

Lareen Newman PhD, Senior Research Fellow
Southgate Institute for Health Society & Equity
Flinders University, Australia

**The Overlooked Impact of Basic Reading and
Education Levels on Inequalities in Internet Use**

International Symposium on Communities in the Digital Age
Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury UK
12 June 2013

Outline of presentation

- Social determinants
- Data on Inequalities in Internet Access & Use
- Social determinants underlying these Inequalities
- Focus in on Basic Reading and Education levels
- Our qualitative research – Examples
- Implications



The Southgate Institute for Health Society & Equity – Adelaide

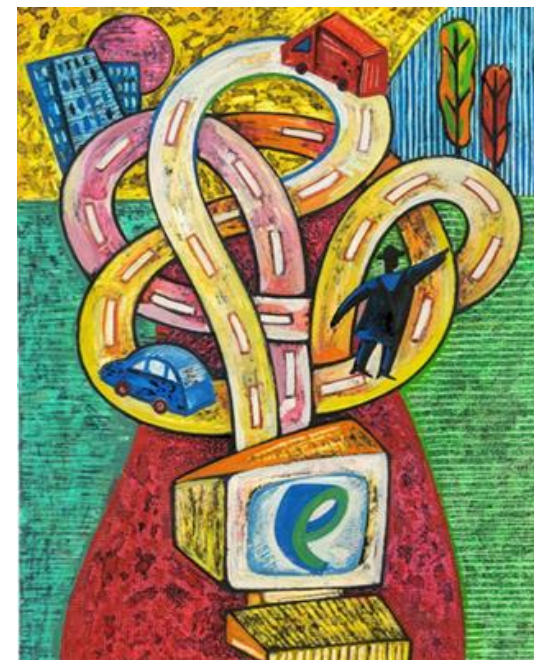
- National Centre for Research on Social Determinants of Health
- Equity and social inclusion > now also Digital Inclusion/Exclusion
- Director - Professor Fran Baum (CSDH Commissioner for WHO)



ICTs as social determinants of health

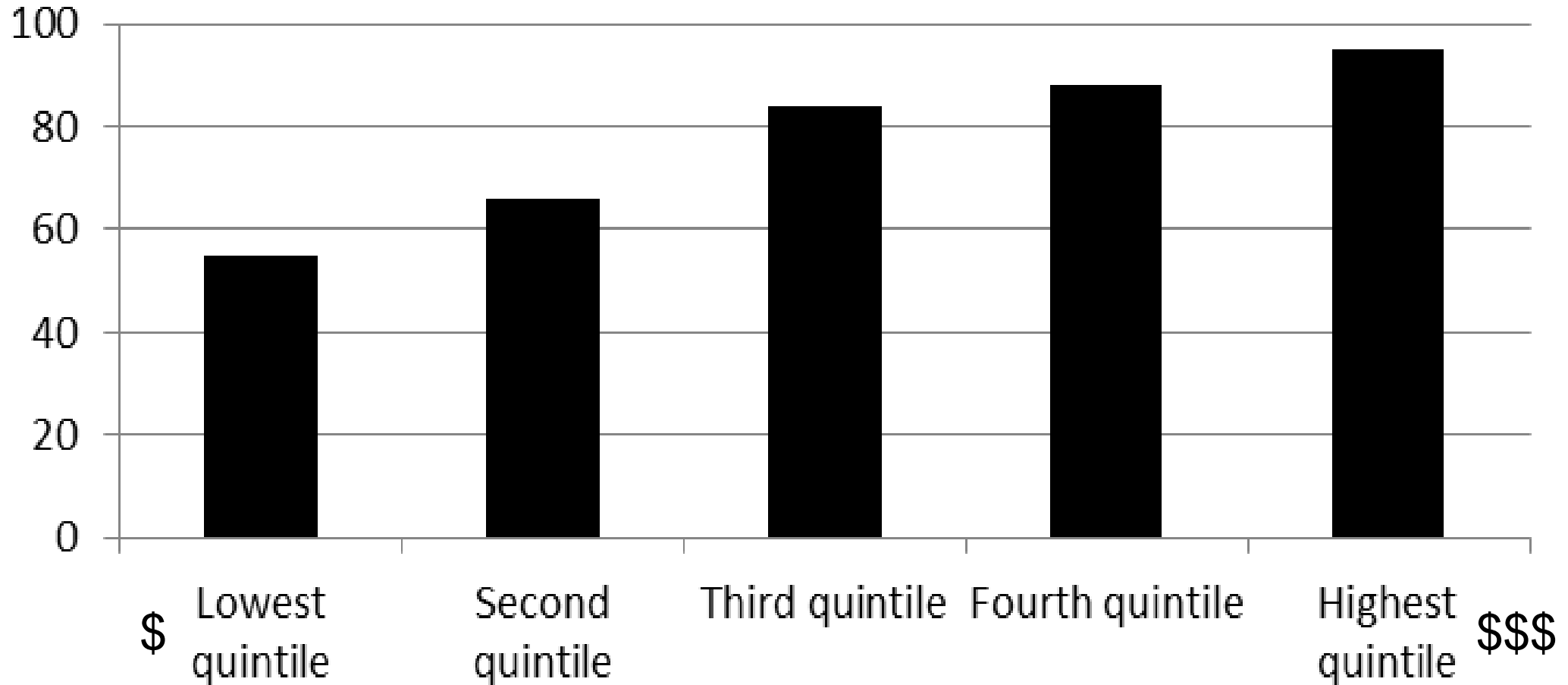
***Social determinants of health (SDH) -
the conditions in which we live and work:***

