thelab

Centre for Inclusive Design

inclusion compass

Building a new framework to drive progress on inclusion in Australian society and culture

Contents

Setting the scene

Introduction to the Inclusion Compass 4

About the research 6

Inclusion Compass explained 8

The inclusivity landscape 10

Pathway to inclusion 14

Deep dive into the six key topics of conversation

Health and well being 16

Income equality 22

Community safety 28

Education and development 32

Supportive communities and representation 36

Digital divide 42

About

The Lab Insight & Strategy 46

UTS Centre for Social Justice & Inclusion 46

Centre for Inclusive Design 46

Compiled and written by: Dr Manisha Amin, Anna Bryant, John Suter Linton, Claire Byrne, Max Lowman, Katie Lucas and Amy Grady

Designed by: Geraldine Simpson

Photography from: iStock and Unsplash

Definitions

Amplified by: The amplification factor (amplified by X) is the sum of key engagement actions (likes, comments and shares) divided by the volume of posts within an identified dimension. This metric allows us to measure the impact of a given topic in the digital discourse. So, the higher the amplification score, the greater the engagement taking place around a topic.

Australian: Refers to all people living in Australia at the time the research was conducted regardless of visa or citizenship status. We acknowledge that the term 'Australian' is contentious or sensitive for some people.

Community conversations: For the purposes of this report, refers to conversations with community groups and individuals.

Digital conversations: Refers to conversations in mainstream social and digital media.

Edge user: The term 'edge user' is used throughout this report to describe a person who experiences significant difficulty with the way a system, process, or product has been designed. Anyone can be an edge user at some time in their lives. Think of a physical injury, a sprain, fracture, or break, recovery from an operation, all these can affect a person's ability.

Inclusive design: Focuses on engaging and considering the insights of people who are often ignored because of age, race, ethnicity, ability, sex, gender, or any other form of human difference.

Omnichannel: Where systems are integrated so the customer has a unified and consistent experience, be it in a physical store, using an app, or on a website.

Polished pathways: Is a system of not supporting people with disability to explore more employment options or integrate them through the education system for better opportunities. In short, people with disabilities are kept separate, segregated from the mainstream for most, if not all, their life.

The wellness economy: Term used to describe industries focused on promoting healthy habits, from exercise and training to food, nutrition, and aesthetics. Wellness spans a wide range of activities and goods.

Governments, community, and business have an opportunity to build lasting relationships with Australians to create an inclusive society. Doing so requires an understanding of the barriers creating exclusion.

Introduction to the Inclusion Compass

How inclusive is Australian society?

The Inclusion Compass is the first report of its kind in Australia. It asks Australians, 'what are the key areas preventing our society from being accessible, equitable, and inclusive?'.

The report is a rare look into how inclusive Australian society really is and reveals what Australians are saying. It focuses on people's needs and challenges in feeling and being fully included in Australian society. Significantly, this report offers solutions to governments and industry.

The Inclusion Compass is the voice of Australians providing solutions for Australia.

Centre for Inclusive Design, in partnership with The Lab Insight & Strategy, used AI-powered digital decoders to analyse over 700,000 online conversations, together with six months of workshops, to identify the short-falls, solutions, and to find the issues stopping Australia becoming a fully fair and inclusive society.

To know what an inclusive Australia should look like, the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals were matched against inclusion factors, like age, race, ethnicity, gender, sex, and religion. The result of this work led to six key topics of conversation where inclusion was found to be an issue. Those key topics are **health and wellbeing, community safety, education and development, income equality, connection and representation, and digital divide**.

The six key topics of conversations are areas governments and industry providers can improve to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, advancing diversity and inclusion within Australia.

To get a full picture of what inclusion looks like in Australia today, it was necessary to go beyond online commentary, and speak to communities, representative organisations, and individuals affected by the key topics. These people came from marginalised communities, referred to as 'edge users', being the elderly, people with disability, LGBTQIA+, culturally and racially marginalised communities, and other groups. This resulted in the sixth key topic of conversation being added, being the digital divide.

Combining our understanding at scale with in-person reflections from edge users, the final report reveals barriers to participation, decodes the emerging cultural conversations on inclusion, defines the issues within the key topics, and shows how government and industry can actively improve accessibility, equity, and inclusion.

All Australians want to belong. Edge communities also want to be valued for their contribution, and not be treated as second-class citizens.

The Inclusion Compass gives governments and industry the insight to uncover what is happening with edge users, and the intersectional challenges they experience which can often be hidden from the 'majority'.

This is the start of the conversation, not the end.

Diversity strengthens us, and enhances us as a country, as a community, rather than everyone being the same.

#Representation

About the research

The Inclusion Compass was put together with research conducted between January 2022 and May 2023. Centre for Inclusive Design partnered with The Lab Insight & Strategy, a creative human understanding practice. As leaders in AI-powered decoding of human behaviour and culture, LabAI used their digital decoder to reveal emerging conversations around the state of inclusion in Australia. These publicly available digital conversations included social media posts, digital forums, alongside other media outlets in Australia.

There were five stages to the project analysis approach. The first, defined the search frame for our digital conversations by combining the UN Sustainable Development Goals and key language around inclusivity in Australia. The Lab's AI-powered digital decoder technology was then applied to cluster the macro data into meaningful topics of conversation. The six key inclusivity areas, mentioned in the introduction, were found to be the most significant topics of discussion.

The second stage saw people sense check what was being said online during a series of in-person workshops. In addition to sense checking, these were an acknowledgement that digital exclusion is real, and not all Australian viewpoints are represented online. Centre for Inclusive Design conducted the workshops with 'edge users', their communities, representative organisations, individuals, carers, and experts who gave their reflections and findings from lived experiences, non-digital experiences, and outlined topics within conversations that mainstream digital narratives didn't cover. The detailed interviews provided a further check to the information and insights gained in the data scan.

