TELSTRA CORPORATION LIMITED

National Indigenous Australians Agency

Response to the Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan - discussion paper

November 2021

1 Introduction

Telstra would like to thank the NIAA for the opportunity to respond to the *Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan (IDIP) discussion paper – September 2021,* both in writing and through participation in the virtual roundtable workshops hosted in October 2021.

Improving First Nations digital inclusion is critically important. This is recognised by the Federal Government with the creation of a new Closing the Gap Target (2020, Target 17) for digital inclusion and access to relevant media services – an issue championed by First Nations Media Australia and the Coalition of the Peaks.

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII)[1] tells us that lower levels of digital inclusion are related to lower levels of education, employment and income. There is also a significant bush-metro divide, with people in regional and remote Australia tending to have lower levels of digital inclusion. First Nations peoples living in Australia's 1,100 remote communities are among the most digitally excluded Australians. Recent studies show that digital inclusion for First Nations Australians diminishes with remoteness.[2] Affordability is a key issue, driven by a disproportionate use of mobile-only and pre-paid connectivity.

Consistent with the spirit of the discussion paper, we are pleased to present Telstra's view on the importance of digital inclusion for First Nations Australians. Our submission addresses Telstra's view in response to the questions raised in each of the four sections of the discussion paper – access, affordability, digital ability, and data on Indigenous digital inclusion.

OUR ROLE

We know that digital inclusion is inextricably linked to economic, community and individual prosperity, and that the benefits of the digital economy cannot be shared equally when First Nations Australians are still facing barriers to online participation. Businesses, the education sector, non-profit organisations, community groups and all levels of government need to collaborate and cooperate to address the gaps that currently exist with digital access, affordability, literacy and awareness.

Telstra recognises that it has a role to play in closing these gaps. We partner with all levels of government and the community sector to co-design and deliver a wide range of digital inclusion programs to assist our most vulnerable customers and communities. For example, Telstra is already contributing to improving digital inclusion for First Nations Australians in the following ways:

- Direct and co-investment in telecommunications infrastructure in remote areas to increase coverage and internet access
- Supporting the ADII to provide national data on trends and issues in access, affordability and digital ability
- Supporting the Mapping the Digital Gap research project to capture valuable digital inclusion data in a sample of remote communities in the NT, Qld, WA, SA and NSW
- Partnering with all levels of government and community organisations to deliver digital literacy and telecommunications literacy programs in First Nations communities
- Providing a range of targeted affordability measures for people on low incomes
- Maintaining a First Nations Connect Hotline in Darwin to provide culturally appropriate customer service

[1] www.digitalinclusionindex.org.au

[2] Cf. case studies in the Australian Digital Inclusion Index reports for 2017, 2018, 2019

SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Federal Government should consider leveraging the insight and investment Telstra has already made by partnering/co-investing in new and existing initiatives, such as inDigiMOB, Deadly Digital Communities, and Mobile MyWay.

The Federal Government should also consider the following recommendations which are aligned to the sections described in the discussion paper:

Access	That the Federal Government provide public Wi-Fi with adequate data to all remote communities, allowing community members to purchase extra affordable data as they need through token or pre-purchase arrangements. That the Federal Government audit essential service websites and online applications such as government services including MyGov, banking, education, employment, justice and health services, with a view to ensuring these are mobile-device and data accessible. That the Federal Government audit infrastructure, digital equipment and resourcing needs of libraries, community centres, and other local hubs, particularly in remote communities, to fully enable them to act as digital access and support centres.
Affordability	That nbn Co develop a permanent targeted offer of a $20 per month wholesale broadband product (at a speed of 50/20 Mbps), enabling Retail Service Providers (RSPs) to supply affordable nbn broadband services to eligible low-income customers, including First Nations Australians.
Digital Ability	That the Federal Government and State/Territory Governments, in conjunction with the industry, be encouraged to scale and enhance existing, localised digital inclusion programs that improve digital capability, especially for First Nations Australians.
Data	That the Federal Government commit to longitudinal and ongoing research to inform First Nations digital inclusion by investing in the ADII or commissioning its own research based on the ADII methodology.

2 Access

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- That the Federal Government provide public Wi-Fi with adequate data to all remote communities allowing community members to purchase extra affordable data as they need through token or pre-purchase arrangements.
- That the Federal Government audit essential service websites and online applications such as government services including MyGov, banking, education, employment, justice and health services, with a view to ensuring these are mobile-device and data accessible.
- That the Federal Government audit infrastructure, digital equipment and resourcing needs of libraries, community centres, and other local hubs, particularly in remote communities, to fully enable them to act as digital access and support centres.