- Employment, Income, Education
- Social Connection and Networks
- Housing, Transport, etc

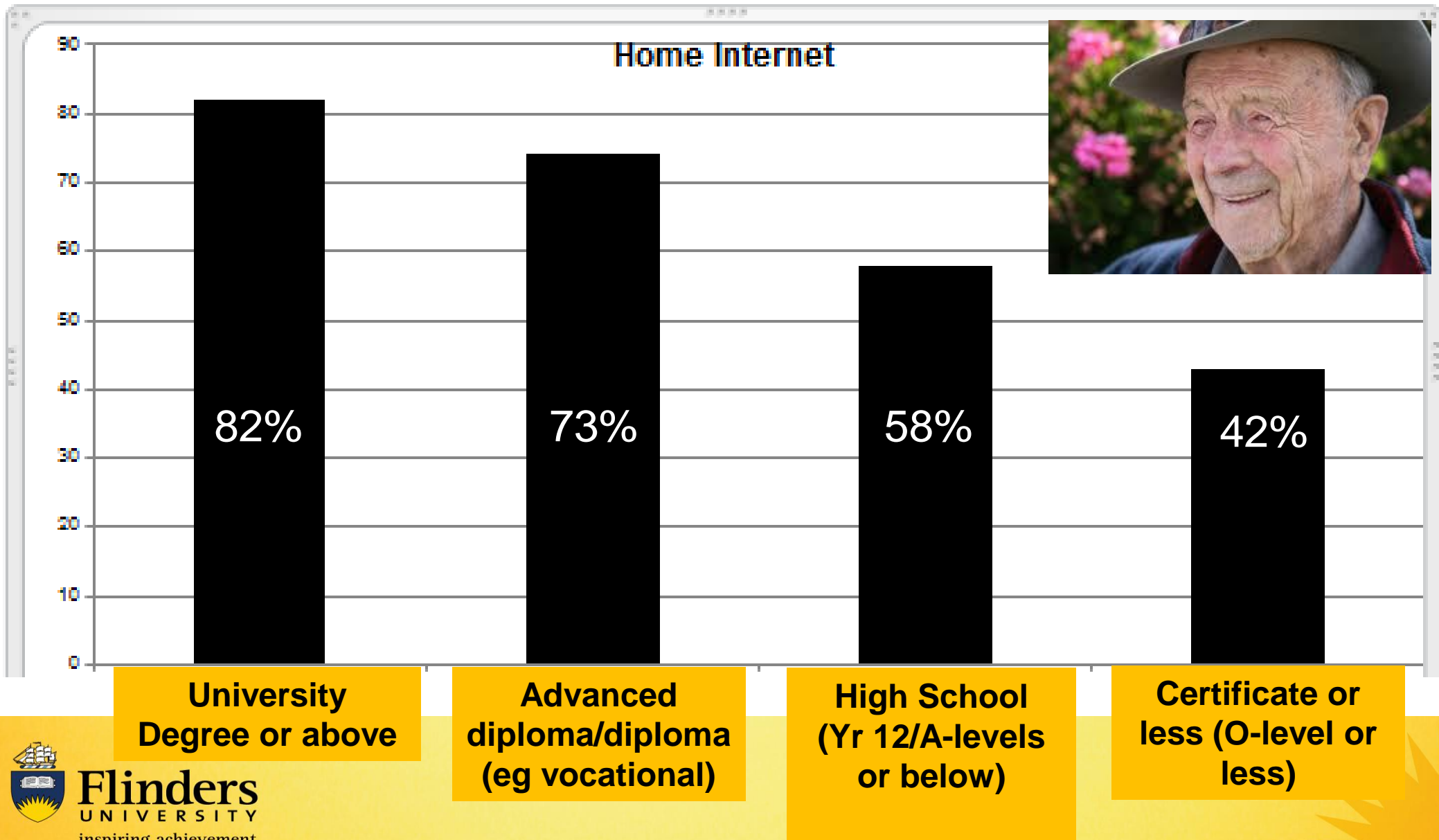


ICTs - computers, Internet, mobile phones... new key determinants as they provide or prevent