



# **RADIO, TELEVISION AND DIGITAL MEDIA IN 21ST CENTURY INDIGENOUS BROADCASTING: A PLACE OF OLD AND NEW WAYS**

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Original artwork provided by Tishara Garrett, a proud Saisarem, Butchulla, Barada Barna and Cingalese woman currently living on Kombumerri country at the Gold Coast, Qld. Tishara has developed the artwork for this report about Indigenous media with the following inspiration for her work:

*The Centre is a gathering place of creatives—a place to share ideas and works, a place of collaboration and celebration of each other. Extending out from this on either side are travelling lines depicting the journey each creative travelled to this central place, each with a space between its own place of learnings and visual perspectives. These contribute to each creative's own unique style or work.*

*The detailed lines below reflect the creative flow of ideas, communication and stories.*

*Above the artwork are stars, incorporated to reflect the magic in bringing each story and idea to life.*

\* See back cover for the artwork in full.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



(from top left) Broadcaster Luke Murphy behind the mic at Ngarralinyi Radio, Taree NSW; Ernest Pan records music in the studios of PY Media, based in Umuwa in the APY lands; (bottom right) researcher Leda Barnett at yarning session and workshop with community members at 6DBY Larrkardi Radio, Derby, Western Australia; researcher Heather Anderson at the Gathering Voices festival on Waiben (Thursday Island) in the Zenadth Kes (Torres Strait Islands); and (bottom left), researcher Troy Meston with yarning session participants in Perth, Western Australia.

The research team acknowledges the community members and media workers across all fieldwork sites for their participation and commitment to the research. Without them, this project would have not been possible. This report reflects their voices and their continuous efforts to support their communities.

We acknowledge colleagues in the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) for their initial decision to support this research, and to fund a nationwide comprehensive study of Indigenous<sup>1</sup> broadcasting and media in remote, regional, and urban sites. Ultimately, the purpose of this research is to better understand Indigenous audiences, media workers, and different communities' use of technology to guide policy and decision-making around Indigenous media—we are grateful to the NIAA for the opportunity to undertake this research and to work with them and the Indigenous media and broadcasting sector to explore these issues.

We thank and acknowledge the members of the Advisory Committee that was established to help design this research. Their local and sector expertise and insights were a valuable contribution to our scholarly undertaking in designing the methodology for this work and establishing the parameters.

We also acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that we are all working on. For the main research team of Susan Forde, Harry Van Issum, Debbie Bargallie, Troy Meston, Heather Anderson, and Leda Barnett, this is the lands of the Jagera people—the country to the south of the Brisbane River (Maiwar), that both Griffith University stands upon, and that we all live upon. We acknowledge the Jagera peoples as the sovereign custodians of this land. We also acknowledge the Bundjalung peoples of the lands in northern New South Wales, where Susan de Groot Heupner works from. The Bundjalung people are the sovereign owners of the land around the northern New South Wales beaches and rivers region and we pay our respects to their elders.

Finally, we acknowledge the people of the Indigenous media sector who have made it what it is today—a burgeoning part of the Australian media landscape that the pioneers of Indigenous media could only have imagined 42 years ago when the first station began<sup>2</sup> broadcasting. Many of the important figures from the early days of the sector have passed on, but their names and their achievements continue to live on in the media organisations, producers, journalists, and broadcasters that we see today around the country. We honour their legacy.

1: The term 'Indigenous Australians' is used throughout this document to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, alongside 'Indigenous' to describe the media, communities, issues etc, pertaining to Indigenous Australians. We recognise that, as a generic term, 'Indigenous' is often contested and is imposed, and that there is no universally agreed term referring to the diverse groups of Indigenous Australians living across mainland Australia and surrounding islands. These phrases are used respectfully and with recognition that Indigenous Australians represent diverse communities, cultures, language groups and kinship systems throughout Australia. Other terms, such as 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People' and 'First Nations' are used when included in original sources, titles or quotes.

2: The Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA), broadcasting as 8KIN, is recognised as the first Indigenous radio station to begin broadcasting in Australia in 1982, with a community radio license.



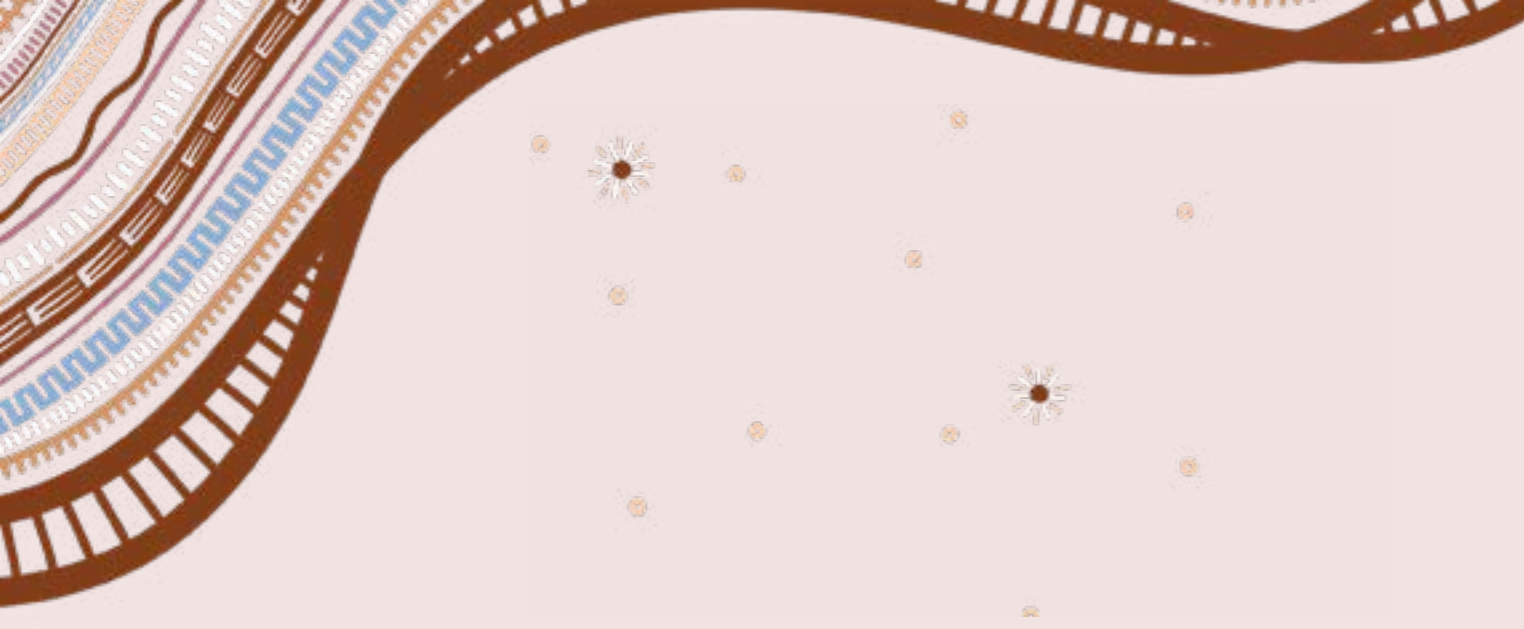
# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides data and analysis from a 12-month period, July 2023–June 2024, about the Australian Indigenous broadcasting and media sector. A comprehensive survey was delivered across Australia (n=762) to understand the media use patterns of Indigenous peoples in urban, regional and remote areas; the community role and value of existing Indigenous broadcasting and media services; and perceptions about current and future needs that can support cultural connection, news and information, entertainment, language maintenance, and community service functions. This was complemented by qualitative research carried out at 18 locations around Australia from September to December 2023. The findings presented in this report build on previous evaluations conducted on the Indigenous broadcast media sector (Stevens, 2010; Watson, 2014; SVA Consulting, 2017; DCA, 2018; Remote Indigenous Communications Review, 2020; Watson, 2021), which are considered in subsequent sections. For now, our overall observation is that evaluations since 2010 have found continuing themes of unmet audience and sector needs, suggestions for policy improvements and enhanced delivery of services to Indigenous communities. Various evaluations have concluded that Indigenous broadcasting and media is a community asset and ‘more than [just] radio’, and that the sector is not appropriately recognised as an essential service. Importantly, the collective reviews noted the expressed need for a forward-looking strategy that considers rapidly advancing technology, ageing infrastructure, and inadequate support for technical and building maintenance. In remote areas, there is the ongoing problem of stable communications infrastructure, in particular internet, wi-fi, and mobile phone coverage. Evaluations also emphasised the importance of investing in new technologies, and the expressed need to prioritise technical training and career pathways. This national research, then, takes learnings from previous work coupled with our own analysis; and is intended to inform present and future funding priorities and policy supports for Indigenous broadcasting in Australia.

## We undertook three key areas of work to explore these issues:

1. A review of a comprehensive sample of survey and qualitative research work that has occurred previously related to Indigenous broadcasting and media in Australia.
2. A national, quantitative survey of Indigenous peoples in remote, regional and urban areas.
3. Qualitative yarning sessions and workshops in remote, regional and urban areas, carried out by our team of researchers. This included an identified local Indigenous community research assistant (CRA) at all remote community sites and those sites where our team has limited existing networks.

The analysis of this data—and indeed, the anecdotal experiences of conducting such extensive research over the past 12 months—has led to a clearer understanding of Australian Indigenous peoples’ use of media, types of media/ platforms used, gaps in media services, access to media, affordability of technology, and issues such as media literacy and digital skills. This all feeds into our understanding and analysis of the place of the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program in the Australian policy and media environment.



## Key Findings

Our key findings, following consideration of the data from both the national survey and the qualitative fieldwork around Australia, are detailed below. **These key findings are embedded within an overarching observation—that Australia’s Indigenous broadcasting sector finds itself at a critical juncture.** Operating in what is a ‘hybrid’ media environment—new digital and social media has arrived, but traditional media is still widely used by many—the sector is at a point where it needs to move quickly into the digital age while genuinely maintaining existing traditional services that are so highly valued by many communities. This will ensure the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program can meet its remit to deliver services, culture, language programs and voice for Indigenous communities across all age groups and areas of residence. It is the case that social and digital media can and do perform hyper-local media roles, even though they have the potential to also be immediately global. We call it a critical juncture because pivotal components—funding, technology, skills, and communications infrastructure—have not kept pace with the changing media world and it is now time to move forward.

**1. Indigenous broadcasting is a highly valued service across all communities, although this is particularly pronounced in remote and very remote areas where Indigenous broadcasting is often the primary media source.**

In remote areas, Indigenous broadcasting is valued for making people feel proud of their communities and their Indigenous identity; hearing positive stories about their communities and mob; an Indigenous focus on content and presenters; and accessing content in traditional languages. This finding is consistent across all age groups in remote and very remote areas and is closely connected to a desire for locally-produced content in local voices.

**2. An increasing number of Indigenous peoples in urban, regional and remote areas are using digital and social media forms but at this point, many Indigenous broadcasting services are not equipped to meet this audience behaviour.**

While Indigenous broadcasting may serve a different purpose than, say, a social media platform such as TikTok, our analysis suggests this is a ‘lost’ opportunity for the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program to update to the digital and social media environment, while still maintaining important broadcasting services. Our findings demonstrate digital and social media can be used for both hyperlocal and broader national and international media content. Our fieldwork in communities suggests there are numerous people producing their own digital/social media content outside the bounds of the local Indigenous broadcasting service. Reinforcing this, there is evidence that it is mainly older rather than younger people who are accessing the traditional radio service.

**3. Related to this, there is a need to develop the skills within Indigenous media organisations to meet the demands of a new and ever changing digital and social media world.**

This was identified by the Stevens Review 14 years ago (Stevens, 2010) and our fieldwork suggests this remains an issue today. This will ensure that Indigenous broadcasting services can continue to meet the needs of their audiences, and of community members who wish to become contemporary media producers and media makers. In another previous report about the sector, Watson (2021) noted that only a small amount of the IBMP funding base is allocated to training initiatives. There is an acknowledgement within the sector that training programs and opportunities need to be targeted to ensure Indigenous broadcasters are upskilled in digital media content production which comes in many forms and formats. We note there is currently some training being offered by both the First Nations Media Australia, and the Community Media Training Organisation and this can be more formally scheduled and rolled out in a structured manner in all regionalities. The success of this will be dependent for some communities on addressing Finding 4, and Recommendation 4.

**4. There are a number of sites, particularly in some outer regional, remote and very remote areas, where the communications and media infrastructure does not meet current needs and is not equipped to meet future needs.**

This relates to problems with existing infrastructure and a lack of technical know-how to use, repair, and maintain equipment attached to current radio services; and also the absence of working Wi-Fi, internet, and other telecommunications infrastructure. While we note this has improved since the early 2000s (flagged by Watson, 2021), we identified various remote communities (for example, Yuendumu, Umuwa, Ernabella/Pukatja, and Ramingining) where either internet access or satellite access were unreliable and sometimes non-existent for long periods of time. This finding is also consistent across Indigenous broadcasting reviews over the past 20 years.

**5. In what we identify as a governance issue, some existing services are held tightly by long-term broadcasters and community members who do not have the knowledge or skills to update their media outputs, but there is no space or opportunity for younger people to become involved.**

This governance issue appears in different ways—in some places, long-term broadcasters are very keen to involve young people and to upskill themselves but do not know how to do this. In other cases,

long-term broadcasters and management committee members are comfortable with existing practices and with the way they are currently serving their communities, and do not see the need to change. Governance issues are something for Indigenous broadcasting services to address to ensure leadership structures enable the service to meet both current and future media needs and provide media training opportunities for community broadcasters across all age groups.

**6. Interviews with sector representatives indicated funding models were constraining their operations—funding levels had not changed significantly over the past 20 years despite transformative shifts in the media landscape.**

Watson’s (2021) previous report identified that just over half of funding is directed towards employment, rather than training, equipment, technical, operational, or infrastructure costs. Funding guidelines and categories have been updated following other reviews to incorporate the social and digital media environment that Indigenous media organisations are experiencing, but many organisations seem unaware of this, are unclear what they can apply for funding for; and what sort of media service they can try to offer beyond the radio service. Evidence from both the quantitative and qualitative fieldwork suggests that Indigenous broadcasting spaces are being used in very diverse ways by community—for example, as a radio service, a rehearsal space for bands, music production and recording, and sometimes as a community gathering space. This suggests a reimagining of the sector as not just an Indigenous broadcasting space, but a space that meets contemporary media production practices and consumption habits.

**7. Finally - and related to all of this - despite a significant number (53 percent) of Indigenous communities being “without a culturally appropriate and locally relevant First Nations radio service” (West, 2018, p. 9), Australia’s Indigenous media sector is world-renowned for its diversity, cultural content, and the excellence of media content and broadcasters’ skills and knowledge**

(see, for example, Fisher, 2016; Waller et al, 2015; Dreher et al, 2016; Forde, Foxwell and Meadows, 2009). This research is well-timed to gain clear sight of the current state of play, and to identify what is needed for the sector to continue to grow and support, represent, foster and inspire Indigenous communities. This emphasises the importance of enacting policy initiatives that will strengthen Indigenous media’s next phase of development.



These findings lead us to some **Key Recommendations** for the NIAA's consideration.

**RECOMMENDATION 1**  
(related to Key Findings 1, 2 and 3):

**The reconceptualisation of Indigenous broadcasting services as 'Community Media Hubs'** would enable traditional radio sites to transition into multi-platformed media and digital hubs that can accommodate a range of activities—music recording and production, digital content production for social media, traditional radio broadcasting, podcasting, training, etc while also maintaining traditional/legacy media outputs that community members value.

**RECOMMENDATION 2**  
(related to Key Findings 6 and 7):

**An immediate reconsideration of the structure and clarity of funding guidelines for First Nations broadcasting services within the IBMP,** to ensure there is sufficient support on digital technologies, digital content production, avenues for distribution through social media and popular apps—all necessary to fulfil the cultural and social connections, valued as outcomes of Indigenous media. This is supported by Watson (2021)'s findings that organisations in the sector are mainly assessed by a small set of indicators which are mostly operational and unrelated to culture capability outcomes. It also reinforces calls from the FNMA (2022) for increased funding for “content production, digital archiving, recruitment and retention, business development and to address indexation pressure”. The standard NIAA agreements indicate that an IBMP must “support a contemporary and flexible Indigenous broadcasting and media sector ...” which might relate to digital services, however this is not well understood at the community broadcasting level.

**RECOMMENDATION 3**  
(related to Key Findings 2, 3, 4 and 5):

**To realise the above, it is necessary for a suite of training programs be developed and where possible, delivered by Indigenous trainers to upskill broadcasters and media producers working at Indigenous broadcasting services in digital and social media content production.** We are aware of some offerings through the Community Media Training Organisation and the First Nations Media Australia that may be relevant; we recommend collaborations and/or a stand-alone program of training for the IBMP be developed and rolled out over the next two years. If we consider the nominal duration of a Certificate III is 6-12 months (full-time), part-time study is likely to be 18-24 months. This would be a reasonable equivalent timeframe for the design and implementation of a comprehensive training program, with necessary follow-up/ refresher to ensure skills are embedded. Indigenous broadcasters will provide sound advice to the NIAA on how this training will work best in their communities (ie whether it is offered in intensive blocks, etc). This corresponds to earlier recommendations from the 2010 Stevens Review, the 2014 Watson report, and more recently, FNMA's (2022) request to increase funding specifically targeted for expanding local media services and training and development opportunities.

**RECOMMENDATION 4**  
(related to Key Findings 4 and 6):

**We recommend an audit of existing station equipment, satellite boxes, access to Wi-Fi/internet, carried out by field officers to report back to the NIAA.** Our fieldwork necessarily sampled stations from urban, regional and remote areas but could not cover all. In some fieldwork sites infrastructure was a consistent concern, particularly in remote areas, but also in some regional areas where donated or purchased equipment was not in use despite community members expressing a desire to use it/be trained to use it. This audit should build on the work conducted by Bynder (2022), that assessed equipment and infrastructure information from 28 organisations, representing 74 percent of targeted media services.

**RECOMMENDATION 5**  
(related to Key Findings 1 and 7):

**Indigenous broadcasting is extended to meet the needs of the significant number of Indigenous communities that are without a locally relevant and culturally appropriate Indigenous broadcasting service** (as identified by the FNMA [West 2018]). While new initiatives may take the form of an Indigenous 'Community Media Hub', rather than just a stand-alone traditional radio station or broadcasting outlet, action needs to be taken to ensure the benefits of Indigenous community media are accessible to all Indigenous Australians, regardless of where they are located.

**RECOMMENDATION 6**

**A consistent and regular study of Indigenous Australians' media use patterns, and the role of Indigenous broadcasting and its related channels be conducted that produces comparative data.** While numerous surveys have been conducted over the past ten years, access to raw data is often not available and variables are inconsistent meaning that it is difficult to confidently track media use patterns, media production, and benefits of Indigenous broadcasting (among other issues) over time. A challenge for this review has been the availability of data that has asked different questions in different ways. The importance of the IBMP and the Indigenous broadcasting sector, and the government's investment in it, suggests consistent comparative data collection will best inform future funding and policy<sup>3</sup>.

To conclude, we offer the suggestion that there might be benefit in discussing the issues raised in this report, and the NIAA's possible responses, through an *Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program Summit*, or something similar. This could occur (perhaps) in the day before or after the Converge Conference, to ensure maximum attendance and the involvement of key sector bodies, noting the importance of consultation with First Nations Media Australia.

<sup>3</sup>: We recommend the existing study provides a strong template for future work—a national survey, followed up by community workshops and yarning sessions in metropolitan, regional and remote areas. The survey document can be streamlined but we recommend key questions are replicated for subsequent administration. Full information on the research methods used are provided to the NIAA.

# INTRODUCTION

This research emerged following calls from the Indigenous media sector and relevant government agencies for research to better understand Indigenous audiences, their media habits, preferences, and communication needs. Specifically, the National Indigenous Australians Agency outlined our purpose:

...to develop and deliver a survey on factors influencing engagement in, and access to, the First Nations Broadcasting and Media sector, and deliver a report on findings that will guide continuous improvement, support program evaluation, and contribute to strategic planning.

The purpose of the survey is to gather qualitative and quantitative information from communities in which the NIAA'S Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program operates to identify how the program may enhance its value and relevance (Request for Quote, SON3352211).

Importantly, this work was tied to the Closing the Gap agreement that drives a significant portion of government policy—in particular for this project, Priority Reform 2, 'Building the Community-Controlled Sector', with a focus on Outcome 16 ('Cultures and Languages are strong, supported and flourishing') and Outcome 17 ('People have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives').

In developing this body of research, Griffith University assembled a team of community and Indigenous media scholars, alongside Indigenous researchers and Indigenous research methodology experts to complete this national survey in a limited timeframe. We developed a national quantitative survey of Indigenous Australians, detailed in our Research Methods section a little later in this report,

with a series of follow-up yarning sessions and workshops with community people in urban, regional, and remote areas around Australia.

We gathered data around how Indigenous communities are accessing and engaging with Indigenous broadcasting services, broader media use patterns in diverse urban, regional and remote areas, eliciting informative data so that meaningful policy and initiatives can be developed and applied. This involved gathering data around what is currently valued about the broadcasting services that exist in communities. Although Indigenous Australian communities in the ACT, Adelaide and Tasmania are not currently serviced by locally based specialised Indigenous broadcasting services, we surveyed communities in those areas to understand what media was currently accessed to service their language and cultural needs, alongside news and information, community connection, and civic knowledge and participation.

In this work, we are building on recent research, detailed in the next section, that was also directed towards understanding Australia's Indigenous broadcasting and media services with a view to getting the policy and funding settings right. For example, in an analysis of the Indigenous Broadcast Media Sector through a number of roundtable discussions, Watson (2021, p. 6) listed four clear areas for development and stability of the sector. These were better "recognition of the contemporary Indigenous broadcasting and media sector, maintaining and modernising the sector's physical infrastructure, building and maintaining skills and capabilities and broadening and strengthening the funding base". A little earlier, in 2018, First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) reported a lack of targeted policy and adequate

funding had compromised the Indigenous broadcasting and media sector (FNMA, 2018). Like numerous previous reports, Watson recognised in 2021 the demise of some aspects of the media sector evidenced by the closing down of newspapers, regional television and radio, reduction in traditional journalism and increased pressures for public broadcasting. This is a challenging time for traditional forms of media, not just in Australia but globally—and this 'crisis' has been long-recognised by both the industry, and the research community. The sustainability of local media, in particular, is threatened (among many, see Park et al, 2022; Hess et al, 2021; Ross et al, 2021). And while a broader problem, the challenges facing local media—primarily brought on by the rise of digital media and related streaming, and smart phone technology—relate directly to the future shape of locally-based Indigenous broadcasting and media services. Digital platforms and social media have changed the nature of media consumption and media production significantly, prompting a re-evaluation of strategic direction and funding. It is our hope this report assists with that task for the National Indigenous Australians Agency in relation to the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program.

We have also considered what the research tells us about how the IBMP contributes to **Closing the Gap**, particularly Priority Reform 2, Outcomes 16 and 17. Underpinning the Closing the Gap National Agreement are four Priority Reforms that focus on changing the way governments work with Indigenous Australians. The Priority Reforms aim to:

1. Strengthen and establish formal partnerships and shared decision-making
2. Build the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector
3. Transform government organisations so they work better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
4. Improve and share access to data and information to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities make informed decisions.

Indigenous broadcast media play a crucial role in contributing to Closing the Gap initiatives, particularly in addressing Priority Reform 2 and achieving Outcomes 16 and 17 in Australia. By providing platforms for Indigenous voices to be heard, these programs foster cultural pride, preserve languages, and promote community engagement and empowerment. Through storytelling, news coverage, health and educational content, Indigenous broadcast media not only help to

bridge the gap in understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians but also strengthen cultural identity and resilience within Indigenous communities. This increased visibility and representation contribute to improved social and emotional well-being (Outcome 16: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing) and educational outcomes (Outcome 17: People have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives) for Indigenous Australians, ultimately leading to more equitable opportunities and outcomes across various sectors of society.

Upon completion of this work, it is also our view that the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program also has the strong potential to play a role in Outcome 8: Strong economic participation and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities through the provision of broadcast, digital and social media skills training and enhanced media literacy. There is evidence in both the research literature and in our own work that media engagement is key to public connection and participation (Couldry et al, 2010; Anderson et al, 2023), and our findings and Recommendations suggest an enhancement of the IBMP therefore has significant public connection, participation and economic development potential.

The findings of this national study have direct implications for stakeholders to address the aspirations and stated needs of Indigenous communities in relation to their media use, use of new technology, and access to technological infrastructure. These stakeholders include the Federal Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (DITRDCA); Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC); the regulatory body the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), the peak body First Nations Media Australia (FNMA), and community broadcasting peak body the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBA). This report is therefore also helpful to address the Closing the Gap Priority Reform 3—Transforming Government Organisations.

Finally, we trust that the results will inform the NIAA's decision-making around the development of an enhanced policy framework for the Indigenous broadcasting and media sector. Our research and recommendations are primarily informed by our data and findings, but also have a clear eye on previous commissioned work and academic literature—and so we will briefly turn to this to establish the background context for this report.

4: Readers will note numerous references of Watson throughout this report. There are two Watsons in terms of research on Indigenous media—Hugh Watson, who conducted several reviews and reports for the NIAA and its predecessor and these are Watson 2021 and 2014. Two other references are from Ian Watson, a community media practitioner and researcher who has published academic research on Indigenous media, particularly in the Northern Peninsula Area. These references are Watson 2013 and 2016.



# SETTING THE SCENE

Indigenous media has a strong imprint internationally, with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) identifying in their Article 16: “Indigenous peoples have the right to establish their own media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-indigenous media without discrimination”. Within the national context, the Australian Indigenous media landscape has a rich history, and is complex in terms of governance, working relationships, funding models and digital transitions<sup>5</sup>. Internationally, our sector is widely admired and observed both for the commitment of the incredible Indigenous broadcasters that work within it, and for the long-established policy underpinnings (Alia, 2010; Fisher, 2016; Ginsburg, 2016).

## **Indigenous broadcasting and community: A brief background**

Indigenous Australia has always been part of community and public broadcasting, even before the first dedicated station was established in the early 1980s. As with many studies that have gone before (for example, Meadows et al, 2007; Forde et al, 2009; Watson, 2013; Waller et al, 2015; NIAA, 2020; Watson, 2021), we have found that Indigenous-led programming, news and current affairs and voices are among the key reasons why Indigenous Australians listen to Indigenous community radio. Darumbal and South Sea islander journalist Amy McQuire’s new work, *Black Witness*, is a significant contribution highlighting the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in Indigenous-led media (2024). Historical studies indicate that community broadcasting has offered some of the earliest opportunities for Indigenous voice and content production. From its humble beginnings,

Indigenous community radio has focused on maintaining culture and language. Upon the establishment of the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) in the early 1980s, founding members Macumba, Glynn and Batty had a mandate to “promote Aboriginal culture, language, dance and music ... [and provide] products that engender pride in Aboriginal culture, and informs and educates the wider community” (NFSA, n.d.). The Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program (formerly the Indigenous Broadcasting Program) was founded in 1987 and piloted in the remote communities of Pukatja/Ernabella (Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands) and Yuendumu (Walpiri lands)—both of which were qualitative field sites of this study. The pilot broadcasting services were designed around the rationale to provide and promote a strong Indigenous voice within remote communities, increase Indigenous Australians’ social and economic participation in society, and strengthen Indigenous cultural expression and conservation (NIAA, 2020). Pioneers of Indigenous radio such as Bill Thaiday, Tiga Bayles, Jim Remedio, Mick Thaiday, Ross Watson, Glenys Croft, and Florence Onus began broadcasting one-hour programs on general community radio stations, eventually moving to establish and lead Indigenous media associations and connected radio and television (often called ‘bush tv’) stations throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Meadows (2000) states that since the establishment of Indigenous broadcasting there has been strong support and interest from Indigenous audiences in locally produced media content. Watson’s (2013) research on the Northern Peninsula Area’s (NPA) radio sites in far north Queensland illustrated five key themes related to the role and function of remote Indigenous radio. These are summarized as providing

community news, maintaining and sharing culture, connecting communities, connecting individuals with key services and fostering a sense of belonging and ownership. Culture and its various aspects, including language and social and cultural connections, are still important facets of Indigenous broadcasting services throughout urban, regional and remote Australia.

Existing academic literature on Indigenous media has considered the issues noted above around culture, language maintenance, social connection and providing voice, leading some to discuss the role of Indigenous media in the creation and maintenance of an Indigenous Public Sphere (see Avison & Meadows, 2000; Burrows, 2004, 2010, 2018; Forde et al., 2009; McCallum, 2012; Meadows, 2005; Rennie 2010, 2013; Latimore et al, 2017; Wilson et al, 2017; Fordham, 2018). Literature from the United States identifies a ‘Black public sphere’ (see especially Squires, 2002; and also Black Public Sphere Collective, 1995), and this is discussed briefly in the Findings of this report following some discussions in the yarning sessions about this idea (and see Jenkins et al, 2022; and Johnson, 2019 for more recent work updating Squires).

More recent literature has emphasised the embedding of digital platforms and the uneasy transition from analogue services for Indigenous Australians and Indigenous media outlets (Carlson & Frazer, 2021; Bynder, 2022; Watson, 2014; Ginsburg, 2016; Thomas et al., 2023; Featherstone, 2020, 2024). In their book *Indigenous Digital Life*, Bronwyn Carlson and Ryan Frazer (2021) contend that Indigenous people are online, often as a political statement to create safe media spaces, and enacting Indigenous futures through their complex and dynamic engagement with digital life (Carlson & Frazer, 2021).

## **The evolution of the digital, and what it means for Indigenous broadcasting in Australia**

For decades now, our society has experienced an acceleration of digital technology across economic and social life. Government services are increasingly accessed online through websites and software applications; access and digital literacy are critical. The 2023 Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) shows a huge disparity between major cities and remote regions on this issue, although there is wide variation that depends upon the “size of the community, distance from regional centres, types of communications access and the socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic context” (Thomas et al, 2023, p. 15). While it is clear Indigenous Australians engage with digital technology for both professional and personal reasons, it is not well understood *what sort of content is accessed through devices, what content is created, and how and to what extent people interact with existing Indigenous and mainstream media*. Carlson (2019; see also Carlson & Berglund, 2021; Carlson & Frazer, 2021) focuses on the digital lives of Indigenous peoples, and views social media as “a space of Indigenous action, proficiency, production, creativity and aliveness” (Carlson & Frazer, 2021, p. 8). This interface centres Indigenous experiences through the creation of an Indigenous sphere of content (Carlson & Frazer, 2021); The creation of a space for Indigenous peoples to talk, listen, relate and organise provides an important, overarching perspective on what it is Indigenous media do, or try to do.

5: As previously discussed, this report is primarily concerned with the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program funded by the NIAA, and particularly the Indigenous Broadcasting Services that sit within the IBMP. The name of the IBMP was changed several years ago to encompass both media and broadcasting to properly recognise that many broadcasting services were doing more than just traditional radio and/or TV. Our research demonstrates that Indigenous broadcasting services are, indeed, in some places doing far more than just radio; although across the sector, we have found a need for a greater embrace of digital possibilities (as per our Findings and Recommendations in the Executive Summary). We use the term ‘Indigenous media’ sometimes throughout this report in recognition of the fact that Indigenous broadcasting is a form of Indigenous media; and to acknowledge that no single media platform can describe the full range of work occurring within IBMP-funded organisations. The rich history of the sector is broadcasting (radio and television); the future is radio and television, and numerous other audio and visual creation, production and delivery opportunities.



