

Digital Inclusion

Digital inclusion can be defined as having access to computer software and hardware such as tablets, computers, smart phones and smart TVs but also having the necessary skills, confidence and capabilities to use the software and hardware effectively.

The key features of digital inclusion are:

- **Access** – the availability, quality, capacity and flexibility of an internet connection, software, hardware, and sufficient data allowances
- **Affordability** – relative to overall costs of living and to the value of expenditure on internet data
- **Ability** – including the attitudes and skills to confidently use online technologies in diverse ways.

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) has ranked Australians aged 65 years and over as the most digitally excluded age group. Older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may face additional barriers to digital inclusion.

Key considerations

- 1) Limited language ability:** Older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may have limited English as an additional language. Language barriers can act to prevent engagement with information provided online, and can reduce confidence in engaging with new technology.
- 2) Limited digital literacy:** Many older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are unlikely to have had significant training in the use of new technologies.
- 3) Limited access to digital technology:** Financial constraints may mean that older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have limited opportunity to engage with new and emerging technologies.
- 4) Cyber-racism and Cyber-bullying:** It is likely that older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds web users will encounter forms of online racist materials that they may find derogatory or insulting. This is likely to have a negative impact on their confidence and willingness to engage with new digital technologies in the future.
- 5) Social isolation:** Some older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experience significant health decline over time and can become socially isolated. Not all older people have family or friends that call or visit frequently. For many older people, their family and friends live overseas, making social media an important connector.
- 6) Digital inclusion and COVID-19:** The restrictions relating to COVID-19 has radically accelerated the need for digital inclusion for older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Many sites with low cost of free internet access such as public libraries are being shut down to minimize the spread of the virus. Some essential service providers – particularly in the not for profit sector – have very limited resources to direct their services to online platforms.

Digital Inclusion (cont.)

Benefits

When older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are digitally connected it can:

- Enhance social connectedness with family, friends and community
- Enhance self-esteem and independence
- Enhance opportunity to pursue interests and media in their own language
- Enhance improvements in daily living by opening up access to culturally appropriate information
- Enhance access to health information – for example, telehealth services and information about COVID-19 updates are often available through digital technologies

To promote better digital inclusion for older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds we need to:

- Reduce financial barriers for the provision of internet access, software and hardware
- Design culturally appropriate mentoring and training programs
- Work with families and carers to build capacity and confidence for older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to access digital technology
- Partner with community led and culturally competent organisations to design digital inclusion programs for older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Good practice story

Hanna was connected to IT 4 Retirees Pty Ltd as part of the social support component in her Home Care Package. Being born in Hungary and having family still living there, Hanna longed to see and talk to them as travelling to her homeland is no longer possible. Through the purchase of an iPad and some lessons with one of their patient and caring trainers, Hanna is now able to FaceTime her family in Hungary and finally connect with her family. Now that Hanna has mastered these basic skills, a whole new world has opened up to her as she is now able to watch Hungarian programs, find out news from her country of origin, use Google Earth to see where she grew up and translate words from English to Hungarian to help with comprehension.

IT 4 Retirees Pty Ltd can work with approved Home Care Package providers to provide tailored IT training from one-on-one to group formats. They offer telephone support and customised guides to empower older people to confidently use current technology to connect with family, friends and the community.

*Hanna is not the real name of the consumer in this story.

Practice guide

Digital Inclusion (cont.)

Useful resources

Victorian Multicultural Commission

<https://multicultural.vic.gov.au/news-articles/496-multicultural-media-grants-program>

IT 4 Retirees Pty Ltd

<https://www.it4retirees.com.au/>

Be Connected, Australian Government

<https://beconnected.esafety.gov.au/>

Council on the Ageing

<https://www.cota.org.au/policy/digital-inclusion/>

National Seniors

https://nationalseniors.com.au/uploads/12172826PAR_BridgingTheDigitalDivide_FNWeb.pdf

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