access to the other key SDHs eg online education/employment, online social networks, online healthcare/e-health and telehealth

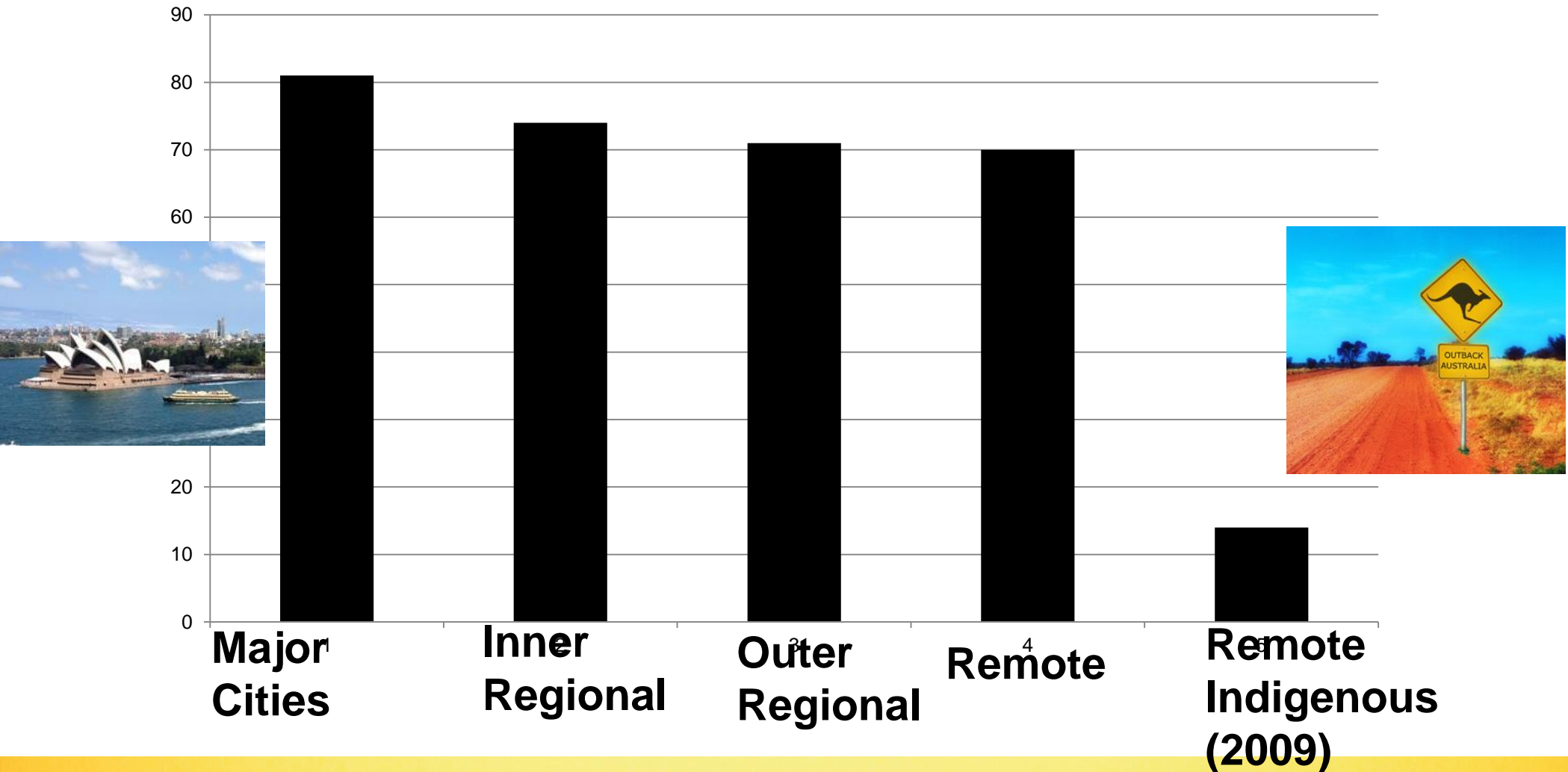
Who has the Internet? Australia's Digital Gradient (\$)