2.1 What are the major factors that reduce digital access for Indigenous Australians? Are they different in remote, regional and urban areas?

Telstra's mobile footprint stretches across more than 2.5 million square kilometres, vastly more than any other mobile network in Australia, and reaches 99.5 per cent of the Australian population. However, the scale of the Australian landmass and concentration of our population make the cost of investing, delivering, and maintaining telecommunication services in large parts of Australia commercially unviable. As a result, digital access is at low levels for First Nations Australians in regional and remote areas. To improve digital access, funding from the Federal Government should be directed toward greater coordination between Governments at all levels, local communities and telecommunications providers to enable the development of plans for enhancing connectivity for local communities based on the specific geographic and social needs of those communities, including to support community resilience during natural disasters. For example, local planning initiatives which would improve connectivity but are prevented from progressing because local planning permission cannot be obtained.

While Telstra does not support mandated domestic mobile roaming because of the impact on innovation and investment incentives, policies and programs which enhance the opportunity for the sharing of passive telecommunications infrastructure should be encouraged.

2.2 Whilst coverage of telecommunications services and digital connectivity has improved, the access gap has widened. What are the barriers to accessing existing telecommunications and digital services for Indigenous Australians?

Similar to the national trends, demand for telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote Australia has increased exponentially. This will continue to increase as communities digitise and as consumers continue to increasingly rely on telecommunications services to perform many functions of everyday life.

The scale of the Australian landmass and concentration of our population make the cost of investing, delivering and maintaining services in large, sparsely populated parts of Australia commercially unviable.

This is why the different Government programs have been so important in supporting providers, like Telstra, to expand coverage into more remote areas. The challenge is to build on this work and align policy and regulatory settings in order to incentivise further investment in, and use of, the telecommunications services required by remote communities.

2.2.1 Are there issues in connecting to or using available satellite services in regional and remote areas? Are there issues with satellite latency?

The higher cost and lower data limits of satellite data connections, combined with shared housing, lack of suitable infrastructure to keep satellite equipment in good working order, and low-income levels, are issues many regional and remote communities experience connecting to and using satellite services. Satellite services are also.[3] The Federal Government's Alternative Voice Service Trial is currently testing the ability of various technologies, including satellite technologies, to provide a good quality voice service to regional and remote Australia, with outcomes of the trial expected before the end of 2022.[4]

2.2.2 Is there a preference for how telecommunications services are accessed, for example at the community level or at the individual premise level? If so, why?

In remote First Nations communities the main type of internet access is via use of mobile data, closely followed by public Wi-Fi and nbn fixed line.[5] There is evidence that the preference for prepaid mobile-only access in remote communities is a response to affordability concerns. While pre-paid plans may reduce financial vulnerabilities by enabling more direct expenditure management than post-paid contracts, they exacerbate other aspects of affordability related to value for expenditure.[6]

In some remote communities, there is concern around the ability to access undesirable websites and the adverse effect this has on local communities. Requests for network level content filtering is viewed as a preferred remedy.

2.3 Are there initiatives that have successfully addressed access issues? Why were they successful?

Building on the strengths of programs such as the Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP) and the Regional Connectivity Program (RCP), future co-investment programs provide greater flexibility for telecommunication providers to deliver improved connectivity to regional communities given the economic challenges of delivering remote connectivity.

Mobile Black Spot Program
Telstra has been the largest industry participant in the Mobile Black Sport Program (MBSP). Once all five rounds of the MBSP are completed, Telstra will have invested approximately $300 million and built around 930 new sites to improve coverage for regional and remote areas around the country – more than two thirds of the total sites are co-funded by Government under the MBSP since 2015.

As of September 2021, there are 112 sites across all states and territories being planned e.g., Soudan Station, Finke and Avon Downs in the Northern Territory, and Djugerari, Kutkabubba, Muludja, Wangkatjunka, Yulga Jinna and Tjukurla in Western Australia.

Regional Connectivity Program
In FY21, Telstra announced it will contribute $24 million in a co-investment with the Federal Government and third-party contributors, including state governments, to deliver 72 projects under the Regional Connectivity Program. These projects will begin to be rolled out in FY22.