In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the uptake of digital media accelerated and this has exacerbated the digital divide for remote communities—particularly in terms of the limitations to engage with critical services such as telehealth, online education or working from home (Featherstone, 2020). The aforementioned 2021 Watson report, commissioned by NIAA, noted a digital inclusion deficit meant the value created by the investment in the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program (IBMP) was not as effective as it could or should be (Watson, 2021).

In response to the 2018 *Regional Telecommunications Review* (RTR) recommendation (Rec. 8) to implement a targeted Indigenous digital inclusion program (Featherstone, 2020), digital inclusion has been integrated into the Closing the Gap framework (Outcome 17), and addressed by the 2023 *Australian Digital Inclusion Index* (ADII) that measures digital inclusion across variables of Access, Affordability, and Digital Ability (Thomas et al, 2023). It has also been addressed by the 2023 *First Nations Digital Inclusion Plan* developed by NIAA and the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, and the Arts (DITRDCA) with the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group. Against the backdrop of a significant increase in smart phone uptake from 44 percent in 2016 (IRCA, 2016) to 70 percent in 2023 (this National Survey) in remote and very remote areas, digital inclusion policy is paramount to the IBMP to make the Program as effective and inclusive as possible across the nation.

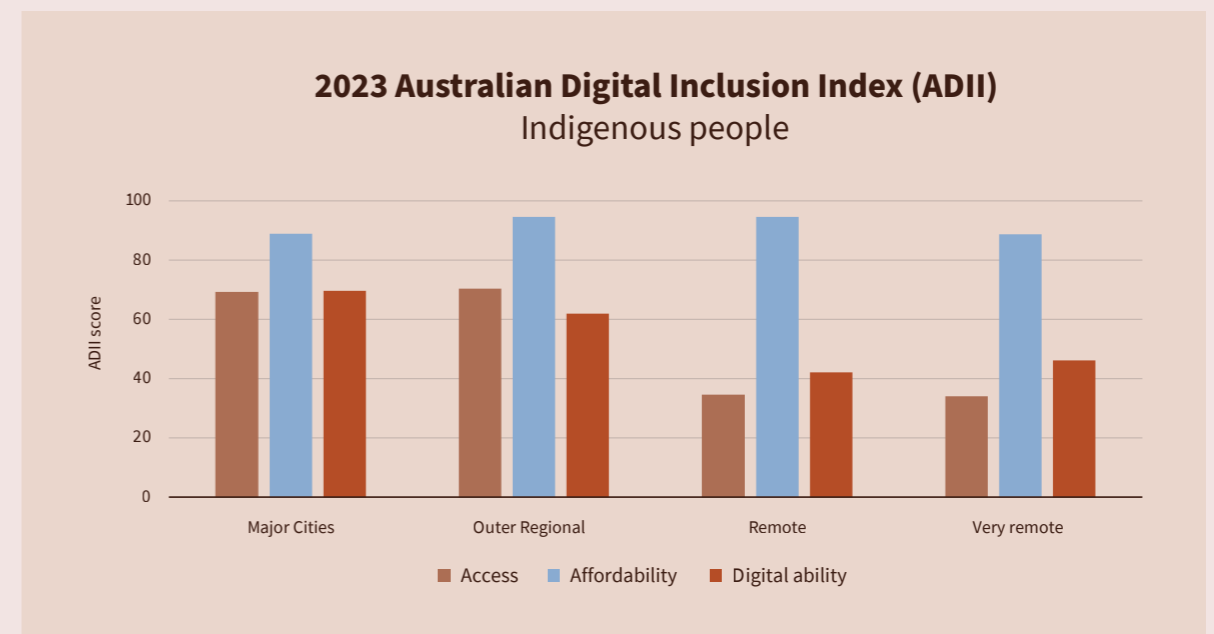
This research has identified a need for the IBMP to take significant steps forward towards digital media production and distribution while maintaining radio and TV services, to ensure the sector is able to meet community informational

needs now and into the future. Sitting behind this, however, are significant issues associated with digital access and inclusion, much of which is driven by telecommunications infrastructure deficits. We will turn to this issue for a moment, then, to recognise that recommending the IBMP ‘update’ to digital forms is not an easy fix, particularly in remote and very remote regions. It will require significant collaboration across government portfolios. Featherstone’s review of the telecommunications needs of remote communities (2020) indicates that \$155 million has been invested in telecommunications infrastructure in remote Indigenous communities since 2015 through industry co-investment. However, this model is largely exhausted due to sparse populations and remoteness, even though an increasing reliance on online service delivery has underscored the vital importance for better infrastructure in remote communities to achieve Closing the Gap Target 17 (‘People have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives’), as well as Targets and Outcomes in Education, Employment, and Economic Participation (5, 6, 7, 8), Justice and Safety (14), and Culture and Language (16).<sup>6</sup>

It is the case, however, that investment in new technologies and better infrastructure does not come without risk. In more recent work, Featherstone *et al* (2024) have warned of digital inequalities if issues of *affordability* and *digital ability/literacy* are not addressed simultaneously. Indeed the 2023 Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) report notes that digital exclusion is closely linked to social disadvantage and this gap widens in more remote regions (Thomas et al 2023). Despite improvements in

telecommunications coverage and access, with new programs and funding initiatives such as NBN Sky Mustersatellite and the Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP), reliable and affordable phone and internet access remains a key issue (ACCAN, 2023b; Featherstone, 2020; Thomas et al, 2023). The 2023 ADII shows that the digital divide is closing but remains substantial, and improvements are vital to close the gap (ACCAN, 2023a; ACCAN, 2023b; Thomas et al, 2020; Thomas et al, 2023), and to achieve the digital equity goals set to be implemented by 2026

(Featherstone et al, 2024). To emphasise this, Figure 1 below shows significant disparities in Access and Digital Ability in remote areas. The gap in Affordability appears low; however, this is calculated based on household income which tends to be higher in remote communities where Indigenous Australians share large households (Thomas et al, 2023). Overall, Indigenous Australians in remote areas have poor access to digital technology; and when they do have it, their digital knowledge and literacy is much lower than in cities and inner regional areas meaning they are less likely to use it.



**Figure 1: Aggregated data from 2023 ADII report highlighting the ADII score for Indigenous Australians across geographic areas<sup>7</sup>**

This reality directly impacts the IBMP’s ability to deliver multi-platformed media content, across a range of digital and social media apps and therefore highlights the continuing importance of supporting, upgrading and maintaining existing broadcasting services in areas where communications infrastructure (e.g. telecommunications/mobile coverage, WIFI etc) remains poor.

While the National Broadcast Network (NBN) is reported to be problematic, and sometimes non-existent in many remote and regional places, those remote areas with a

strong commercial interest—such as mining—often manage to attract excellent internet access and infrastructure. According to Toledano & Roorda (2014, p. 12), some mining towns (including in the Pilbara) were included in the first years of the NBN program, due to the:

[...] importance of the mining sector in the national economy, the significant demand of telecommunications services of mine sites, and the significant number of workers who live in nearby cities.

6: Closing the Gap Outcome 5: ‘Students achieve their full learning potential’; Outcome 6: ‘Students reach their full potential through further education pathways’; Outcome 7: ‘Youth are engaged in employment or education’; Outcome 8: ‘Strong economic participation and development of people and their communities’; Outcome 9: ‘People enjoy high levels of social and emotional well-being’; Outcome 16: ‘Cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing’ (Closing the Gap Targets and Outcomes, <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets>).

7: Inner Regional results were excluded due to low samples.



Auntie Pam McAdam in the CAAMA studios, Alice Springs

# RESEARCH METHODS



Affordability has been noted as a key issue for most remote Indigenous consumers of media and telecommunications (ACCAN, 2023a; Featherstone, 2020; Thomas et al, 2023). This is related to limited choices of telecommunications options, restricting many Indigenous consumers in remote and outer regional communities to mobile-only internet access and less affordable mobile data plans (ACCAN, 2023b). A nationally representative survey conducted in 2023 by the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) highlights that phone and internet costs are unaffordable for more than a quarter of consumers (ACCAN, 2023a). Indigenous Australians are comparatively more negatively impacted by unaffordable plans and inflexible payment options (ACCAN, 2023a). Considering the increasing importance of phone and internet access, Indigenous Australians are more prone than non-Indigenous people to sacrifice on essentials to afford phone and internet access (Thomas et al., 2023). Connectivity is crucial to Indigenous Australians and for those on low incomes, and cutting back on essentials is the only way to remain connected. Remote Indigenous communities are therefore among the most vulnerable to digital exclusion (Thomas et al, 2023).

This must be taken into account in the context of recommendations around advancing Indigenous broadcasting services beyond terrestrial radio. The evidence around digital exclusion in remote areas reinforces the importance of upgrading and maintaining existing Indigenous broadcasting services, as they are the only connection to the outside world for many individuals who do not have digital connectivity. However, we are hopeful the evidence provided within these pages will assist the government's decision-making to resource genuine efforts to address the digital gap for remote

and some outer regional areas *to better enable* digital media production, reception and engagement.

In terms of community radio, the sector still holds an important place in the Indigenous media landscape. It is considered a foundational source of news, critical information, and services, as well as the key site for connecting individuals and communities, and building a sense of belonging (Watson, 2013). The 2021 Hugh Watson report examining Indigenous broadcasting services emphasized the value of Indigenous broadcasters in closing the digital gap by targeting their content to community demands, providing a wide range of digital activities, and increasing digital ability and skills in community through positive education (Watson, 2021), where digital capacity and connectivity existed. Ian Watson's earlier work (2016) also suggests a community communication centre incorporating all forms of media.

Many of these themes covered here recurred in our interviews and yarning sessions with both Indigenous media workers and audiences. It is with these issues as a backdrop that the National Survey and qualitative research instruments for this study were developed.

This research was designed and carried out using an Indigenist research paradigm to ensure that current media use, and informational needs of communities serviced by the Indigenous Broadcast and Media Program are best understood. Where possible, we have attempted to gauge the media and communication needs of communities currently not serviced by the program—in the ACT, Tasmania, and Adelaide—to inform current and future policy for the NIAA.

The proposed project was methodologically and ethically framed by an 'Indigenist research methodology,' enunciated by Rigney (1997). Consistent with this approach, this research privileges Indigenous voices (Rigney, 1997, p. 119). This was established using Indigenous perspectives from the literature; a research team that included both community media research experts and Indigenous researchers as chief investigators; and through local, community-based Indigenous participants in data collection.

Four members of the research team—Bargallie, Meston, Van Issum, and Barnett—work from an Indigenous standpoint, within an Indigenist research paradigm, allowing us to operationalise Indigenous knowledges and standpoints for research ends. This includes consulting with Indigenous peak bodies and the communities they service to refine the research methods and to ensure the project was designed, from the outset, with community benefit in mind.

Our work was initially guided by an Indigenous Advisory Group of relevant Indigenous Australians with knowledge of the sector, who provided insight into different components of the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program. The Indigenous Advisory Group was led by the Brisbane Indigenous Media Association (BIMA) and National Indigenous Radio Service CEO Jyi Lawton and involved three key people

from the Indigenous media and broadcasting sector. Consultation with the NIAA in the planning phase was undertaken to determine the additional two members of this Indigenous Advisory Group to represent urban, regional and remote media.

A mixed methods approach was deployed to meet the needs of research, which involved three key components—a comprehensive literature review, a national quantitative survey with Indigenous Australians, and qualitative fieldwork incorporating yarning sessions and workshops at 18 sites across the country.

First, a survey of existing research and grey literature was conducted to assess key learnings to date, information about the state of the sector, and audience uses and needs. This stage identified data gaps, so that this project could be designed to meet these. Previous industry reports and survey data were drawn upon in this stage, and summarised.

A large, national quantitative survey was delivered online, by telephone, and in person through a partnership with McNair yellowSquares, Australia's major survey provider. This quantitative survey drew upon McNair yellowSquares' 'SurveyMob' database, survey field officers, and the research team's proven methods to access and contact community members through fieldwork visits, enhanced by on-the-ground community research assistants (CRA) who conducted surveys face-to-face where possible. The survey was delivered across all states and territories. Because Tasmania and ACT do not have a NIAA-funded Indigenous broadcasting service, the team did not deliver follow-up qualitative fieldwork (workshops and yarning sessions) in these locations. However, the survey did include these locations to present a representative sample.

Thirdly, qualitative fieldwork was undertaken to understand the experience of Indigenous broadcasting more deeply from the perspective of audiences, broadcasters and other ordinary community members. This comprised of combined yarning sessions (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010) and workshops, with Indigenous community members in selected urban, regional, and remote areas of Australia, alongside informal conversations with other community members

(including people working at Indigenous media organisations) and ethnographic observations during fieldwork visits. Our chosen fieldwork sites were selected following consultation with the NIAA, and key stakeholders such as members of First Nations Media Australia, the Community Broadcasting Foundation, the Queensland First Nations Media Coalition, and others as advised by the NIAA, and our Indigenous Advisory Group.

**Table 1: Fieldwork Locations**

Fieldwork locations	State	Residential category
Brisbane	QLD	Major Cities
Sydney	NSW	Major Cities
Adelaide	SA	Major Cities
Perth	WA	Major Cities
Melbourne	VIC	Major Cities
Taree	NSW	Inner Regional
*Cherbourg	QLD	Inner Regional
Darwin	NT	Outer Regional
Geraldton	WA	Outer Regional
Port Augusta	SA	Outer Regional
Broome	WA	Remote
Alice Springs	NT	Remote
Derby x 2	WA	Very Remote
Bourke x 2	NSW	Very Remote
Yuendumu	NT	Very Remote
Ramingining	NT	Very Remote
Pukatja	SA	Very Remote
Umuwa	SA	Very Remote
Waiben (Thursday Island)	QLD	Very Remote
*Bamaga	QLD	Very Remote

Due to unforeseen circumstances (i.e., sorry business, severe weather) two field visits were cancelled prior to the scheduled fieldwork, in Cherbourg (Qld) and Bamaga (Qld). However, the team completed further individual interviews

with industry experts. In two locations (Derby and Bourke), the team carried out more than one yarning session and workshop to allow for cultural sensitivities around age and gender.



**Figure 2: Fieldwork Locations, September-December 2023, mapped**

Most of our researchers who conducted the fieldwork were Indigenous, ensuring appropriate methodology, community connection and opportunities to provide training, experience, and financial support back to communities. This team identified and collaborated with locally based community research assistants (CRA) who helped coordinate fieldwork visits including participant recruitment and venue selection and facilitated fieldwork while on site. The selection of the CRA meant that in some cases the participants represented their family, friendship groups, colleagues or genders. This was offset by the radio announcements, Facebook posts and personal research networks that we also used to recruit people to take part in the yarning sessions and workshops. Selection criteria for participation in the yarning sessions and workshops were straightforward—participants needed to be over the age of 18 and identify as an Indigenous Australian. In cases where there were more than 12 interested participants, an additional yarning session was added to the schedule. On two occasions, a non-Indigenous person closely aligned with Indigenous broadcasting also yarned with researchers—one was an active listener, the other an ‘off-air’ volunteer with an Indigenous media organisation.

Our fieldwork in major cities tended to have a female bias but with a reasonable balance between older and younger participants. This was the case in Sydney and Brisbane. Perth had a cohort of various ages and gender but few under

30 years of age. Regional sites had a higher proportion of middle to older participants with a balance of genders. This was the case in Geraldton and Taree; however, Darwin had a predominantly younger and female participant group in the 18-30 age group. Remote sites had a range of ages and a balance of genders. This was the case in the APY (Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara) lands, Alice Springs, Derby and Ramingining. Overall cohorts in major cities, regional areas and remote sites were representative of all age groups with a slight bias to female and with fewer younger people in the 18-35 bracket. The face-to-face mode of data collection tended to attract a more mature audience rather than youth who may prefer on-line interactions.

Venues also had an influence on the makeup of participants groups. Using radio broadcasting sites as venues also attracted participants familiar with the broadcasting services. The researchers intentionally broadened the type of sites to diversify the pool of participants. For example, in remote sites we used council buildings, radio stations, community organisations and local houses. In urban sites we used radio stations, universities, and business hubs, whereas in regional areas we selected radio stations, community hubs and media associations as the base for the fieldwork visits.



CAAMA, in Alice Springs, is the oldest Indigenous broadcaster in Australia

Due to unique local circumstances and conditions, such as the level of rapport in certain communities, cultural responsibilities and obligations, and adverse weather conditions, attendance at each yarning session and workshop varied across fieldwork sites. When limited opportunities arose to assemble a large group, the research team conducted small group and/or individual yarning sessions. In most fieldwork sites, a yarning session and workshop was conducted with 4-6 participants and responses were electronically recorded. In some locations, the yarning session and workshop consisted of more than twelve participants, and, when appropriate, more than one was conducted to include as many voices of the community as possible. In some remote regions participants were reluctant to be recorded and field notes were taken during conversations. In some cases, community members were wary of being visually recorded, or cultural protocols prohibited this. In these cases, field notes were collected, audio recorded but no photos taken. Most participants in these yarning sessions, workshops and small group or individual yarns were community

members who had no particular attachment to the local Indigenous radio station. Both formal and informal interviews with paid and volunteer broadcasters and/or station managers, technical supports etc were also conducted to gain a good sense of operations of the Indigenous Broadcasting Service in the area.

This combined quantitative and qualitative national scoping initiative was delivered by a team of researchers, project management and administration, combined with the necessary local community research assistant support across relevant geographical areas. The method outlined above enabled us to collect and analyse a robust collection of rich and meaningful data. We combine the quantitative and qualitative components in the following two sections below. First, we present demographic information pertaining to the quantitative national survey, followed by an in-depth discussion of our findings that draws on data from both survey and fieldwork.

# FINDINGS

## Demographics of Survey Respondents

The survey attracted 762 respondents across all states and territories. The sample is distributed among age groups from 18 and above across remoteness areas using the Remoteness index ARIA+.<sup>8</sup>

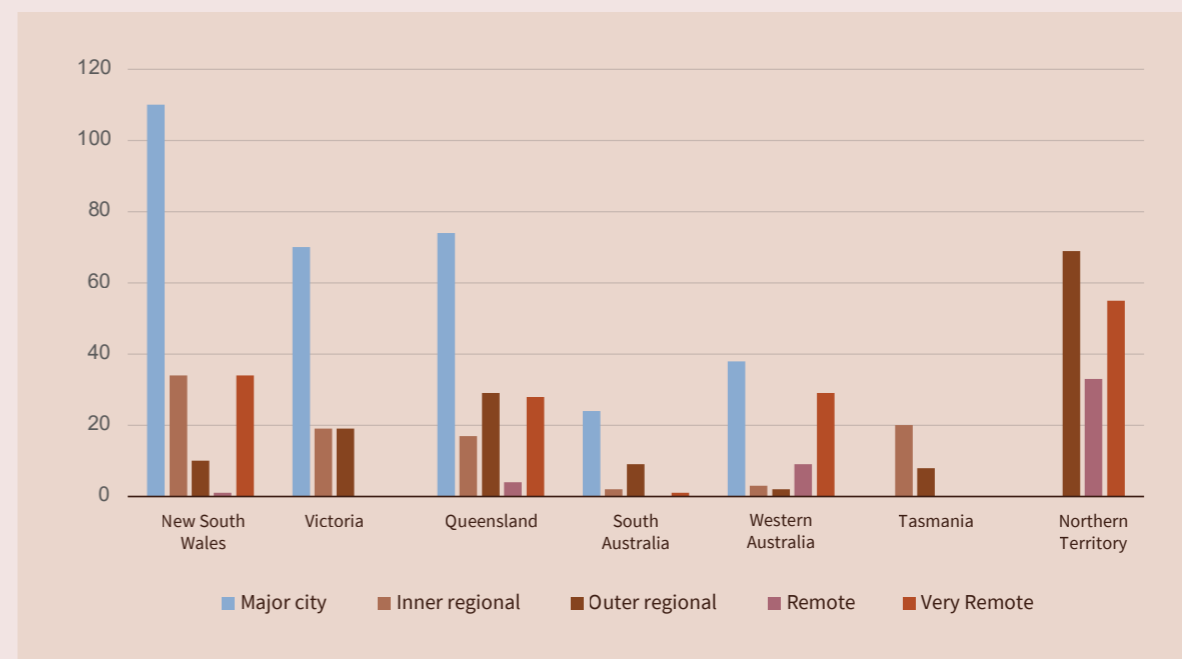


Figure 3: Initial demographics of the respondents by State and Residential Category (n=762)

As of June 30, 2021, from an estimate total of 983,709 Indigenous Australians, the largest Indigenous population is recorded to reside in New South Wales (35 percent), Queensland (27 percent), and Western Australia (12 percent)<sup>9</sup>. With Queensland, New South Wales, and Western Australia

comprising almost three-quarters of Australia's Indigenous population, our survey sample is representative of a large proportion of respondents in these states. The survey also attracted many respondents from the Northern Territory, where the highest density of Indigenous Australians

8: The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines The Remoteness Structure as "Remoteness Areas for the purpose of releasing and analysing statistics. Remoteness Areas (RA) divide Australia into five classes of remoteness which are characterised by a measure of relative geographic access to services. Access to services is measured using the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia Plus (ARIA+), produced by the Australian Centre for Housing Research (formerly the Hugo Centre for Population and Migration Studies) at the University of Adelaide." The five ARIA categories are Major Cities, Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote, and Very Remote.

9: Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/latest-release>.



Indigenous broadcasting services many regional areas of Australia. Charleville, the site of this outback music festival, is a large regional town in western Queensland and has been serviced by Indigenous station 4RRR since 2000.

live—the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics data indicates the Northern Territory has the highest proportion of Indigenous Australians at about 44 percent of the total population; compared to about 4.3 percent in New South Wales, 5.5 percent in Queensland, and 4.5 percent in Western Australia.<sup>10</sup>

It should be noted that according to the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA), the Northern Territory does not include the categories of major cities, or inner regional areas—the capital, Darwin, is categorised as outer regional and other areas are either remote, or very remote.<sup>11</sup>

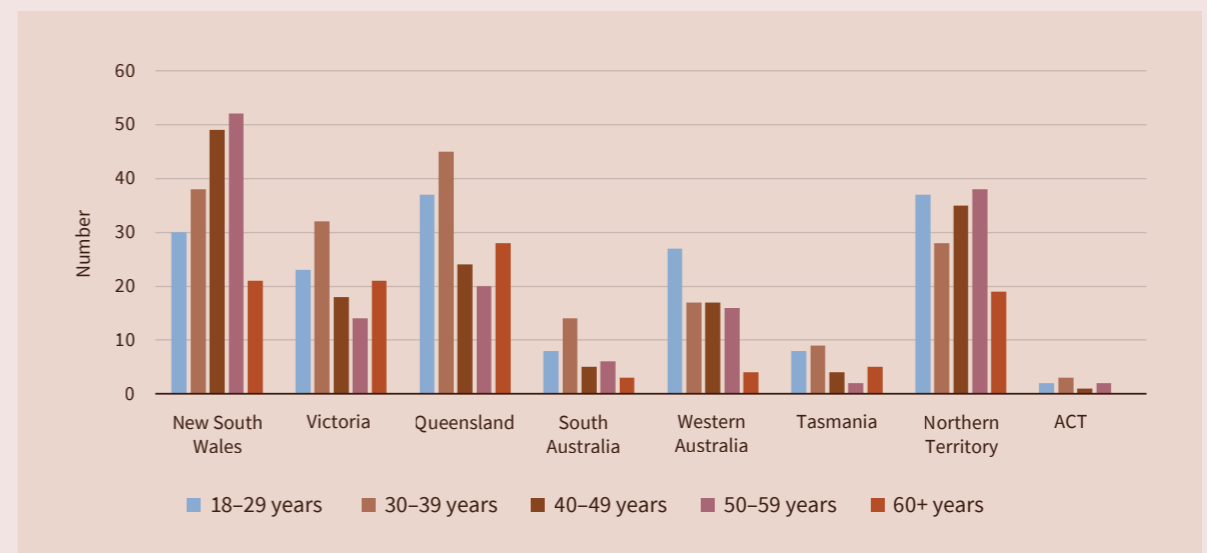
**Table 2: Breakdown of respondents by residential category**

Area	Number of respondents (national)	% of respondents (national)
Major city	324	42.7
Inner regional	95	12.5
Outer regional	146	19.2
Remote	47	6.3
Very remote	147	19.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>759*</b>	<b>100.0</b>

NOTE: Total sample size was 762; there were 3 responses missing to this question about the area lived.

Our sample indicates the largest single group of respondents came from major cities—42.7 percent of the total national sample, which is close to the national statistics which see 40.8 percent of Indigenous Australians residing in major cities<sup>12</sup>. Our proportion of outer regional respondents is also consistent with national data—about 19 percent of Indigenous Australians live in what is categorised as outer regional (rural) areas, and this is closely reflected in our responses. Our data is slightly under-representing Indigenous Australians living in inner regional areas (12.5 percent of our sample compared to

24.8 percent of the national population), and this is due to the fact that we deliberately increased the number of respondents we identified and received survey responses from in remote and very remote areas. This slight skew to remote areas was deliberate, to ensure those Indigenous Australians living in remote areas—where Indigenous broadcasting is often the main media service—were well represented across the nation so we could capture the diversity of conditions and experiences.



**Figure 4: State breakdown by age group (n=762)**

Across all states, the survey attracted a wide range of age groups—that is, in all states we had both young, middle-aged, and older people responding to the survey. In New South Wales, where we achieved the highest response rate, the majority of respondents were aged over 40, with a significant number aged over 50. In contrast, we had a significant number of 18–29-year-olds responding to the survey in the Northern Territory—about the same as those from the over-50 age bracket. In Queensland, middle-aged respondents aged 30–49 dominated responses. Overall though, the data indicates a strong cross-section of age groups across all states, with a focus of numbers in NSW, QLD, VIC and NT, as indicated earlier.

A disproportionate number of the 762 respondents were female (62 percent), with a substantially lower number of male respondents (37 percent). This is not representative of the actual national gender breakdown among adult Indigenous Australians (a ratio of 101 males to every 100 females). Overall, then, the quantitative survey data is skewed towards female responses, although the number of male responses is still sufficiently significant to draw conclusions about male patterns of media use, and attitudes to mainstream and Indigenous media. Further, it is common in surveys of Indigenous Australians for there to be more female than male respondents—Wright et al.'s large health study yielded about 56 percent female and 43 percent male responses—and while this is more representative than the current sample,

10: Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/latest-release>.

11: Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). Remoteness Areas: Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Edition 3. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/australian-statistical-geography-standard-asgs-edition-3/jul2021-jun2026/remoteness-structure/remoteness-areas>

12: Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/latest-release>.



# FINDINGS

## *Indigenous media at a critical juncture*

it does demonstrate that a higher number of female responses is not uncommon to surveys such as this (and Wright et al., 2020 confirm this trend). A group of six respondents indicated they were non-binary, or did not wish to nominate their gender.

In terms of languages spoken, and as anticipated, there were far more respondents speaking Indigenous Australian languages in more remote locations. Overall, 41 percent of the sample said they spoke an Indigenous language; 59 percent said they did not. In remote and very remote areas 83 percent and 69 percent of respondents indicated to speak an Indigenous Australian language, respectively. This is compared to 23 percent of respondents in major cities, 22 percent in inner regional (close to a major regional town), and 46 percent in outer regional (smaller, rural-type regional areas). These figures still represent a relatively high number of Indigenous language speakers in metropolitan and major regional areas—this is often due to the fact that many people nominate ‘lingo’ or ‘Aboriginal English’ as a spoken language in this part of the survey. Of those who said they spoke an Indigenous language, just over one-quarter of those indicated ‘Aboriginal English/lingo’ as the Indigenous language they spoke. A further 12 percent indicated Kriol/Creole as their language.

While the data indicates that more respondents in the older groups (40-49 years, 50-59 years, and 60+ years) speak Indigenous languages (50 percent, 47 percent and 38 percent, respectively), the number remains relatively stable among younger respondents (34 percent in the 30-39 years, and 37 percent in the 18-29 years). There were 8 languages that at least ten respondents identified as speaking: Arrernte, Djambarrpuyngu, Gamilaraay, Jaru, Kriol, Murrinh-patha, Noongar, and Warlpiri.

Overall, then, the survey attracted a strong number of responses from Indigenous Australians—762—from all regions of Australia including a relatively high proportion from remote and very remote regions, which forms an important aspect of this study. This meets an important criterion in understanding

and evaluating the current Indigenous Broadcast and Media Program and communities’ current and future media needs. While the gender breakdown is skewed towards female respondents, this is not unusual in surveys of Indigenous Australians; and the proportion of male respondents is sufficient to elicit reliable data. Our respondents also reflect a good cross-section of the different states of Australia; with the highest proportion of respondents coming from the most populous states for Indigenous Australians. As such, we present our quantitative findings assured that our demographic breakdown is representative of the cohort of Indigenous Australians who use and rely upon Indigenous media services.

The National Survey provides strong basic information about how different groups of Indigenous Australians—different age groups, and people living in different regions—use media, access information, and their preferred ways to communicate with each other. It also provided useful data around social media use, which is (as expected) widespread within Indigenous communities although far more so among young people. Similarly, new technologies such as smart phones are owned by most people, although anticipated age differences are also evident with smart phones indispensable to young people; but not used by all people over 50 years old. Older age groups are more likely to rely on television and radio for entertainment, news and connection.

In the following section—the heart of this report—we present and analyse our findings on the diverse ways Indigenous Australians engage with and use a broad range of technologies and media. We combine qualitative and quantitative data, organised through five key themes: Media Technologies; Social and Cultural Connections; Content; Equity and Access; Infrastructure, Management and Governance.

This section presents our findings from a combined analysis of quantitative data from the National Survey and qualitative data from our yarning sessions, workshops and fieldwork notes. Analysis of the data led to the emergence of five key themes to help organise our research findings: Media Technologies; Social and Cultural Connections; Content; Equity and Access; and Infrastructure, Management and Governance. These themes provide a robust framework for the discussion of media use patterns of Indigenous Australians, the role of Indigenous broadcasting in communities and peoples’ lives, and the current and future needs of both the Indigenous media sector, and the communities they serve.

### **MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES**

This category focuses on media technologies used by participants, encompassing the diverse range of tools individuals deploy to interact with and harness media. Its purpose is to capture, and better understand, the data on Indigenous Australians’ access to information and digital infrastructure; the technological devices people use to access media and information, and the variations in the access and uptake of technology that exist between age groups, and remoteness/region of residence.

#### **Access to technology by device**

For the overall National Survey sample, the technology most likely to be owned was a smart phone – 80 percent, with a smart TV being the second-most popular device among respondents, owned by 61 percent. The third-most owned and used piece of media technology is a car radio, and we have highlighted those top three categories in Table 3, in pale yellow, below. Note the category of ‘mobile phone’ in the Figure 5 below means a non-smart phone – perhaps an older-style flip phone, or something similar. Most people are indicating that they share computers, radios, tablets and televisions at home; while computers and car radios are often accessed through friends or family as well as in the home. This data takes on greater relevance when we consider it in terms of residential category and age breakdowns.



