Dubbo and Armidale of initiatives seeking to digitally preserve languages, spiritual stories and life experiences (First Nations Digital Advisory Group, 2023).

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[20] Analysis of the 2018-19 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey.

Disbenefits and costs

Increased exposure to cyber-racism

Cyber-racism is a disbenefit associated with increased access to the internet – when connected with increased use of social media. Respondents to some surveys note that challenges to Indigenous authenticity and identity, and cyber-racism, have been sourced from both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous groups and could involve shaming First Nations persons who don't have a close connection to culture (Kennedy, 2020). For some First Nations Australians, social media participation has resulted in increased pressure to prove their Indigeneity (Rice, 2016).

Domestic and international research has found online hate can have profound impacts on those who experience it personally, including impacts to mental health, self-confidence and a person's sense of safety (eSafety Commissioner, 2025a). First Nations Australians who have personally experienced online hate are more likely than non-First Nations Australians to report that online hate had a significantly negative impact on their beliefs, values and identify, their work, their financial situation and their own cultural community (eSafety Commissioner, 2025b).

First Nations peoples encounter online hate speech and other negative content more frequently than the broader population (National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2021; eSafety Commissioner, 2025b). Online platforms have been identified as contributing to this issue. The Joint Standing Committee recently launched an inquiry into racism, hate, and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and is examining how online platforms affect the reach, prominence and harm caused by racism and hate directed at First Nations people (Joint Standing Committee, 2026). A survey of 60 Indigenous persons[21] in 2020 found 97% encountered negative content 6-month period (Kennedy, 2020). Respondents noted being exposed to white supremacist and colonialist ideologies, including discrediting Indigenous knowledge, and presenting highly negative and harmful stereotypes of Indigenous persons.

First Nations children are also more likely to experience online hate speech than other children within the community. Just under one-third (29%) of First Nations children have had "*offensive things said to them because of their race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age or disability*" compared to approximately 10% of children overall (eSafety Commissioner, 2023). As noted in the *Risk of worsened mental health* section, parents of First Nations children help their child navigate these experiences.

Online Racism Surrounding the Voice to Parliament Referendum

A 2023-24 report on racism experienced by First Nations Australians (Allison, 2025) noted a significant increase in racist behaviour and rhetoric in the lead up to the Voice to Parliament October 2023, across social media as well as other public forums. Heightened levels of racism led to a lift in the number of First Nations Australians seeking mental health support. Between March and June of 2023, 13YARN, which is a national crisis support line for First Nations peoples recorded a 108% increase in callers reporting 'abuse, racism and trauma'. The report highlighted comments from the Australian Human Rights Commission that racism witnessed and experienced by First Nations Australians during the period in the lead up to the referendum had continued to impact on First Nations communities after the referendum (at which the Voice was not carried).

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[21] This study included persons who identified as Indigenous to other parts of the world.

4. Summary of findings and next steps

4.1 Key findings

Context and current state

Digital inclusion—defined as equitable access to and ability to use digital technologies—is essential for participation in modern social, cultural, and economic life. According to the ADII, digital inclusion encompasses three dimensions: access, affordability, and ability. While internet access is nearly universal in Australia, First Nations Australians are digitally excluded at twice the rate (41%) of other Australians (20%). The gap widens in remote areas, where connectivity, affordability, and digital skills are major barriers.

Potential impacts of closing the digital divide

Improved digital inclusion could present opportunities and benefits for First Nations Australians, but there are also risks and costs which could eventuate. The potential costs and benefits of increasing digital inclusion for First Nations Australians have been analysed through the lens of the five domains comprising the Measuring What Matters framework:

- Prosperous: Improved employment opportunities, higher incomes, and better access to financial services, education, and goods.
- Healthy: Enhanced access to telehealth and health information, though risks include exposure to harmful online content.
- Secure: Better access to emergency information and financial security, but increased exposure to cyber security risks and scams.
- Sustainable: Reduced travel time and emissions through remote work and access to online services.
- Cohesive: Strengthened social connections, cultural expression, and civic engagement, though risks include cyber-racism and misinformation.

Potential for alignment of impacts with Closing the Gap Targets

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap aims to facilitate work to overcome inequality experienced by First Nations Australians, enabling them to achieve life outcomes which are equal to those of all Australians. The National Agreement on Closing the Gap is centred on four Priority Reforms which will guide the way in which governments work with First Nations Australians. Two of these Priority Reforms, formal partnerships and shared decision making (Priority Reform 1) and shared access to data and information at a regional level (Priority Reform 4), are particularly important in ensuring policies and programs which assist in closing the digital divide and those which assist in measuring the closing of the digital divide are aligned with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The Closing the Gap Targets themselves enable the monitoring of progress of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The impacts of improving digital inclusion of First Nations Australians, as outlined in this document, have the potential to align with (or work against) some of the 19 Closing the Gap targets, as described in Table 3.