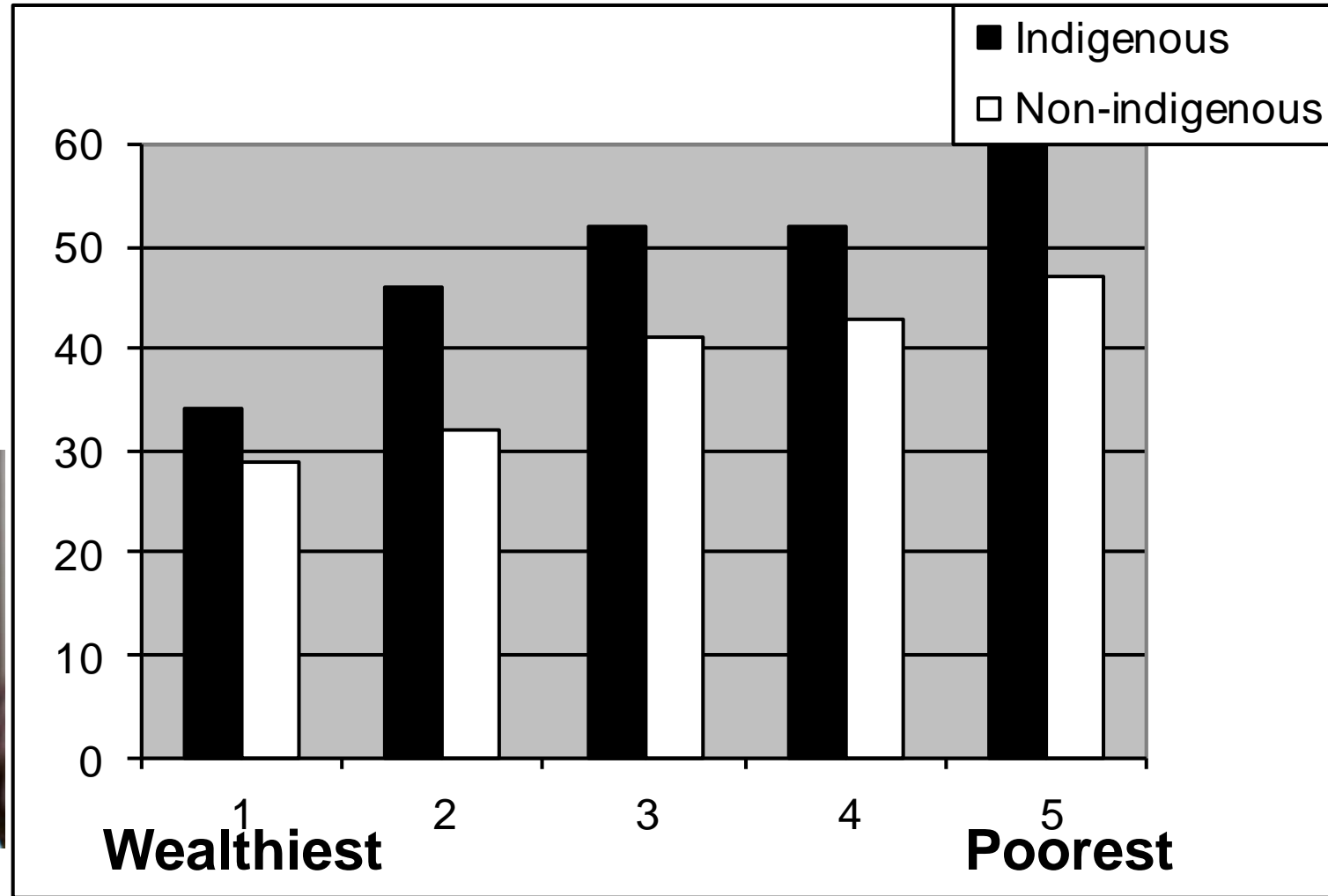
Older Australians 60+, by education level