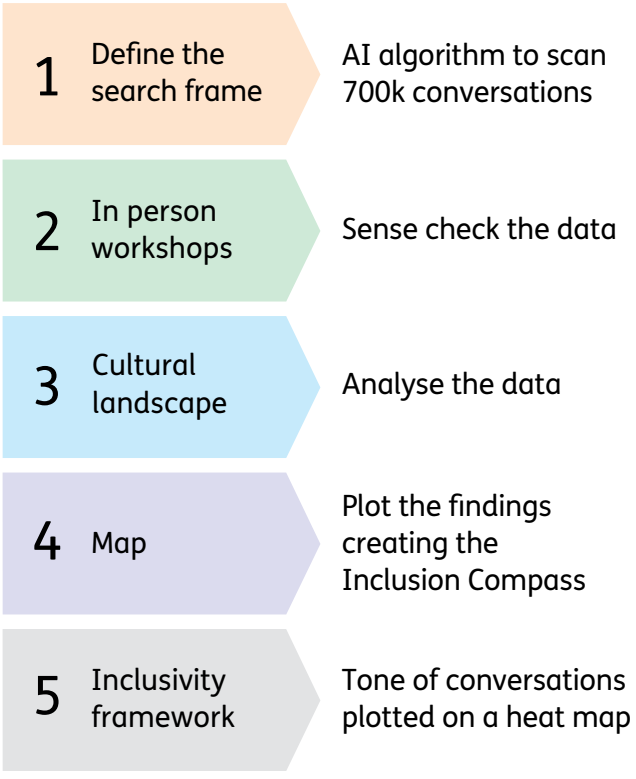
The third stage combined these digital and community conversations into an analysis, creating a cultural landscape around inclusivity to show the salient conversations shaping Australian society.

Stage four plotted the six key topics against influences and outcomes, creating the Inclusion Compass. Those topics are health and wellbeing, income equality, community safety, education and development, connection and representation, and digital divide.

The final stage provides a heat map of the tone of some of the conversations within each key topic, creating an inclusivity framework.

The findings from the report were then circulated for additional feedback to organisations, academics, experts and people with lived experience as well as their carers.

There were five stages to the analysis



Methodology and findings

What are the key areas preventing our society from being accessible, equitable, and inclusive?

HUMAN factors of inclusion + SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS + 700k social media conversations over one year + workshops with edge users

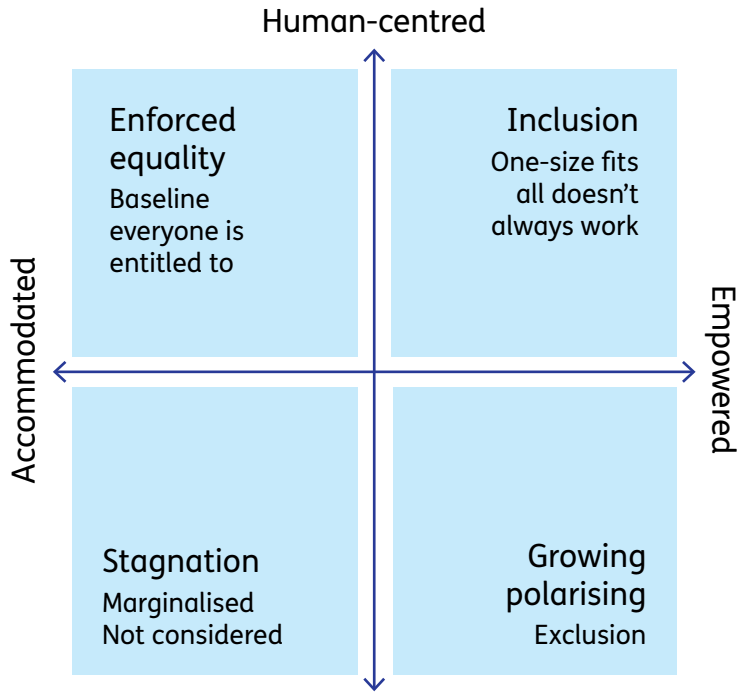
Topics of conversation where inclusion was found to be an issue

Inclusion Compass explained

Analysis of digital and community conversations show the six key topics of conversations around inclusion in Australia sit in one of four Compass areas.

Human-centred conversations consider the protection of human needs as vital.

Accommodated conversations are when the needs of edge users are seen as the needs of a few to be accommodated by the mainstream and status quo.



Empowered conversations are when the needs of 'edge users' are seen as critical to creating a diverse society with recognition that the status quo needs to change.

Politically focused conversations refer to the topic being highly politicised, used as a human tool, with conversations revolving around, for example, left verses right issues. Call out culture sits here.

Two axes are shown to help encompass the many narratives around inclusivity from everyday Australians. Where communities believe the conversation is politically motivated, rather than human-centred, the impact on society is negative. Likewise, accommodated rather than empowered.

*Human connection is about the **quality** of the connection.*

#Connection

The inclusivity landscape

Why does this matter?

Positive conversation and positive actions will create a stronger, more inclusive Australia.

Six key topics of conversation:

1. **Health and wellbeing** – do people have a positive state of health and wellbeing to take part?
2. **Income equality** – do all Australians have the financial means to support themselves in a positive quality of life?
3. **Community safety** – how secure do Australians feel in both public and private life?
4. **Education and development** – do all Australians have access to strong development pathways to be informed and progress in life?
5. **Connection and representation** – how people feel their current and future voices are being heard and advocated for, and is there diverse representation in key decision making?
6. **Digital divide** – for people in marginalised communities, technology was either inaccessible or unusable, or relied on having several devices which only increased the digital divide.

This Inclusion Compass is unique, showing both the movement of conversations and the underlying themes. As inclusion becomes more important and understood there will be a move towards 'human-centered' and 'empowered' conversations, however, it is important to recognise where conversations currently sit.