Table 3. Alignment between potential impacts and the Closing the Gap Targets

Potential Impact	Potential (dis)alignment with Closing the Gap Target*	Rationale
Prosperous		
Increased employment	Target 8 – Strong economic participation and development of people and their communities	Digital inclusion can improve access to job search, remote work and workforce participation.
Higher incomes	Target 8 – Strong economic participation and development of people and their communities	Improved digital skills and employment opportunities can support higher earnings.
Improved access to financial services	Target 17 – People have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives	Digital access facilitates online banking and financial inclusion.
Improved access to education and training	Target 5 – Students achieve their full learning potential Target 6 – Students reach their full potential through further education pathways Target 7 – Youth are engaged in employment or education	Online learning and digital tools support education participation.
Improved access to goods and services	Target 17 – People have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives	Online access can expand choice and service availability.
Time savings from accessing services online	-	-
Healthy		
Improved access to health services (telehealth)	Target 1 – Everyone enjoys long and healthy lives	Telehealth improves access to care, especially in remote areas.
Improved access to health information	Target 1 – Everyone enjoys long and healthy lives	Online health information supports health literacy and wellbeing.
Risk of worsened mental health	Negative impact on Target 14 – People enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing	Increased exposure to negative content and experiences can impact on mental health.
Secure		
Improved access to emergency information	Target 13 – Families and households are safe	Reliable digital access can support timely emergency warnings, recovery information and community safety during disasters.

Potential Impact	Potential (dis)alignment with Closing the Gap Target*	Rationale
Exposure to cyber security risks	Negative impact on: Target 8 – Strong economic participation and development of people and their communities Target 17 – People have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives	Increased online activity can lead to exposure to cyber security risks.
Sustainable		
Reduced travel time and emissions	-	-
Cohesive		
Improved social connection	Target 14 – People enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing	Digital platforms strengthen community and family connections.
Improved sense of belonging and cultural expression	Target 14 – People enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing Target 16 – Cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing	Online can platforms support cultural expression and language.
Improved connection to Country	Target 14 – People enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing Target 15 – People maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and waters Target 16 – Cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing	Digital tools support maintaining connection to Country.
Improved access to media	Target 17 – People have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives	Digital access expands culturally appropriate media and news.
Increased exposure to cyber racism	Negative impact on Target 14 – People enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing	Increased exposure to negative content and experiences can impact on mental health.

Notes: *As some impacts of increased digital inclusion are costs/disbenefits, these impacts may result in a negative relationship with Closing the Gap targets.

4.2 Costing the gap in a further study

Recommendation 29 requested an economic analysis of the digital divide for First Nations Australians, considering both the cost to close the gap as well as the cost of inaction. This report provides research and analysis which can be leveraged by any potential, quantitative analysis that could follow.

There remain considerable information and data gaps which would need to be closed before any form of quantitative economic analysis could be undertaken. Quantifying impacts requires detailed data on affected populations and parameter values for benefits and costs. This research has not uncovered First Nations-

specific data which could be used for these purposes. Data relating to the cost of programs and policies to close the gap may also be required, depending on the type of analysis to be undertaken.

Future work to address the Advisory Group's recommendation is likely to require:

- Primary data collection on First Nations cohorts, including consideration of First Nations communities choices regarding digital inclusion, and potentially by locality and cultural context.
- Estimation of costs of service delivery.
- Estimation of the timeframe associated with closing the gap, and accrual of benefits and costs.
- Economic modelling.

Meeting these requirements will require the expertise of an external provider. In addition to demonstrated capability and experience in undertaking quantitative economic modelling, required experience for an external consultant could also include:

- A First Nations lens, which is foundational to developing a report that appropriately captures First Nations experiences of the digital divide. Demonstrated delivery of research projects relating to First Nations communities and knowledge of the unique challenges and context for connecting First Nations people will be essential. The project should be led by First Nations researchers to support Indigenous data governance principles, data sovereignty objectives and better capture the cultural impacts of the digital gap, and enhance alignment of this project with National Agreement on Closing the Gap Priority Reform 4. The project should be informed by local community perspectives and cultural context, improving the ability for future work to accurately capture the drivers of adoption and potential for impacts to be realised for communities.
- Commitment to ethical research conduct of First Nations communities, such as the codes and standards published by the department (including the First Nations Engagement and Partnership Guide) the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (including the Guide to Applying the AIATSIS Code of Ethics) and the National Health and Medical Research Council (including the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research).
- Privacy and data management processes in place (compliance with relevant legislation and codes).

With additional primary data collection to fill information gaps on First Nations Digital Inclusion, a study quantifying these values should be possible. As with all studies forecasting future socioeconomic impacts, any estimations should be defensible, but their accuracy is difficult to verify until an ex-post (after the fact) evaluation is conducted. Additionally, estimations may struggle to capture the varied experiences of connectivity for First Nations people across Australia. Despite these limitations, the proposed secondary study would complement the existing literature and provide insight to Government on the true costs involved with the digital gap.

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