[3] Remote Indigenous Communications Review (ACCAN), p.58
[4] https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-technology-communications/phone/phone-services/universal-service-guarantee-telecommunications/alternative-voice-services-trial
[5] Young, Metta & Smede, Ben. *Indigenous community perspectives and experiences of digital inclusion*, ACCAN & FNMA, February 2021
[6] ADII 2019 p.25

Infrastructure Sustainability Co-Contribution Agreement
A recently completed $30 million telecommunications partnership between Telstra and the Northern Territory Government delivered new mobile and/or fixed broadband internet connectivity to 17 remote communities in the Northern Territory.

Remote Telecommunications Co-Investment Program
Expected to be completed in 2022, the Regional Telecommunications Co-investment Program sees the Northern Territory Government and Telstra each commit $14 million across four years to help better connect remote communities.

Arnhem Land Backhaul Project
The Arnhem Land Backhaul Project will see the transmission network capacity upgraded from 5Gb to a combined 100Gb capacity through 15 Telstra exchanges across East Arnhem Land. The total cost is approximately $8 million, of which Telstra and the Northern Territory Government are each contributing approximately $2.5 million, with additional support from the Federal Government and Developing East Arnhem Land (DEAL).

Other Telstra initiatives that address access:

- As of 30 June 2021, Telstra has delivered 130 satellite small cells, 69 of which were delivered in FY21. Satellite small cells improve connectivity in regional and remote communities and are used where it is not feasible to construct a full mobile base station.
- Telstra will invest $150 million in FY22 to improve regional networks and announced an additional $200 million co-investment fund for additional regional coverage improvement programs over the next four years.
- Following the sale of 49 per cent of its InfraCo Towers business, Telstra announced that $75 million of the proceeds would be invested to further build and deepen connectivity in regional and remote Australia. Telstra will be guided by the recommendations of the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee (RTIRC) in directing this investment.

Case Study 1: Telecommunication co-investment project

Telstra mobile base station Bulla NT

Media Release, 5 November 2021
Telstra's $30 million deal to improve mobile coverage across over 17,000 square kilometres of the most isolated parts of the Northern Territory.

The recent switch on of a new Telstra mobile base station in Bulla, 380km south west of Darwin, signalled the completion of construction under the Infrastructure and Sustainability Co-investment Agreement (ISCA), delivering new mobile and/or fixed broadband internet connectivity to 17 remote Territory communities.

"Regardless of where they live, all Territorians deserve access to reliable mobile phone and internet services," said Nic Danks, Regional General Manager for Telstra in the NT.

"While Telstra provides mobile coverage to almost 96% of the NT population, vast distances, challenging terrain, and small, dispersed communities make it difficult to get everyone connected. Costs to deliver connectivity in remote communities are huge and without co-investment, it wouldn't be viable," he said.

"Over 4,000 of the Territory's most remote residents are now receiving new mobile coverage and another 1,000 people have the option of fixed line internet because of this program.

"The impact of these programs – bringing connectivity and educational and potential economic activity to the bush and its communities – is life changing for many."

As part of this agreement, Telstra will be providing digital literacy initiatives, cyber safety programs and telehealth services in effected communities.

2.4 Are there other initiatives that could address barriers to access?

Wi-Fi enables a means of shared access to online services without having to install and pay a monthly bill for a consumer satellite service (which is typically uncommon in remote First Nations communities). For the agency providing the Wi-Fi service, it should be provided as a free service to the community (e.g., library, council offices, community hubs) or as a managed system with data quotas paid for through purchase of vouchers.[7]

Learnings from multiple programs over several years that provide Wi-Fi services and access facilities to remote communities, including through the Federal Government's Remote Australia Strategies Programme, should be harnessed to develop public Wi-Fi with adequate data for all remote communities.

[7] Remote Indigenous Communications Review (ACCAN)

3 Affordability

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- That nbn develop a permanent targeted offer of a $20 per month wholesale broadband product (at a 50/20 Mbps wholesale speed tier), enabling Retail Service Providers (RSPs) to supply affordable nbn broadband services to eligible low-income customers, including First Nations customers; or
- That nbn co provide a discount or subsidy that RSPs would be eligible to receive when supplying low-income customers with a retail service that makes use of any of nbn co's standard wholesale broadband products to ensure equitable outcomes for First Nations Australians.

3.1 What are the major factors that affect digital affordability for Indigenous Australians? Are they different in remote, regional and urban areas?