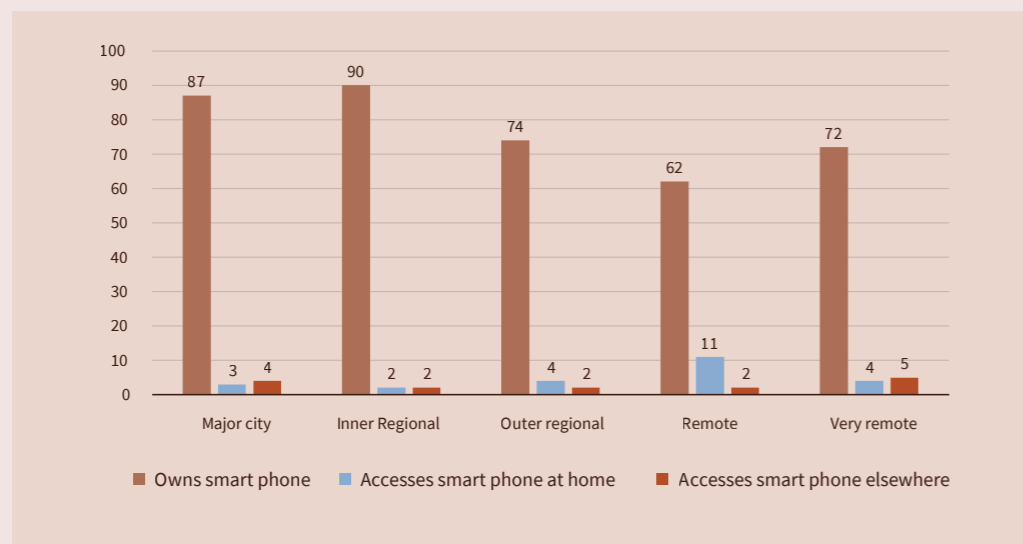
**Table 3: Media technology and devices owned by RESIDENTIAL CATEGORY**

	Major City	Inner regional	Outer regional	Remote	Very remote
<b>Smart phone</b>	87%	90%	74%	62%	72%
<b>Old-style mobile phone*</b>	18%	11%	14%	9%	10%
<b>Tablet</b>	43%	44%	25%	15%	12%
<b>Computer</b>	56%	51%	36%	17%	15%
<b>Radio (e.g. home wireless, stereo, transistor etc)</b>	45%	48%	28%	29%	26%
<b>Car radio</b>	57%	67%	51%	30%	31%
<b>Smart TV</b>	69%	71%	55%	47%	50%
<b>Game console</b>	42%	38%	29%	17%	15%

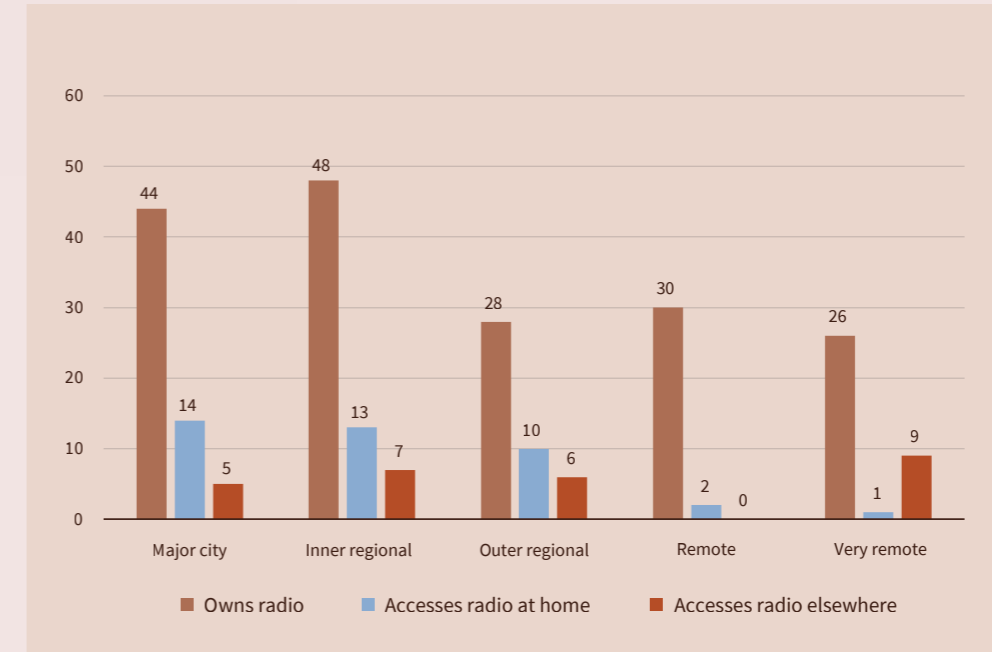
\*i.e. a mobile phone that is not a smart phone.

There is a slight variation across regional categories, with less National Survey respondents owning and using a smart phone and smart TV in remote and very remote areas. A similar variation

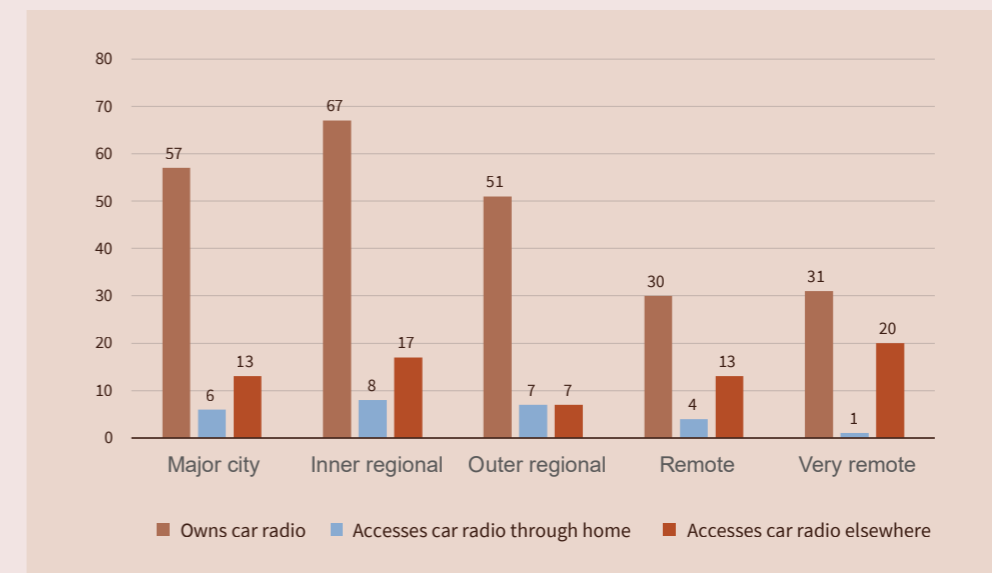
is evident with the ownership and use of other digital devices, such as computer, tablet, and game console.



**Figure 5: Smart phone ownership and access by region (%)**



**Figure 6: Radio (excluding car) ownership and access by region (%)**



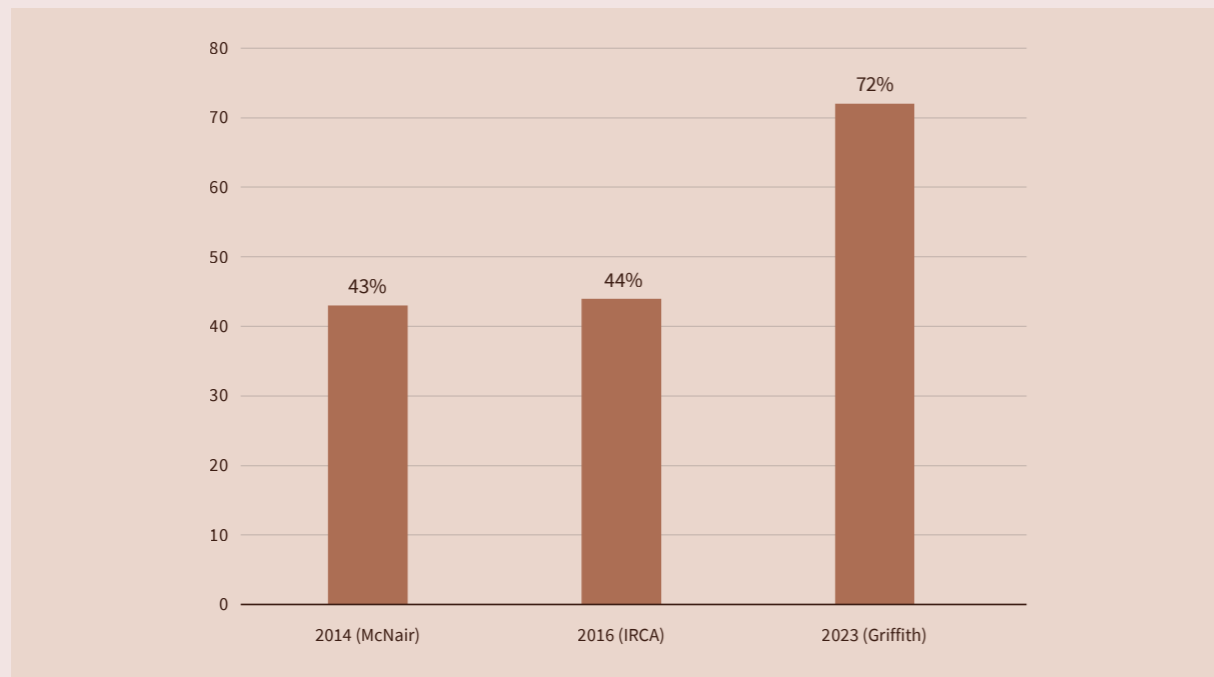
**Figure 7: Car radio ownership and access by region (%)**



Although the ownership of a car and therefore car radio is also lower in remote and very remote areas as indicated in Table 3, the use of a car radio through a friend or family member is slightly more common among these respondents (see above).

It is possible to compare device ownership longitudinally, by drawing on findings from previous surveys. The 2016 Remote Indigenous Communications and Media Survey (IRCA 2016) surveyed 218 people (face-to-face) living in remote communities across the Northern Territory, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia, with results weighted to population as per the ABS 2011 Census (the results of our

National Survey were not similarly adjusted). Based on the locations of the Remote Indigenous Broadcasting Services captured in this survey, we have taken the term 'remote' to refer to what our National Survey categorised as 'very remote'. An additional 2014 McNair report can also be drawn upon, however, it is unsure which States and Territories were surveyed in the 2014 survey, and what level of 'remoteness' is applied to the results. Comparing the three sets of data shows evidence of a steady uptake in smart phone ownership in remote areas in the 10 years from 2013 to 2023, rising from 43 percent of remote Indigenous residents in 2013 to 72 percent now. That is, from well under half of the population, to near three-quarters with most of this growth occurring since 2016.



**Figure 8: Smartphone Ownership in Very Remote Areas, across time**

To return to the 2023 survey results, we will now consider the age of respondents and their device use and ownership (Table 4). Although not all younger survey respondents in the 18-29 years category owned a smart phone, they all used one. A small percentage (7 percent) indicated that they share the use of a smart phone. Older respondents own or use a smart phone far less, with 24 percent of respondents over 60 years indicating they did not use a smart phone.

The ownership and use of a game console is more common in major cities and inner regional areas. The low uptake in remote and very remote areas could be linked to access to internet and phone connectivity, and costs associated with extensive data use.

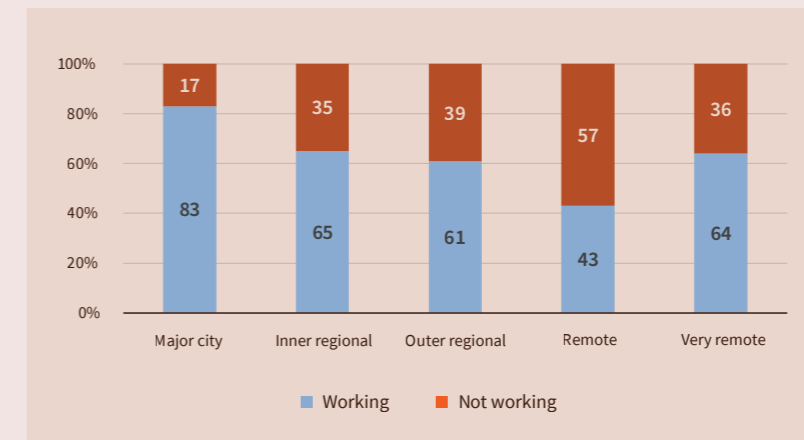
**Table 4: Media technology and devices owned by AGE**

	18- 29 years	30-39 years	40-49 years	50-59 years	60 + years
<b>Smart phone</b>	93%	87%	74%	69%	74%
<b>Mobile Phone*</b>	9%	12%	17%	17%	22%
<b>Tablet</b>	29%	42%	25%	24%	41%
<b>Computer</b>	52%	52%	30%	31%	35%
<b>Radio (e.g. home wireless/radio, stereo, transistor radio etc)</b>	27%	38%	43%	32%	52%
<b>Car radio</b>	55%	60%	44%	40%	50%
<b>Smart TV</b>	66%	70%	56%	52%	60%
<b>Game console</b>	46%	44%	30%	16%	13%

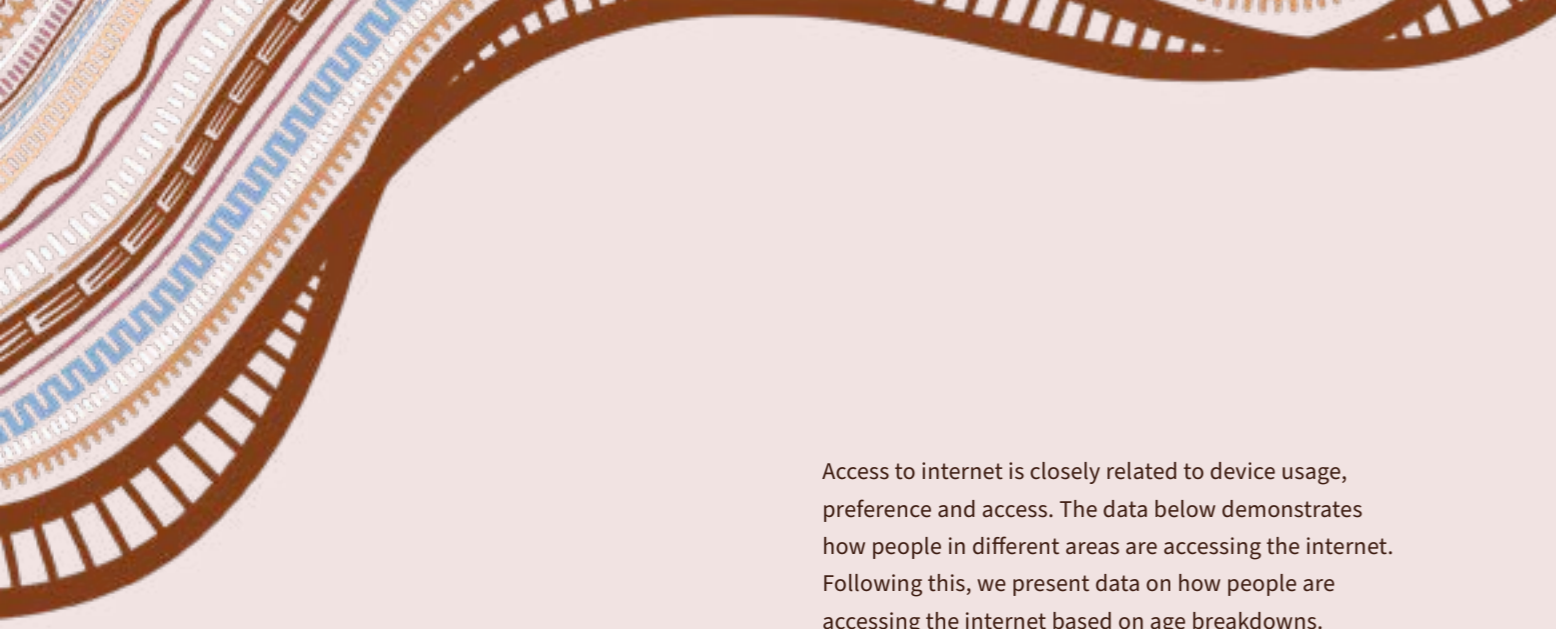
\*i.e. a mobile phone that is not a smart phone.

Landline phones are being used by 17 percent of respondents for voice calls (45 percent), ADSL internet (35 percent), and emergencies (10 percent). Importantly, and this is reflected in the table below, about one-quarter of our survey respondents needed satellite to receive television. However, almost one-third of those people said their satellite service was not working;

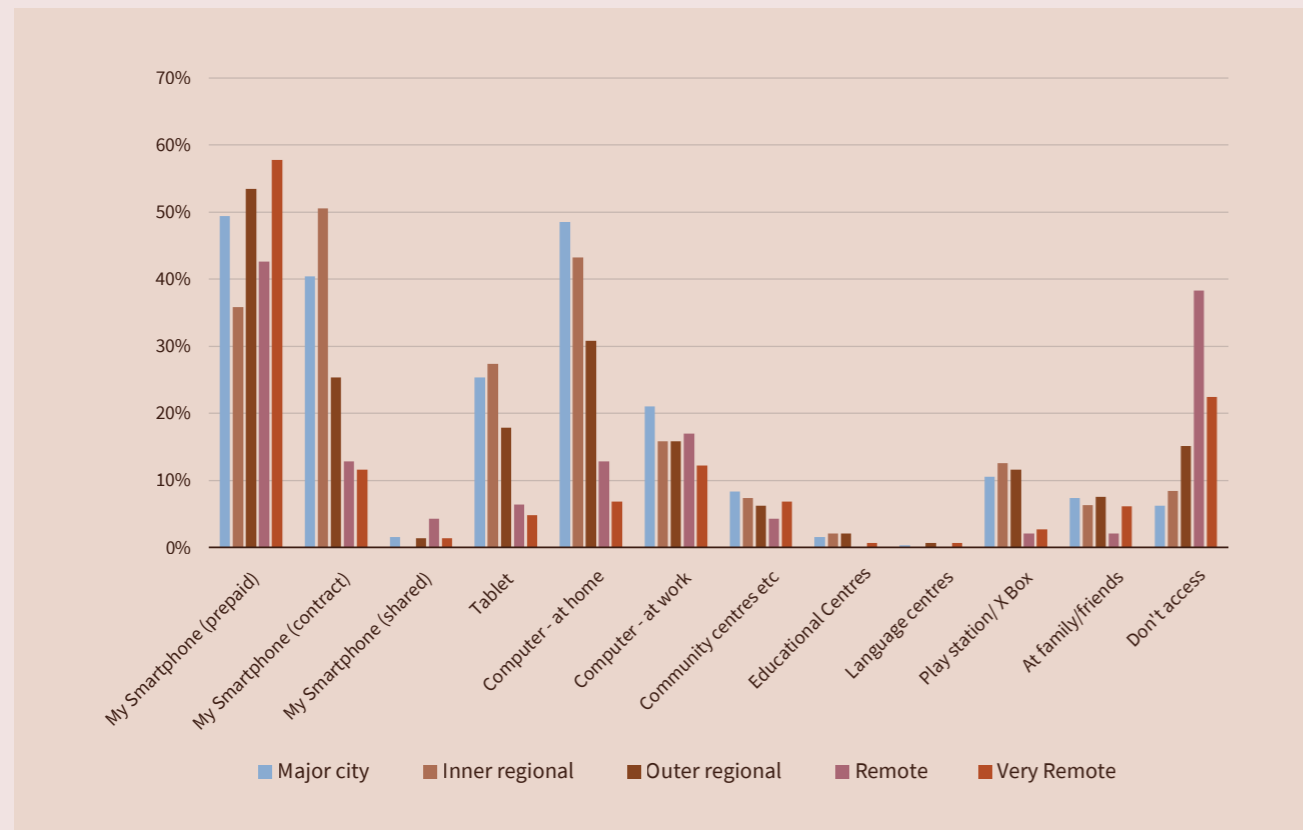
and in remote regions, this was reportedly as high as 57 percent. This is important because TV (36 percent), after social media (40 percent), is an important information source for emergency information among respondents.



**Figure 9: Working vs non-working satellite service (% based on those indicating they required a satellite service to watch television)**



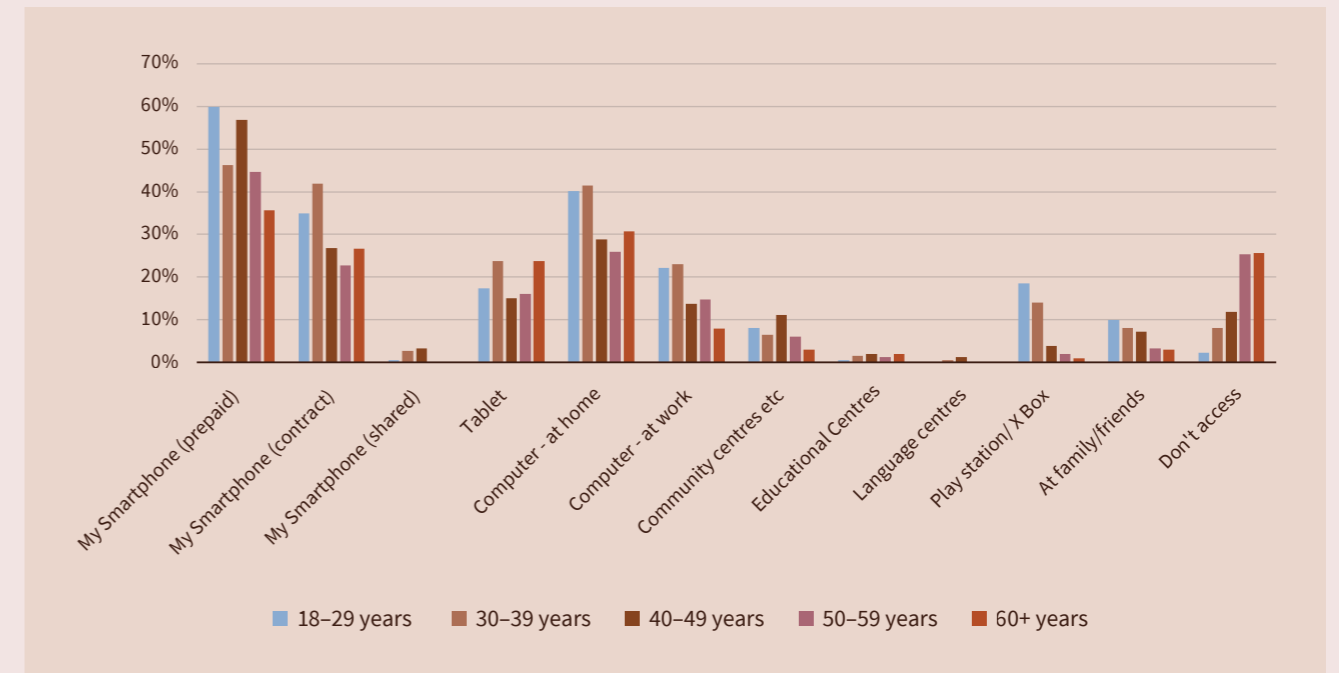
Access to internet is closely related to device usage, preference and access. The data below demonstrates how people in different areas are accessing the internet. Following this, we present data on how people are accessing the internet based on age breakdowns.



**Figure 10: Access to the internet by RESIDENTIAL CATEGORY**

What we see is that prepaid smart phones are by far the most common way that people in very remote areas access the internet (almost 60 percent); with a further 22 percent indicating they do not access the internet at all in very remote areas. For major cities, the most common ways to access the internet are fairly predictable—a combination of pre-paid smartphones, contract smartphones, and a computer at home.

It is useful to breakdown the regional areas into 'inner' and 'outer' regional—the inner regional areas more closely reflect the trends of their major city peers; while the outer regional areas more closely reflect the patterns of remote areas. We note a fairly large proportion of National Survey respondents in outer regional areas thought they did not access the internet at all.



**Figure 11: Access to the internet by AGE**

The above graph shows both community centres, and shared internet access at family or friends form a small proportion of methods for people to access internet, but they are sufficiently large in some age groups (around 10 percent) to warrant acknowledgement. We note this data also shows that about one-quarter of people aged 50-59, and one-quarter aged 60-69, said they did not access the internet at all, mostly likely because it is not available in communities or is in areas that are difficult to access for older people (for example, a telephone booth on the outskirts of the community). Pre-paid smart phones, smart phones on a contract, and a home computer are the most common ways to access the internet across all age groups. Young people are more reliant on games consoles to access the internet—just under one in five of 18-29-year-olds use their games console for this purpose.

The yarning sessions and workshops identified similar patterns of access to technology. Participants described using a broad range of media to access news and entertainment, from the traditional 'wireless' to contemporary digital platforms. While devices and applications differed between urban, regional, and remote areas, common trends indicated an acceleration towards digital devices and platforms. The most preferred devices used by yarning session and workshop participants were smart phones, radio, and smart TV. Traditional radio also occupied a primary place in communities, as a foundational broadcasting service for community information. With a strong presence in community as a trusted service provider, many saw the role of community broadcasting services expanding as a base for future digital production.

As per the National Survey findings, smart phones proved to be the device of preference for yarning session and workshop participants. However, despite, their overwhelming presence across all research sites, the full range of a smart phone's technological capacity was under-utilised, particularly with older participants, who used them mainly for traditional voice calls and messaging, whereas young to middle-aged participants engaged deeply with all capabilities. This finding is consistent with the literature and reinforces the need for stable and uniform internet coverage and digital literacy across age cohorts in all Indigenous communities nation-wide.

Yarning session and workshop participants across all demographics mentioned that laptops and computers are more commonly used for employment purposes. Tablets and iPads are used but not substituted for a smart phone. Everyone has a smart phone, but not everyone has a tablet, iPad, or computer. In addition, in urban areas devices such as smart watches are becoming increasingly popular, enabling use in more areas where smart phones may be too intrusive (e.g. in meetings).

One middle-aged woman living in a major city<sup>13</sup> said she felt “naked without my smart watch”. Observations and recorded field notes indicated that use of smart watches was an urban trend, and few regional or remote participants owned these. Indeed, there is an obvious geographical variance between remote and regional areas and major cities regarding the use of certain devices. In the following sections, we provide individual snapshots of the most popular devices and applications used by participants across our field sites.

## SMART PHONES

The smart phone is the most used device across all fieldwork sites to access and use media. Yarning session and workshop participants referenced the value of phones to access the internet. This is the case in those communities where internet access was more reliable, as well as urban areas where fast-paced internet access is often part of everyday life. Participants commented on the extensive use of smart phones by the younger generation and to a lesser extent the older generation, and reliance on smart phones for accessing and connecting with the broader world.

“I could best describe my phone as an extension of myself in order to function.” (Mid-Age, Female, Major City)

“These days you can do everything on your phone.” (Mid-Age, Female, Regional)

“I do everything with my phone, it’s an extension of my arm.” (Mid-age, Male, Remote)

“I can do absolutely everything on my smart phone. If you look at my photos, it is my memories. My photo reel is like an external part of my brain.” (Mid-Age, Female, Major City)

Younger participants who produce media noted the camera/video feature on smart phones was an important reason to use them. The quality of the camera feature justified the cost of a more expensive smart phone for participants who are active in producing media content, as these comments indicate:

“Cost is a limiting factor... but it’s something that we need, so I always find the money for it somehow. I can have zero dollars but can always come up with money for a phone. The selling point for me is the camera.” (Mid-age, Female, Major City) “Everyone has a phone. They consume and produce media through their phones. Phone is used for music, messaging, hotspot to watch on TV, use Facebook Messenger. We produce content and put it on YouTube. The old mob use the old ways, but the new mob use YouTube.” (Young, Male, Remote)

13: When citing yarning session and workshop participants we use three age generation ranges: Young—18-30; Mid-Age—31-50; Older—50+

“My phone is used for movies, camera, music, news content generating, news consumption, communication.” (Young, Male, Remote)

“We get a plan for expensive phones. This phone here, you people have shot movies on this phone... full movies that are in cinemas.” (Mid-age, Male, Regional)



Researcher Leda Barnett with Justin Gaykamangu at Ramingining boat ramp

During fieldwork in one very remote community, many young people were carrying some form of mobile phone. As is the case across many parts of society, community members indicated that children from as young as two years old know how to use a [smart] phone; and some adults are using the latest communication tools (e.g., smart phones, gaming consoles, wearable devices), and platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Discord, Twitter) to communicate, socialise, be entertained, produce, share and receive content.

## RADIO Methods of Listening

Overall, our National Survey sample demonstrated that those people who access radio, do so for a variety of reasons (more below) and they are far more likely to listen to the radio in their car than anywhere else—more than 50 percent of people listen to the radio in their car, compared to 28 percent through a radio in the house or workplace; and about 26 percent through a smart phone.

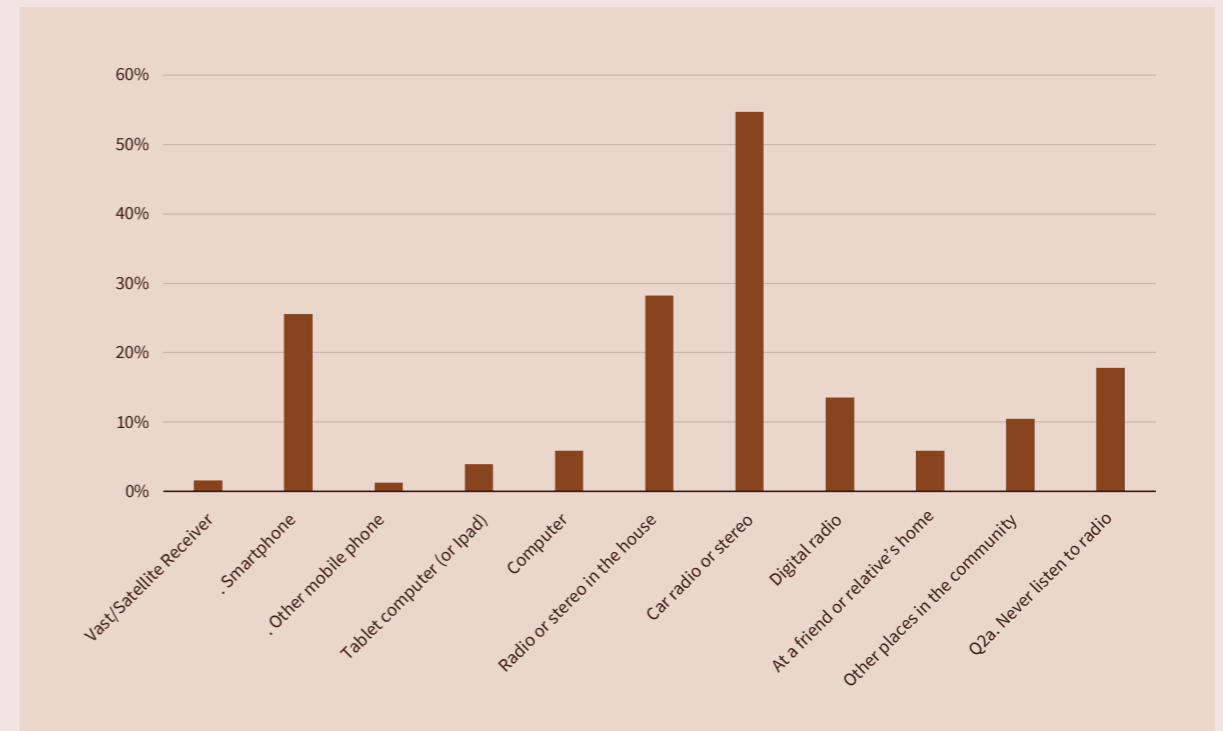


Figure 12: How do you listen to radio? i.e. through what device or technology?