Home Internet access, Australia 2011 (%)



WITHOUT Home Internet, South Australia



Social Determinants of ICT Access and Use



The connection “tip” = Digital Access

At the surface = The “Use Divide”
complexity, frequency, quality, benefits?

Hidden Resources & Capabilities > Exclusion ?

Literacies – **technical** and **digital**

Trust versus suspicion - “ripped off”, billshock
Ability to understand/compare costs , contracts

Income – stable, predictable?

Motivation, confidence, cognition, perceptions, anxiety

Social connection - to get online, fix problems

English literacy (even for native English speakers)

Disability and physical ability (eg dexterity, eyesight)

Neighbours/friends who won't steal the device

Ability to “keep up” - compatibility/functions

Housing stable, shared with reliable others?

Newman L, Freeman T (2011), ‘Are health services’ information and communication pathways socially excluding?’, *7th Health Services & Policy Research Conference*, Adelaide 5-7 Dec.

Newman L, Biedrzycki K (2009). *Use of Mobile Phones as a Vehicle to Increase Internet Use to Improve Health & Wellbeing in South Australia*. Southgate Institute for Health Society & Equity, Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia, 32pp.

Australia 'Best place to live' but can we Read?



Reading:

- **46%** of adults aged 15-74 (ie 7 million) score at **lowest 2 reading levels**
- Level 3 = minimum for everyday life and work

Reading & Internet Use:

- 40% of this 7 million only use Email a few times a week, 33% use it for Online Shopping a few times a month.
- Those with literacy Levels 3-5 - 79% use Email, 64% Online Shopping.

UK: More than 5 million adults lack functional literacy; 1 in 6 “struggle with literacy” and are below the level expected of an 11 year old

Basic Education and Socioeconomic Status

Internet use lower among:

Adults with lower education and lower health literacy

Lower-income males

Lower-income older people (Jensen et al 2010)

Lower status groups use the Internet more for Entertainment while higher status groups increase their advantage eg Online Education (Helsper & Galacz 2009).

***Is Reading/Writing an overlooked barrier common to these groups?
Are work-arounds or hiding reading problems easier in Entertainment?***

Our ICTs research

Digital Use & Disadvantaged Groups (age 25-55)

*Lower income, Supported housing, Aboriginal, Refugees
People with Mental & Physical Health Conditions*



Young People

*Online Social Participation - Youth with Physical Disabilities (now also Rural)
Online Gambling among Young Adults*

Older People

*Digital Communications in Rural Falls Prevention for Older People
Older Greek & Italian Migrants' Information Needs*

Goodall K, Ward P, Newman L (2010), 'Use of information and communication technology to provide health information: What do older migrants know and what do they need to know?', *Quality in Primary Care*, 18(1): 27-32.

Newman L, et al (2012). *The Impact of Traditional & Digital Communication on User Access to Rural Health Services*. Report for Country Health SA. Southgate Institute, Flinders University, Adelaide.

Reading and Internet access & use



Digital dropouts – “ex-users” - intermittent users



Voice calls only, or more?