The ADII tells us that lower levels of digital inclusion are related to lower levels of education, employment and income. There is also a significant bush-metro divide, with people in regional and remote Australia tending to have lower levels of digital inclusion.

In remote communities, affordability is a major issue, driven by a disproportionately high use of mobile-only and prepaid connectivity, which carries higher costs per gigabyte than fixed connections. Other factors impacting affordability are the higher cost and lower data affordances of satellite data connections, shared housing, lack of suitable infrastructure to keep satellite equipment in good working order, and the low-income levels in remote communities.

3.2 How can affordability be improved for Indigenous Australians living in urban, regional and remote areas to ensure equitable outcomes?

Telstra generally supports the argument of consumer bodies such as ACCAN for nbn co to develop a permanent targeted offer of a $20 per month wholesale broadband product (at a 50/20 Mbps wholesale speed tier), enabling Retail Service Providers (RSPs) to supply affordable nbn broadband services to eligible low-income customers, including First Nations customers. This would enable RSPs to offer a range of affordable fixed broadband products and services to eligible customers making a vital difference in the ability of these customers to access government, education and health services, as well as employment opportunities and maintaining social connections. Similarly, a discount or subsidy that RSPs would be eligible to receive when supplying low-income customers with a retail service that makes use of any of nbn co's standard wholesale broadband products to match their needs could also be considered to ensure equitable outcomes for First Nations Australians.

As outlined at 2.4, providing public Wi-Fi with adequate data to all remote communities allowing community members to purchase extra affordable data as they need through token or pre-purchase arrangements will also address affordability

3.3 Are there initiatives that have successfully addressed issues? Why were they successful?

Telstra has several initiatives to address affordability for people on low-incomes or who are experiencing financial hardship. These measures are successful as they address affordability throughout the customer lifecycle, not just at point of sale. They include:

- Removing excess data charges from all new fixed and post-paid mobile plans (i.e., data access is continuous but shaped at a useable 1.5Mbps once the included data is exhausted) to provide cost certainty

- Not charging late fees for customers on direct debit and customers can immediately suspend their service for a period of time as their needs change
- Migrating pre-paid mobile customers on legacy plans to in-market pre-paid mobile plans which provide better value for money through greater call inclusions and higher data caps
- Releasing a $30 per month affordable mobile plan in FY21, available to low-income customers holding a Health Care Card. The $30 value mobile offer includes 2GB of data (shaped to 1.5Mbps after that) with no excess data charges, plus unlimited standard national calls and texts, all to use in Australia. Approximately 33,000 customers have taken up the plan since its release.
- Making payphones free of charge nationally which has seen usage more than double
- Partnering with more than 2,000 local community organisations across Australia to deliver our Access for Everyone program to support customers in vulnerable circumstances. In FY21, the program provided 13,432 people who were homeless with a free $40 pre-paid mobile recharge or Telstra Phonecard; 594,621 pensioners with a discount on their Telstra services; and 9,861 low-income families with emergency bill assistance. These concessional benefits totalled $43 million.

4 Digital Ability

KEY RECOMMENDATION

That the Federal Government involve collaboration across all levels of government, business, and the community to invest in digital ability and cyber safety programs to improve First Nations digital inclusion and capability based on best practice examples to date.

4.1 What are the major factors that affect digital ability, including attitude and confidence, for Indigenous Australians? Are they different in remote, regional and urban areas?

There is a lack of digital literacy education programs particularly in remote areas, and an absence of First Nations digital inclusion policy and investment across all levels of government. This increases the burden on individuals and community-based organisations to facilitate digital engagement.[8] In addition, the mainstream digital literacy activities and programs that do exist are predominantly online, not specifically tailored to the needs of First Nations Australians, and do not provide in-community training delivery to support the online resources available.

Poor understanding of cyber safety, and a lack of mechanisms to address such issues, can be a barrier to uptake in remote communities. Research[9] commissioned by Telstra in 2016, and focussed on the Northern Territory, suggested the main cyber safety issues for remote communities are inappropriate content and comments on social media, privacy issues due to phone sharing, lack of PIN protections, and susceptibility to online scams and fraud. These issues still exist today.