Yarning session and workshop participants, particularly in remote regions, also indicated that the car radio is an important device to access and tune into local radio stations. Younger participants are more inclined to use radio applications, such as Community Radio Plus or the local radio station application, to consume media from the local radio stations. Older participants in remote and regional areas indicated that the car radio is important in areas with limited or no internet connectivity. In these areas, participants referred to the car radio as a valuable local medium that is simple to access and importantly engages with local people. However, it has a limited coverage, and some participants switch between radio and downloaded music through apps when coverage is lost.

“Concerning radio, sometimes you cannot receive coverage, because of the vast distances we have to travel.” (Mid-Age, Male, Remote)

When comparing longitudinally the ways that Indigenous Australians who live in very remote areas listen to the radio, we can again draw on findings from the 2016 Remote Indigenous Communications and Media Survey (IRCA 2016), taking into account the previously mentioned caveats around differences between the two surveys (most notably that results from the 2016 survey were weighted to population and it is unclear how the term ‘remote’ is defined).



Uncle Donald Fraser (left) and Michael Lang on the transmission site for PY Media, at Pukatja/Ernabella

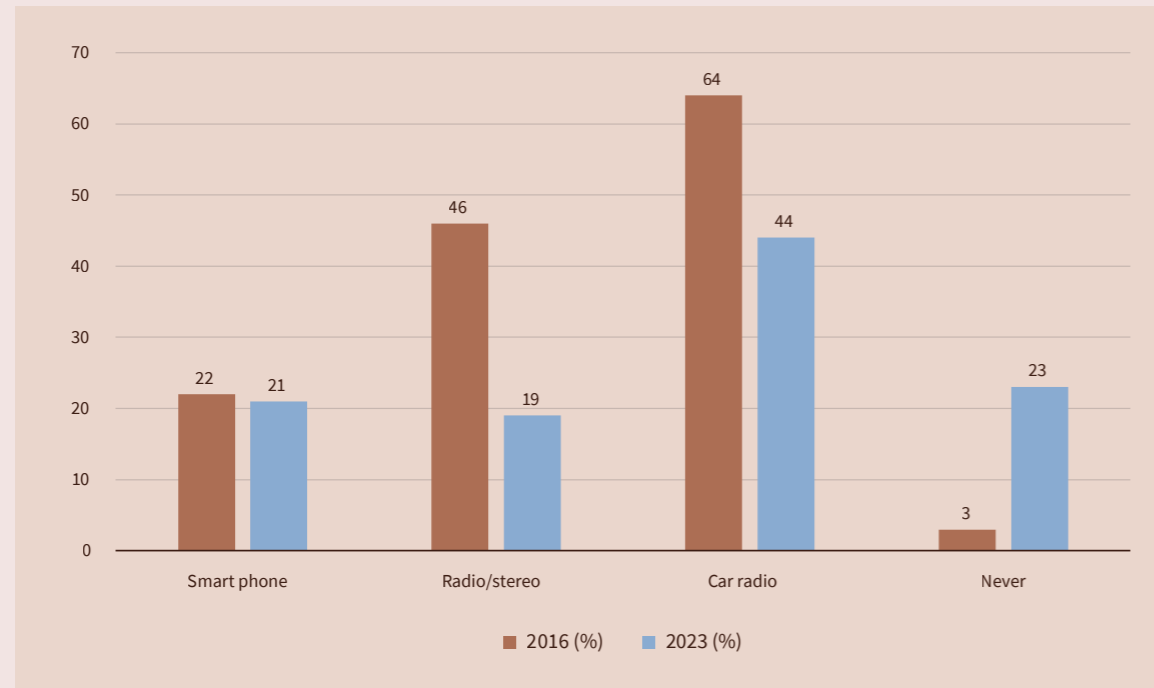


Figure 13: How do Indigenous Australians listen to the radio in remote areas? (2016/23 comparison)

There are a few important things to note here—firstly, listening to the radio through a smart phone has not changed a great deal from 2016–2023—it remains at about one in five people. Note the data in this graph also adds up to more than 100 percent, as some people indicate they listen to radio through a few different mediums (e.g. sometimes on their phone, sometimes in the car etc). Listening to radio through a device in the home (e.g. a wireless, clock radio etc) has dropped significantly in the past 8 years (it has more than halved); and listening to the radio in the car has also dropped markedly. Overall, traditional radio listenership is dropping due to the growth of access to other forms of media and other genres of delivering information and entertainment. This is demonstrated in the final bar—the number of people indicating they ‘never’ listen to radio has risen from just 3 percent in 2016 to 23 percent now. This may be partly

explained by an increased number of remote Indigenous radio stations that are currently not operating in very remote areas due to technical failures, loss of staff, possible vandalism of the equipment or the long wait to have technical issues attended to. People may be saying they are not listening to radio, as they cannot. We also reiterate our caveat on this comparative data as these surveys were of very different sample sizes; and the 2016 data was weighted to match population numbers. It is for this reason that one of our recommendations is for future data gathering on the sector to follow a consistent method with replicated (or at least comparable) questions, recruitment methods, and survey administration methods to ensure sound comparative data is gathered in this very important space—Indigenous-controlled broadcasting and media services.

## Indigenous Radio

We were particularly interested in Indigenous radio listenership, given most Indigenous media currently operates via a local radio station, with varying degrees of additional social media content, video content, podcasting, and so on. The quantitative and qualitative data confirms listening to some form of local Indigenous radio is common among Indigenous Australians. It is more common in remote and very remote areas, where there are few other media options

(and this does not diminish, but enhances, the importance of the quality of the service); but listenership is still substantial in metropolitan and regional areas.

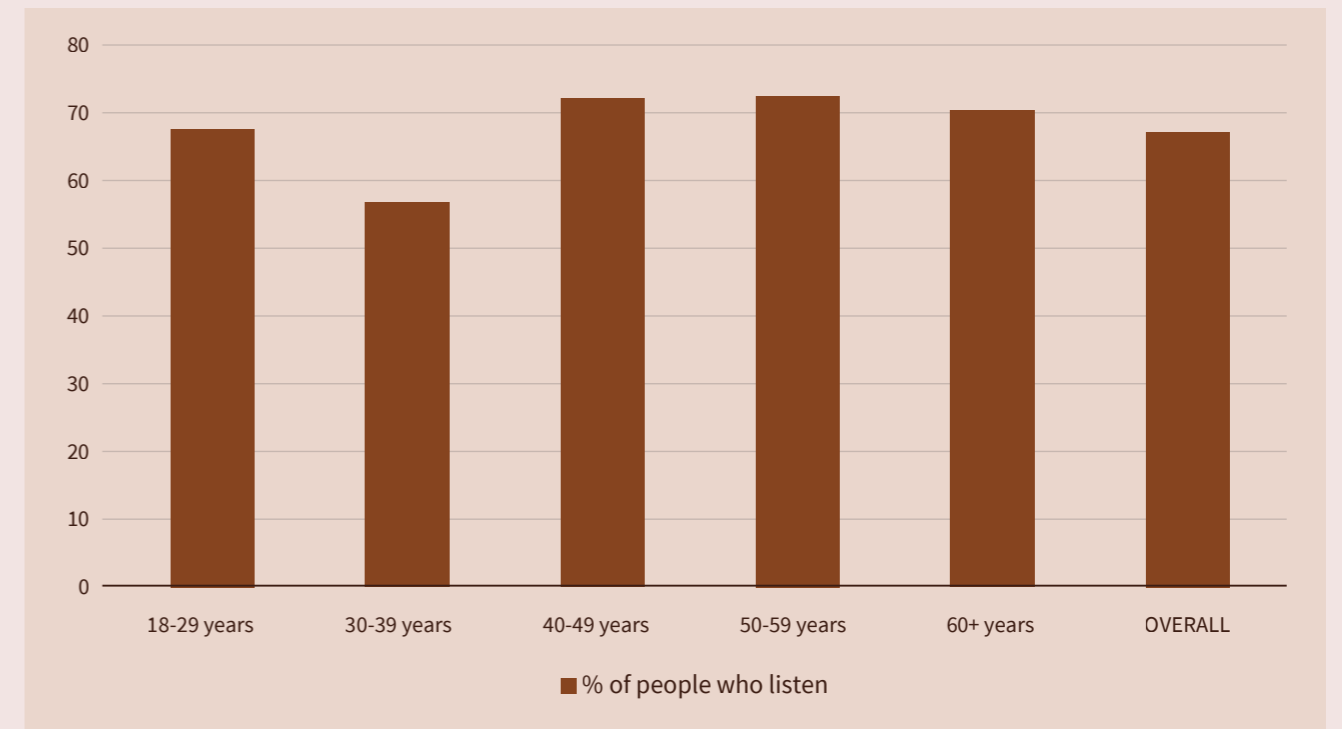


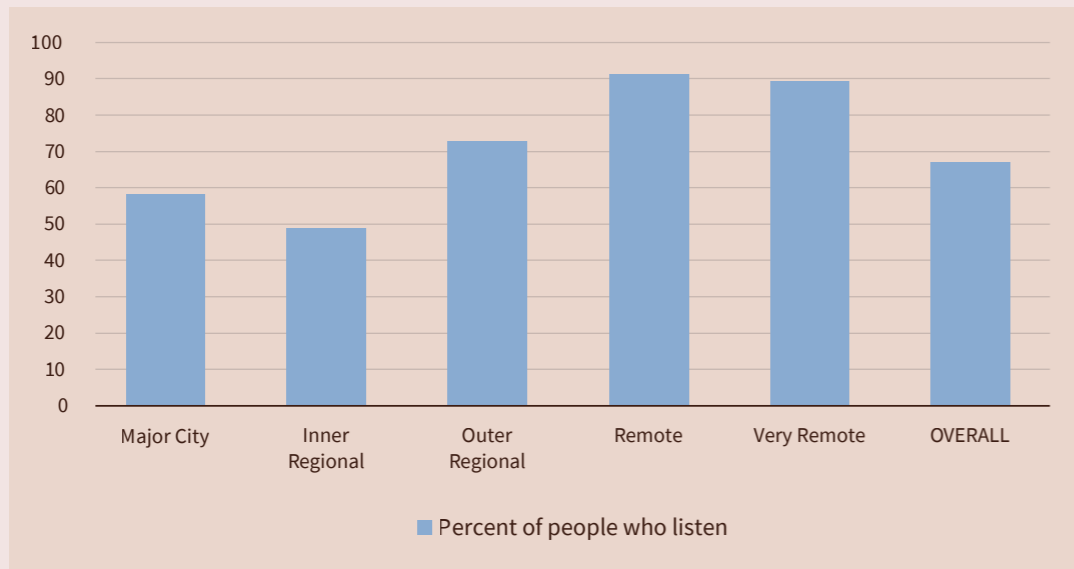
Figure 14: Percent of people who listen to Indigenous radio, by AGE

Based on age characteristics, the National Survey data indicates that people aged 40 years and older are more likely to listen to Indigenous radio than their younger counterparts. This is partly to do with use of radio—older people are far more likely to access this ‘legacy’ form of media—and is also related to the ways in which young Indigenous Australians access ‘Blak’ content through TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube and Instagram as well as through more traditional media. Listenership for Indigenous radio, then, is quite high among people over 40—more than 70 percent—but even among young people the numbers are strong, with more than two-thirds of survey respondents aged 18-29 indicating they listen to Indigenous radio.

This is partly to do with the slight skew in our survey towards remote areas as we needed to ensure these communities were covered, and as the data indicates below, Indigenous radio listenership in remote regions is very high—around 90<sup>14</sup> percent. The large number of young people who indicate they listen is slightly elevated, then, by the large number of people in remote areas who listen—this cuts across all age groups. Indigenous radio listenership is lowest among Indigenous Australians living in major cities and inner regional areas, as we might expect due to the plethora of other media options and access to working Wi-Fi, unlimited internet data etc. There is a significant increase in listenership once the findings move into the outer regional and remote areas though—more than 70 percent in outer regional and around 90 percent in remote and very remote areas.

8: The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines The Remoteness Structure as “Remoteness Areas for the purpose of releasing and analysing statistics. Remoteness Areas (RA) divide Australia into five classes of remoteness which are characterised by a measure of relative geographic access to services. Access to services is measured using the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia Plus (ARIA+), produced by the Australian Centre for Housing Research (formerly the Hugo Centre for Population and Migration Studies) at the University of Adelaide.” The five ARIA categories are Major Cities, Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote, and Very Remote.

9: Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/latest-release>.

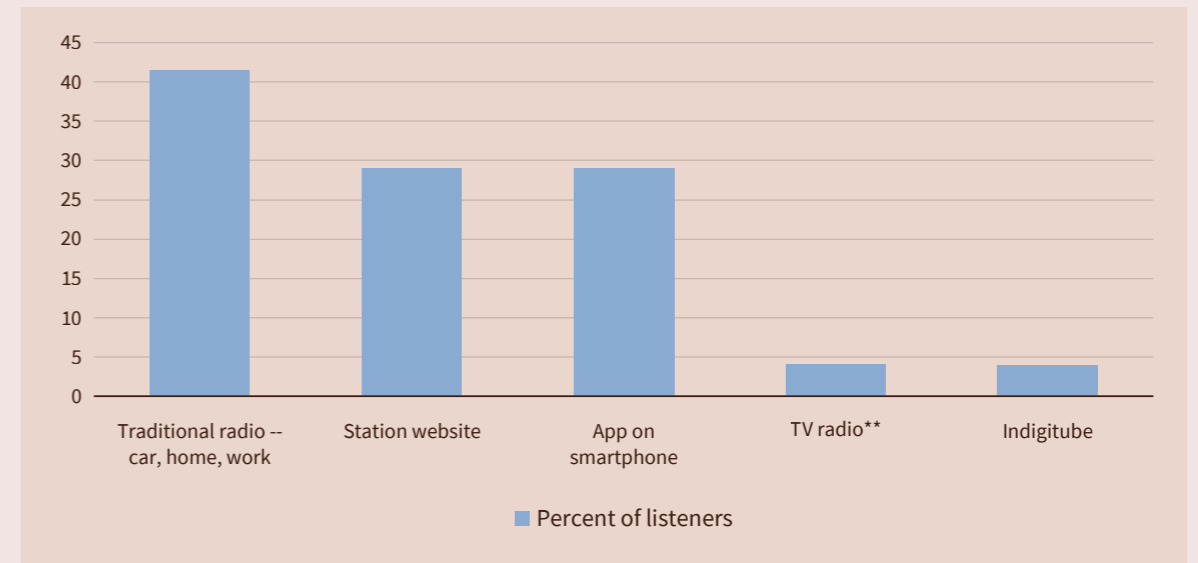
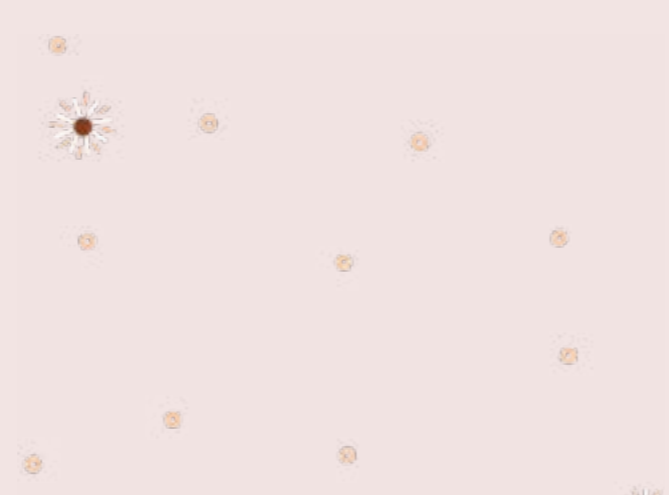


**Figure 15: Percent of people who listen to Indigenous radio, by RESIDENTIAL CATEGORY**

Taken together, the two graphs above show that while young and metropolitan people are far less likely to listen to Indigenous radio than (to take the other extreme) older people in very remote areas, there is still significant Indigenous radio listenership among all age groups, and across all residential categories. Indeed, the ‘Overall’ category suggests that across the country, of the 762 people who completed the National Survey, more than two-thirds (67.1 percent) indicated they listened to Indigenous radio.

In terms of how Indigenous radio content is accessed, according to the National Survey the largest group were listening through either a car radio, a radio in the home or a radio on in the workplace (about 40 percent), with that figure evenly divided between car and home radio with only a small number accessing through the workplace. Other key sources to access Indigenous radio were ‘going to the station website and accessing a live stream or recorded content there’ (29 percent); using an app such as iHeart radio, Community Radio Plus, TuneIn or the station app (a further 29 percent); with smaller percentages accessing through a smart TV (n=15, 3.5 percent); and IndigiTube is used by a small number of

respondents who listen to Indigenous radio (3 percent). Many responded that they listened in someone’s car “if I can get a ride”, that they listened in their mother’s car or a friend’s car; and another said they “stand next to someone with a radio playing” to be able to hear Indigenous radio content. Other occasional answers described hearing the radio playing at the shops or in the pub.



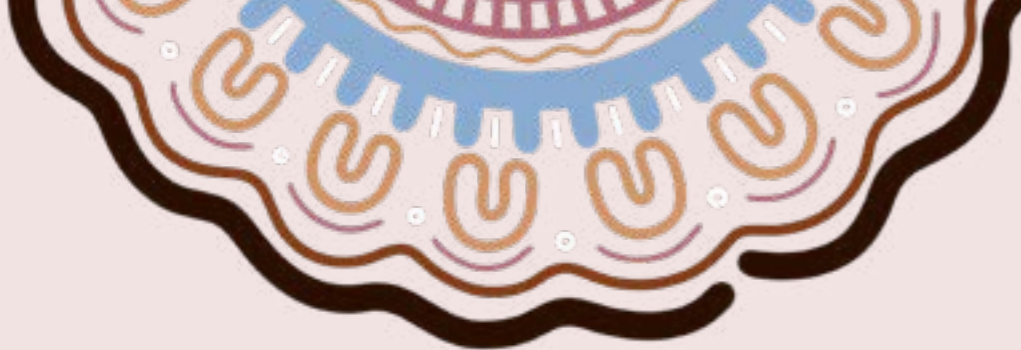
**Figure 16: Ways that people access Indigenous radio content (%)\***

\*Total percent of listeners here is a little over 100 percent as numerous respondents nominated ‘car and home radio’; or ‘at my home and in my friend’s car’. In such cases we attributed each response to both home and car radio categories, etc

\*\*A number of people said they listened to Indigenous radio through their smart TV, or through ‘TV radio’. Some said ‘digital radio on my TV’; and another wrote ‘Digital radio in this survey means radio on TV’. The NIAA funds the Imparja network to provide uplink services for Remote Indigenous Media Organisations to broadcast via the VAST network. Other broadcasters such as Radio Larrakia (Darwin) also broadcast via the VAST network and we believe this is what people are referring to in terms of ‘radio on my TV’.

The relatively few yarning session and workshop participants who said they use the Community Radio Plus application listened to Indigenous radio stations produced outside of their community, as well as using the app to listen to their local station when travelling. For example, one mid-aged male listener from the Zenadth Kes (Torres Straits) said he listened to the Torres Strait Island Media Association radio station via their app, when travelling on the mainland. The collated data indicated that older generations across fieldwork sites who rely on analogue radio have little knowledge of the option to consume Indigenous local, and national, radio through an application on their smart phones or other digital devices.

The majority of consumers of Indigenous radio listened to the radio 1-7 hours a day (39 percent) or one hour and less (31 percent). These percentages were similar when narrowed to examine the listening habits of Indigenous Australians in Adelaide (the only major city without a dedicated Indigenous radio station), as well as Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory—both of which also do not have a dedicated Indigenous station. This suggests listeners in these areas are tuning into Indigenous radio stations elsewhere in the country, further suggesting that there is demand for Indigenous media services in these areas. This was confirmed by yarning sessions and workshops held in Adelaide, where some Indigenous content is already delivered through generalist community radio stations.



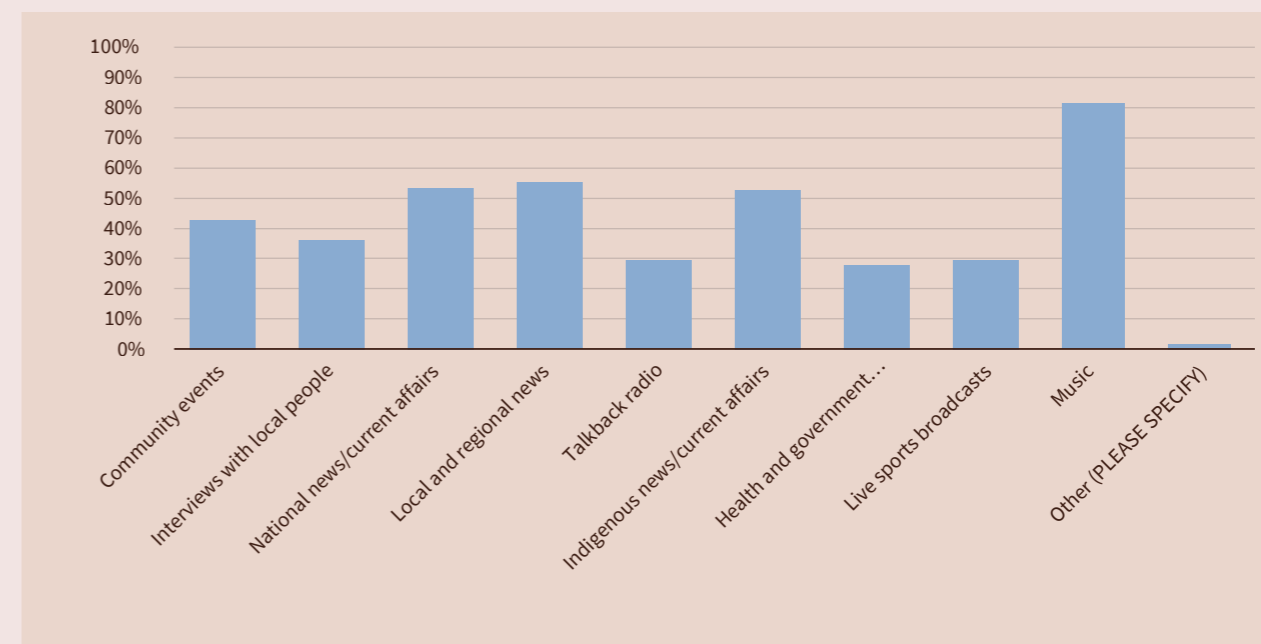
**Figure 17: Hours of listening to Indigenous radio in the past week**

Yarning session and workshop participants who consumed new forms of digital media mentioned the advantage of purposefully selecting and consuming media content at specific times. This includes radio and TV when available to stream online. The personalised nature and choice by which media can be consumed is seen as preferable by younger and middle-aged audiences across all locations. However, some of these also noted terrestrial radio and TV have an element of novelty that can be a welcoming change from the self-curated and predictable content on playlists. As one participant summed up in one very remote location:

“Radio provides a surprise. When you play your own music, you know what is coming.” (Mid-Age, Male, Inner Regional)

### Reasons for listening to Indigenous radio

In terms of future policy and funding initiatives, it is important to know peoples’ reasons for listening to Indigenous radio. For that reason, this next section draws on National Survey data to consider the main reasons for listening to Indigenous radio, with a particular focus on the areas people live in (i.e. remote, regional, urban); and secondly, their age groups.



**Figure 18: Which of the following programs or formats do you prefer to listen to on your radio\*? (Overall)**

According to the National Survey, in terms of the broad types of radio programs people prefer to listen to through Indigenous broadcasting, Music (81 percent of respondents) is the most popular choice followed by an almost equal interest in local current affairs (55 percent), Indigenous current affairs (54 percent), national news (53 percent), and community events (43 percent). This indicates radio listeners’ strong attraction for programmed music. In addition, respondents’ key reasons for why they listen to the radio centred strongly around Indigenous Australians’ social and cultural identity. So, beyond the preferred programming, we also asked what their key reasons for listening were—using categories such as ‘the station content makes me feel proud’; or ‘I like hearing local presenters/voices from my own community’.

We broke these findings down by both age group and areas that people lived in—so we can gain a clear understanding of why, for example, young people in remote areas listen to Indigenous broadcasting; or why older people from metropolitan areas might be listening. Note respondents to this question were able to nominate multiple categories, so we can gain a sound understanding of the top three to four reasons why National Survey respondents listen to Indigenous radio across all age groups, and residential areas.

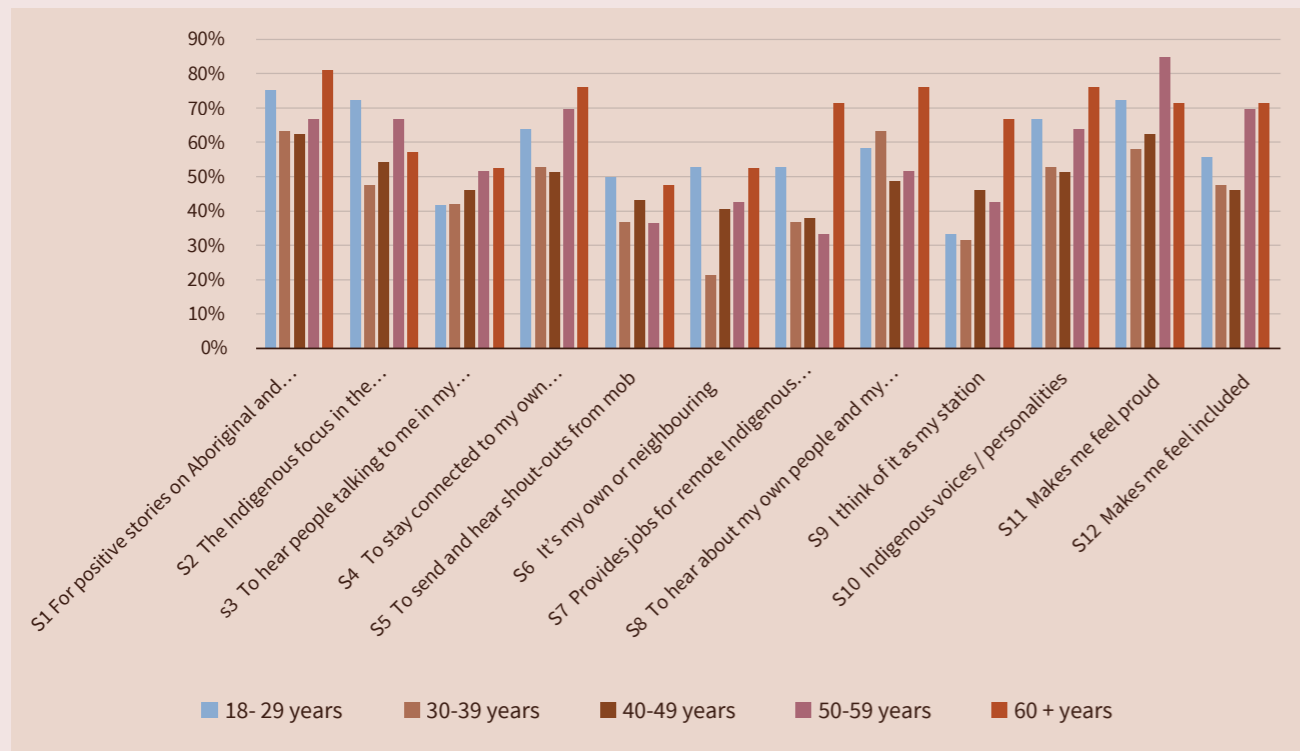


Figure 19: Reasons for listening to Indigenous radio REMOTE AREAS x AGE

The categories are a little difficult to see on these detailed graphs, but the categories reflected in the graphs are:

- For positive stories on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- The Indigenous focus in the programs/news & current affairs
- To hear people talking to me in my own language
- To stay connected to my own people, culture, and community
- To send and hear shout-outs from mob
- It's my own or neighbouring community members who are the presenters
- Provides jobs for remote Indigenous community members and I want to support it
- To hear about my own people and my own community
- I think of it as my station
- Indigenous voices / personalities
- Makes me feel proud
- Makes me feel included

In remote communities (Figure 19), there were more responses across all reasons for listening. This might suggest that radio is a primary medium for a range of social well-being indicators. The most common reasons chosen were 'makes me feel proud' (71 percent), 'positive stories on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' (69 percent), with 'to stay connected to my own people, culture and community' and 'Indigenous voices/personalities', both 62 percent. The lowest responses were 'it's my own or neighbouring community members who are the presenters' and 'to send and hear shout-outs from mob', both at 43 percent (still significant). The relatively small difference between the most and least common reasons suggests that most reasons are important to listening to radio in remote communities. There was a slightly higher proportion of older people who listened for positive stories; 81 percent of older respondents chose this response.

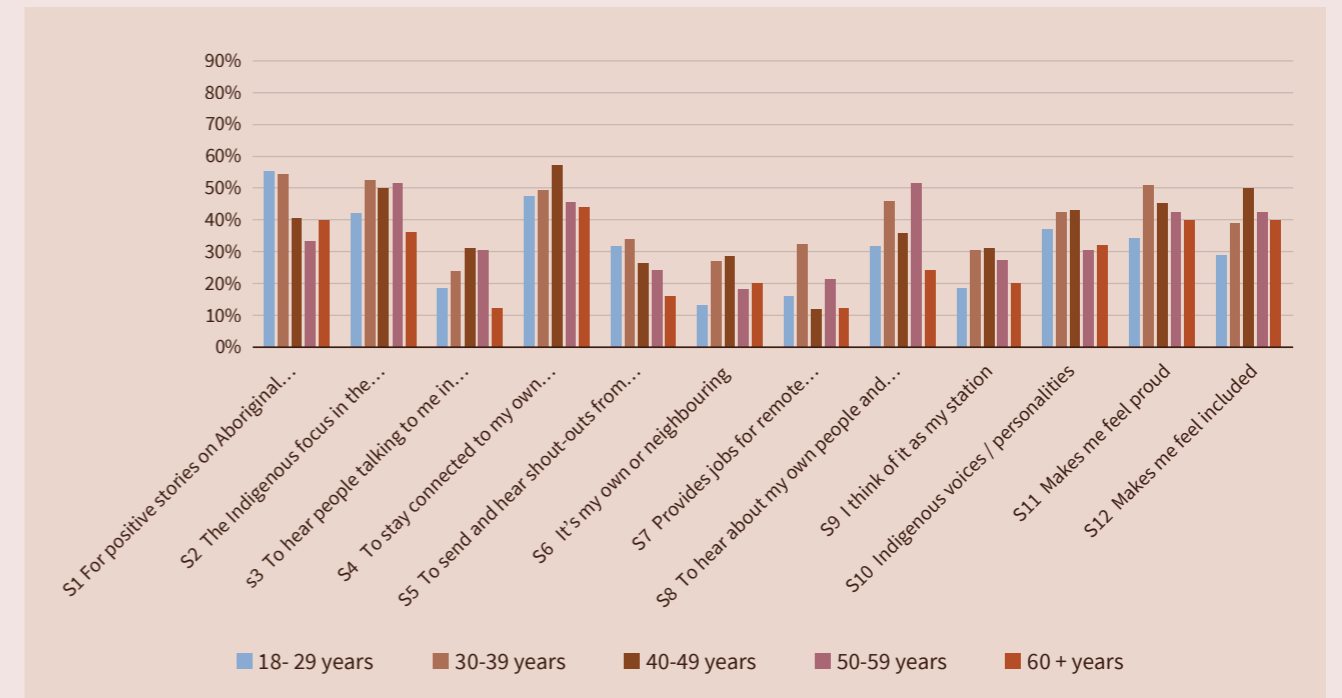
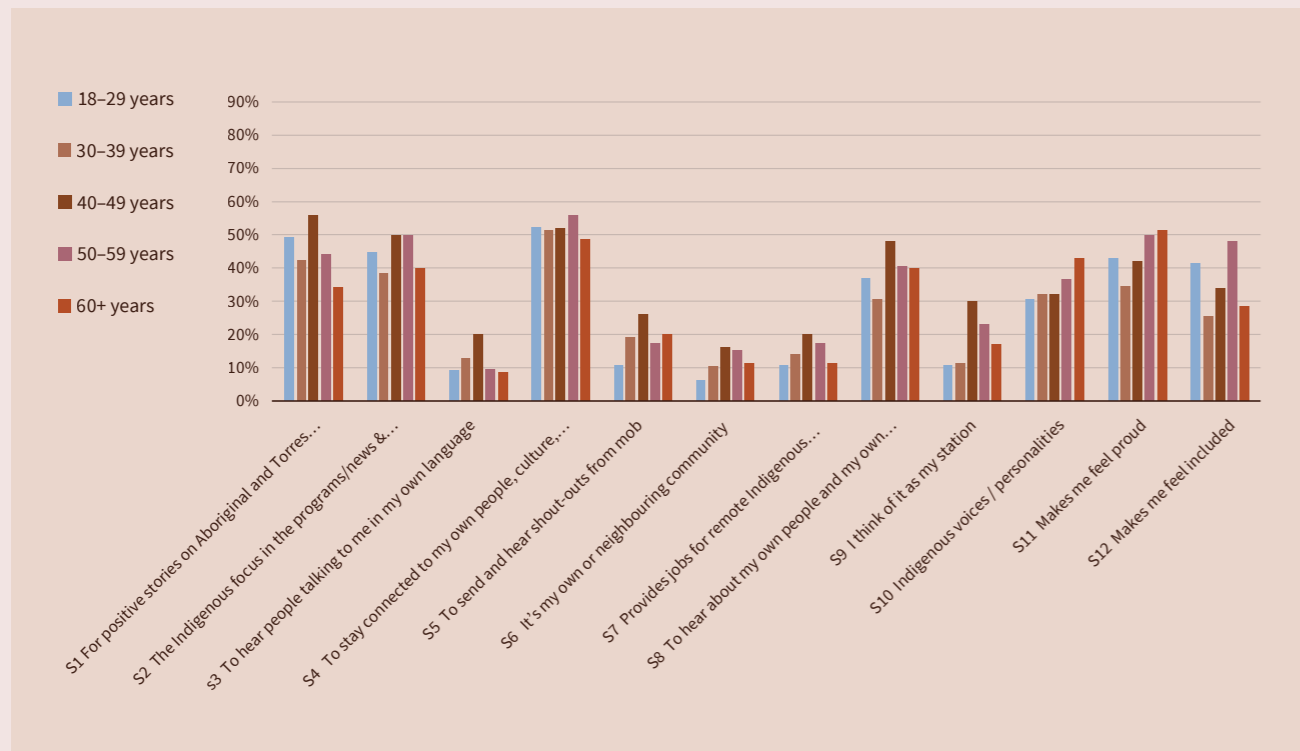


Figure 20: Reasons for listening to Indigenous radio REGIONAL AREAS x AGE

In regional communities (Figure 20), across all age groups the main reason for listening to the radio was 'to stay connected to my own people, culture and community' with 49 percent of respondents choosing this, followed by 'Indigenous focus in programs/news & current affairs' (48 percent) 'positive stories on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' (46 percent). The lowest responses were 'provides jobs for remote Indigenous community' (20 percent) and 'it's my own or neighbouring community members who are the presenters' (22 percent). Interestingly, in the 18-29 age range, 55 percent of youth appreciated listening to positive stories.





**Figure 21: Reasons for listening to Indigenous radio MAJOR CITIES x AGE**

Based on this data, we can see the main reasons for listening to radio in major cities (Figure 21) is ‘to stay connected to my own people, culture and community’ with 52 percent of respondents choosing this, followed by ‘positive stories on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’ (46 percent), ‘Indigenous focus in programs/news & current affairs’ (44 percent) and ‘makes me feel proud’ at 43 percent. In major cities, respondents were less likely to nominate reasons such as being familiar with the presenters or hearing programming in Indigenous languages. Given the population of major cities and predominance of English language, this would be expected. The spread across ages is fairly even with no standout data.

Related to this, we also asked what people saw as the **main benefits (in addition to understanding the main ‘reasons,’ as per above) of listening to Indigenous radio.** From an overall point of view, looking at all regions and age groups, the main benefits of listening were well-aligned with the ‘reasons for listening’—that is, to ‘stay connected with local Indigenous people, culture, and knowledge’ (53 percent), for ‘positive stories on Indigenous people’ (51 percent), for ‘an Indigenous focus on news and current affairs’ (49 percent), and ‘to feel proud of being an Indigenous person and of communities’ (49 percent). Other reasons that gained

significance were ‘hearing about and from people in the community’, ‘Indigenous voices and personalities’, and ‘fostering a sense of inclusion’. This pattern is also common across age groups. Listening to connect to local language and people was more pronounced in remote areas (45 percent compared to major cities where only 12 percent nominated this as a reason for listening). Sending and hearing shout-outs from mob (family group, clan group or wider Indigenous community group) was a reason for listening particularly noted in remote areas (46 percent), as well as to receive information about employment (an average of 45 percent in remote areas, compared to 15 percent in major cities). For listeners to Indigenous radio in regional and remote areas, the station is certainly considered part of the community (‘I think of it as my station’) with a majority of people nominating this as a benefit of listening.

The qualitative data from yarning sessions and workshops supports the above and offers further insight into the reasons people listen. Often, for middle-aged and older participants at least, Indigenous radio is the primary media they consume for news and entertainment.

“A lot of Indigenous people still stick to the radio.” (Mid-Age, Male, Regional)



Communications infrastructure in remote areas is an identified area for improvement

“Stories never die if you have the radio.” (Mid-Age, Female, Major City)

“I listen to the radio either live or recorded. When I listen to it later online, I am purposely turning in to listen to particular content.” (Mid-Age, Female, Major City)

The fieldwork revealed that, although younger generations across all locations have shifted from terrestrial media to social media, they still acknowledge the significant value of radio, and particularly Indigenous radio, for storytelling and community building. Indigenous radio, and Indigenous content on other community radio, facilitates important links to people with very few means of contact with the outside world (for example, because of incarceration), or are homeless or disconnected from family.

“There are so many different mediums [sic] that are available through the radio, that are not accessible to other people that are locked in prison, for example. Radio is an important means of communication to the outside world, by sending a loved one a message through a song played on the radio.” (Mid-Age, Female, Major City)

“Our kids are homeless on the streets here ... they might have a radio or access on their phone and listen ... there’s supports shouted out to them ... What’s interesting about all of these things (apps).... is they all create a

community.” (Mid-Age, Female, Major City)

Importantly, when stations are off-air or temporarily closed, older participants said they are deprived of essential information about sorry business—the passing of family or community members.

“I do not know who has passed away anymore because these communication avenues have changed.” (Older, Female, Remote)

Participants across all fieldwork locations commented that Indigenous radio is an alternative to mainstream media, which generally does not embrace Indigenous voices in the reporting and telling of Indigenous stories.

“Mainstream radio has restrictions on who is telling the stories that Indigenous media has not. There must be some boundaries, but it should be the voices of and for our people.” (Mid-Age, Female, Remote)

“It is only Aboriginal radio that informs us on the things that are important to our daily lives, such as where to vote or information about Centrelink and other services.” (Young, Male, Regional)

“My interest has always been what we can bring as our alternative voices and that’s what community radio is all about.” (Older, Male, Major City)



Some younger participants in a major city commented they are more likely to listen to the radio if the content can be shared or reposted on social media. Otherwise, they had little awareness of the local Indigenous radio or Indigenous programming on community and mainstream radio. Other young participants in remote areas commented that they rarely listened to the radio and music streaming was commonly used when driving. Listening to the radio was only seen as an occasional change to routine streaming. A middle-aged woman in a very remote region observed that “We are the last generation to listen to radio.”

When comparing Indigenous Australians’ reasons for listening to Indigenous radio longitudinally, we can again draw on findings from the 2016 *Remote Indigenous Communications and Media Survey* (IRCA 2016), considering the previously mentioned caveats around differences between the two surveys. The comparison shows us that responses to most ‘reasons for listening’ remained similar (within 10 percentile points or less). Most notably, the number of people saying that listening to Indigenous radio made them ‘feel proud’ almost doubled to 70 percent. The ‘other’ option also increased by over six times the 2016 response rate, with the vast number of answers manually inputted to qualify this response referring to music selection. There were fairly significant increases in the number of people saying they listened to hear Indigenous voices and/or personalities, and that Indigenous radio made them ‘feel included’.

**Table 5: Reasons for listening to Indigenous radio: Comparative data 2016-2023**

Reasons for Listening	2016 (%)	2023 (%)
For positive stories on Aboriginal and Torres Strait people	79	73
The Indigenous focus in the programs/news & current affairs	54	63
To hear people talking to me in my own language	56	47
It's my own or neighbouring community members who are the presenters	46	43
Provides jobs for remote Indigenous community and I want to support it	48	44
To hear about my own people and my own community	65	55
I think of it as my station	37	44
Indigenous voices/personalities	44	59
Makes me feel proud	36	70
Makes me feel included	36	55
Other	2	13



Radio provides significant early support to First Nations bands – here, Dem Arrente Mob perform in Alice Springs and are recorded live by an audience member for posting to YouTube and social media

### TELEVISION

In terms of television consumption, the National Survey found free-to-air TV is the most watched at 83 percent, followed by smart TV streaming at 63 percent of respondents. Of the 629 respondents who had access to free to air, 401 (64 percent) also indicated they accessed streaming services. However, streaming services appeared much more popular than free-to-air TV among yarning session and workshop participants, where most younger and mid-aged favoured smart televisions with streaming platforms such as Netflix, Stan, Binge or YouTube. Few yarning session and workshop participants watched free to air programs on smart televisions. Most participants cited negativity and lack of local content.

“Negative stuff all over the world, especially news and propaganda.” (Mid-age, Female, Very Remote)

“I don’t watch TV at all, but I do stream Netflix ... and I certainly don’t [their emphasis] watch anything like channel, 7, ABC, channel 9 or anything like that.” (Mid-age, Female, Major City)

On a smart TV, streaming platforms offer most entertainment that would have traditionally been offered by terrestrial TV. Some participants advised that YouTube is an affordable alternative platform to consume news and entertainment broadcast through television. Although there is a cost attached to streaming any service, YouTube can be accessed via a smart TV without a paid subscription, making it more attractive than Foxtel, which can be expensive. There was little discussion during yarning sessions and workshops regarding platforms such as ABC iView, SBS On Demand or Freeview Australia.

The functions of a smart television are available on a smart phone, and workshops indicated that young and mid-aged participants

often preferred to engage with these devices rather than large screen devices. Conversely, many older participants with diminishing visual acuity preferred a larger screen and simplified remote controls. As one participant explained:

“I have a smart TV with applications built in. All my content is just a button away. It’s just a big phone ... you can download apps. A lot of my movies I can put it on my USB and play it through the PlayStation or I can plug it into a smart TV.” (Mid-age, Male, Outer Regional)

However, not all yarning session and workshop participants have access to a smart TV. This is more evident in remote and very remote areas, where the cost of smart TV is a consideration and signal issues make this less attractive.

“With a smart TV, sometimes you can’t access things because you don’t have Wi-Fi, ‘cause it costs a lot of money ... without hotspot all the kids play outside but if you got Wi-Fi all the kids are there. When it storms our box blows up, so we just got rid of it.” (Young, Female, Very Remote)

Very few yarning session and workshop participants used a traditional (not-smart) TV set except for a limited number of older participants who continue to use traditional television sets for terrestrial television. ABC television, commercial television and NITV are the most-watched television services across the nation (59, 57 and 56 percent respectively); while Indigenous Community Television (ICTV) attracts about one in five Indigenous Australians across the nation. Importantly, to emphasise the significance of ICTV, of the 141 people who said they had access to ICTV (i.e. 18 percent of the total sample), about 70 percent said they watched it regularly. Indigenous Community Television, part of the IBMP and formerly known as the iconic Bush TV, therefore has strong viewership among those people in remote areas who can access it.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

The National Survey data indicated that 84.7 percent of respondents use social media across all age groups and residential areas, although the figures vary considerably, particularly based on age. What this suggests is that Indigenous broadcasting services in Australia need to be highly active on social media, particularly if they wish to engage audiences under 35 years of age. For the most-used platforms and applications, there is a clear preference for Facebook (70 percent of respondents), followed by YouTube (23 percent), Instagram (21 percent), TikTok (15 percent) and Snapchat

(12 percent). Our fieldwork found widespread use of social media across all sites. The most common platforms cited in yarning sessions and workshops were Facebook (and Facebook Messenger) for social and cultural connections, TikTok for news, and YouTube for accessing and uploading digital content associated with maintenance and repairs in remote areas, as well as music and entertainment. To a lesser extent participants engaged in X (Twitter), LinkedIn, and Spotify (for podcasts).



Samantha Lee, senior broadcaster at Umeewarra Aboriginal Media Association, Port August, SA

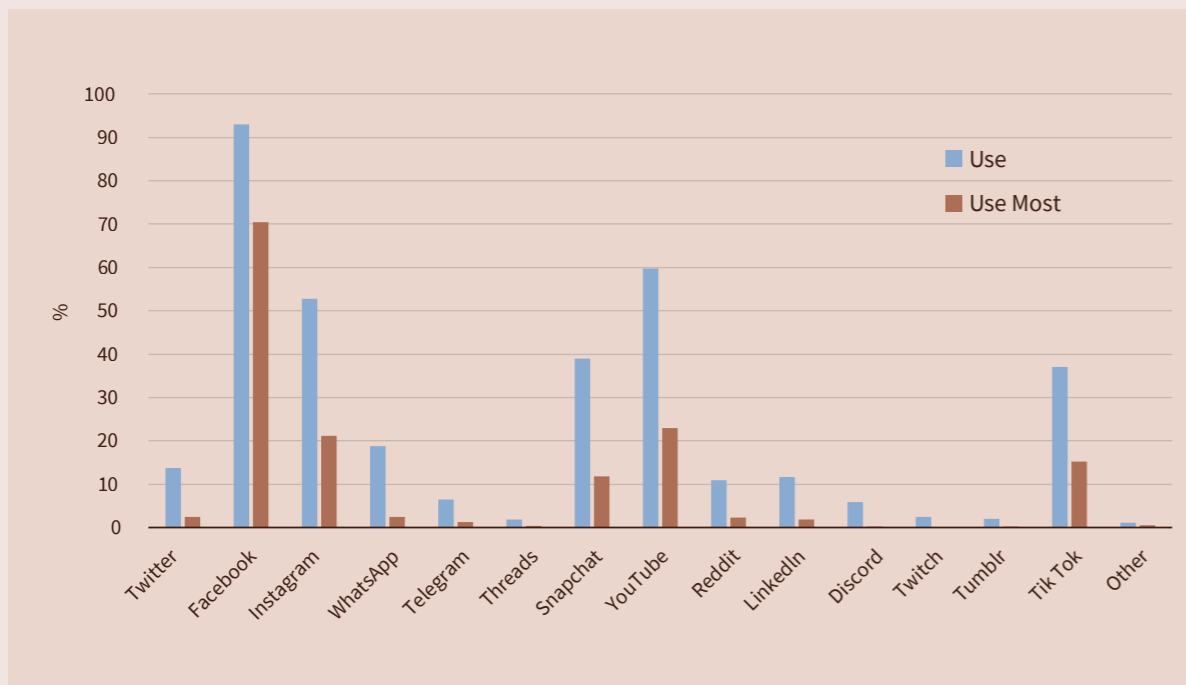


Figure 22: Used and most used social media platforms

If we break down the survey data, there is a minor variation between regions, with YouTube more popular in remote and very remote areas compared to major cities, and Instagram more commonly used in major cities and inner regional. Interestingly, there is fairly equal distribution of the use of TikTok across different types of regions. Facebook is also relatively equally used across different areas, with slightly more usage in inner regional areas. As for variations across age groups, TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat have the largest variance between younger and older demographics, with the highest usage among 18–29-year-olds. YouTube has a relatively equal distribution across age groups, and Facebook is most popular among the oldest age group. There is considerably less use of X (Twitter), WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and platforms such as Telegram, Twitch, Discord, Tumblr and Reddit are hardly used by respondents.

In terms of the reasons given for using social media, ‘connecting with friends and family’ was an overwhelming response, nominated by 80 percent of National Survey respondents as the main reason for using social media. The second most-common response was for entertainment. Almost 50 percent of respondents used social media for news and information, specifically for local news, and also for Indigenous news and current affairs. One in five people also use social media for emergency information; and a similar percentage use it for health and government information.

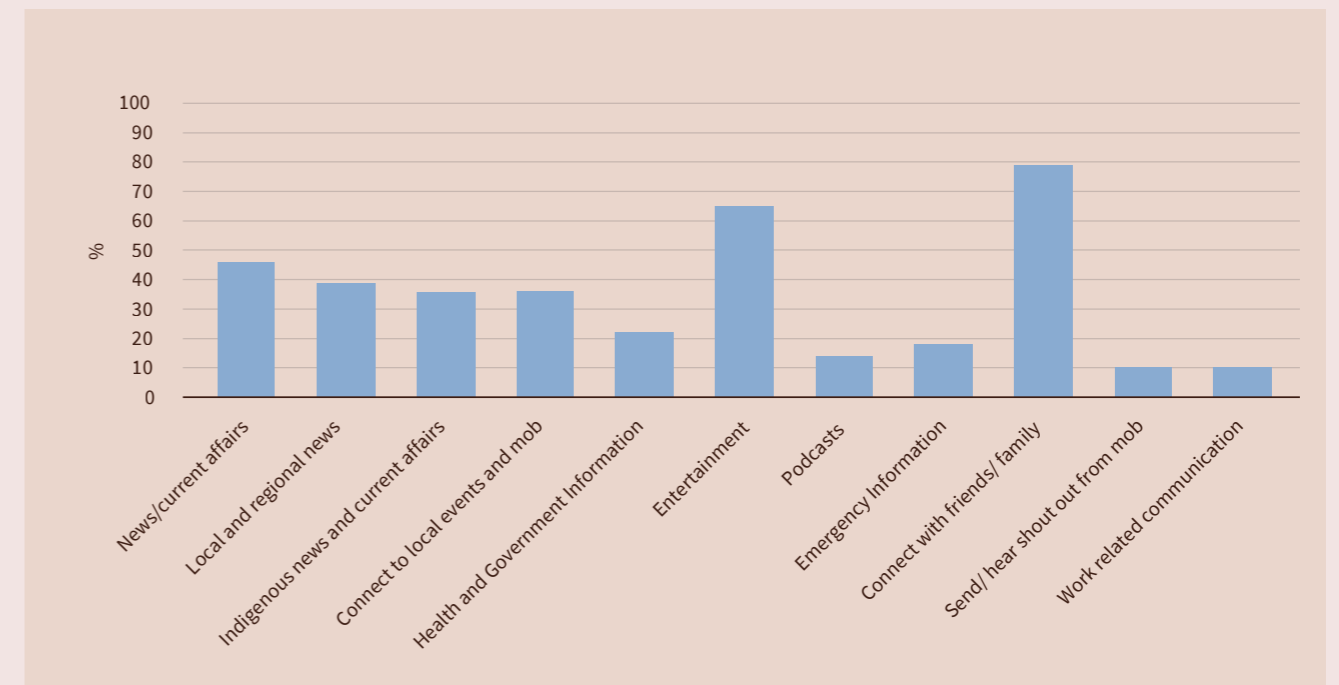
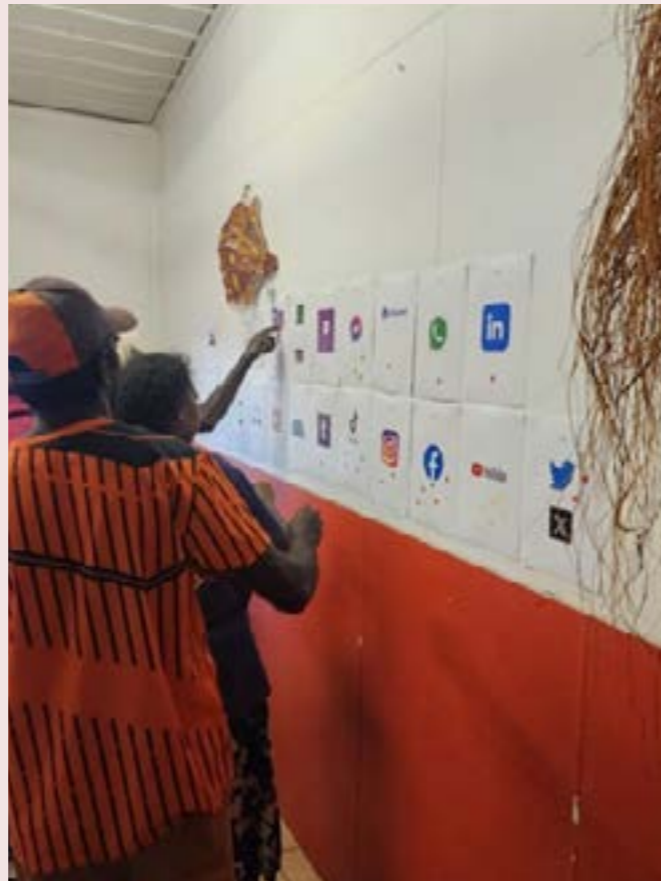


Figure 23: Reasons for using social media

During the workshop component of the fieldwork, participants were presented with a range of social media (and other media) options and asked to identify which they used, which they ‘couldn’t live without’ and which they did not use at all. This provided a visual prompt for a more in-depth discussion about attitudes towards and usage of a range of media platforms. In the following sections, we individually discuss the social media applications most commonly mentioned during this activity.



Workshop and yarning session participants in different parts of the Top End of Australia, engaging in an activity about media preferences.

## FACEBOOK (META)

Across all fieldwork sites, Facebook emerged as the primary application used by participants to maintain connection with friends and family. The data shows that in every community visited, young and mid-aged participants were engaged in Facebook. Older participants also engaged but to a lesser extent. Almost all participants preferred the social aspects of Facebook.

“It’s very different, depending on age, if someone’s on one thing then everyone’s on one thing, but the younger—18 and under—they are using not as much Facebook, it’s more the quicker way, like looking at something quick. Like snapchat, something very, very quick like TikTok ... so their whole life they have had access to media ... They consume a lot more, I feel they consume a lot more.” (Mid-age, Female, Very Remote)

Facebook is primarily used for connecting with family living in other regions and states, and for learning about social activities and events in the local community. As these participants stated:

“I use Facebook for family and keep contact with mobs

around Australia. Facebook is my main connection for group chats with multiple family members.” (Young, Female, Outer Regional)

“I don’t really watch TV but I use Facebook and like YouTube, ‘cause I like to follow music and see my own countrymen and how well they are doing in their music business. I get a lot of ideas from other musos.” (Older, Male, Outer Regional)

Across all regional, remote, and urban fieldwork sites, participants stated Facebook is the social media platform everyone has. Its use is predominantly social, and secondly for seeking out news and events information. Evidently, it is a source of news which many participants turned to first thing every morning.

“First, I’ll go to Facebook and click on events tab and to events close to you. If I can’t find it then I’ll just google it. If you, like, go to artists, you go to their profile and see it, you know it’s 100 percent .... sometimes information on Google can be altered or not right.” (Young, Male, Outer Regional)



“(I get) my news through a lot of good friends. In the morning, I do a quick flick through Facebook, I turn the Foxtel on to news, and if you’re really interested go to Google to see if anyone else is backing that up. I’ll find out then I’ll work through it.” (Young, Male, Outer Regional)

“I’m a consumer of news, mainly TV and radio. I do Facebook every morning, I watch the telly, I watch Aljazeera a lot. I have the radio under my pillow so I can sleep.” (Older, Female, Major City)

Some participants use Facebook to obtain information on events, profiles, and business, instead of using a search engine such as Google. Participants indicated that an advantage of Facebook is that it highlights local events common to their respective communities. The primacy of Facebook to participants is reflected in the comments below.

“Everything’s on Facebook. I search events to find what’s happening, then I go to specific pages.” (Young, Female, Outer Regional)

“Facebook allows me to know what my family and mob are up to.” (Young, Male, Remote)

“I am on dialysis fifteen hours a week and am unable to go anywhere. Through Facebook, I know where all my mob are. For me it is a powerful tool.” (Older, Female, Major City)

“I got mob all over Australia and I connect through social media. I think it’s powerful in that way.” (Mid-Age, Female, Major City)

This highlights the use of social media apps such as Facebook for local information and events, as well as for connecting with people nationally and globally. However, in some communities, Elders discouraged the use of Facebook use for its potential to cause community dysfunction and conflicts between children, as these comments indicate:

“Facebook is for my family, YouTube and Linked in is for business. But Facebook you gotta be careful what you’re saying because it’s not a safe space.” (Mid-age, Female, Major City)

“Facebook makes problems as well. Some media is okay. But Facebook is the worst one. We don’t like Facebook, we don’t want it, too much trouble, young and old. Even old one involved in that Facebook and talk, it’s not good.” (Older, Male, Very Remote)



Yarning session participants in Derby, WA, at 97.9FM Larrkardi Radio (6DBY)

## TIKTOK

Participants who desired a more immersive news experience, covering a wide geographical scope but tailored to their preferences, often turned to TikTok.

TikTok is used by both young and mid-age audiences, either as consumers or creators of content. It is recognised for providing a more accessible platform for Indigenous voices and experiences, particularly by young people.

Some yarning session and workshop participants noted that TikTok is considered an alternative to mainstream news among younger generations because it does not have ‘ulterior motives’. This refers to media ownership, funding/sponsorship, and political bias. In addition, many users of TikTok refer to its algorithmic function that is used and valued for generating a personalised media sphere. Younger audiences across regional, urban, and (to a more limited extent) remote fieldwork sites said TikTok was predominantly used to disseminate personal views and create an “echo chamber” of preferred content.

“I get my main news from TikTok. It is the media of the people because they are out there reporting on the ground about what is going on. I see TikTok particularly as a form of modern-day activism. With the algorithm it becomes an echo chamber. It is a modern way to politically place yourself in the world, have a following and have our voice heard.” (Mid-Age, Female, Major City)

Participants who use TikTok appreciated the value of short reels and immediate access to international information compared to more traditional forms of media.

“I call it feeding my algorithm. I go away and let it run. I search the same people every day. I want the content I want. I tell it exactly what I want to see.”

(Young, Female, Major City)

“Facebook is family, but TikTok is the world.”

(Mid-Age, Female, Outer Regional)

“Indigenous TikTok isn’t just Australia. I get a lot of Canadian and Māori content. It is not just First Nations Australia, but First Nations all over the world.”

(Mid-Age, Female, Major City)

As the above participant indicates, TikTok has opened the world to many young and middle-aged Indigenous Australians and enables them to connect with a broader community, both nationally and internationally. However, the nature of TikTok -- short clips created and consumed by users -- means that reasonable internet signal, WIFI, and/or mobile phone coverage is required for viewing and uploading video. This is limited in many remote areas.

## YOUTUBE

YouTube is used across remote, regional, and urban sites for viewing, production and uploading of content to a learning and entertainment platform. Yarning session and workshop participants in very remote locations noted the value of YouTube to instruct communities on essentials, such as repairing automobiles or installing and repairing satellite dishes. In very remote communities where essential services are unavailable or limited, YouTube is filling the gap by providing community members the means to self-educate.

“On YouTube, you can watch anything from shows on TV to podcasts. You can catch up on news and your favourite influencers.” (Mid-Age, Female, Major City)

“Everything is on YouTube.” (Young, Male, Remote)

“[I use] YouTube to help me teach me to learn stuff.”

(Young, Male, Very Remote)

YouTube is used to consume news and entertainment. Participants also discussed the use of YouTube for music, films, arts, and podcasts. A substantial number of younger audience members use YouTube as a substitute for terrestrial TV and streaming services and platforms, such as Foxtel and Netflix.

“We produce content and put it on YouTube. The old mob use the old ways, but the new mob uses YouTube.”

(Young, Male, Very Remote)

“You can make music, edit videos, shoot stuff on your phone and take it back home to edit and put it on YouTube.”

(Young, Female, Outer Regional)

The importance and value of YouTube to disseminate Indigenous voices and stories is recognized across generations. Older participants who do not produce content for YouTube, or use the platform frequently, recognised in our yarning sessions the opportunities the platform provides to younger generations.

## X (TWITTER)

Young and middle-aged yarning session and workshop participants demonstrated a discerning approach when selecting social media platforms for specific purposes. For instance, some participants use X (Twitter) to curate their

own media sphere. The choice of platforms is often tailored to connect with specific cohorts, although preferences vary across urban, regional, and remote areas, and sometimes even between states and territories. Similar observations were made by participants in the Eastern states of Australia regarding the use of X.

“I curate my own Twitter to follow certain people, to see certain conversations, and be connected to other Indigenous academics.” (Mid-age, Female, Major City)

“I curate my own Twitter so I can consume the news I want.” (Mid-Age, Female, Major City).

“Twitter is a good way of catching news.”

(Mid-Age, Male, Major City)

However, X was seldom utilised by participants in remote and regional communities—and more broadly in the west of the country—due to concerns about its toxic environment and potential for general lateral violence. Additionally, some participants find X irrelevant to their community’s needs.

“No one is interested in Twitter; we just watch the news out here. And our local news is on Facebook.”

(Mid-Age, Female, Very Remote)

“Nobody I know in WA uses Twitter or X, the credibility has taken a nosedive. I use TikTok.”

(Mid-age, Male, Outer Regional)

“Twitter is toxic, a lot of lateral violence.”

(Mid-age, Female, Major City)



Heading to Pukatja (formerly Ernabella) and Umuwa, home of PY Media in the APY Lands

## MISCELLANEOUS APPS

Our fieldwork found a greater variance across remote, regional, and urban sites regarding the use of Instagram and Snapchat, although some younger participants did indicate that choice of Indigenous content and positive stories was a key feature of this social media selection. Many young Indigenous Australians engage across multiple social media platforms seeking diverse voices.