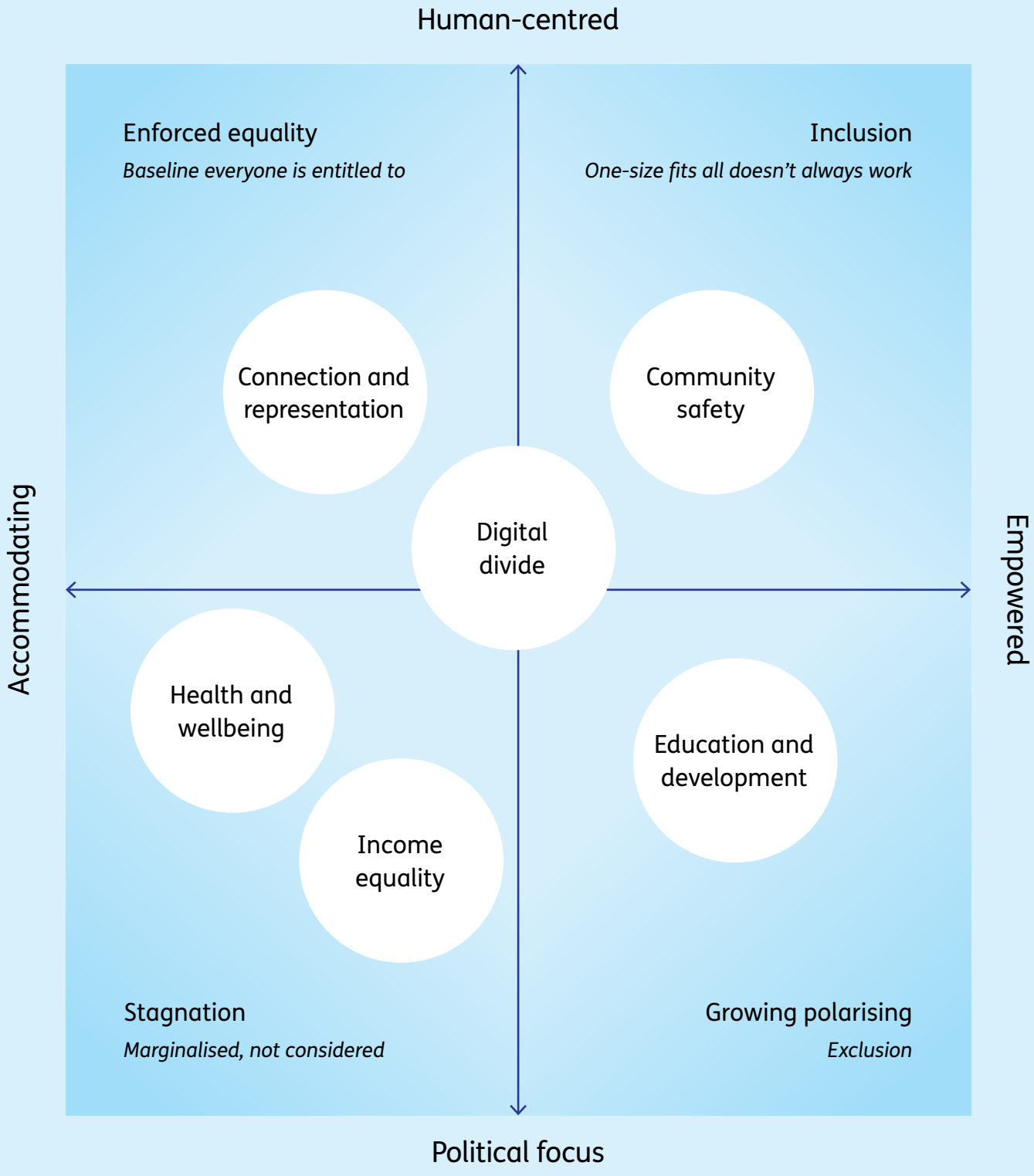
The six topics of conversation can be loosely placed over these axes shown on the opposite page.

The Inclusion Compass shows where conversations and viewpoints on the six key topics currently sit. That is, health and wellbeing, and income equality are viewed as sitting bottom left of the Compass, 'accommodated' and 'political focus'. The tone of these conversations demonstrate, despite the best intentions of governments, people find themselves marginalised, and their needs and experiences are not considered.

Community safety and the digital divide sit in the top right of the Compass, 'human-centred' and 'empowered'. These conversations focus on the need for equity. The need to recognise a 'one size fits all' approach will not always work.

While education and development conversations are also empowered in tone, they are often politicised. This combination can be polarising and create exclusion. Conversations regarding connection and representation are human-centred and have a focus on accommodating everyone. They are equality based and often advocate for the creation of a baseline everyone is entitled to have.

How conversations sit on the compass



Conversations online and in person

"NDIS is all about access, inclusion and agency, but you don't allow me to use my money. It looks great on paper, but in reality, it's really hard."

Income equality

"Interest rates increasing is creating a vicious cycle for people below the poverty line."

"A patient recently told me that their medical problems would improve if I could prescribe them a full time job, stable housing and a puppy."

Education and development

"We need practical conversations about how to make the workforce more inclusive, and shifting the focus to the employer, not the employee."

Digital divide

"If people aren't able to use technology they face exclusion."

"Assumption that everyone who uses a mobile phone can use a computer."

Connection and representation

"A male victim, a female victim and a Trans victim will all have slightly different needs and issues. Each deserves their own space."

"Diversity strengthens us, and enhances us as a country, as a community, rather than everyone being the same."

Health and wellbeing

"Australian of the year? Easy. Every health care worker, every nurse, every doctor, every hospital cleaner, every frontline worker, every lab technician, every carer."

"There are stigmas, just because it is free, there is a five year waiting list for something simple like dental care."

Community safety

"I'm forced to use technology, and then can't sleep worried that I'll be hacked. We are so reliant of tech and it scares me."

"Invasion and dispossession of Australia's First Peoples.

Imprisonment of 10 year old children.

Black deaths in custody."

Pathway to inclusion

The following are snapshots of what the Inclusion Compass conversations reveal as pathways for a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive society.

Health and wellbeing

To create a pathway forward for health, it is recommended to:

- improve access to healthcare for vulnerable people to remove and mitigate the disadvantages experienced when access to healthcare is restricted,
- consider an individual's whole health, not just focus on disease, and
- treat people with dignity and take a strengths-based approach to ensure people leave in a better place because of the intervention.

Income equality

To create a pathway forward for income equality, it is recommended to:

- design communities so diverse groups exist together rather than being segregated,
- redesign systems to accommodate and celebrate difference rather than expecting people to slot in,
- recognise poverty leads to a vicious cycle of exclusion,
- ensure current support systems and welfare services are designed to reduce rather than increase barriers for people trying to break the cycle of poverty, and
- government policies should focus on skilling, upskilling, and supporting the unemployed rather than looking to overseas for skilled workers.

Community safety

To create a pathway forward for community safety, it is recommended to:

- be aware fear, physical safety, and psychological safety look and feel different for different communities and, therefore, different interventions are needed,
- create programmes to de-stigmatise government responses to marginalised communities to break the cycle of mistrust and harm, and
- recognise the harm and isolation words can cause through social media, whether by traditional media organisations or individuals, and determine a way for people to be accountable for this impact.

Connection and representation

To create a pathway forward for connection and representation, it is recommended to:

- have a variety of community voices be heard and valued, and their insights be considered throughout decision and policy making processes,
- ensure media are required to adopt more inclusive language around underrepresented groups to reduce harm and isolation,
- acknowledge one size does not fit all, and different groups face different challenges in creating connection,
- promote the story of this country to represent the diversity of people who call Australia home, and
- explore further the need for non-digital opportunities for connection and human interaction.

