Productivity Commission
5-year Productivity Inquiry: Australia's data and digital dividend
Via: www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/productivity

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Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance Submission to the 5 Year Productivity Inquiry: Australia's data and digital dividend

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission.

The Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance (ADIA) is a shared initiative with over 500 business, government, academic and community organisations working together to accelerate action on digital inclusion. Our member organisations conduct a variety of research and practical programs aimed at reducing the digital divide and enabling greater social and economic participation for all Australians. The ADIA is supported by Infoxchange, Google and Telstra. Australia Post was also a founding partner.

The ADIA's vision is to build a digitally inclusive Australia where everyone is equipped to fully participate in the economy and society. When the ADIA talks about being digitally included they mean:

- A person has affordable access to quality internet and appropriate devices.
- A person has access to inclusively designed online content, that's readable and accessible, including if they are differently abled or from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- A person has the knowledge, ability, skills and confidence to complete tasks safely and securely online.

We know that digital technology and data have the potential to significantly improve Australia's productivity. We also know that 17% of the national population remains digitally excluded, with a vast number lacking the foundational digital skills necessary to fully participate. According to the latest Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII), highly excluded Australians are most likely to:

- have not completed a secondary education;
- fall in the lowest income quintile;
- live in a single person household;
- have a disability;
- currently be unemployed;
- or not be in the labour force.

Given this context, the ADIA's submission relates to **Chapter 3: Targeting government investments and policy priorities**, with specific commentary on items **3.1 Investing in regional digital**

infrastructure, 3.3 Developing digital, data and cyber security skills and **3.6 Coordinating the policy and regulatory environment.**

3.1 Investing in regional digital infrastructure

The Commission is considering a recommendation in its final report to improve access to low-cost, reliable, future-proofed internet services in regional and remote parts of Australia.

The implementation of affordability measures for internet connectivity will support low income families to access the internet as an essential service in contemporary day-to-day life. Presently, a lack of connectivity makes it more difficult for students to complete their education and for adults to find employment; both detrimental to the nation's productivity. It is also a barrier to accessing support services and staying connected to society.

The ADIA is a signatory of the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network's No Australian Left Offline initiative, which calls for a 50 mbps service for $30 per month to be available to households receiving income support.

The strong recommendation is for this to be a fixed broadband connection. As the Australian Government's Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan Discussion Paper and the latest ADII acknowledged, mobile-only users are less digitally included and mobile-only use can lead to people being excluded from the advantage of fixed broadband services. This is exacerbated by the fact that many if not most digitally excluded groups are using pre-paid mobile, putting them in a situation where their cost per gigabyte is restrictive.

Affordability can also be a heightened issue in remote areas, where it may be that investments need to be made in place-based solutions such as pay-as-you-go community WiFi or expanded free public WiFi access points.

3.3 Developing digital, data and cyber security skills

What role (if any) does government have in increasing the number of students and workers undertaking formal and unaccredited education and training in digital and data skills, given that various options are already being offered and taken up?

In the ADIA's view, the Government, VET sector and industry have a joint role to play in transforming digital and tech-related credentialing in Australia. There are myriad private sector micro credentials freely available online (including Grow with Google, Microsoft Learn, and the consolidated Skill Finder, among others) as well as community based programs including BeConnected and inDigiMOB. Often, these organisations have invaluable relationships with communities that enable greater uptake and engagement with training opportunities. Supporting all of these avenues is important to harness the collective efforts of the private, community, Government and VET sectors. There is a role for Government to

provide leadership in how these efforts will be brought together to drive towards clearly articulated outcomes, as at present the efforts are fragmented.

Are existing government programs to improve digital literacy adequate, or are some cohorts still at risk of being left behind in an increasingly digitised world?
Currently, the approach to increasing digital inclusion is decentralised and inconsistent across government, business and community groups. Each entity is setting its own goals and creating its own programs to address the problem, lessening the impact of each program. Some are national, some are targeted at particular demographics, some are short-term, some are online, some are group based. In totality, they lack coordination and there is not a common understanding of what the map of efforts looks like. Providing a central strategy to address digital inclusion would allow all stakeholders to work together to amplify the efforts, ensuring the most vulnerable Australians are not left behind (as outlined above, the most recent ADII data shows that 17% of the national population remains digitally excluded).

In its 2020 publication, A National Digital Inclusion Roadmap, the ADIA compiled a list of the most prominent government, private and community programs, strategies and frameworks in the digital inclusion space. The list demonstrated the vast number of programs and strategies all working independently and targeting different groups in Australia. At the time, the ADIA found a total of 65 programs, frameworks and strategies including 37 Government Initiatives and 28 Private and Community Sector Programs.

How large are the productivity gains to be had from meeting Australia's digital and data skills needs or, conversely, what is the size of economic losses associated with failing to meet these needs?
The ADIA is not aware of any reliable data on the economic cost of a vast number of Australians remaining digitally excluded, and sees this as a compelling research opportunity to support not only digital inclusion efforts but also productivity in Australia. We do know however that almost all jobs in contemporary society require a basic level of digital skills. Aged care workers use digital interfaces to track residents' medication; paint factory workers use technology solutions to create particular paint colours; and customer service staff in fast food retailers log orders through wholly digitised systems. Even basic administrative tasks such as completing timesheets or applying for leave require the ability to operate a device, access the internet, and log on to a platform securely. These are just a few examples of how very basic digital skills are required by all levels of employment, not only those operating within highly advanced environments.

3.6 Coordinating the policy and regulatory environment

Which policymakers and regulators must be involved to effectively coordinate government activity in digital, data and cyber security areas, and how should they be coordinated?

The ADIA encourages the Government to champion the creation of a common understanding and set of objectives that would better harness the currently fragmented efforts of those in the digital inclusion space. A Digital Capabilities Framework would outline which digital skills are associated with which level of learning or competency. This would allow organisations to tailor their training programs to a common reference, and ensure everyone is working towards the same goal.

A Digital Capabilities Framework would also support potential employers to clearly articulate levels of digital capability that are required for open roles, as well as have benefits in supporting job seekers in their pursuit of employment. Increasingly, not only must a person have internet access to find and apply for positions; they must have a level of digital capability in order to join businesses that have levelled up their digitalisation through the course of the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, digital exclusion is a driver for unemployment.

In the view of the ADIA, it is important the Framework is led – or at least endorsed – by the Government. With myriad skilling programs currently underway, and inevitably more on the horizon, it is necessary to have a Government-backed shared understanding.

Thank you for your consideration of our submission. We would be pleased to discuss these matters with you further. Please don't hesitate to be in touch with Ishtar Vij, convenor of the Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance, ishtar@eloquium.com.au.

Yours faithfully,

David Spriggs   Ishtar Vij
CEO, Infoxchange   Director, Eloquium Group
Chair, Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance   Convenor, Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance