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Welcome to the APO Digital Inclusion Snapshot. These regular snapshots introduce some of the recent offerings from academic, government and non-government sources available in the APO Digital Inclusion Collection.

This snapshot is inspired by the initiation of the Digital Health Literacy program being piloted for the Australian Digital Health Agency between July and December 2019. This program will deliver training to support people to improve their digital health literacy, including how to find quality, reliable information, as well as understanding how to use and manage their My Health Record. While there has been substantial investment in the digital transformation of Australia's health system (as documented in the APO Digital Health Systems collection), the Digital Health Literacy pilot is a somewhat belated foray into addressing 'patient-side' digital inclusion issues that impede the realisation of maximal and equitable returns from that investment.

This snapshot examines the treatment of digital inclusion as a digital health system issue in Australia's National Digital Health Strategy and the subsequent Framework for Action that details how Australia will deliver the benefits of digitally enabled health and care. It also examines the revised Digital Inclusion Guide for Health and Social Care recently released by the UK National Health Service (NHS). The NHS has long been a leader in addressing digital inclusion as it pursues a digital-first service delivery strategy. Indeed, the Good Things Foundation, who are piloting Australia's Digital Health Literacy program, have been delivering a similar Widening Digital Participation program for the NHS since 2013 (see reviews in 2015 and 2016). While the NHS Digital Inclusion Guide points to the importance of skills training (like that offered through the Digital Health Literacy program), it also highlights a broader set of practical interventions necessary to address digital inclusion as a complex multifaceted barrier to equitable digital health outcomes. The guide provides a useful template that could be adapted for use, both in the

Australian health sector, and by organisations in other government service sectors undergoing digital transformation.

Australia's National Digital Health Strategy - Safe, seamless and secure: evolving health and care to meet the needs of modern Australia

The Australian Digital Health Agency (the Agency) was formed in 2016 by the Federal and State and Territory governments of Australia to lead the development and implantation of a National Digital Health Strategy (the Strategy). The Strategy, launched in July 2018, was the product of detailed consultation and co-production with a range of citizen and institutional stakeholders. It also draws on domestic and international evidence of the clinical and economic benefits of health system digital transformation.

The Agency notes that during the Strategy consultation process digital inclusion, referred to as "Australia's digital divide", was highlighted by stakeholders as a key barrier to the equitable distribution of the benefits of digitally transforming the health system (p.49). Despite this concern, and the Agency's reference to "improving equity of access" as one of the guiding principles underpinning the development of the strategy, the issue of digital inclusion is marginalised in the Strategy (p.19).

The Strategy opens with an appraisal of the digital health system landscape under the title 'Where are we now?'. While it celebrates the fact that "[t]he majority of Australians are digitally connected, and make everyday use of digital services across a range of industries including travel, banking, education and government services", it makes no reference at all to those who are not digitally connected (p.10). This oversight is not the result of a lack of acceptable evidence; buried on page 49 of the Strategy, the Agency accepts that "there are three million Australians without internet access, and only 63% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households have internet access at home". Given equity of access was a guiding principle in developing the Strategy, one would surely expect this to be fundamental to a description of the current state of digital health and digital connectivity against which strategic priorities were to be set.

Overall, discussion of digital inclusion in the Strategy is limited to around half a page (of a total of 63 pages). This discussion is included under the incongruous strategic priority of supporting "[a] thriving digital health industry delivering world-class innovation" (p.47). Here the Agency clearly highlights that "while digital innovation is transforming many aspects of our lives, there is not yet equal opportunity for all to participate, particularly those people who make the greatest use of health services". Given this acknowledgment and the principle of equity, it is perplexing that the Agency does not consider addressing digital inclusion to be one of the six critical success factors of the Strategy (see pp.52-53).

The Agency does call for some direct action on digital inclusion as part of the Strategy – the convening of "stakeholders across the community to develop comprehensive approaches to digital inclusion, ensuring that actions to address *digital literacy* are based on high-quality evidence for how best to support people who are currently experiencing digital disadvantage" (p.50, my italics). Whilst this is commendable, in limiting action to digital literacy, it does not engage with the access, accessibility and financial barriers to digital inclusion all clearly identified by stakeholders in the consultation process as highlighted on page 49 of the Strategy.