Education and development

To create a pathway forward for education and development, it is recommended to:

- shift responsibility from the employee or student to employer or teacher/education provider to create accessible, and safe working and learning environments,
- view diversity and difference as a strength, not a deficit,
- identify and address barriers to education, skills, and employment for marginalised groups, and those looking to settle in Australia,
- support people with disability with training and resources on technology for special adjustments and personalisation, so it is factored into development, and
- ensure government employment and training programs support vulnerable people and cater for their varied needs.

Digital divide

To create a pathway forward and to bridge the digital divide, it is recommended to:

- provide omnichannel experiences (physical, digital, phone etc.) for services and products offered online, so people who are not online are not excluded,
- have people feel safe in online spaces.
- provide training for communities on how to use technology appropriately, and
- create accessible digital products, services, and spaces which cater for the varying needs of the community.

Health and wellbeing

174k
conversations

Amplified by
25x

UN Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved:

Health is the most discussed and engaged dimension online. Edge users perceive their health is treated as accommodating diverse needs rather than an expected part of the health service.

The digital discourse workshop discussions reveal how the health systems are making strong health and wellbeing available for all Australians, and poses the question, do people have a positive state of health and wellbeing to participate?

Health: the state of play

The health landscape has changed in Australia in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic led to increased awareness of integrated health services. Broadly, this is viewed as a good thing, however, edge users believe these services do not always meet the needs of the most vulnerable.

People consider health as more than physical health, extending the conversation to emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and social health. Edge users want the health system to take a holistic view, to go beyond treating just the illness. They believe the wellness community has succeeded in shifting this lens but want more done in the public system.

Access to healthcare is an issue across rural, regional, and remote settings. In isolated areas accessing a range of services, including general practitioners, mental health supports, NDIS services, and maternity care, is limited or non-existent, placing additional strains on these communities. They voiced their fear of people outside of major cities having lower life expectancy, worse outcomes on health indicators, and more long-term health conditions due to geographical barriers. It was critical to people in these areas they have equal access to healthcare offered to those in metropolitan areas.

The role of social media in health information is a key issue, particularly, the link between wellness and health. Social media is used to dictate and influence conversation which impacts health outcomes. For the public health sector, this is a positive outcome as it relies on social media channels for information purposes. In contrast, too often social media messaging is seen as prying on people and targeting the vulnerable with misinformation. Where communities have low trust in government systems, they are more likely to seek information from other sources which may contradict and undermine healthcare advice.

Health: challenges and opportunities

Connection to mental health supports

Mental health is at the front-of-mind since the pandemic. There is acknowledgement that people from marginalised groups are disproportionately affected by this. The impact of mental health for First Nations peoples, women, LGBTQIA+ communities, and people with disabilities is significant.

For people experiencing mental health issues some of the key considerations included:

- access to mental health services in a timely manner,
- awareness of the significant risk of harm in Aboriginal communities of youth suicide, and what supports are available,
- fear of stigma and judgement leads people to isolate rather than seek support, especially if they are subject to inappropriate commentary by health professionals, and
- First Nations communities and the disability sector believe the use of restraints, both physical and chemical, is a significant issue.

"Every month there is another coronial inquest into First Nations peoples who have died... because of systemic racism. This issue was prevalent for people from minority language groups too."

Capacity of the public health system

The need for care to be acknowledged as an underlying and significant societal issue is clear. Urgent calls for more nurses and better wages for nurses in the public health system is a major conversation.

There is also discussion on the need for reduced costs and accessibility of the private sector health services to reduce the burden on public health services.

The increasing dependency on technology, mentioned in this report, is another significant concern, particularly for people experiencing vulnerability and digital exclusion. People with disability often face difficulty in accessing sites. People in regional and rural areas experience reduced access to services and poor connectivity. Non-digital natives often share devices, or the experience is poor enough for them not to use the system. Telehealth, for example, doesn't work without connectivity.

The focus for improving Australia's healthcare system for the future needs to be on enhancing existing services, rather than digitising what already exists. The barriers to accessing digital healthcare often sits outside the remit of the health system.

Reproductive health

Discussions around menopause and menstrual cycles, and the support women need, are a major conversation. There is an emerging conversation around trans rights and health, with some fringe conversations around trans pregnancy.

For First Nations peoples, birthing on Country was a significant issue with concerns around having limited access to appropriate health care. Either they do not have access to birthing on Country programs or are challenged in having to leave Country and family to give birth in regional centres.

There is a consistent, long-standing conversation on the need to legislate an end to forced sterilisation of women with disabilities. The use of sterilisation to limit outcomes of sexual assault is perceived as continuing the damage rather than limiting it.

People with disability and their advocates believe they should be afforded the same access to mainstream reproductive services as other members of the community.

NDIS

While NDIS has its own challenges, a key issue is the marginalisation of elderly people with disability. The issue being, when their NDIS support finishes because of age, elderly people with disability feel discarded. The assumption is their disability is equal to aging.

Drug use

There is an understanding the policing of drug-use is biased towards over-policing people of colour and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Strong discourse around the success and need for safe injecting rooms exists. One of the challenges discussed is the polarisation between the needs of the individual requiring medical support, what an injecting room provides, and the click bait conversations marginalising people with stigmatised conditions.

> *If the violence is going to happen, we may as well prevent you getting pregnant.*

Stigma in health

There is discussion around discrimination being perpetuated by racial and sex-based attachments to AIDS and Monkeypox. Both remain 'gay' diseases with a focus on LGBTQIA+ health. Misinformation and fake news around public health advice affects all groups.

Feedback on some of the key areas of stigma included:

- indigenous people assessing whether they felt safer in hospital or at home and often not presenting at hospital as a result,
- people with disability treated as if their disability was a problem for the system, and
- discussions around acknowledgment and acceptance of cultural background in patient experience.

The path forward for health

To head in the right direction, it is recommended to:

- ✓ improve access to healthcare for vulnerable people to remove and mitigate the disadvantages experienced when access to healthcare is restricted,
- ✓ consider an individual's whole health, not just focus on disease, and
- ✓ treat people with dignity and take a strengths-based approach to ensure people leave in a better place because of the intervention.