“I have a problem with the reading and writing side of it. OK I admit that, no worries, and it doesn't mean that I don't know what I'm doing. But...**if you have to go on the Internet and you can't damn well read the words...** how are you supposed to access the Internet in the first place?” (Men's support group)

“Well mobile phones they're okay, I suppose they are a necessity of today... and computers – **I'm illiterate for a starter**” (Employment support group)

Reading, literacy and Internet access & use

“I didn’t have a very good education and **I can really only read basic fictional books**. I think with the computer it would improve my spelling because you have to spell properly or the computer does not compute [work].” (Housing group)

“I think [their] friends would do more than [them on the Internet]. A lot of it is **the literacy** – the verbal communication” (Mother of youth with disability)

“**Everything is in English** – Internet, even mobile phones. A big barrier remains the language because you can have the website... a lot of information, and everything’s in English” (African refugee group)

Digital Divide among “Digital Natives”

Young people aged 10-18, cerebral palsy, brain injury are using computers and Internet BUT



www.pacer.org

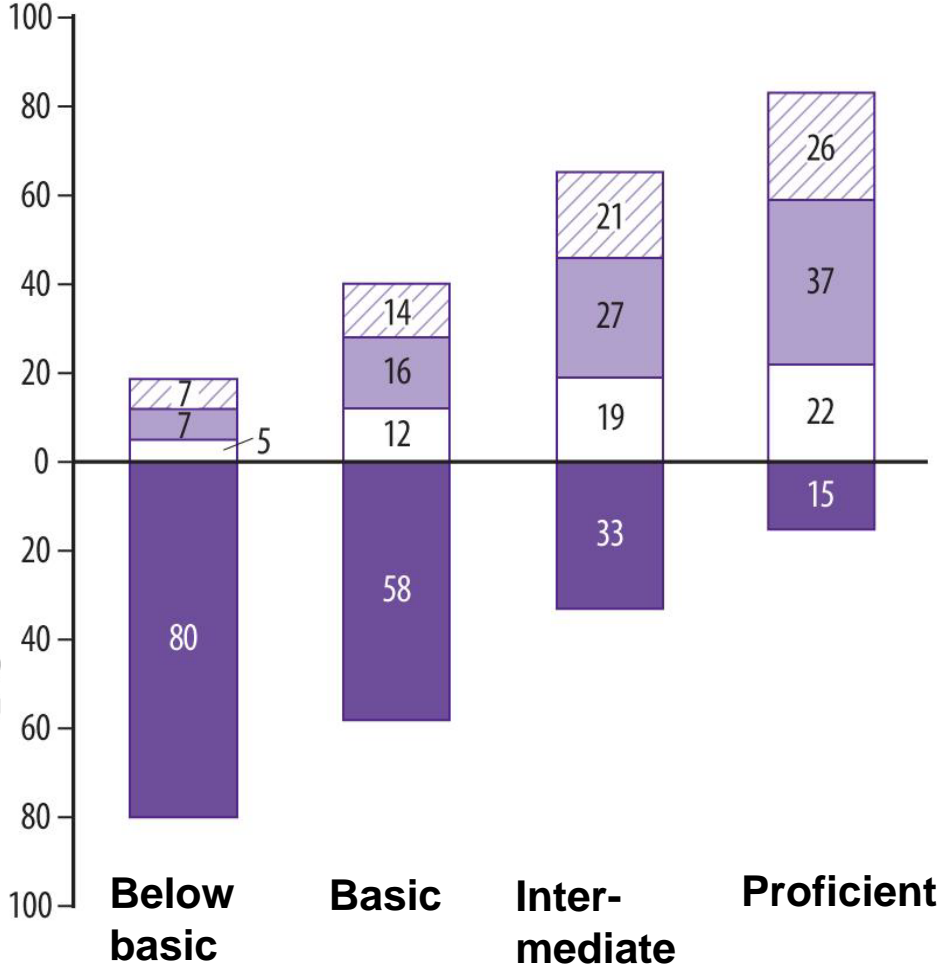
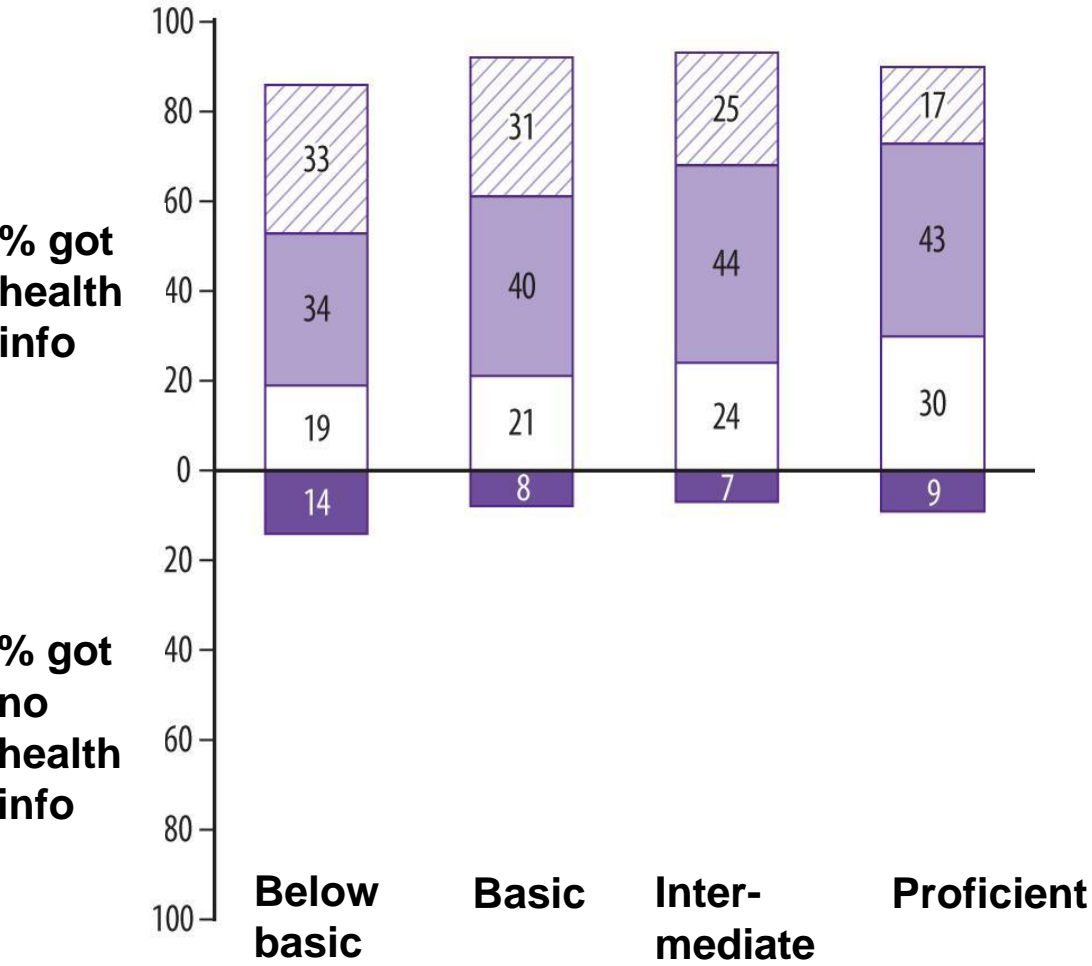
Barriers to more frequent and beneficial use