“I want diverse voices. That is why I go to Facebook, Insta, TikTok.” (Young, Female, Major City)

Instagram was mostly used to stay connected with family and friends and to seek information about businesses and entertainment, but also to consume a diverse representation of voices. Some yarning session and workshop participants note that Snapchat and TikTok are more frequently used by younger generations for their speed of communications, compared to Facebook. Instagram and Facebook are becoming common forms of media used among older generations.

“Instagram, TikTok, it gives us our voice in our way, and it's not censored.” (Mid-age, Female, Major City)

“I use Instagram for positive content.” (Young, Male, Outer Regional)

In general, the workshops indicated that few participants in remote and very remote areas used LinkedIn. As a professional network, it may be of little use for people who live and work in small communities. However, those who do use LinkedIn consider the platform valuable for networking for business and professional purposes, and consuming news that is deemed more trustworthy. Some yarning session

and workshop participants noted it a useful platform for truth telling because it is more of a professional platform. Compared to Facebook and X, LinkedIn is less inclined to have hate speech and other forms of malicious content, which is why some participants use this platform for news and information.

“The big one is LinkedIn, I used it to my advantage in the lead up to the referendum, mainly to educate the Wadjalas (white people). They appreciated truth-telling directly from us. 40,000 hits and 60 shares across LinkedIn, so there's power in a good way. It's important to get our ideas out there. We need our Indigenous media to be right up there with things like the referendum.” (Mid-age, Female, Major City)

## PODCASTS

Only 18 percent of National Survey respondents said they listened regularly to podcasts, with 61 percent indicating they did not engage with podcasts at all. This suggests podcasting is a growing, but not-yet-established form of audio for Indigenous audiences. This is reinforced by 74 percent of survey respondents who indicated they were not interested in podcasts and through qualitative findings, discussed below. We note, though, that about one in five people said they did not know how to access podcasts, with an additional 6 percent reporting no (known) access to technology to access podcasts.

We were interested to understand a little more about the (primarily younger) Indigenous Australians who do access podcasts regularly. The National Survey found that of the group that do listen to podcasts regularly (about one in five of our respondents), a significant number of them sought out Indigenous-produced podcasts (43 percent).

It should be noted that includes Indigenous-produced podcasts in other countries, such as New Zealand and Canada. In terms of reasons for listening to podcasts, the key explanations were for entertainment (72 percent), education (58 percent), news and current affairs (37 percent), and for Indigenous content (28 percent). Eighteen percent also noted that they use podcasts to listen to previously recorded radio programs.

Through the yarning sessions and workshop discussions, it is evident audiences across generations and remote, regional, and urban locations value the use of podcasts for Indigenous truth telling, in particular older participants. They consider this important, because it means Indigenous mob can educate non-Indigenous people about culture and history. Participants using podcasts noted its value as an educational medium that is personally aligned and selected. Some commented that podcasts were useful for storytelling by younger generations and that it is a form of storytelling that is aligned with Indigenous ways. Hence, it is a useful tool for culture and language maintenance.

“Radio is one avenue, but with young people's ingenuity and their easy access to media, podcasting can allow Elders telling their stories to the children.” (Older, Male, Major City)

“Podcast is like a yarning circle. With the microphone being the fire.” (Mid-Age, Male, Outer Regional)

“I should have said, we are up to 136 podcasts on a white radio station, so we are reaching a lot of white people, 100,000 I think. The potential for truth telling is very good.” (Mid-age, Female, Major City)

Participants also pointed to the flexible nature of podcasts, availability at any time (on demand), and on a variety of platforms, such as YouTube, Google, Spotify and specific apps. Some participants indicated that linkages with other colonised Indigenous cultures across the world allowed a sharing of the colonial experience through digital media.

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

This section explores the significance of social and cultural connections forged via various media platforms. This was consistent across all age groups in all regions and is intricately connected to a desire for locally-produced content. Participant data revealed noteworthy evidence that, at the core of media, social and cultural connections are important. This encompasses everything from community news, cultural insights, and engagement in activities, linking families and communities, to nurturing a sense of belonging, and promoting health and well-being. Media engagement has been found to be key to public participation and sense of social connection by previous research (Coudry et al 2010)—this is evidenced in the findings from this body of research too.

### Community engagement

Yarning session and workshop participants noted that Indigenous radio connects community members in a way other media does not, through news and information about local events, services, community health, and emergencies, shout-outs to family and community members, local (Indigenous) stories, and by listening to familiar community voices. One younger female participant from a very remote area said she valued hearing about “surrounding communities, town



updates, our weather ... buildings getting built ... sports, opportunities to sign up ... visiting other communities". As per earlier findings, a number of people also reported that they used Facebook in particular for hyper-local news—in this sense, both the local radio station and social media platforms such as Facebook are delivering local content to audiences. As we have previously reiterated, the global potential of Facebook, Instagram, X and other social media platforms does not mean those apps are always being used solely for non-local information. There is significant evidence that expanding the focus of Indigenous broadcasting services to include delivering hyper-local news, events, and connection through social media attached to the broadcasting service (i.e. the radio station) will serve to update the activity of the stations, and engage more community members in listening, working/volunteering and media production while still maintaining the content and integrity of the highly valued radio station.

Indigenous broadcasting is a highly valued service across all communities, with its importance particularly evident in remote and very remote areas, where it often serves as the primary media source. In these remote areas, Indigenous broadcasting is valued for instilling pride in community Indigenous identity; sharing positive stories about their communities and mob; and offering content in traditional languages.

*"Give culture a big plug, it's so important our people know out there. Who are we and what gift we bring to the table. Young voices on the radio... it's a beautiful sound."*  
(Mid-age, Female, Very Remote)

*"Radio Centrelink ads [advertises] in language for community is really good I reckon ..."*  
(Mid-age, Female, Outer Regional)

Participants across fieldwork sites and demographics noted the role of (local) Indigenous media in fostering community connections and creating a safe place for expressing Indigeneity. Participants highlighted radio as a useful media for activism and truth telling, preserving culture and history for future generations and as a platform for cross-cultural exchange. Moreover, Indigenous community radio was recognised as a site of both resistance and resilience. Given the historical context of Indigenous radio, there exists a steadfast determination to uphold this medium and preserve its platform.

*"Indigenous radio and media are extremely important to encourage mob from all backgrounds to share Indigenous knowledge."* (Mid-Age, Female, Major City)

*"I want the Indigenous radio station to run to put our voice out there. To show we are teaching our children about our ways. That we teach them to be safe in their own place."* (Mid-Age, Female, Very Remote)

Participants across all fieldwork sites acknowledged the value of community and Indigenous radio for connecting Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to Indigenous voices and stories. For example, in Adelaide, there are a few Indigenous programs broadcast on two different non-Indigenous community radio stations. These programs are delivered by Indigenous broadcasters, and include content about First Nations issues, music, politics, and culture. Participants highlighted the important role played by these programs in promoting Indigenous issues and voices to a broader audience.

*"Because not only are our First Nations people listening, but it's a wider community. You know, because going through [local community radio station] ... all the listeners out there listen to what we do, and talk about all those dates [such as Mabo Day] and what's important, you know."* (Mid-age, Female, Major City).

Some participants reflected on their experience of Indigenous radio being a way to connect non-Indigenous and Indigenous mob as a kind of interface through the organising of local events, and the sharing of Indigenous content and stories. Unfortunately, few Indigenous radio sites had the resources to commit to services outside of basic broadcasting, however participants commented on their value as a community service. Examples of this are the promoting of community events and festivals, informing community about services and authorities, and broadcasting from within community. For example, in one outer regional community, mainstream media is thought to be less approachable. Local Indigenous radio is more community accessible. The local Indigenous radio station visits the schools to engage the wider community and educate children about Indigenous culture.

*"Indigenous media breaks down barriers between Indigenous or non-Indigenous people."*  
(Mid-age, Male, Regional)

In one inner regional town, participants explained that non-Indigenous volunteers at the local radio station engaged with Indigenous members of the community. Through the radio station, Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members come together. Although our yarning sessions were comprised of Indigenous Australian listeners, at one station we had a committed listener come for a yarn with the research team who was non-Indigenous. He was a regular caller and felt it important to emphasise the value of the station, not just to the Indigenous community but the broader community as well. He said his interactions with the broadcasters—who were accessible and who he had come to know—along with the music programming that he loved had been instrumental to his health and well-being. The station was on '24-7' at his house.

*"[People at the radio] have become my family. The radio station has brought me out of depression."* (Older, Male, Regional, Non-Indigenous)

Much of the strength of community broadcasting draws from partnerships across local people, local voices, and local actions. As some participants indicated, local Indigenous radio is more embedded in community than mainstream media and is therefore more approachable and accessible to broader (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) communities. Given the recent referendum in 2023, some participants saw this as an opportunity to disseminate authentic Indigenous voice for all listeners. Participants who consume a diversity of forms of Indigenous media, highlighted the ability of Indigenous media to break down barriers between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

*"The Indigenous radio mingles with people, it does not matter if they are Indigenous or non-Indigenous people."*  
(Mid-age, Male, Outer Regional)

At one inner regional site, the local Indigenous radio station engages with the whole spectrum of community, including police, schools, youth and the aging community. The station assists with fundraising for local causes and individual needs, and functions as the bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Through the radio station, people of the community come together, and some participants noted this has a mitigative impact on experiences and levels of racism and social distrust.

While some forms of Indigenous media (for example, newspapers<sup>15</sup>) are in decline, the continuing recognition of the value of Indigenous radio is motivated by more than pure nostalgia. Participants indicated that communities are reliant on this media as an authentic voice of the community.

15: The Lismore-based Koori Mail is an exception to the decline of newspapers—it maintains strong readership and a strong brand among Indigenous Australians around the country and as per earlier data, is considered a major source of news and information

When radio stations are not operative, as was the case in some remote and very remote areas, audiences indicated this has an impact on the community. As one male participant in a regional area explained, the radio is central to the culture of community and, “where there is no culture, there is mass suffering”. The centrality of local Indigenous radio for the older generations was pronounced, particularly in the absence of a radio service which it was felt would dramatically impact the ability of older people to access important community announcements related to Centerlink, Medicare, health services and, for example, COVID-19. They were less likely, when compared with younger people, to access these service announcements via smartphone. The stations also offered opportunities for local musicians and bands to have their music heard, and to record in studios and film rehearsals and performances for upload to YouTube—the loss of such a resource was having significant negative impacts on the morale within some communities who had lost this opportunity and resource.

As a physical site, radio offers opportunities that an exclusively digital space cannot. For example, in one regional community, the local Indigenous radio station engages extensively with local police, who regularly update the radio station about what is going on in the community, and about any community activity that the police are engaging in. The police listen to the local Indigenous radio. Furthermore, Aboriginal Liaison Officers visit the radio to inform community about their role, programs, and events. Radio is the bridge to better relationships with police and community.

The resilience of this media is noteworthy however the exponential rise in digital technologies will necessarily mean a transition of this space to a more modern approach to Indigenous media. As one participant concluded:

“Indigenous radio is a special thing to have for a community. There is only a handful around the country. So, we are lucky.” (Older, Male, Inner Regional).

## Language

The importance of Indigenous languages was echoed across the fieldwork sites. It was particularly emphasised in remote and regional areas as crucial to preserve and strengthen culture and knowledge. Some older participants expressed concerns about the diminishing role of language, and the need for local media to preserve the community’s connection to language.

“It feels safe to use language and connect with language.” (Mid-Age, Female, Major City)

“Listening to language gives me courage.” (Mid-Age, Female, Very Remote)

“It is the radio that keeps our culture and language alive. We need to show the kids that we are here, and our culture remains strong.” (Mid-Age, Female, Very Remote)

Participants in regional and remote areas stated that Indigenous media, and particularly Indigenous radio, is considered the guardian of language through their broadcasting. Participants in workshops also recognised new forms of media and their potential to sustain language, and make language more accessible to children, and to non-Indigenous people who come into their communities.

“They [the radio] do a lot of the language programs. At times we do ‘word of the day’ or by telling stories, sharing language, and we’ve been involved in keepers of language, recording of language, interviews with some of the last speakers of language in this area.” (Mid-age, Male, Outer Regional)

Podcasts were emphasised as a meaningful medium to preserve language and culture, as well as forging connections with different Indigenous languages and cultures across the region (in the Zenadh Kes/Torres Strait, for example, in relation to Melanesian cultures), the nation, and the world.



Visiting 2CUZ-FM in Bourke NSW for fieldwork



Community members gather outside the Ernabella Arts centre in Pukatja. This is one of the oldest Aboriginal art centres in Australia

## Health and Well-being

The influence of Indigenous media on health and well-being is significant, particularly around self-esteem and a sense of belonging. Participants indicated positive stories and strengthening of culture and identity as key virtues of Indigenous media. Some emphasised how this can contribute to individual and community health and well-being, fostering a sense of belonging and identity through both listening to, and participating in, local Indigenous media.

“Sometimes all it takes is to hear an Auntie’s voice on the radio and you know everything is going to be OK. It is so important to someone who has no hope. It is a sense of community.” (Mid-Age, Female, Major City).

“A sense of community and ownership is integral to Indigenous media across the country. It is uniquely placed to improve community well-being.” (Young, Male, Outer Regional)

Even in Adelaide, where Indigenous broadcasting is limited to individual programs on generalist community radio stations, the importance of these programs to support positive mental health was recognised.

“I’ve been a bit down with the referendum, and what’s happened, and I needed time to sort of, you know, comprehend all of that. But I think just knowing that our mob are resilient, and we keep going, that’s the important part of why, you know, media is ... broadcasting is so important for our mob.” (Mid-age, Female, Major City)

Workshop data in regional areas indicated that Indigenous media is not limited to Indigenous Australians, and non-Indigenous people have also started to feel an increased sense of belonging in their community through their consumption of, and participation in, Indigenous radio.

Participants in urban and regional areas also referred to the use of the audiobook service, Audible, to improve mental health. Audible is also mentioned as a useful application to help people who experience difficulties with reading and can be useful for learning in remote communities with lower levels of literacy.

However, it must be noted that some participants across all categories of fieldwork site expressed serious concerns about the “toxic” and “divisive” nature of social media as previously highlighted. Older and mid-age audiences, in particular, expressed concerns about health and well-being regarding social media, raising concerns around bullying, online gambling, sexual predation, and racism. Facebook and X (Twitter) were particularly highlighted as conducive to conflict, as reported earlier. Participants also noted the lateral violence associated with X can have an impact on the mental health of the individual, alongside concerns about the divisive effect Facebook can have on communities.

“It’s stressful, a lot [of youth] are taking their own lives because it’s so stressful, there’s a lot of bullying.” (Mid-age, Female, Very Remote)

There is a variance between communities around the use of Facebook and its effects on community dysfunction. Facebook and Twitter were reported through the workshops as being the worst social media platforms in promoting dysfunction within their communities and thereby impacting health and well-being. Conversely, Facebook is also seen as a positive medium to connect community members, particularly for regional and remote participants undertaking medical treatments in cities far away from their communities.



Triple A Murri Country in Brisbane gets ready to broadcast live from Musgrave Park following the Invasion Day rally in January 2023

## Digital Archives

The value of a digital archive was noted by several participants across remote and regional sites. Some Indigenous radio stations are engaged in programs and activities to digitally archive local media content as well as broader community culture, photographs and audiovisual material. Other Indigenous radio stations have expressed the desire to safeguard their media content in a digital archive.

“Songline is that thing for dancing, story for the song, that’s why our culture is strong, it’s Anangu thing. Rebuild that part ... Old time ceremony / dance, you know? ... I want to rebuild that little thing that they do, you know ... old generation left us something, left us something big.” (Young, Male, Very Remote)

Where this is indicated, participants noted the significance of a digital archive for maintaining local history and culture. Audiences in some remote and regional areas valued initiatives and platforms that make media content accessible to community members. One such media platform is the *Ara Irititja* project that “returns and collectively documents Anangu historical material and preserves it for the future”.<sup>16</sup> Elders in a very remote community in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands use the *Ara Irititja* application, ‘Ara Winki No. 1’, to browse local historical media content.

Observations and field notes from some remote sites indicated that smart phones were often used as portable archives and shared with other allowable people. Local elders advised that this included language, pictures and videos that were used often in funerals. Interestingly, the forbidden practice of avoiding the display of photos of the deceased, is slowly changing in some areas through a transition to digital practices and a desire to record and remember the past.

16: <https://publications.archivists.org.au/index.php/asa/article/view/10337/10409>

Some media workers in a very remote community indicated that previous archived material had been taken from the local community and stored in Canberra, and other capital cities. They expressed the desire to have these materials returned to community and for local community members to be provided the knowledge and training to manage and record oral and visual histories themselves.

“The need to archive the old ways - radio responsibility to archive Indigenous media. Some archival documents are not located in the community. The community wants this back in the community, where it belongs.” (Young, Female, Very Remote)

Digital transformation allows the opportunity to access and use digital technologies. The use of digital archives is sporadic but is on the increase. One example in a very remote community is an archive project underway that is digitising 40 years’ worth of content including the documentation of local customs and traditions. Issues of data sovereignty and skills to record, archive and safeguard cultural material will need further attention. As a corollary, rules around access and ethical use will become increasingly needed. We are aware from the NIAA that the national Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) recently opened a facility in Alice Springs, with digitisation technology to digitise at-risk audio-visual materials held by Indigenous broadcasting and media organisations in remote areas. First Nations Media Australia and AIATSIS have also made available mobile digitisation kits for communities to digitise materials—these initiatives are not known about in some IBMP stations/areas but indicate significant advancement in digitising important audio-visual material from stations and individual broadcasters.

## CONTENT

This section of the research reports on how people are accessing information, preferred ways to receive news, and related issues. Firstly, though, we quickly turn to an issue that arose from fieldwork observations in relation to content production. A growing number of Indigenous Australians residing in urban, regional, and remote areas are using digital and social media forms. However, many Indigenous broadcasting services are not equipped to meet this demand. It is the case that much social media creation and content production occurs outside the bounds of ‘traditional’ media such as radio and television services—but, within the IBMP and particularly in media-poor regional and remote communities, there is the opportunity for the broadcasting service to fulfil broader media content needs. Our fieldwork identified and witnessed a number of community members creating their own their own digital/social media content outside the bounds of the local Indigenous broadcasting service, which is brilliant—and this suggests opportunity for these skills and audiences to be harnessed within the Indigenous



This telephone box in Yuendumu is one of the few places people can receive reliable wifi, sometimes

broadcasting services as well (or at least, form part of the broadcast and social media content of the radio/TV service). Seeding the ability for individual and community content creation increases the likelihood of generating thriving local micro-economies through the creative economy (also known as the orange economy). The United Nations Economist Network defines the creative economy to consist of the “economic, cultural and social aspects interacting with technology, intellectual property and tourism objectives: it is a set of knowledge-based, and thus more localized, economic activities with a development dimension and cross-cutting linkages at macro and micro levels to the overall economy”.

Consequently, there exists an opportunity to enhance the skills within Indigenous media organisations to adapt to the evolving digital and social media world.

This adaptation is crucial to ensure that Indigenous Broadcasting Services can continue to meet the needs of their audiences, and community members can effectively cater to the preferences of their audiences and empower community members aspiring to become media creators and producers.



## Accessing Information

When asked, 'Which ways are most likely to help to get information you want?' National Survey respondents reinforced the importance of family, friends and mob as a source of reliable information. Television (43 percent) and information on the internet (46 percent) are also important sources for official information. This is followed by social media (28 percent), emails (21 percent), and local community radio (22 percent).

Importantly, local community (Indigenous) radio is significantly more important than other (commercial) radio, which is statistically non-significant.

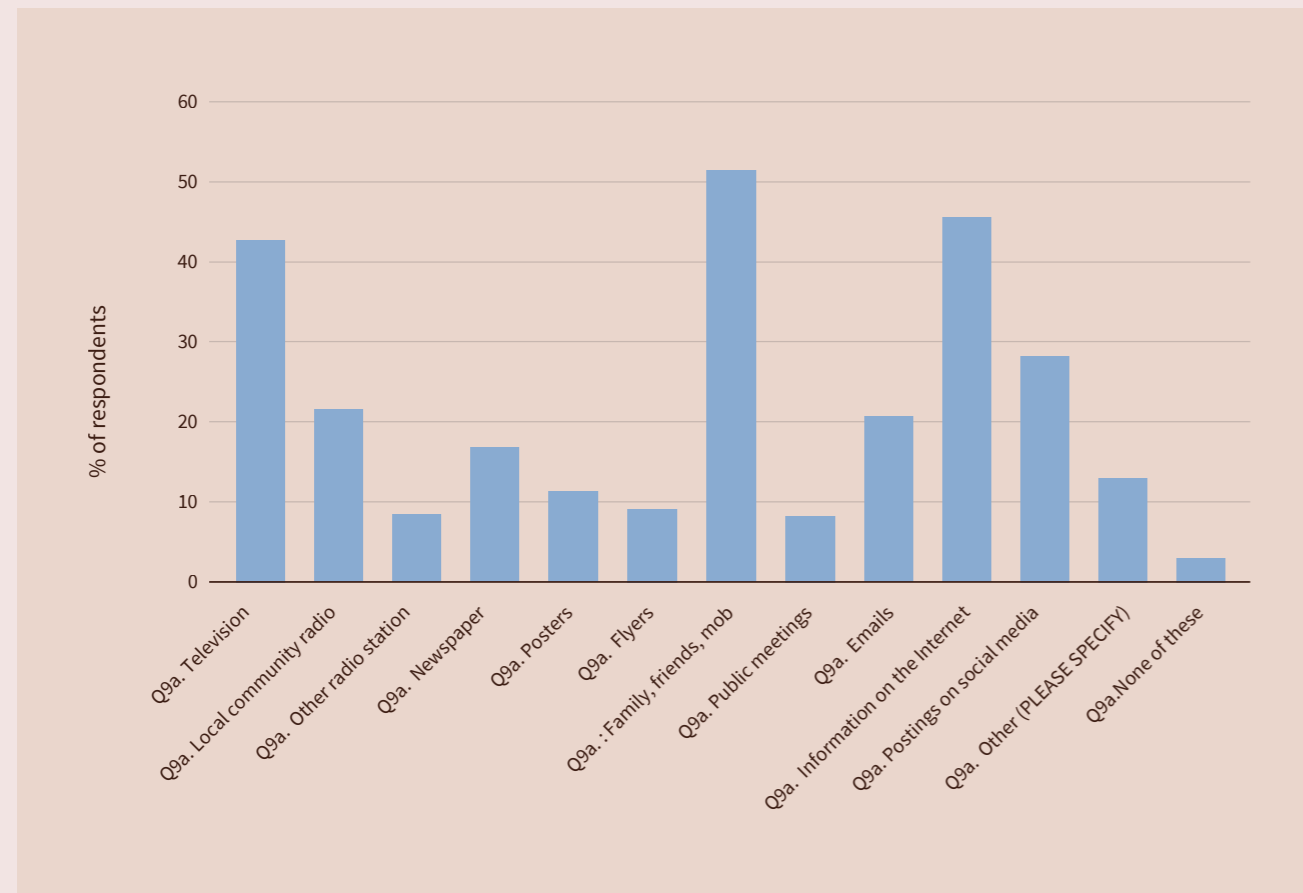


Figure 24: Ways to receive information

These findings are confirmed when asking about preferred method of receiving information, with family, friends, and mob the most trusted source of information. Interestingly, this is the most relevant for the youngest age group (18-29 years), who significantly prefer and trust information from friends, family, and mob (33 percent) over the internet (19 percent), social media (17 percent), and television (14 percent), respectively. Older age groups (50 plus) mostly prefer television as well as friends, family and mob.

This is particularly the case in remote and very remote areas, where television and friends, family and mob ranked highest, with social media and information on the internet of substantially less significance. Local community radio is also important for the older age groups (50 plus), with a relatively equal distribution across different regions. The internet, including social media, is comparatively more important in major cities and inner/outer regional areas. Emails are more relevant for information transmission than strategies such as flyers, posters, newspapers, and public meetings.

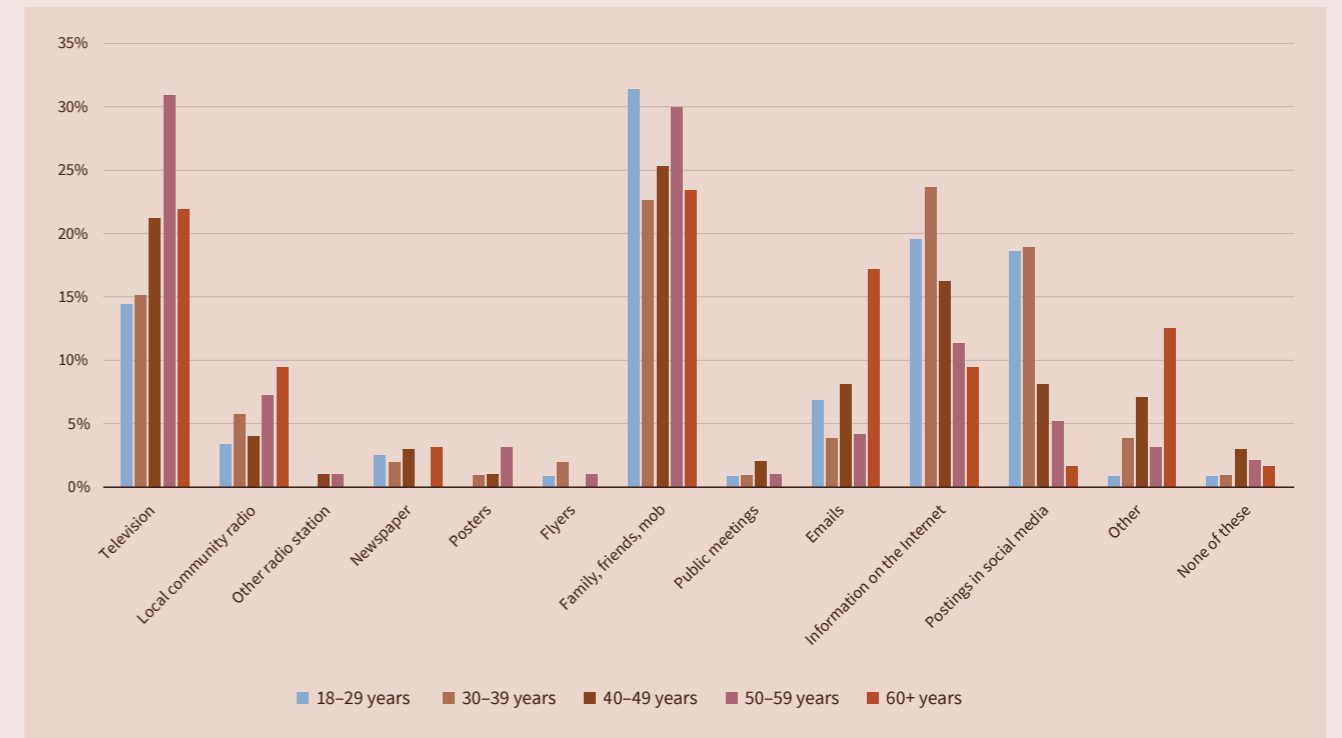


Figure 25: Preferred ways to receive important information by AGE

Family, friends and mob are a preferred source of information for Indigenous people. It is clear that Indigenous Australians trust others from their community far more than they trust other sources of information (see section on the Black/Indigenous media sphere below); although internet searches, social media, and television also rate highly as sources of information in certain age groups. Indigenous Community TV (ICTV, formerly known as 'Bush TV') is an important source in remote and very remote communities, and we reiterate here that 70 percent of people who can

access ICTV said they watch it regularly. Postings on social media are markedly unimportant for people aged 50 years and older; while television is an important source for people aged over 50.

## Mainstream news and media

In terms of official (mainstream) news outlets, public and commercial television were the most cited sources of news and information across the entire National Survey sample. However, NITV was the fourth-most popular source of news for our sample; Living Black hosted by Karla Grant on NITV and Indigenous community radio were also identified as important sources of news and information. What is important

to note here is that, if we take the Indigenous media sector and its programming together, there is significant viewership across several programs. In total, there is almost a collective 90 percentage points across Indigenous media programming—with local Indigenous community radio and fortnightly newspaper the Koori Mail most used with nearly one in five people choosing them as a regular source of news and almost 40 percent tuning in to NITV.

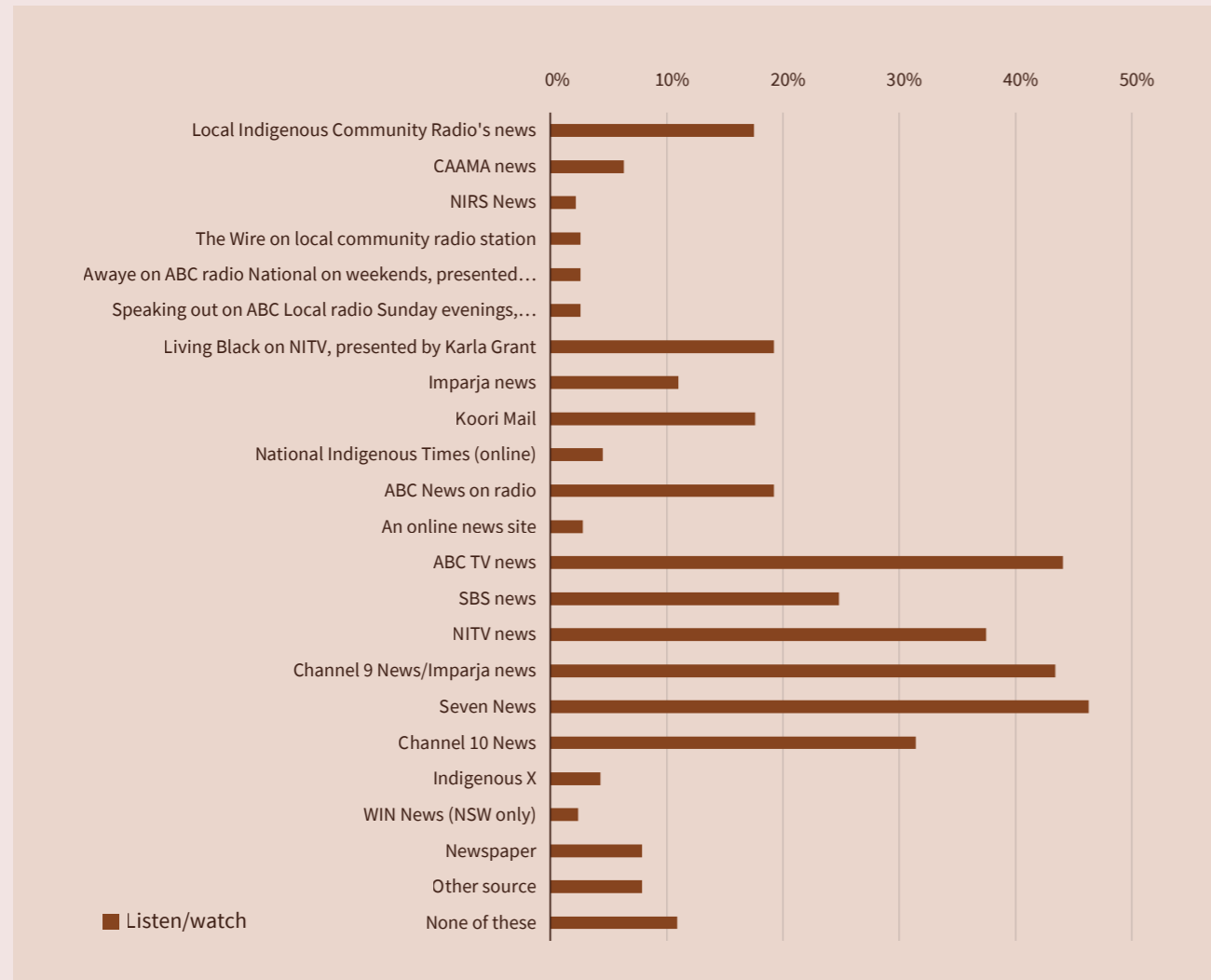


Figure 26 : Ways to receive information

Considering these levels of viewing alongside other Indigenous media suggests strong audience demand from Indigenous Australians—and this does not include Indigenous programming on the ABC and SBS which would significantly add more. What this graph tells us, then, is that while Indigenous audiences watch mainstream content through

ABC television, Seven News, Nine/Imparja etc, there is also significant demand for Indigenous produced and delivered media content. Indigenous Australians are consuming Indigenous media alongside other forms of media—in this, the data confirms the importance of the sector's continued support and growth.