4.2 What is needed to encourage greater understanding and use of digital technologies?

See 4.3

4.3 How can digital ability be improved for Indigenous Australians Living in urban, regional and remote areas?

Telstra plays a key role in supporting First Nations Australians to connect and thrive in the digital world. We focus our program efforts on remote First Nations communities that are the most digitally excluded. In FY21, we committed to investing an additional $5 million over the next few years to extend the reach and impact of our First Nations digital inclusion programs. Our programs include:

inDigiMOB: A pioneering co-designed digital inclusion project, supported by Telstra and delivered by First Nations Media Australia, that supports community aspirations for digital inclusion and cyber safety awareness. The program has reached over 12,849 workshop participants, including over 3,654 individuals. In FY21 alone, inDigiMOB's digital mentoring and literacy programs reached 1,079 people across 24 remote locations in the Northern Territory. The program is looking to expand beyond the Northern Territory in FY22.

Deadly Digital Communities: A community-based digital literacy and technology training program for First Nations communities in Queensland. In FY21, the program was delivered in four communities with more than 600 people gaining new digital skills. This was a decrease to FY20 due to the impact of COVID-19 and access to community.

Mobile My Way: A new consumer education program to be rolled out by the Centre for Appropriate Technology, in remote communities in the Northern Territory that have recently received new telecommunications infrastructure.

[8] Young, Metta & Smede, Ben, *Indigenous community perspectives and experiences of digital inclusion*, ACCAN & FNMA, February 2021

[9] Rennie, E., T. Yunkaporta & I. Holcombe-James (2018). *Cyber Safety in Remote Aboriginal Communities, Final Report*. Melbourne: Digital Ethnography Research Centre, RMIT University.

Our experience in program delivery over many years has highlighted several key success factors for First Nations community digital capability programs in remote locations:

- Continuity and the ongoing development of existing community digital literacy programs is critical.
- Local ownership of all aspects of program delivery is essential - building upon the capacity of existing organisations, infrastructure and programs. This includes building the confidence of existing digital champions in communities to ensure program buy-in.
- Community members should play a vital role in identifying the appropriate frameworks for aligning and integrating digital access and activities within existing cultural structures.
- A flexible and locally targeted approach is more likely to work than a one-size-fits-all model given the diversity of communities.
- Cultural creation, documentation, preservation and dissemination are key drivers of engagement with digital technology.
- Digital infrastructure, and the ability to use and access this, is essential to community self-determination, including the financial wellbeing of community members, especially as government and financial services transition online.
- Identification of appropriate sites and partnerships takes time and effort, however upfront investment in planning, engagement and risk management is essential to securing outcomes.

4.4 Are there initiatives, including international initiatives, that have successfully addressed digital ability issues or improving digital skills, particularly for older Indigenous Australians, and why were they successful?

As mentioned, Telstra focuses its program efforts on remote First Nations communities who are the most digitally excluded. Digital inclusion in this context is seen as an inclusive community-driven process that recognises that culture and community ownership is important, particularly in areas that have strong connections to traditional languages, kinship structures and connection to Country.[10]

inDigiMOB, a remote co-designed First Nations digital inclusion project supported by Telstra and delivered by First Nations Media Australia (FNMA), recognises this context, which is why it has been so successful. Established in 2016, inDigiMOB builds digital ability and awareness to enable people in remote communities across all age levels, including older people, to safely and appropriately engage with the digital world and actively shape their own digital futures.

Findings from the Year 3 Evaluation Report shows that participants who engaged in inDigiMOB are more digitally included, particularly in terms of their access to, and use of technology, with 96% of participants wanting to learn more digital skills and 89% feeling more confident using technology after attending inDigiMOB. For many participants the activities promoted well-being and quality of life and there were pointers to economic participation as well.

inDigiMOB's successs is attributed to its niche culturally appropriate and place-based approach and support of digital champions to building locally relevant digital capability and to develop the basic digital literacy skills required to operate competently and safely in the online environment.

For more information visit indigimob.com.au

[10] Indigimob 2020 Program Year 3 evaluation report

Case Study 2: inDigiMOB

Michael Hunter, inDigiMOB Participant, Nhulunbuy NT

"I've spent most of my life in some of the more remote regions of the NT. It's a long way from the bigger cities like Darwin or Cairns. I love this place and its people but sometimes the opportunities can be limited living in regional Australia. I know the world is becoming more and more connected through digital media. Maybe I was being left behind?

The culture is rich and I see my future here. But I needed some new skills to make this future. With the help of inDigiMOB I have learnt the skills that will help me to be more connected.

inDigiMOB has helped me succeed in life. For the first time I'm enjoying my work and I wake up in the morning looking forward to coming to work. I've found my path. I've found my connection and inDigiMOB has helped me to fine the work that I really love. I've also found a way to also help others with their digital futures".