To enable better health outcomes, it is recommended to:

- ✓ improve the ways Australians access healthcare information online and offline, with a focus on regional, rural, and remote communities,
- ✓ ensure there are accessible avenues for people with disability, First Nations, and rural and remote communities to access the healthcare and healthcare information they need,
- ✓ tighten government regulation around health misinformation in online forums,
- ✓ focus on the quality of care and an individual's quality of life and employing a holistic approach rather than the individual medical challenge,
- ✓ value the needs of edge communities, not just those of 'mainstream Australia' (e.g., COVID has not gone away, appropriate healthcare needs to be available for vulnerable First Nations, elderly, and persons/communities identified at risk), removing social constructs from healthcare (e.g., racism, ableism, and other hidden biases),
- ✓ prioritise basic human needs and affordability within the healthcare system, and
- ✓ leverage existing connections to enrich and bring people together.

> *We need to move away from a 'one size fits' all model.*

Income equality

95k
conversations

Amplified by
18x

UN Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved:

Cost-of-living effects edge users the most, but Australians still feel priorities are given to the wealthy and powerful.

The scanning of digital conversations and hosting of one-on-one workshops focused on discussions around how money and wealth is distributed amongst Australians. The question being, do all Australians have the financial means to support themselves in a positive quality of life?

Income equality: the state of play

Australia has always been seen as the lucky country. The gap, however, between the haves and the have nots is seen as broadening. People widely discussed the impact of major environmental emergencies and regional conflicts on food security, cost of utilities, housing prices, and access to supplies. Increased inflation and the looming threat of recession add to this issue. A key challenge is the vicious cycle between financial vulnerability and social exclusion, and further marginalisation. Many of the systems meant to support people also lead to increased trauma. The Robodebt system is a key case in point.

'Robodebt was a crude and cruel mechanism, neither fair nor legal, and it made many people feel like criminals. In essence, people were traumatised on the off chance they might owe money. It was a costly failure of public administration, in both human and economic terms', Catherine Holmes, Commissioner of the Robodebt Royal Commission.

Segregation of people by wealth, in terms of postcode, schools, and what goods and services people receive, also lead to 'othering'. When people do not experience diversity, they are more likely to label and stigmatise others with no real knowledge of their lives or circumstances.

Key areas of focus on income equality

Employment

When it comes to employment key mainstream conversations centre on small business owners and women-led businesses. There is also discussion around employment rates among younger Australians and other marginalised groups who do not benefit from the low unemployment rates.

For all groups, the notion of the shame of not being employed or able to contribute is a key conversation. It is perceived the media often focuses on portraying the unemployed as 'bludgers'. All groups found this narrative harmful and demeaning.

While digital discourse highlighted the importance of employment for people with disability and young people, the workshop groups focus on employment attitudes and bias towards older Australians, the spectrum of gender discrimination, and the lack of supports in rural Australia.

"Today, because of the gift card, I will be able to buy my diabetic medication. I have not been able to buy it lately as the budget just doesn't allow it. You have really made my day, my week, and my year."

Employment is a key issue for people with disability. While there is more attention on hiring people with disability, there are several key issues needing to be addressed for successful employment to occur:

- people with disability need to be paid a fair wage for their work. Disability employment payments do not match inflation,
- people with disability are often seen as less capable by mainstream society and sometimes by their carers, and
- people with disability and chronic health conditions can have variable levels of disability. This can make it difficult for employers if they need certainty in the workforce.

People with a disability and from edge communities should be given the opportunity to participate in education, training, and employment programs. To do this, government policies and programs need to recognise the varying needs of participants. Government programs cannot be a 'one size fits all' model.

The Disability Support Service (DSS) is difficult to sign onto receive benefits. The payments cease when a person with disability finds employment, however, it is difficult for people to reapply should they become unemployed. This serves as a disincentive for people with disability, given the challenges in seeking and maintaining employment.

If you find employment and get off the disability support pension, (then become unemployed again) getting back onto it is a nightmare.

Housing

Australia still values the idea of home ownership. Not only is this unachievable for many, but even renting has become expensive. There is a need for more public housing and, specifically, public housing addressing diverse needs. It is noted diverse communities co-existing together has increased and needs to continue.

A key issue from both edge communities and broader conversations is the grave concern about the rising proportion of homeless elderly women.

When considering public housing there are some key themes:

- public housing needs to be accessible (ramps and rails) as a baseline, and it needs to also be safe and easily accessible by public transport,
- residents want to see blended community models, rather than 'towers of doom', and
- existing housing services are difficult to navigate and sometimes inaccessible, and there is a level of assumed knowledge which creates a barrier to access. This is particularly the case for people with disability.

Poverty

Cost-of-living is at the forefront of discussions, and around mothers, middle-aged, and elderly women being the fastest growing proportion of people experiencing homelessness. People experiencing poverty are not a homogenous group, but rather they are individuals with diverse needs.

For many living in poverty, rising interest rates have perpetuated the vicious poverty cycle. To address this, participating groups believe there needs to be intervention coming from several angles. The key issue is when people live below the poverty line, all the other dimensions are affected, including housing, health, mental health, disability, employment, safety, digital supports, and community cohesion.

Skilled migration

There is conversation around the need for skilled migration to Australia, yet significant barriers exist, including the lack of recognition of international education. With the Pacific climate-based refugee situation and global unrest, the current system doesn't allow refugees to access employment or training. By the time their visas are approved, refugees have been in a state of limbo for years. This impacts their ability to access skilled work once they are eligible.

There is latent capacity for work in the Australian community, however, often these people are considered unemployable. Where there is an identified skills shortage, this area should be complemented with a sustainable skilled migration policy to address the gaps.

This is an area of opportunity for Australia to build its skilled workforce.

The path forward to reduce the impact of income inequality

To head in the right direction, it is recommended to:

- ✓ design communities so diverse groups exist together rather than being segregated,
- ✓ redesign systems to accommodate and celebrate difference rather than expecting people to slot in,
- ✓ recognise poverty leads to a vicious cycle of exclusion,
- ✓ ensure current support systems and welfare services are designed to reduce rather than increase barriers for people trying to break the cycle of poverty, and
- ✓ government policies should focus on skilling, upskilling, and supporting the unemployed rather than looking to overseas for skilled workers.

To enable better income equality outcomes, it is recommended to:

- ✓ put a focus on upskilling people with disabilities, refugees, and migrants,
- ✓ provide genuine employment opportunities and pathways for people with disabilities, and ensure they are remunerated with adequate wages reflecting the work and matching inflation,
- ✓ supply safer and more accessible public housing for those in need,
- ✓ ensure government give support and welfare to cover the cost of necessities and match inflation,
- ✓ recognise the need to invest in adjustments and supports so people with disability and other communities experiencing vulnerability can access employment opportunities,
- ✓ government to lend support to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and other entry level employment providers, so people can have more workplace flexibility due to carer requirements, trauma, or variable disability, and still access permanent work, and
- ✓ ensure the Disability Support Service is easier to opt in and out of, so people can apply for work without the risk of failure being as high.

“We need practical conversations about how to make the workforce more inclusive.”

Community safety

95k
conversations

Amplified by
22x

UN Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved:

Safety has one of the highest amplification scores within public discourse. Australians rely on social networks for protection rather than governments.

So, how secure do Australians feel in both public and private life, and do people feel safe and secure leading their everyday lives within their local community?

Community safety: the state of play

One of the key findings of this work is the divide in what safety looks like and how people are kept safe. The institutions mainstream society relies on for safety, are the institutions which make marginalised groups feel the least safe. Those being health, government, justice, and digital connection.

In community conversations there is strong discussion on the impact of systems which do not consider the needs of marginalised communities. This includes the preventable deaths of First Nations peoples, older Australians, and people in regional areas. Racism and discrimination in both the health and justice system are particularly damaging, and there are case studies across the board of people being too scared to speak out because of concerns they will be placed at higher risk.

People felt the state perpetrated violence in a range of ways, including:

- lack of understanding on the impact of strip searches for transexual communities,
- discrimination and inappropriate questions when being assessed for a medical condition, and
- the level of force in response to incidents within stigmatised communities.

"Community safety is different for everyone, for example, police keep us safe from people who use drugs and are the reason we are safe but for First Nations peoples police are the perpetrators of violence."

Key areas of focus on community safety

Public spaces

The need for safe spaces is a conversation of importance with workshop participants. This conversation is not highlighted online. Access to safe public spaces includes recognition of the isolating impact of a lack of safely, and the need for access supports, like hearing loops, improved lighting, and good public infrastructure.

Family violence

Family violence, often referred to as domestic abuse in conversations, is a major topic of discussion for both female and male survivors and includes same-sex relationships. There is a call to have better support systems for people to leave violent relationships. This includes trauma-informed specialised services, access to housing, emergency leave payments, mobile phones, social conditions to support victims from returning to an abusive relationship, as well as acknowledging diverse cultural groups need different responses.

Narratives in media

The conversations point to harmful narratives in media which fuel racism within communities, especially around racialised gang violence. A sizable conversation believes sections of the media are responsible for perpetuating stigmas against people of colour and beyond.

Fear is seen as being used by media and government as click bait or an election tool, further harming communities.

The need for an unbiased and transparent media is consistent across all parts of the research.

Deaths in custody

Deaths in custody is a major concern. First Nations peoples do not feel safe in community because of violence that is then exacerbated by institutions. The over criminalisation and incarceration of First Nations peoples with disabilities in prison, youth detention centres, and forensic mental health units, is of significant concern.

"The first response is to lock up Indigenous people, rather than deal with the larger systemic issues."

The path forward to increase community safety

To head in the right direction, it is recommended to:

- ✓ be aware fear, physical safety, and psychological safety look and feel different for different communities and, therefore, different interventions are needed (not a one-size fits all approach),
- ✓ to identify as systemic the view some groups mistrust government services and see them as being creators of harm. This issue must be accommodated, so everyone, including the most stigmatised, feel safe and supported, and
- ✓ recognise the harm and isolation words cause through social media, whether by traditional media organisations or individuals, and determine a way for people to be accountable for this impact.

To enable community safety outcomes, it is recommended to:

- ✓ make all places, products, and services for the community accessible to everyone, which includes having non-digital options,
- ✓ use training and research to understand the complex issues around stigmatised communities, including their specific fears and culture, to supply tailored, safe options and environments,
- ✓ provide greater choice and control to people in care environments, and safer reporting systems for people with disabilities and people in care environments,
- ✓ address and acknowledge systemic issues, particularly in health and justice, which affect First Nations, refugees, people of colour, and marginalised communities,
- ✓ recognise the impact of cyber bullying on marginalised communities,
- ✓ build trust between the community and government services, like police and healthcare, and
- ✓ provide culturally appropriate, supportive behaviour change and integration programs for perpetrators of violence to reduce reoffending.

“Inclusion happens from the ground up.”

Education and development

118k
conversations

Amplified by
11x

UN Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved:

Education is a politicised battleground Curriculums and funding are seen as weapons of left versus right politics.

Are there opportunities for learning to be made accessible and achievable, and do all Australians have access to strong development pathways to be informed and progress in life?

Education and development: state of play

It is perceived Australia is a country where everyone has access to education. The mainstream systems, however, privilege some groups over others. Accessible education has never been the default. There are many instances where standardised classrooms fail students with disability who cannot keep up with the style of teaching often seen as mainstream. While technology can improve outcomes for some people, it needs to be recognised technology can also widen the divide between people. There is, however, often embarrassment when not being able to use, afford, or access technology.

Diversity needs to be recognised and valued to ensure minority groups have both a seat at the table and a voice.

For people with disability and refugees, one key issue is the provision of open pathways to respectable employment from education. Often people are on an education merry-go-round with no chance of employment without having work experience, which they cannot get without some previous work experience.

In addition, there is recognition employers, and community in general, accept and be educated on systemic bias and its impact on disability, ethnicity, gender, and treatment of First Nations peoples.

Key areas of focus on education and development

Primary and secondary

Key conversations request support to expand school curriculums to include same-sex and First Nations' education history. Equalising funding to private and public schools is another key area of conversation.

In community, key issues include:

- lack of support in mainstream schools for students with disability and others to thrive,
- the need for strengths-based language that is positive and a move away from language which can be stigmatising or objectifying,
- the need for resources and funding for overwhelmed schools,
- understanding communities' needs and having in-place support (i.e., in a community in Northern Australia young people will know nine languages, including First Nation languages, with English being the least known), and
- being aware of increased racism in schools and addressing the problem.

"My son was put into the emotionally disturbed class at school. It had huge impacts. He couldn't get part time work, and TAFE insisted he always had a support worker with him. The exclusion added to the stigma and the isolation he felt, which then exacerbated his mental health issues."

Workplace education and culture

Employees are demanding more inclusive workplace cultures. Rise in courses like bystander, inclusivity, sensitivity training, and a focus on inclusion of people with disability in the workplace is a growing conversation.

Community conversations around this issue also highlight the need for pathways for people with disability to have genuine paid employment with a proper wage. Current polished pathways provide training and ability building with no employment outcomes. Education opportunities are more difficult in rural areas. Discrimination in employment, based on age and ethnicity, are also key issues.

Education on sustainability

There are opportunities to engage First Nations peoples and their knowledge in creating more effective climate policy. Climate change affecting rural and island areas is a key issue for the country.

Industry education

Addressing gender balance in industry leadership and pay gaps, a focus on creating policies for sustainable production and diversity on boards, are key topics of conversation.

The path forward to increase education and development outcomes

To head in the right direction, it is recommended to:

- ✓ shift responsibility from the employee or student to employer or teacher/education provider to create accessible, and safe working and learning environments,
- ✓ view diversity and difference as a strength, not a deficit,
- ✓ identify and address barriers to education, skills, and employment for marginalised groups, and those looking to settle in Australia,
- ✓ support people with disability with training and resources on technology for special adjustments and personalisation, so it is factored into development, and
- ✓ ensure government employment and training programs support vulnerable people and cater for their varied needs.

To enable education and development outcomes, it is recommended to:

- ✓ have inclusion built into education systems, to demonstrate the value of diversity as a strength in the workforce and education, and not allowing it to be tokenistic,
- ✓ allow flexibility for people with disability in the workforce,
- ✓ incorporate accessible avenues for education and employment which consider the diversity of an individual's needs, and
- ✓ shift focus from employee to employer to make workplaces inclusive and accessible.

"Diversity needs to be viewed as a strength, not a weakness."

Supportive communities and representation

100k
conversations

Amplified by
11x

UN Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved:

Edge users face barriers to fully belonging to a community.

How do people feel safe and secure leading their everyday lives within their local community? How can people's voices be properly heard and advocated for?

Supportive communities and representation: state of play

The modern Australian narrative is rooted in everyday tropes. This includes close mate ship and comradery, celebrating our multicultural makeup and diversity, and a rigid democracy where everyone has a say. For most Australians, this narrative does not reflect their reality.

The recent and rapid advancements in technology have shaped how people connect with those around. During the pandemic, technology replaced face-to-face interaction. The shift to online connection has lasted beyond the years of lockdown and fundamentally changed how people interact and support one another. People are more connected than ever yet, paradoxically, have never felt more isolated and alone.

Australia prides itself on being a multicultural, diverse, and accepting nation where a multitude of differences are united. A major challenge is edge users don't feel represented, and decisions are made for them by people who don't consult or understand them. This desolation signals a break in the relationship between community and its representative, elected and non-elected.

This report was researched and written in the lead up to the Indigenous Voice to Parliament referendum. Both groups, campaigning for and against the Voice, have shown representation as a key challenge and reason for their positioning. For 'yes' voters, the current system does not provide opportunities for First Nations peoples to inform policy and legal decisions which directly affect them. While the 'no' campaign does not support the Voice, as it believes the Voice is a mechanism which would not adequately address the needs of First Nations communities.

Key areas of focus on supportive communities and representation

Advocacy

Communities are evolving. Climate emergencies, public health concerns, and the rise of technology all contribute to conversations on the use of lobby groups and community advocacy. People are concerned about the fall of unionisation, and fear younger people are less likely to join at a time when worker rights are seen as eroding. What the future is for unions in the digital age and what advocacy will look like are causing contention.

Post COVID-19, the conversations continue about the role of 'big pharma' having too much influence on health and public policy decisions. This conversation is mirrored in social and community conversation.

Solutions from a community perspective included:

- increased regulation on both government and academia receiving money from pharmaceutical companies, and
- ethical policies around prescribing pharmaceuticals.

These conversations seem to correlate to the rise of the wellness sector mentioned in the Health section of this report.

Representation in decision making

This area is of particular interest to community. In online there are two key topics. One, giving voice to carers, focusing on the nursing industry and the need for better rights of an overworked health industry. Two, First Nations voices in parliament and at more decision-making levels.

Community groups also recognise the need for:

- First Nations peoples to be represented across all aspects of government,
- minority communities to have a genuine say in decision making,
- frustration of people from marginalised groups when asked to be spokespeople, however, they aren't supported, and the system doesn't change,
- the issue of violence in response to opinions and voices from marginalised communities,
- the need to increase co-design, consulting with edge users, and to balance it with user testing, and
- opportunities for people to come together and share their lived experience and insight.

Religious institutions and spirituality

The role of religion and different religious groups has been changing. In digital discourse there are both positive and negative conversations about religion. For instance, the role of Church or religious beliefs in politics is not seen as helpful. Religion is seen, however, as a vital part of community building in a time of isolation.

What does the future of community look like in a digital, atheist society?

From a community perspective there are also strong positive and negative views on issues such as:

- the Religious Discrimination Bill, where religion could be privileged over marginalised communities,
- concern over the prosperity gospel, the theology and movement based on the belief God rewards believers with health and wealth, which is seen at odds with Christian charity,
- increasing Islamophobia and a shift to the alt right,
- destruction of sacred sites and not valuing First Nations' spiritual and cultural practice, and
- recognition that religion can play a vital part in compassion, security, and hope.

Identity and belonging

Queer rights and identity are a major focus, with trans identity discussed uniquely and separate from other LGBTQIA+ matters. Conversations were had about LGBTQIA+ and accessible events becoming more mainstream. There is also a celebration of trans identity and trans rights online.

Community conversation advocates the need to acknowledge:

- diversity creates different voices, and this means the need to work on social cohesion and constructive dialogue,
- a group can be marginalised and still marginalise others, meaning different groups have different beliefs which can be counter to the views of mainstream or other marginalised communities,
- finding community is difficult in marginalised communities,
- the challenges of navigating more than one culture, particularly for CALD families or children being educated in a culture not their own,
- a lack of understanding of the needs and wants of marginalised groups,
- low expectations of people with disability from community, family, and sometimes the people themselves, and stigmatised attitudes towards people, and
- the segregation of people with disability and other groups, like older people, and people needing care generally.

Social support groups

Social networks have taken on services government is underfunding. While the social conditions create a focus on the individual, there are pockets of the community turning to mutual aid, with the conversation explaining this was needed as welfare and other supports were failing.

The focus of digital conversations was on individuals needing to improve their sustainable behaviours, spending habits, mental health programs, etc., rather than it being the responsibility of government.

Communities recognised:

- the role of community and religious groups stepping in where there was a lack of funding,
- the loneliness epidemic is real and there is a need for support groups for people in similar circumstances and communities, as well as groups where people from different groups can come together, and
- significantly missing in the mainstream is the conversation around isolation in rural and remote communities, due to distance, population, and poor public infrastructure.

The path forward to increase support and representation

To head in the right direction, it is recommended to:

- ✓ have community voices be heard and valued, and their insights be considered throughout decision and policy making processes,
- ✓ ensure media are required to adopt more inclusive language around underrepresented groups to reduce harm and isolation,
- ✓ acknowledge one size does not fit all, and different groups face different challenges in creating connection,
- ✓ promote the story of this country to represent the diversity of people who call Australia home, and
- ✓ explore further the need for non-digital opportunities for connection and human interaction.

To enable increased support and representation outcomes, it is recommended to:

- ✓ recognise and value the contributions of people with lived experience,
- ✓ train people to engage respectfully with communities,
- ✓ respect and value disability culture,
- ✓ design avenues for participation and connections that are local and not exclusively online,
- ✓ have government make online spaces safer, and
- ✓ promote strengths-based attitudes for marginalised groups to instill higher expectations, as low expectations create low outcomes.

“Let’s provide opportunities for people with lived experience to share their insight.”

Digital divide

Systemic issues

The key issue arising from community and online conversations across all dimensions, but even more starkly in focus groups, was the impact of a digital first policy and practice. For people in marginalised communities, technology was either inaccessible or unusable, or relied on having several devices which only increased the digital divide. In other research conducted by CfID, it was noticed the experience of using technology is worse for people not considered mainstream, and the consequences for them are significant.

UN Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved:

Key areas of focus on digital divide affecting accessibility

Accessibility needs to move from physical ramps to personalised universal access for all people in the digital world, at work, and in public spaces. Spaces and places need to be designed for difference, so they include, for example, hearing loops, and different ways of consuming information.

Diversity in design

Conversations include the need to have creators from diverse groups, and to have diverse groups take part in research and user testing. People with lived experience need to be valued, to share their insight, and be supported to use their voices effectively. Confidence to engage in the consultation processes is required by both the person with lived experience and the people asking the questions, so they are appropriate and focus on the challenge. It is critical to pay people for their insight if it comes from their lived experience.

Impact of assumption

The assumption everyone can be online and is online excludes some of the most marginalised communities. People may not be online for a range of reasons. Mental health, choice, safety, affordability, and competency, to name a few. This proves a variety of means are needed to connect with people.

Non-digital spaces

Communities want to know how they can be supported in non-digital spaces. While technology allows people to connect virtually there is an understanding, for some groups, this was at the cost of physical connection. The challenge is in providing a voice for people who are not online, as well as creating opportunities for people who are overly reliant on online connection.

Training

A significant barrier for many Australians is a lack of training to use smart devices, and confidently engage online. There is a need for training on how to use technology. This is consistent across a range of communities, including people in regional and remote areas, older Australians, people with disability, and people with low literacy. It must be culturally appropriate, affordable, accessible, and tailored to different skill levels/needs. People want training, not only on how to use the internet, but also how to stay safe online.

"This is the next industrial revolution."

The path forward for bridging the digital divide

To create a pathway forward and to bridge the digital divide, it is recommended to:

- ✓ provide omnichannel experiences (physical, digital, phone etc.) for services and products offered online, so people who are not online are not excluded,
- ✓ have people feel safe in online spaces,
- ✓ provide training for communities on how to use technology appropriately, and
- ✓ create accessible digital products, services, and spaces which cater for the varying needs of the community.

To enable an increase in digital proficiency, it is recommended:

- ✓ rather than a digital first policy, the recommendation is for an omnichannel policy, where all communication mechanisms are funded equally until people prefer digital options,
- ✓ to improve access to digital connection, particularly in areas not classified as remote, but are locations just outside rural areas,
- ✓ to give greater focus on digital safety for communities highly vulnerable to attack, like people with disability, new to Australia, or elderly,
- ✓ to train education providers and workplaces on accessible systems, and
- ✓ to understand new technology can have baked in assistive supports from a NDIS perspective.

> *The reality is that we are in a digital world, and we need to find ways to address the challenges like providing non-digital channels for people.*

Every person deserves the opportunity to thrive - not only just survive.

About us

The Lab Insight & Strategy

The Lab is a creative human understanding practice where ambitious brands come to make brilliant leaps. Founded in 2006, our fiercely independent collective of strategic thinkers fuses the powerful forces of culture, behaviour, and technology to reveal fresh perspectives that enable brands to take advantage of our rapidly changing society and stay ahead of change.

We're lighting the way forward with an eye on the bigger picture. As a company committed to the triple bottom line, we maintain a sharp focus on our work, the wellbeing of our people and the impact on our place. As a certified B Corp, we meet the highest verified standards of social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability, and aspire to use the power of business to address social and environmental challenges.

We're committed to reconciliation and have completed our Reflect RAP to drive change and unification.

UTS Centre for Social Justice & Inclusion

The UTS Centre for Social Justice & Inclusion is the academic and promotion partner for this report.

As a public purpose institution, UTS is committed to driving social change within and beyond our campus. Our social impact agenda focuses research, education, and practice from across the university to benefit people and communities.

The Centre for Social Justice & Inclusion is a gateway for community organisations, not-for-profits, social purpose businesses and individuals to engage with the university's resources and expertise to maximise social impact.

The Centre for Inclusive Design

The Centre for Inclusive Design (CfID) is a leader in inclusive design methodology and application, with over 40-years' experience working with governments, educators, business, industry, and community organisations to deliver policies, products, services, and experiences which are accessible to all.

Inclusive design connects government and industry with communities of people who are traditionally excluded or unable to access products, services, and the built environment. Incorporating their lived experience into the design process increases the accessibility of the planned service, policy, product, or built environment.

CfID strives to ensure those with physical & hidden disabilities and disadvantages are considered throughout the decision-making process by both government and the private sector.

As a not-for profit working as a social enterprise, CfID specialises in bringing together different perspectives to the design process and delivering useful and usable solutions.

CfID exists to help governments, organisations and industries embody Inclusive Design.

Email info@cfid.org.au
Phone +61 2 9212 6242
Web centreforinclusivedesign.org.au

Learn more

Centre for Inclusive Design teammates Angela Tragotsalos and Claire Byrne

Thank you

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