Framework for Action: How Australia will deliver the benefits of digitally enabled health and care

Following the release of the National Digital Health Strategy, the Australian Digital Health Agency conducted a further round of consultation to identify the activities that would be undertaken to address each of the seven strategic priorities identified in the Strategy. The resulting Framework for Action (the Framework) outlines 44 key activities prioritised for delivery between 2018 and 2022 that are "necessary to implementing the National Digital Health Strategy and realising the benefits of digitally enabled health and care" (p.3).

The Agency notes that "digital inclusion features prominently in [the Framework] to ensure that all Australians will have access to the coming wave of digital health technologies" (p.82). However, this is not actually evident in the document. Digital inclusion remains somewhat uncomfortably nestled under National Digital Health Strategy priority seven: "a thriving digital health industry delivering world-class innovation" (p.73) and just two of the nine fields of action identified under this priority are targeted at addressing it–Action 7.1.1 and Action 7.1.2.

According to Action 7.1.1, "barriers to digital inclusion" will be addressed (p.75). This will involve the promotion of digital inclusion through "thought leadership, conference presentations and industry engagement". Also, a network of local community partners (such as NGOs and public libraries) will be formed to deliver digital literacy training for target population groups (such as Indigenous Australians and older Australians) (p.75). This Action underpins investment in the Digital Health Literacy program currently being piloted.

Under Action 7.1.2, "reliable and affordable connectivity" is to be provided to all Australians (p.75). According to the Agency, this commitment is primarily being delivered by the rollout of the National Broadband Network (NBN). Although this is the only identified activity on the Action 7.1.2 timeline, the Agency does concede that "further government intervention" is likely to be required to address service availability for some user groups, including "people with disability or life-threatening health conditions, people living in remote Indigenous communities, some older people with limited digital literacy, and people without a permanent fixed address" (p.76).

The Framework references a miscellaneous collection of existing government and non-government agencies involved in measuring or responding in some way to digital inclusion, but it is not clear how these initiatives align with each other, the Strategy or the Framework (see p.82).

The Australian Digital Health Agency through the National Digital Health Strategy and Framework for Action clearly outlines the many benefits an Australian digital health system will generate. The Agency acknowledges digital inclusion as a barrier to the equitable distribution of the benefits of such a system—nevertheless, addressing this issue does not feature prominently in the Strategy or Framework. The actions to be pursued also focus largely on digital literacy which is just one aspect of digital inclusion. Perhaps digital inclusion would have received greater attention had the Agency considered it to be one of the critical success factors for the Strategy.

Digital Inclusion Guide for Health and Social Care

In early July 2019 the UK National Health Service (NHS) released a revised edition of its *Digital Inclusion Guide for Health and Social Car* (the Guide). The Guide aims to assist local health and care organisations take practical steps to increase access to digital services for all members of their communities.

The UK has been a global leader in recognising and responding to the issue of digital inclusion. The Guide draws on (and provides links to) much of the evidence compiled in the UK that identifies the nature and extent of digital inclusion, as well as the type of interventions that can be deployed to address the issue.

It highlights the critical impact that digital inclusion has on realising the benefits of digitally transforming the UK health and social care systems as set out in the NHS Long Term Plan. It also emphasises the role that health and social care providers can play in addressing digital inclusion.

The NHS takes a broad approach to digital inclusion, conceptualising it not only in terms of a deficiency of digital skills, but also as an issue of connectivity and accessibility (p.10). As such, the recommended "practical steps to help with digital inclusion locally" set out in the Guide for health and social care providers tackle a range of barriers to digital inclusion (p.27). The interventions include: digital skills training, training and equipping digital champions to work with the community, facilitating intergenerational mentoring, providing free public wi-fi, engaging in digital inclusion-focussed social prescribing, providing assistive technologies, ensuring staff have digital skills and confidence, and raising awareness of digital inclusion. The Guide acknowledges that providers may not be directly engaged in some of these interventions, and it provides a simple step-by-step guide to commissioning digital inclusion support. It concludes with links to the government, community and commercial partners that health and social care organisations may work with in addressing digital inclusion.

The Guide is simple and succinct, but it presents a useful template that could be adapted for use in other government service sectors undergoing digital transformation. It might prove a useful model for considering a broader range of practical interventions that could be undertaken by Australian health and social care providers to address digital inclusion.

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The APO Digital Inclusion Collection features reports, commentary and other grey literature related to digital inclusion in Australia and internationally. The collection is supported by the Centre for Social Impact at Swinburne University.

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