4.5 What organisations or agencies could support and improve digital ability levels?

There are a range of channels that could be used to improve digital ability. For example, Indigenous Community Television (ICTV) and First Nations community radio could be used with both English language and First Nations languages to communicate visual messages.

The role of young people or school children in enabling digital inclusion for families should be leveraged. With suitable investment, schools could extend their digital curriculum to offer community-based learning for digital skills in accessing a range of essential services.

With governments increasingly moving service delivery into a digital space there is opportunity for agencies to consider how they support and engage First Nations communities to increase their digital ability and to provide support with online tools. Services Australia is driving this type of demand through the need for clients to access MyGov. The Australian Taxation Office focuses on providing online support with superannuation and First Nations specific programs. State and federal health agencies are capturing immunisation records, medical history and treatment via online portals.

4.6 What is needed to help address online safety issues experienced by Indigenous Australians?

The Telstra commissioned *Cyber Safety in Remote Aboriginal Communities, Final Report June 2018*[11] (Final Report) found that a participant's level of digital capability and cyber safety awareness generally corresponded to the length of time they had been using the internet.

It also identified that although some participants knew how to set passwords, block and report people on social media and use device privacy settings, they were choosing not to. This indicates the differences between online privacy and community notions of privacy.

Key recommendations from the Final Report include raising awareness of privacy and other common cyber safety issues, such as image-based abuse and cyber-bullying as well as facilitation of in-community and mediation and conflict management strategies through traditional structures or mainstream legal services for when online abuse goes offline.

[11] Rennie, E., T. Yunkaporta & I. Holcombe-James (2018). *Cyber Safety in Remote Aboriginal Communities, Final Report*. Melbourne: Digital Ethnography Research Centre, RMIT University.

5 Data on Indigenous digital inclusion

KEY RECOMMENDATION

That the Federal Government commit to longitudinal and ongoing research to inform First Nations digital inclusion by investing in the ADII or commissioning its own research based on ADII methodology to enable national comparison.

5.1 Are there any additional existing data sources regarding Indigenous digital inclusion or other data sources that are being used to measure Indigenous digital inclusion?

The ADII provides a comprehensive view of Australia's online participation by measuring three key dimensions of digital inclusion: Access, Affordability and Digital Ability. Telstra undertakes this research each year, in partnership with RMIT and Swinburne University's Centre for Social Impact, to gain the insights required to drive informed, effective action to help bridge the digital divide, and improve digital inclusion outcomes for those most at risk of exclusion. The ADII has tracked digital inclusion since 2014, enabling identification of the demographic and geographic contours of digital inequality. The ADII has been widely used by the not-for-profit and business sectors, and all tiers of government, resulting in significant impact on policy and practice.

ADII data, however, is limited in that it does not capture data from remote First Nations communities. First Nations digital inclusion is a crucial issue but is difficult to accurately capture in national survey approaches, such as the ADII's. Measuring digital inclusion within and across First Nations communities requires deep engagement with the communities themselves, their organisations, and leaders. If the ADII was to be used for this purpose it would require additional investment to reach a representative sample of First Nations Australians and track progress over time. We note that the data collection required for the Closing the Gap initiative is currently still under development.

The Telstra sponsored Mapping the Digital Gap research project, being delivered by the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society at RMIT University, aims to make a significant contribution to the evidence base in this area. The research aims to develop the first comprehensive study of remote First Nations communities' participation in and access to the digital economy.

The project involves working with 10-12 remote communities to generate First Nations Index scores and track changes in digital inclusion over a four-year period (2021-2024). It will also provide insights for local digital inclusion strategies and for measuring digital inclusion more broadly. Potential research sites have been identified based on criteria to ensure a diverse national sample, and selected communities will be offered the option of being involved in the project.

The research team will work closely with local and regional agencies to ensure the project adheres to local policies and cultural protocols, community trust and engagement, and to ensure the research addresses local needs and provides benefit to the community.

The research will draw on a modified version of the Australian Internet Usage Survey that is appropriate for use in remote First Nations contexts. This means the data collected will be directly comparable with the ADII.

SUMMARY

Telstra wishes the NIAA well in the development of the Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan and would welcome the opportunity for further discussion on any information contained in this submission.


is why