- disability-related (eg typing speed)
- confidence, social skills, family income etc
- **basic literacy levels**

New PhD student Emma Grace > Literacy & IT use



Health information: Radio/TV vs Internet (Kutner 2006)



A lot
 Some
 A little
 None

A lot
 Some
 A little
 None

Literacy 'key' to Ford workers' future

24 May 2013

Ford will close its manufacturing operations in Geelong and Broadmeadows (nr Melbourne).

Manufacturing workers in Victoria, which includes Ford, **54% score at the lowest** levels of functional literacy (ABS)

THE CONVERSATION



(AAP)

The announcement that Ford will close its manufacturing operations in Australia by 2016 at the cost of 1,200 jobs raises questions of what the workers' future employment options are.

By Stewart Riddle, *University of Southern Queensland*

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Implications - inclusionary processes?



Graham (2002:54) - “Replace the ideas that ICTs are intrinsically liberating” with recognition of “the biases that are currently wrapped up in the ways in which a whole variety of cyberspaces are currently being constructed, largely by and for the more powerful”.

- Online Text levels appropriate for those who CAN read
- NOT all English-speakers can read or write English
- May be illiterate in any NATIVE language
- Text-alternatives > visual, audio (popularity of Entertainment)
- Easier navigation (iPads, Kiosks etc)
- Measure Reading levels > do people need MORE than IT skills?
- ***Ensure WE don't become part of the problem in assumptions & rules***



THANK YOU

Twitter: @LareenNewman; LinkedIn; Google Scholar

Email: lareen.newman@flinders.edu.au

Phone: +61 8 7221 8488

Page: www.flinders.edu.au/people/lareen.newman