Broadcaster Luke Murphy at Ngarraliny radio, Taree, NSW

As a note, it was clear from the National Survey that most listed newspapers in the study were primarily read online. However, newspapers comprised less than 10 percent of news sources for our sample with the exception of the Northern Territory News. The consumption of newspapers, both online and in-print, is therefore quite low.

Despite high viewership for some mainstream media outlets for news, many yarning session and workshop participants across all regions felt that mainstream media tends to report on Indigenous affairs negatively. Some participants said this negative framing has caused them to stop consuming traditional forms of news altogether, or they have turned to news through Indigenous-controlled sources. They recognised the impact of negative mainstream media reporting on local communities. The avoidance of mainstream media is more than a simple alternative or an avoidance of news that is perceived to be unpalatable. Increasingly Indigenous Australians question the source of information and critique its content.

“That’s the big media like on TV, and I think who owns that, Channel, 7, Channel 9, like everything they report on has an agenda behind that.” (Mid-age, Female, Major City)

Podcasts, Indigenous community radio, X (Twitter) and TikTok were mentioned often during the fieldwork, as preferred sources of news which might present a more balanced viewpoint.

“I get my news from our [Indigenous] media that is on social media. To me it is more honest than hearing it from mainstream news outlets because it [mainstream news] is so tainted.” (Mid-Age, Female, Major City)

“It is cool to listen to mainstream news media, but they also cause negative perceptions on Black people based on the stories and angles they choose.” (Young, Male, Remote)

“Indigenous newsrooms and media are focusing on positive news and local stories. It offers an alternative to mainstream news and media.” (Mid-Age, Male, Remote)

Yarning session and workshop participants across remote, regional, and urban sites rarely view newspapers, particularly non-Indigenous newspapers. Some participants mentioned they are more inclined to consume and purchase local news in the form of in-print or online newspapers if they have been informed by family and friends about a story or news item that has covered someone they knew. Indigenous newspapers such as the Koori Mail (national coverage) and Torres News (local), remain relevant, and there is a growing tendency to consume news online. However, online local news can come with a paywall, and people are then more inclined to consume the same news through social media where it is free of charge. There are also numerous hyper-local ‘newsletters’ produced such as Palm Island Voice, Pormurr Paanthu (Pormporaaw), and Yarrabah News (mainly in Queensland—and there are many more) and these are text-based publications with high community readership, based on positive news and community photographs. Many of these local newsletters are published by the local community council or Aboriginal Corporation.

Younger participants in major cities commented they are more inclined to avoid mainstream media through any source or platform. Older participants, particularly in remote areas tuned in to the ABC through television or radio.



Researchers Suus de Groot Heupner (far left) and Harry Van Issum (far right) with Kathryn Wintinna, Michael Lang and Ernest Pan in Umuwa

### Creating an Indigenous public sphere

Given a significant proportion of participants expressed growing disillusionment with news from mainstream media outlets, it is important to recognise the value of the ‘public sphere’ created by Indigenous media. In the United States, scholars refer to this as a ‘Black public sphere’ (Squires, 2002; Black Sphere Collective, 1995; Jenkins 2022; Johnson 2019) and we have canvassed this concept earlier in our introductory comments. Even if participants did not usually identify it as such, there was enough discussion about the space created by Indigenous media that warrants thinking about this space as a particular and unique forum for voices and listening. The ‘Black public sphere’ typically refers to the collective network of media outlets, platforms, and content creators that cater primarily to Black audiences or focus on issues relevant to Black communities. This sphere encompasses a diverse range of media forms, including television networks, radio stations, newspapers, magazines, websites, social media accounts, podcasts, and more, similar to the outputs of our own Indigenous media in creating an Indigenous public sphere. Within such diverse ‘counter’ public spheres (Fraser, 1990), there is often an emphasis on representing and amplifying the voices, experiences, and perspectives of Indigenous people. The importance of a Black or Indigenous public sphere, created by Indigenous-controlled media, becomes particularly evident in the aftermath of the government’s unsuccessful 2023 referendum on the Voice to Parliament, which sparked a highly emotional public outcry against the idea of an Indigenous voice. Our yarning sessions elicited comments that we see as consistent with the recognition of an Indigenous public sphere by audiences:

“I can’t ever remember hearing any other [mainstream] stations being a part of NAIDOC. When it’s NAIDOC week, the Indigenous radio will be promoting all the community events, ‘make sure you get down to the march’ and stuff like that. Indigenous radio would be the only place you would hear it.” (Mid-Age, Male, Outer Regional)

“On radio we were activists, we were protesting, we can get to our people.” (Older, Female, Major City)

“Blackfullas—we use it [Indigenous media] for strengthening identity, social connection.” (Mid-age, Female, Major City)

Participants remarked that local Indigenous radio exhibits a level of cultural awareness that mainstream and non-Indigenous media formats lack. They asserted that Indigenous media recognises and respects the diversity with Indigenous Australian communities and voices, making it a safer option for consumption compared to non-Indigenous media. Others stated that Indigenous media stands out for its dedication to celebrating Indigenous stories.

Yarning session participants confirmed that they often turn to Indigenous media (broadly, not just Indigenous broadcasting services) to stay better informed about Indigenous affairs. They observed that social media platforms offer a wider range of Indigenous media compared to the limited options available through traditional TV channels and programs, such as NITV, local Indigenous radio stations, and Indigenous newspapers like the Koori Mail. Participants also accessed alternative sources such as podcasts hosted by Indigenous Australians, Black media pages on Facebook, individual Indigenous media reporters on X (Twitter) and TikTok, and Black music and arts on Spotify, YouTube, and Google.



Vehicles for Radio Mama (Geraldton) and TEABBA (Darwin and Top End remote communities) help the stations’ visibility, and live broadcast from community events



Some participants expressed a concern around Indigenous representation and the ‘whitewashing’ of more mainstream Indigenous media.

“Imparja was good when it first came out, it was natural with Indigenous people but then it became too white and too mainstream. In the 80s we all listened to CAAMA; they put on health messages which are important to our community.” (Mid-Age, Female, Very Remote)

Indigenous radio is considered an accessible source to gather local news and information about issues and events that pertain to the Indigenous Australian community. It highlights local events, people and issues. Importantly, many participants mentioned the notification of sorry business, health messages and government information as a critical service, and social media with a generated algorithm toward Indigenous content was popular. While much of the focus in yarning sessions was on local Indigenous radio, in remote and very remote areas the Indigenous Community Television service is important and dominates television viewership, as previously noted.

A key feature is the ability to select several sources considered to be trustworthy to collectively verify news, and people deployed several methods to ensure information they received was trustworthy. We see this as an extension of the ‘Black public sphere’, in the sense that people are continuing to look to their own sources—either Indigenous media, or communication from mob—to access trustworthy information.

“Media can be fabricated. But if multiple [sic] of my family members are telling the same story, I can get my answer from that.” (Young, Female, Outer Regional)

“I know what news is trustworthy because I choose them.” (Mid-Age, Male, Outer Regional).

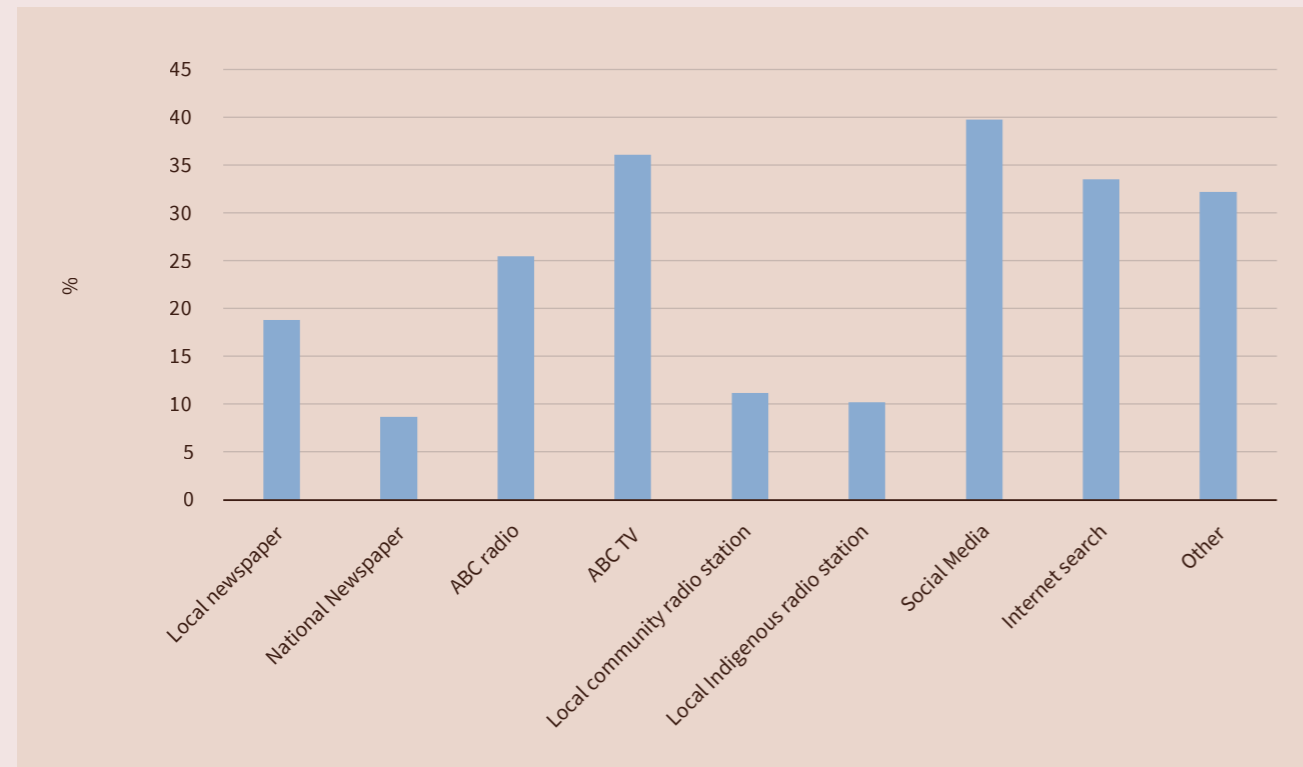
As some participants stated, the trustworthiness of news is dependent on the criteria by which it is selected. This is particularly the case when participants primarily use social media for news and information. As previously confirmed, many participants of all ages across all regions often listened to trusted close friends and family—word of mouth remains an important source for news and information, particularly in remote and regional areas. When asked about the accuracy of facts or statements, participants advised that they sought confirmation through several family members and friends.

“I get my information through other family and friends; I don’t really go to Google.” (Young, Female, Outer Regional)

Some older participants noted there is a trustworthiness in verbally sharing news and information which prevents them from using social or traditional media for news. These participants use digital media for entertainment but are reluctant or unable to consume social media for news and local information.

## Accessing Emergency Information

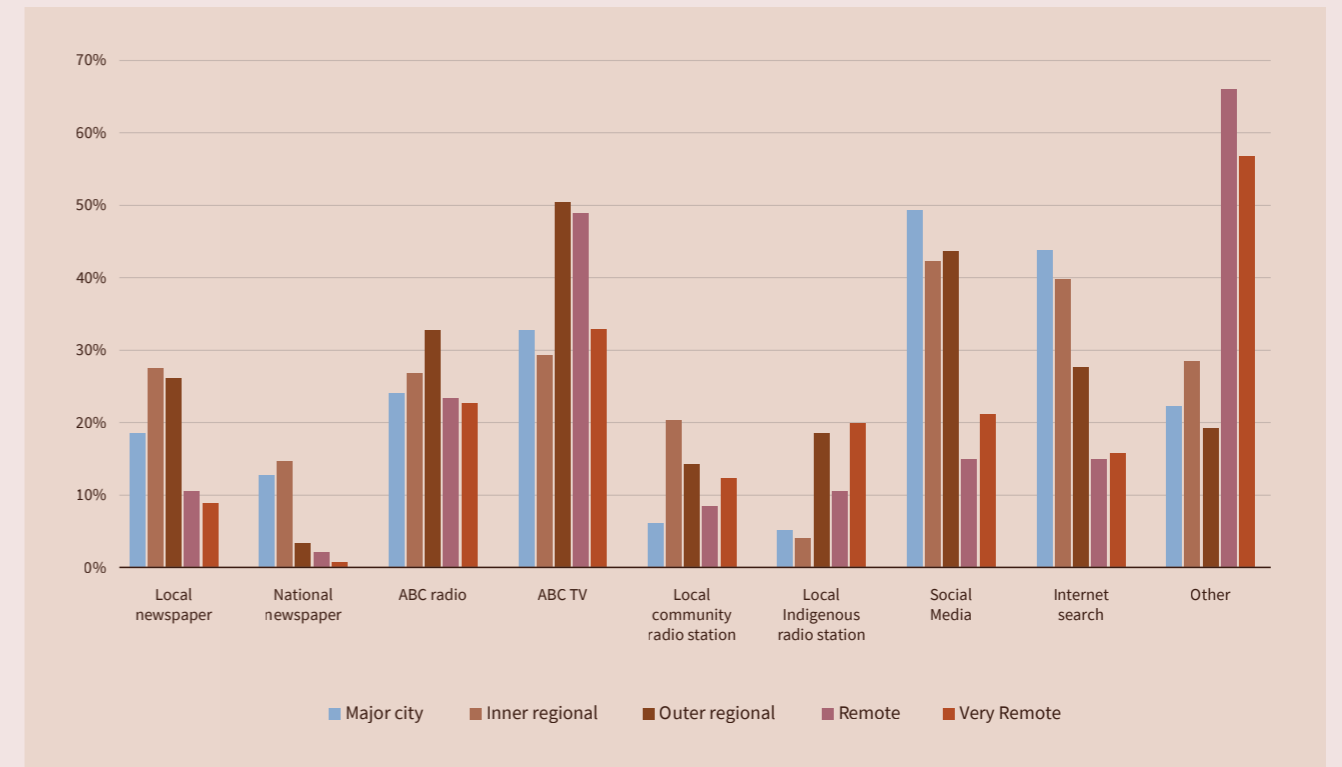
Recognition about the importance of media during emergencies and natural disasters is growing—both the increasing frequency of extreme weather events, along with the world’s recent experience with the global COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the importance of effective and reliable communications to the public during crisis and disaster. This is particularly important in Australia, in our remote regions, which often experience the most extreme weather events.



**Figure 27: Information sources during emergency and natural disasters (Overall)**

For accessing information on emergencies, social media is ranked highest among younger respondents to the National Survey (under 40s), and very low for 60 plus (16 percent). ABC radio and television is, on average, equally important across all age groups. Local community radio stations and Indigenous radio stations are relied upon by about 20 percent of the National Survey sample collectively, with an anticipated increased importance in outer regional and remote areas compared to major cities.

Figure 28 shows the different information sources that National Survey respondents nominated they relied upon during emergency and natural disaster, with an emphasis on the different residential categories of the respondents. Major cities and regional areas relied very heavily on social media as a source of information during emergencies and, along with the ABC and ‘internet searches’, social media was particularly important for residents of metropolitan and regional areas. Commercial television and radio were regularly nominated as sources of information during emergencies across all residential areas, although this was more common in major cities and regional areas.



**Figure 28: Information sources during emergency and natural disasters by RESIDENTIAL CATEGORY**

According to the National Survey, Indigenous Australians living in very remote and outer regional areas relied relatively heavily on local Indigenous radio, although all categories clearly identified the ABC as a reliable and heavily used source, with social media just slightly ahead of Indigenous broadcast services. ABC television and radio were also the most used sources for people living in remote areas, although they were far more reliant on local Indigenous radio than people in the city, or inner regional areas. Outer regions similarly relied heavily on local Indigenous radio. This was confirmed by the fieldwork. Yarning session and workshop participants in more remote areas indicated that radio (Indigenous and otherwise) serves as an effective means of meeting the

needs of community members to receive information during emergencies such as flooding, bushfires, or cyclones. While the comment below comes from a major city, the participant had previously lived in a very remote community.

“If there’s cyclones and stuff the radio is very important. They got no outside voices from their communities ... in your emergency pack there is always batteries and wireless, updates on roads and things ... it was a lifeline in itself... With no power for days, you have the wireless.”  
(Mid-age, Female, Major City)

“The word spreads quicker than the bush fire.”  
(Mid-Age, Female, Very Remote)



Broadcaster Michael Lang in the studio at PY Media, Umuwa

The fieldwork component of the research emphasised that local radio remains important for emergency information. Participants say they receive official information via text messages in cases of emergencies, however, for further details, radio is an important source for emergency information. It was often mentioned that official government communication could be improved to make emergency information more accessible. This could be through using popular social media platforms, such as TikTok and Facebook or through known social media influencers for those living in urban and regional areas with reliable internet coverage.

When natural disasters affect the infrastructure that is needed for phone and internet connectivity, radio is the only means people can receive information from outside their immediate community. Some yarnning session and workshop participants in remote and regional sites mentioned the unreliability of power and the overreliance on phones which lose battery power within a day. These participants suggested radio as a useful source of information or simple word of mouth. These participants suggested that Indigenous Australians often look at the natural elements around them to inform themselves on natural emergencies. They have cultural knowledge that they disseminate among community members by word of mouth, as well as through local radio and phone. For these participants, social and digital media is less relevant for information on natural emergencies.

The 'Other' category in the National Survey must be noted here, particularly for remote areas where it is the most selected category, indicating the survey categories did not capture the most reliable and used source of information

during natural disasters. This is undoubtedly related to the large number of people who said "mob", "friends", and/or "family" were sources of information for them about emergencies, or "word of mouth around our mob", "word of mouth in the community, family and neighbours"; "friends and community around me", "from my family and mob" and so on. A number of people made comments such as "I feel the wind blowing" or "I just see it coming". Information from friends and family, and knowledge of the local environment, then, is considered by remote and very remote survey respondents to be their most-used source of information during emergencies. As a note and based on the extended comments in the 'Other' category, we also believe reliance on social media is slightly higher than the figures suggest—a number of people put 'Facebook' in the 'Other' category; or something like "[I hear about emergencies] from my son who is on Facebook".

Technical failings were one of the major issues confronted by Indigenous broadcasting services in remote and very remote areas, and this has clearly impacted on their ability to provide emergency information when needed. The issues surrounding equipment, lack of technical know-how, and lack of technical support are significant for many remote Indigenous broadcasting services, and their related Remote Indigenous Media Organisations (RIMOs)—most of the RIMOs are aware of technical difficulties in their satellite stations, but many say they cannot access the technical support to fix the issues. This is an issue that requires a comprehensive audit by the NIAA's field officers with accurate reporting needed to be delivered to the agency, so that gaps and closed services can be identified and revitalised where there is community demand. Our fieldwork suggests any

of the remote communities that had non-functioning Indigenous broadcast services significantly regretted the loss of the service and were frustrated by the failure of government resourcing to recover the station's service. This is covered further in the Infrastructure, Management and Governance section, below.

## EQUITY AND ACCESS

This section concerns equity and access to all forms of media for Indigenous Australians, including the internet, digital literacy, and affordability, which are paramount in today's interconnected world. The digital divide exacerbates existing disparities, hindering Indigenous communities' ability to fully participate in the global discourse, preserve their cultures, and advocate for their rights. Limited access to the internet and digital technologies not only further isolates some Indigenous communities but also constrains their economic opportunities and educational prospects. Moreover, without adequate digital literacy training, Indigenous Australians face challenges in navigating online spaces and utilising digital tools effectively. Additionally, the affordability of internet services and devices poses a significant barrier for some, further marginalizing Indigenous populations who may already be grappling with socio-economic challenges. However, by addressing these issues and promoting equitable access to media and digital resources, we can empower Indigenous communities to reclaim their narratives, bridge cultural divides, and foster meaningful participation in the digital age. In a global context, access to information is regarded as a fundamental right of every human being.

## Media as a Human Right

Access to information is considered crucial for individuals to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, opinion, and participation in the democratic process. It empowers people to make informed decisions, engage in public discourse, hold governments and institutions accountable, and participate effectively in society. Furthermore, access to information is essential for education, personal development, and the advancement of knowledge, contributing to individual and societal progress. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) recognizes this right explicitly in Article 19, which states that "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers". More specifically, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) recognizes the rights of Indigenous people to establish their own media in Article 16: *Indigenous peoples have the right to establish their own media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-indigenous media without discrimination.*

Participants identified that it was imperative to receive information through any media, regardless of location. Some perceived that a lack of Indigenous media in their area was a violation of human rights (and indeed, Article 16 would reinforce that view). The workshops were held only months after the 2023 Federal government referendum on a 'Voice to Parliament' and some participants spoke specifically on the role of Indigenous media and access to critical and trustworthy information about the principles behind the Yes and No campaigns.



Travelling between Alice Springs and Tennant Creek through the NT's Barkly region, home to PAW Media who have been broadcasting to the central desert for 30 years. PAW Media reaches 14 remote communities.

“Indigenous mob appreciate truth telling directly from mob. It is important to get our ideas out there. We need Indigenous media to be right up there with topics like the referendum.” (Mid-Age, Female, Major City)

In one very remote area, a participant explicitly framed internet access as a fundamental human right, highlighting its crucial role as a cornerstone for everyday living:

“If they are going to provide internet service, it has to be spot on. We are entitled to the same thing as anyone down south, and that is where human rights come in.” (Mid-age, Female, Very Remote).

In remote and regional areas where internet is limited, participants pointed to the importance of the internet for individual and community well-being. They referred to education and work opportunities, as well as access to health services, that are offered online and which Indigenous Australians in some regional and remote areas have limited access to.

“Internet is the best thing that can help someone.” (Young, Female, Outer Regional)

Many broadcasters also spoke of broader rights of governance, articulated in UNDRIP (2007), around political institutions and the role that Indigenous media can play to inform communities. For Indigenous Australians to access media content, access to Indigenous-controlled media services is essential, as is internet accessibility. This is vital for education, on-line health services, access to government services and emergency information.

## Digital Literacy

A distinct generational divide exists between individuals highly immersed in various digital media and those with lower levels of digital literacy. Young and mid-aged participants across all fieldwork sites provided an extensive array of examples of engagement with a wide variety of digital devices and applications.

“I can do absolutely everything on my smart phone... [the] second most important thing, is my laptop.” (Mid-age, Male, Major City)

“Gamers can't live without Twitch and Discord.” (Mid-age, Female, Major City)

More pronounced in remote and regional communities is the gap in digital literacy to access new forms of media. Recent technologies demand a degree of digital literacy, that some participants in remote areas claim are inaccessible to a cohort of community members. They pointed to some media and news that is often accessed through email, which makes it inaccessible for Indigenous Australians who do not possess email, electronic devices, or the literacy to obtain them.

In some communities, participants noted Elders were not equipped to deliver stories and cultural knowledge in a digital form, and children were unwilling to engage in more traditional modes of communication. Elders can feel disempowered because they do not have the digital ability to meet their responsibility to educate younger generations about culture and history. This is evident in the expressions of older participants about the need for training and education in community, to enable them to have the digital ability to connect and use new forms of media (and storytelling).

“Elders feel disempowered because of their responsibility to grandchildren and not having the capacity to learn or be part of new forms of digital media.” (Older, Male, Major City)

Some participants raised concern about the low level of digital literacy among Indigenous Australians, increasing their vulnerability to scams and risks associated with digital media use and ability to discern genuine from fake interactions. Indeed, it should be recognised that, in terms of digital literacy, there needs to be a balance between the requirements to educate communities on digital media skills and use, but also to be made aware of the financial, health and well-being risks associated with digital media. Older and mid-age participants expressed concerns about the risk and implications of digital media for scams and data traceability. New social media, such as TikTok, come with certain risks that some participants think are overlooked.

“I think lot more Aboriginal/Indigenous people are a lot easier to be scammed ... because you know that people target Aboriginal people and try to scam them, as an Aboriginal person, I think.” (Mid-Age, Male, Outer Regional)

“When you download the application, you have to agree to the terms ... you're agreeing for them to sell your information.” (Mid-age, Male, Outer Regional)

Participants with a higher level of digital literacy also expressed concerns around data sovereignty and traceable data when using certain applications, such as X (Twitter) or Instagram, aware that data can be compromised, and personal details can be used for malicious ends. One younger male participant in an outer region specifically highlighted “the link between low social-economic status, free wi-fi points and data sovereignty”. Other participants said

they were also aware of the privacy risks associated with more established messaging services, and therefore use WhatsApp or other end-to-end encrypted communication channels. However, the matter of privacy was not often raised during yarning sessions and workshops.

## Affordability

The cost of phone and internet connectivity is higher in the remote and regional fieldwork sites that are limited to Telstra services. In the Top End and most remote areas, Telstra is the only available or reliable service, and community members do not have the option to purchase more affordable data plans with alternative service providers. Indeed, some members of the research team found themselves without reliable mobile phone and internet services while conducting fieldwork. New service provider, StarLink, is often touted as expensive and unaffordable for a large cohort of people.

City participants rarely spoke of expensive access to service but more the cost of applications and new phones (“If I like the app, I will pay for it” [Mid-Age-Female, Major City]), whereas participants in remote and regional fieldwork sites were more inclined to comment on the free services that some applications provide. Spotify and YouTube, for example, can be accessed free of charge with advertisements. Some people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more inclined to accept advertisements as a trade-off against the cost of subscription.



An elder tunes in to his smart phone while waiting for the boat to arrive in Ramingining

Some participants across remote, regional, and urban areas consider paid subscriptions to applications and streaming platforms when there is a clear option to share or bundle the cost. This is the case when multiple people can access the same account. One mid-age female in a major city stated that she has subscriptions to at least four streaming platforms to satisfy the preferences of all the people in her (four child) household. In some cases, the phone is the “hub of the family” and data is shared among all family members for streaming or internet searches.

“iPhone 14 on contract/ plan—gotta know how to budget, that phone is the hub of the family. We particularly share the data...services on my phone.” (Young, Male, Outer Regional)

The high cost of smart phones does not appear to be a deterrent against purchasing. Most participants indicated that they would simply “find the money somewhere” by avoiding upfront costs and putting phones on a plan. Few participants spoke of costs associated with smart TVs, computers, tablets or games. A central consideration was the access to reliable internet services and the ongoing costs.

## INFRASTRUCTURE, MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

This final theme considers issues related to the operations of Indigenous media outlets, with an emphasis on broadcasting outlets. Communities expressed concerns for the future of Indigenous radio, across all regions for a variety of connected reasons, including poor infrastructure, unreliable internet, complex governance, management and funding needs, alongside a lack of opportunities for training.

### Accessibility and infrastructure

This research has identified multiple sites, particularly in remote and very remote areas, where media and communications infrastructure does not meet current needs and is certainly not equipped to meet future needs. This relates to problems with existing infrastructure and a lack of technical know-how to use, repair and maintain equipment alongside the absence of reliable, working wi-fi. While we note this has improved significantly since the early 2000s (Watson 2021), there are currently remote communities (including Yuendumu, Umuwa, Ernabella/Pukatja and Ramingining) where either internet access or satellite access is unreliable and sometimes non-existent for lengthy periods of time. This highlights the necessity for communities to have quality emergency satellite connections for when telecommunications are out and there is no internet access.

“The point is that weather is unpredictable and can affect all of our media because emergency responses can’t get through to where we live.... Some people don’t have smart phones but they have payphones.” (Mid-age, Female, Remote)

“Some communities do not have internet access. They have land line phone reception, but when Telstra is down, they have no access to emergency information, and emergency services cannot contact them.” (Mid-age, Male, Remote)

Access to internet declines with levels of remoteness, which is linked to broader communications infrastructure. This disproportionately affects remote Indigenous communities. Participants who worked in the industry spoke about

problems with transmission towers, digital equipment for production and distribution, and other required devices.

“Our equipment is outdated. For us to be taken seriously, we need to be equipped with the resources to produce Indigenous and local media.” (Mid-Age, Female, Very Remote)

A key concern for participants, especially in very remote and remote areas, was the lack of technical expertise within communities to repair disruptions to transmission and the inability of local people to conduct this work. Participants from the radio industry noted that accessing funding sources for various services is complex and that independent contractors come with high costs. However, it is important to note that—as previously mentioned—while the National Broadcast Network (NBN) is reported to be weak or non-existent in many remote and regional places, those remote areas where there is commercial interest—such as mining—often manage to attract reliable internet access and infrastructure.

Given the distances and small populations in remote areas, infrastructure and access is expensive but a critical part of modern life. Participants in very remote areas are more likely to have mobile-only internet access. Their digital access can be further impacted by the shortage of telecommunication towers in these areas. By far, the most difficult barrier to digital inclusion is a reliable internet source.

“This day and age, the fact remote communities do not have internet access should not be happening.” (Mid-Age, Male, Remote)

Some workshop participants in remote and very remote fieldwork sites used satellite services, such as StarLink,

to access internet or have more reliable internet access. However, participants mentioned this to be unaffordable to most Indigenous Australians in remote communities. During a workshop showing a wall of multimedia devices, a young woman from an outer regional area expressed that “without internet you wouldn’t have 90 percent of things on that board—without internet there wouldn’t be a reason to have a computer”.

The VAST network (Viewer Access Satellite Television), which provides digital television and radio services, was stated to be periodically unreliable in many remote areas, but of greater concern was the lack of technological assistance for installing and repairing satellite services.

“A lot of [our] mob do not even have an email, so they cannot sign up and pay for media and online support services.” (Mid-Age, Male, Outer Regional)

Moreover, the StarLink and VAST networks require a certain level of digital literacy to commission the system. A community member in a very remote community noted that community members with lower levels of digital literacy must rely on community members with higher levels of digital literacy to help them to install the satellite dish. When there is a need for repairs in remote communities, participants and technological experts from the Indigenous media sector stated that the response is delayed due to remote access. This leads to communities and community members being without internet connectivity for several days and sometimes extended periods of time. System problems happen especially after simple weather events such as rain and cloud cover that frequently impacts upon satellites and telecommunication infrastructure. We reported earlier in this document that about one-third of the survey respondents



CAAMA, PAW and community radio station 8CCC broadcast live from the Desert Harmony Festival, Tennant Creek, August 2024

and sometimes extended periods of time. System problems happen especially after simple weather events such as rain and cloud cover that frequently impacts upon satellites and telecommunication infrastructure. We reported earlier in this document that about one-third of the survey respondents with satellite said their satellite service was not working; and in remote regions, more than half (57 percent) of people said their satellite was not currently working. This is most likely to be their VAST service, but could also be satellite delivered through other providers which can be knocked out if the satellite dish is damaged and/or needs repair.

One participant and technical worker in a remote community suggested the need to return to a centralised system where the local council is responsible for reliable and sustainable infrastructure which is obtained on a commercial/bulk cost with subsequent distribution to the community.

### Management and governance issues

Workshops advertised through local radio stations in some locations attracted industry professionals, who provided significant insight into matters concerning management and governance of Indigenous broadcasting services. This facilitated discussions on topics such as self-determination, funding structures and skill development.

“I want them [funding bodies] to take us [Indigenous broadcasters] seriously. We are here, we can do it ourselves. We do not need others to come in and manage us. If they take us seriously, they will give us training to teach us how to manage our radio stations ourselves.”  
(Mid-Age, Female, Very Remote)

“It is local people, it is local voices, and it is local actions that are most appropriate.” (Young, Male, Outer Regional)

“Once Indigenous people know Indigenous people created it, they will support it. They can see it; they can hear it.” (Mid-Age, Male, Outer Regional)

It is evident from participants’ voices across remote, regional, and urban areas that local Indigenous stories and knowledge are best created and delivered by local Indigenous Australians themselves. It speaks to the broader agenda of self-determination. This includes management and ownership of Indigenous media. Some media workers noted when Indigenous Australians manage and own their own media, culture and language is more easily preserved. As one young male in an outer regional site said:

“We [mob] need to be across all media channels, all forms of funding, and across all systems.”  
(Young, Male, Outer Regional)

Effective management, requiring a variety of skills, is difficult to attract and retain. Local community members demonstrate strong commitment and serve as the backbone of their media organisations. However, turnover among managerial staff can pose challenges as transitions are often not seamless. Furthermore, boards typically consist of local community members who are respected within the community but may lack expertise in technical operations, business management or financial aspects. Participants, particularly in regional and remote areas, also indicated the importance of the inclusion of younger people in the decision-making processes on Indigenous media.

“Bring more younger people on the board and get them involved in decision making.” (Mid-age, Female, Very Remote)

“I would like to see more youth, and young people involved in the running, because we need to learn our young people how to run the place. If no one gains those skills about business, that business mind, there’ll be no more [Indigenous community radio station].”  
(Mid-age, Female, Very Remote)

Youth involvement was another structural issue raised in the yarning sessions and workshops. Older audiences emphasised the importance of allocating resources and funding to youth, encouraging them to engage in the creation and production of Indigenous media. They emphasised that funding should target the disparities in media consumption and production within the Indigenous community, providing increased opportunities for younger people. This can be achieved through initiatives such as media training, access to improved equipment, and enhancements in technological infrastructure. These efforts aim to empower younger generations to create and share content that resonates with their preferred media consumption habits.

It was identified that numerous existing services are held tightly by long-term broadcasters and community members who often do not have the knowledge or skills to update their media outputs. Consequently, there is a lack of space or opportunity for younger people to become involved. This governance concern manifests differently in various places: in some instances, long-term broadcasters are eager to engage young people and enhance their own skills but lack guidance on how to do so; in others, they are content with current practices and do not see the need for change.

Indigenous Broadcasting Services must address these governance concerns to ensure leadership structures facilitate meeting both present and future media needs, including providing media training opportunities for broadcasters of all ages.

Finally, throughout the fieldwork, participants frequently mentioned that they regarded Indigenous radio to be inadequately financially resourced (or, resourced wrongly). Media workers in local Indigenous radio felt government funding was restricted to conventional radio and did not allow radio stations to produce content that meets the media habits and needs of the community transitioning into the digital world. Participants expressed frustration with a lack of resourcing to support the production of Indigenous media in a digital media sphere.

“We do not have the resources to put into digital media. There is no money to develop into YouTube content. And a lot of listeners have turned off because they [radio stations] do not have access to the stuff the listeners need and want. The sector does not have the money to provide for those people.” (Older, Male, Major City)

Media workers expressed a need for radio funding models to be restructured to align with the needs of the community to preserve local knowledge, language, and culture. This suggests a need to reconceptualise the sector not solely as Indigenous broadcasting spaces but as spaces that accommodate contemporary media consumption habits and practices. Participants in the Adelaide yarning session and workshop also recognised that—should the city ever be allocated radio spectrum for a dedicated Indigenous radio station—there needs to be considerations around what a modern Indigenous media outlet might look like.





Participants at a yarning session in Ramingining, remote Northern Territory

“I mean, it would be good to see an actual station, you know, it would be good to have the first Aboriginal one in Adelaide, you know, be deadly. But it’s a lot to put into. It’s a lot of money ... a lot of radio stations are going down, you know ... The media landscape’s very different from when [the Indigenous radio show on a generalist community station] first started too. So, all the notions of having a bricks and mortar station might not be the only way. So, it’s not only about ascertaining what community would want but looking at different models. And I think it’s probably more useful not to say ‘a station’, it’s more useful to say ‘a media organisation’ or ‘outlet’, because it then encompasses [more].” (Mid-age, Female, Major City)

## Training

Participants across remote, regional, and urban fieldwork sites acknowledged the value and need for digital and media training. They observed that formal training is not available and affordable to community members, especially in remote areas, however, recognised the value and need for trained and certified media workers in the community. Some participants expressed the need for in-community training that aligns with their specific media needs. Community members want to be trained to produce radio content in their own communities.

In-community training should also create opportunities for youth to explore and develop skills in Indigenous media, beyond radio. This might include journalism training alongside general content creation, production and dissemination. Older and younger generations across regional and remote sites commented on the potential of podcasting, as well as creating video content for social media, that youth can take up to be more actively involved in Indigenous media.

“Podcasting is an opportunity for youth to produce Indigenous media content for their generation.”  
(Older, Female, Outer Regional)

There is little to no awareness of the Community Media Training Organisation (CMTO) within local media communities and among community members. Once the function of the CMTO was explained to participants, they expressed a desire for in-community training that aligns with their media habits.

“They need to come here and train us.”  
(Mid-Age, Female, Very Remote)

“There’s nothing ongoing. It only goes for so long at school.” (Young, Female, Very Remote)

Participants frequently emphasised the need to provide youth with training on new digital equipment and platforms. Some mid-aged and older participants also encouraged their peers to become digitally literate to effectively communicate with younger generations through digital media. However, some participants noted their local Indigenous radio station often faced resource shortages, impacting their capacity to facilitate the involvement of younger people, even if they had received training.

“High school students - they started training them here [at the radio station] ... There’s a lot of young people at the high school now who would be in year 11 or 12 ... they’re equipped to run programs and they are keen to do that but they [the radio station] haven’t done that for a very long time.” (Mid-age, Female, Very Remote)

## FINAL WORDS ON FINDINGS

There are wide-ranging findings emerging from this national quantitative and qualitative study that inform current and future funding priorities, and current and future policy mechanisms for Indigenous media in Australia. Australia’s Indigenous broadcasting and media sector finds itself at a critical juncture with fundamental components, such as technology, funding, skills, and communications infrastructure falling behind the changing media world despite the continued importance and value of Indigenous media. This applies for media producers as well as media consumers. There are endless examples of significant and high-quality media being produced by services funded through the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program, and evidence that this content is greatly valued by communities. The Indigenous broadcasting sector, in particular, is at a point where it needs to move quickly into the digital age while genuinely maintaining existing traditional services that are so highly valued within many communities. We address this further in our Recommendations and will next quickly articulate some limitations of the current study to put our key findings in context.

# LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

There were several limitations relating to the development of the research design and data collection, the most significant of which was the short timeframe for fieldwork. This impacted when researchers could visit communities, and how much time they could spend at each location. While the limitations outlined below did not impact upon the research outcomes, it is important to acknowledge they did have some influence on our ability to access more people, more perspectives, and more experiences. Ideally, and instilling an Indigenous research methods approach, we would have had the opportunity to build relationships in some areas more completely. We engaged Indigenous Australian community research assistants to help facilitate this, and to help mitigate this limitation.

Research of this nature requires ethical approval in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research before data collection can commence, and research that involves Indigenous Australians requires additional levels of approval. This narrowed an already small window of time to conduct fieldwork before 'cyclone season' restricted travel to much of north Australia (approximately three months). Regional and remote sites across the Top End face adverse weather conditions in the lead up to summer that result in excessive heat and monsoonal rains. As such, all efforts were made to visit these areas at the beginning of the fieldwork period. However, some communities commenced movement to drier sites (e.g. from Kimberley communities to larger centres) earlier than usual, resulting in a smaller pool of potential participants. Some urban sites (e.g. Melbourne) also experienced out-of-season weather events that impacted on potential participants' decisions to leave home to attend yarning

sessions and workshops. One site in far north Queensland was unable to accommodate a research trip until December and then a cyclone completely disrupted the opportunity to visit that community, within the research timeframe.

The unpredictability of cultural factors such as Sorry Business was an unavoidable disruption resulting in some yarning sessions and workshops being cancelled or poorly attended. Limited time frames and deadlines for research deliverables prohibited the rescheduling of these fieldwork opportunities. As discussed in the Research Methods section, the team was able to complete individual interviews with Indigenous industry experts and media consumers in areas that could not be visited (for weather and cultural reasons) to garner some understanding of the issues faced by those communities. The research team also had the opportunity to conduct multiple yarning sessions and workshops at some fieldwork sites, which somewhat supplemented the cancelled visits. Despite this, significant data was gathered both quantitatively and qualitatively.

We also note we relied on community research assistants (CRAs) in most remote and some regional areas, broadcasting networks such as the Remote Indigenous Media Organisations, as well as individual Indigenous radio stations, rather than spending more time developing rapport with communities. This resulted in yarning session and workshop participants who were sometimes known to the CRA, and to the radio station. This did not happen in all sites, and ordinary community members were our regular yarning session participants, however, we acknowledge the timeframes, and the impending December/summer/Christmas season pressured the team to draw upon existing community networks as much as



Broadcaster John-Ross Pearce Scharnberg at TEABBA, Darwin

possible. This sometimes included enlisting the local radio station to facilitate call-outs, announcements, and assist with recruitment through publicity of the upcoming research visit.

The yarning sessions and workshop engagement should also be viewed within a broader socio-cultural context. Attendance was aligned with those who could access the venue physically. This might be limited due to financial constraints, disabilities, perceived language issues or work and family commitments. On occasion, when a participant was unable to attend, a member of the research team was able to interview them individually, either face-to-face, via Zoom or on the telephone.

Finally, the nature of digital media research indicates that many users, particularly youth, are comfortable using devices online rather than participating in face-to-face workshops. This was indicative of the larger proportion of youth who engaged in the survey, as compared to a lower proportion of younger people attending yarning sessions and workshops. Furthermore, ethical clearance for the research only included adult participants (18 years and above). To somewhat compensate, the research team asked questions about the media use of participants' children, when relevant, during the yarning sessions and workshops.



# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this final section, and following our data findings and analysis, we reiterate the Key Findings and Recommendations as originally outlined in our Executive Summary. These findings are given more clarity following the presentation of data drawn from the quantitative national survey of 762 Indigenous Australians; and the concurrent fieldwork in 18 sites in urban, regional and remote Australia. We confirm here that the Australian Indigenous broadcasting sector is at a critical juncture. This is partly driven by the rapid shift to digital and social media; ongoing challenges to deliver telecommunications infrastructure in regional and remote areas; and the legacy

of an enduring traditional broadcasting sector that is seeking support and direction to move into the contemporary media environment. There are significant opportunities here to build the community-controlled sector—the Indigenous media sector—as per Priority Reform 2 in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap; and for Outcomes 16 and 17, which are focused on the support and growth of culture, language, information and services for communities. Indigenous media plays a key role in all of these Outcomes, and has the potential to contribute in an even more significant way, given the opportunity and a supportive environment.

In its 2023 review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the Productivity Commission identified four key government actions that were needed in relation to Priority 2, Strengthening the Community-Controlled sector. These four key actions were to:

1. recognise that ACCOs<sup>17</sup> can achieve better results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
2. take steps to strengthen the capability of ACCOs in key sectors
3. increase the number of programs and services designed and delivered by ACCOs
4. provide dedicated, reliable, consistent funding (Productivity Commission, 2023).

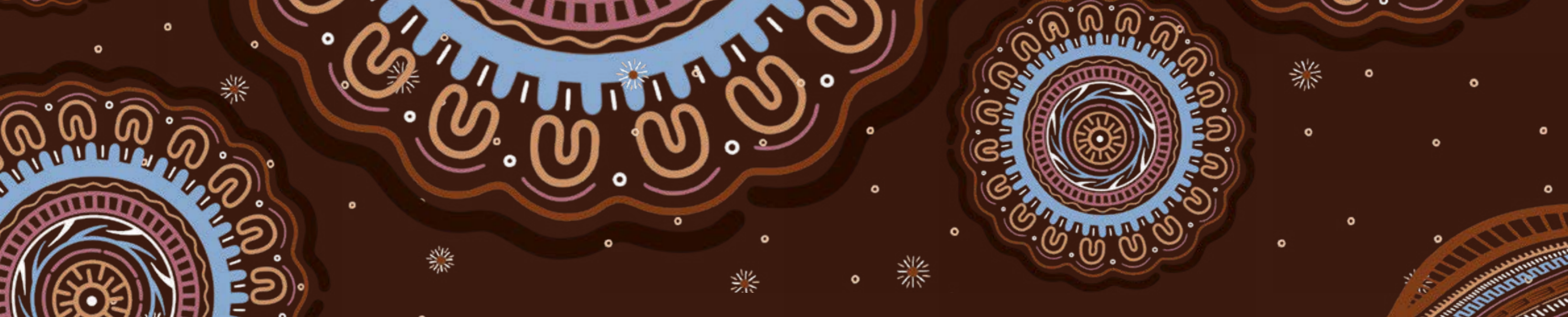
There is opportunity here to use the Indigenous-controlled media sector, funded by the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program, as a clear case study in enacting the four actions above—by recognising what they can and do achieve for their communities; taking steps to strengthen their activities in communities; support and increase training

and skills development for media workers and future media workers in community; revisit and refresh funding guidelines to overtly encourage media content beyond the standard radio and television service; and recalculate funding amounts to account for rises in wages, equipment costs, travel costs necessary to operate the service. An Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program Summit or something similar may provide an opportunity to communicate these issues with the whole of sector, including with First Nations Media Australia and individual stations, Boards and broadcasters. This is a most important sector, an essential ingredient in Indigenous Australians' engagement and involvement in local, state and national issues and in finding ways to address the different challenges that confront Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in urban, regional and remote settings.

<sup>17</sup>: Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, a term used by government that includes all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Organisations

## KEY FINDINGS: SUMMARY

- 1. Indigenous broadcasting is a highly valued service across all communities, although this is particularly pronounced in remote and very remote areas where Indigenous broadcasting is often the primary media source.** In remote areas, Indigenous broadcasting is valued for making people feel proud of their communities and their Indigenous identity; hearing positive stories about their communities and mob; an Indigenous focus on content and presenters; and accessing content in traditional languages. This finding is consistent across all age groups in remote and very remote areas and is closely connected to a desire for locally-produced content in local voices.
- 2. An increasing number of Indigenous peoples in urban, regional and remote areas are using digital and social media forms but at this point, many Indigenous broadcasting services are not equipped to meet this audience behaviour.** While Indigenous broadcasting may serve a different purpose than, say, a social media platform such as TikTok, our analysis suggests this is a 'lost' opportunity for the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program to update to the digital and social media environment, while still maintaining important broadcasting services. Our findings demonstrate digital and social media can be used for both hyperlocal and broader national and international media content. Our fieldwork in communities suggests there are numerous people producing their own digital/social media content outside the bounds of the local Indigenous broadcasting service. Reinforcing this, there is evidence that it is mainly older rather than younger people who are accessing the traditional radio service.
- 3. Related to this, there is a need to develop the skills within Indigenous media organisations to meet the demands of a new and ever changing digital and social media world.** This was identified by the Stevens Review 14 years ago (Stevens, 2010) and our fieldwork suggests this remains an issue today. This will ensure that Indigenous broadcasting services can continue to meet the needs of their audiences, and of community members who wish to become contemporary media producers and media makers. In another previous report about the sector, Watson (2021) noted that only a small amount of the IBMP funding base is allocated to training initiatives. There is an acknowledgement within the sector that training programs and opportunities need to be targeted to ensure Indigenous broadcasters are upskilled in digital media content production which comes in many forms and formats. We note there is currently some training being offered by both the First Nations Media Australia, and the Community Media Training Organisation and this can be more formally scheduled and rolled out in a structured manner in all regionalities. The success of this will be dependent for some communities on addressing Finding 4, and Recommendation 4.
- 4. There are a number of sites, particularly in some outer regional, remote and very remote areas, where the communications and media infrastructure does not meet current needs and is not equipped to meet future needs.** This relates to problems with existing infrastructure and a lack of technical know-how to use, repair, and maintain equipment attached to current radio services; and also the absence of working Wi-Fi, internet, and other telecommunications infrastructure. While we note this has improved since the early 2000s (flagged by Watson, 2021), we identified various remote communities (for example, Yuendumu, Umuwa, Ernabella/Pukatja, and Ramingining) where either internet access or satellite access were unreliable and sometimes non-existent for long periods of time. This finding is also consistent across Indigenous broadcasting reviews over the past 20 years.
- 5. In what we identify as a governance issue, some existing services are held tightly by long-term broadcasters and community members who do not have the knowledge or skills to update their media outputs, but there is no space or opportunity for younger people to become involved.** This governance issue appears in different ways—in some places, long-term broadcasters are very keen to involve young people and to upskill themselves but do not know how to do this. In other cases, long-term broadcasters and management committee members are comfortable with existing practices and with the way they are currently serving their communities, and do not see the need to change. Governance issues are something for Indigenous broadcasting services to address to ensure leadership structures enable the service to meet both current and future media needs and provide media training opportunities for community broadcasters across all age groups.
- 6. Interviews with sector representatives indicated funding models were constraining their operations—funding levels had not changed significantly over the past 20 years despite transformative shifts in the media landscape.** Watson's (2021) previous report identified that just over half of funding is directed towards employment, rather than training, equipment, technical, operational, or infrastructure costs. Funding guidelines and categories have been updated following other reviews to incorporate the social and digital media environment that Indigenous media organisations are experiencing, but many organisations seem unaware of this, are unclear what they can apply for funding for; and what sort of media service they can try to offer beyond the radio service. Evidence from both the quantitative and qualitative fieldwork suggests that Indigenous broadcasting spaces are being used in very diverse ways by community—for example, as a radio service, a rehearsal space for bands, music production and recording, and sometimes as a community gathering space. This suggests a reimagining of the sector as not just an Indigenous broadcasting space, but a space that meets contemporary media production practices and consumption habits.
- 7. Finally - and related to all of this - despite a significant number (53 percent) of Indigenous communities being “without a culturally appropriate and locally relevant First Nations radio service” (West, 2018, p. 9), Australia’s Indigenous media sector is world-renowned for its diversity, cultural content, and the excellence of media content and broadcasters’ skills and knowledge** (see, for example, Fisher, 2016; Waller et al, 2015; Dreher et al, 2016; Forde, Foxwell and Meadows, 2009). This research is well-timed to gain clear sight of the current state of play, and to identify what is needed for the sector to continue to grow and support, represent, foster and inspire Indigenous communities. This emphasises the importance of enacting policy initiatives that will strengthen Indigenous media’s next phase of development.



These findings lead us to some **Key Recommendations** for the NIAA's consideration. We have kept these limited, and focused.

### RECOMMENDATION 1

**The reconceptualisation of Indigenous broadcasting services as a 'Community Media Hub'** would enable traditional radio sites to transition into multi-platformed media and digital hubs that can accommodate a range of activities—music recording and production, digital content production for social media, traditional radio broadcasting, podcasting, training, etc while also maintaining traditional/legacy media outputs that older community members value.

### RECOMMENDATION 2

**An immediate reconsideration of the funding guidelines for individual stations and RIMOs within the IBMP,** to ensure there is sufficient focus on digital technologies, digital content production, avenues for distribution through social media and popular apps—all necessary to fulfill the cultural and social connections, valued as outcomes of Indigenous media. This is supported by Watson (2021)'s findings that organisations in the sector are mainly assessed by a small set of indicators which are mostly operational and unrelated to culture capability outcomes. It also reinforces calls from the FNMA (2022) for increased funding for “content production, digital archiving, recruitment and retention, business development and to address indexation pressure”.

### RECOMMENDATION 3

**To realise the above, it is necessary for a suite of training programs be developed and where possible, delivered by Indigenous trainers to upskill broadcasters and media producers working at Indigenous broadcasting services in digital and social media content production.**

We are aware of some offerings through the Community Media Training Organisation that may be relevant; we recommend collaborations and/or a stand-alone program of training for the IBMP be developed and rolled out over the next two years. This corresponds to earlier recommendations from the 2010 Stevens Review, the 2014 Watson report, and more recently, FNMA's (2022) request to increase funding specifically targeted for expanding local media services and training and development opportunities.

### RECOMMENDATION 4

**We recommend an audit of existing station equipment, satellite boxes, access to wi-fi/internet, carried out by field officers to report back to the NIAA.** Our fieldwork necessarily sampled stations from urban, regional and remote areas but could not cover all. In some fieldwork sites infrastructure was a consistent concern, particularly in remote areas, but also in some regional areas where donated or purchased equipment was not in use despite community members expressing a desire to use it/be trained to use it. This audit should build on the work conducted by Bynder (2022), that assessed equipment and infrastructure information from 28 organisations, representing 74 percent of targeted media services.

### RECOMMENDATION 5

**Indigenous broadcasting is extended to meet the needs of the significant number of Indigenous communities that are without a locally relevant and culturally appropriate Indigenous broadcasting service** (as identified by the FNMA [West 2018]). While new initiatives may take the form of an Indigenous 'Community Media Hub', rather than just a stand-alone traditional radio station or broadcasting outlet, action needs to be taken to ensure the benefits of Indigenous community media are accessible to all Indigenous Australians, regardless of where they are located.

### RECOMMENDATION 6

**A consistent and regular study of Indigenous Australians' media use patterns, and the role of Indigenous broadcasting and its related channels be conducted that produces comparative data.** While numerous surveys have been conducted over the past ten years, access to raw data is often not available and variables are inconsistent meaning that it is difficult to confidently track media use patterns, media production, and benefits of Indigenous broadcasting (among other issues) over time. A challenge for this review has been the availability of data that has asked different questions in different ways. The importance of the IBMP and the Indigenous broadcasting sector, and the government's investment in it, suggests consistent comparative data collection will best inform future funding and policy.

As per our opening comments, we provide the suggestion here that a positive gathering created by an *Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program Summit* might provide a great opportunity to discuss these findings with the sector, and to set a path for the next five years.

Finally, we reiterate that we recognise these findings and recommendations have a significant (necessary) focus on digital and social media in response to the transformed media environment that Indigenous audiences have clearly embraced. It is the case, however, that many community members enjoy and appreciate traditional Indigenous broadcasting services, and there is no doubt that the sector is currently living through a transition phase between the old and the new. At this point, it is essential to support both—hence our visualisation of the classic Indigenous radio station as an Indigenous Community Media Hub that includes a traditional broadcasting service alongside spaces to create TikTok content, Instagram reels, music rehearsal and production, vlogs, podcasts, audio books, and other media outputs. This serves the dual purpose of meeting audience needs, and training and providing experience to an exciting and inspiring new generation of the Indigenous media workforce.

**June 14, 2024**

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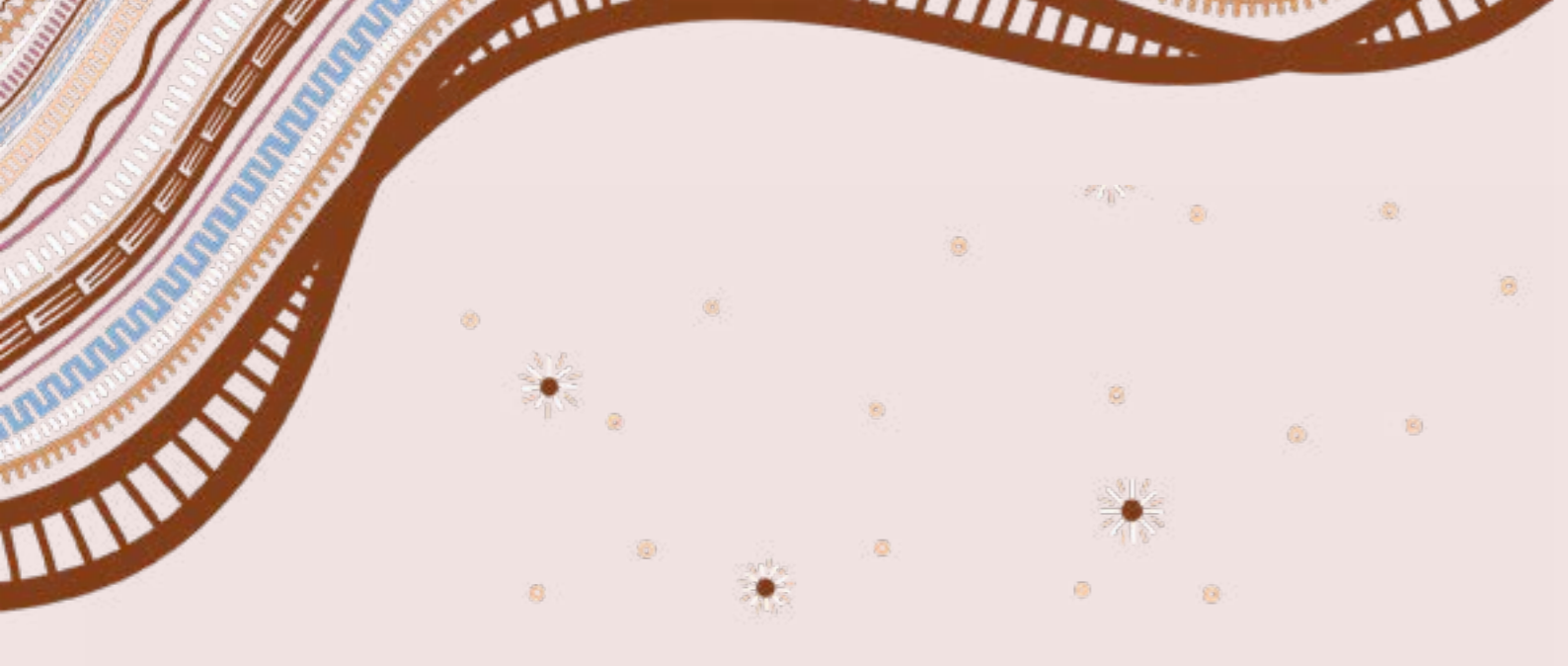
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# APPENDIX I

## Survey Instrument [sample]

### 2023 National Indigenous Broadcasting & Media Survey SAMPLE QUESTIONS—SECTION 1

McNair yellowSquares are conducting this survey on behalf of Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research for the National Indigenous Australians Agency to find out the ways Indigenous peoples are using Indigenous Broadcast and Media Programs, their media use and perception and value of Indigenous broadcasting.

**S1a.** First, can you please tell me the postcode for where you live so that we can ask questions specifically relating to your area?

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**S1b.** What state is that in?

New South Wales	1
Victoria	2
Queensland	3
South Australia	4
Western Australia	5
Tasmania	6
Northern Territory	7
ACT	8
Torres Strait Islands	9

**S2.** Can I just confirm, do you identify as: **(MULTIPLES ALLOWED)**

Aboriginal	1	<b>CONTINUE</b>
Torres Strait Islander	2	
Neither	3	<b>END OF SURVEY</b> <b>I am afraid this survey is for Indigenous Australians only.</b> <b>Thanks for being willing to participate, but we can't include you on this occasion.</b>

**S3.** May I check how old you are?

18-29 years	1
30-39 years	2
40-49 years	3
50-59 years	4
60+ years	5

**S4.** Do you identify as:

Male	1
Female	2
Non-Binary	3
I'd rather not say	4

**L1.** Do you speak any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander languages?

Yes	1
No	2





## COMMUNICATIONS ACCESS

This set of questions is about the technologies you have for phone calls, listening to radio and watching TV.

**Q1a.** Which of these do you own or have access to at home (shared) or use at a friend or relative's home? Please answer for each device.

	Own	Share at home or Community Centre	Access at a friend/ relatives home	Do not use at all
A smartphone	1	2	3	4
A mobile phone—that is not a smartphone	1	2	3	4
A tablet computer such as an I-pad	1	2	3	4
A computer (laptop or desktop)	1	2	3	4
A radio or a radio as part of sound system	1	2	3	4
A car radio	1	2	3	4
Digital radio	1	2	3	4
Smart TV	1	2	3	4
A TV—that is not a smart TV	1	2	3	4
A games console e.g. Xbox, Playstation	1	2	3	4

**Q1b.** Do you have a phone landline (not just a mobile phone) at home?

Yes	1	<b>CONTINUE</b>
No	2	<b>SKIP TO Q1d</b>

**Q1c.** Do you need a satellite to receive TV (e.g. a VAST TV Receiver)?

Yes, working and in use	1
Yes, but it doesn't work or is not in use	2
No	3
Don't know	4

**Q1e.** During times of natural disaster (e.g. floods, fires), where do you get your information from?

Local newspaper	1
National newspaper	2
ABC radio	3
ABC TV	4
Local Community radio station ( <b>PLEASE SPECIFY</b> ) _____	5
Local Indigenous radio station ( <b>PLEASE SPECIFY</b> ) _____	6
Social Media ( <b>PLEASE SPECIFY</b> ) _____	7
Internet search	8

**Q1d.** Do you use your phone landline for... (MULTIPLES ALLOWED)

Voice phone calls (as a telephone) to make calls and receive calls	1
Voice phone calls (as a telephone) only to receive calls or for emergency calls	2
ADSL Internet (Internet comes through the phone and a modem)	3
None of these	4

# APPENDIX II

## Guiding Questions

### Yarning Sessions

#### Key Research Question

What media do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people access and use in urban, regional and remote settings? And, how are mob accessing and using Indigenous broadcasting services?

#### Sub-questions

1. What access do you mob have to telephone, internet, radio and television infrastructure?
  - How do you access media, do you have access to internet, radio, TV?
  - Who listens to the radio .... (coverage / infrastructure/ language / content/ location/source)?
  - Who watches TV, what's your favourite program (include news & gaming)? (coverage/ infrastructure/ language/ content)?
  - Who uses the internet to access media, information and news?
  - Where do you get your internet from? (available source, infrastructure)

2. What media (telephone, internet, radio and/or television) do you mob commonly use and what content do you prefer to watch / read / listen to?
  - What media do you most read, listen, or watch? (e.g., entertainment, news, podcasts)
  - What streaming services do you use? What do you use these streaming services for?
  - What programs / content do you like to watch / read / listen to?
3. What media (telephone, internet, radio and television) do you mob prefer to use?
  - Tell me a bit about your phone and what you use it for? (access & preference, include smartphone, tablet)
  - Given the choice, what device / platform would you love to have access to?
  - What device/platform is best to use? (this is about choice)



