



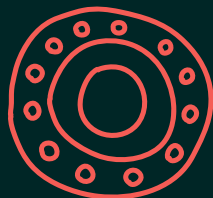
Measuring
Digital
Inclusion
**for First Nations
Australians**

Counting on Connectivity

Regional and Remote Towns Research
2025 Supplementary Report

2026





We respectfully acknowledge the Barngala, Kaurareg, Ngoonooru Wajarri, Nyiyaparli, Martu, Rirratjinu, Gumatj, Wakka Wakka, Wardandi Noongar, Warrwa, Warumungu, Widjabul/Wia-bal (Bundjalung Nation), and other Traditional Owners of the lands on which this research was conducted. We extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and to their Ancestors and Elders, past and present. We also acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and their Ancestors of the lands and waters across Australia on which we work, live and undertake other related research.

Warning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this report may contain images and names of deceased persons.



Acknowledgements

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Research team

The 2025 regional target research was led by First Nations Principal Research Fellow Dr Heron Loban (Torres Strait Islander Mabuiag/Boigu) in 2025. Thanks to Heron, Project Manager Alison Barton (Wiradjuri) and all members of the ADII and Mapping the Digital Gap research team who participated in the research, data analysis and report writing.

Research participants

A big thank you to all 729 First Nations Australians in the ten regional towns who participated in the surveys.

Community partners and co-researchers

This research would not have been possible without our First Nations community partners in the ten regional towns. We thank Aboriginal Resource and Development Service (Nhulunbuy), Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa (Newman), Larrkardi Radio 6DBY (Derby), Myuma Ltd (Mt Isa), Ngulingah/Lismore Local Aboriginal Land Council (Lismore), Port Lincoln Aboriginal Community Council, Wayne Bynder (Bunbury and Meekatharra), Wilya Janta (Tennant Creek), and Torres Strait Islander Media Association (Waiben/Thursday Island) for their collaboration and support. We also thank the many community co-researchers from these organisations that supported the research through engagement and surveys with local residents in the ten regional towns.

Advisory Group

Thank you to the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group for recommending this research and for their leadership as Advisory Group for this research project. Thanks also to the FNDIAG Secretariat for input and support.

Research Partner organisations

We also acknowledge First Nations research partner organisation Ipsos Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Unit for the national data collection, industry partner Social Research Centre for the data processing and Dassier for the Dashboard development.

Research Ethics

This research project has received Ethics approval from the Human Research Ethics Committees of RMIT University (#28091) and Swinburne University (#8485). The Mapping the Digital Gap projects also have RMIT Ethics approval (MtDG Phase1 #24155 / MtDG2 Phase 2 #28005). The ADII has Ethics approval through Swinburne University (#4585).

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Message from Authors



Digital inclusion is no longer a ‘nice-to-have’

Digital technologies are now an integral part of our everyday lives, vital for staying connected with family and friends, keeping informed, safety, accessing critical government services, banking, health, education, economic participation and much more. Yet too many First Nations Australians are digitally excluded, primarily due to inequities in reliable connectivity, affordable access to internet or devices, and digital skills or supports needed to use critical online services and safely and confidently navigate the internet.

In rural and remote areas, limited infrastructure and sparse service provision restrict access for many First Nations Australians. Exclusion is also produced by systems that have failed to account for the full range of people who need to use them including the elderly, those facing economic hardship, insecure housing, or inaccessible design as well as by the uneven distribution of support across different communities.

This report outlines the findings of 729 surveys of digital inclusion and communications and media use undertaken by First Nations Australians living in ten regional towns across Australia.

The surveys were undertaken in partnership with local First Nations organisations and community co-researchers in each location from April to September 2025. We gratefully acknowledge the critical contribution to this research by these partner organisations and co-researchers (see Research Sites section) in providing the trust, enduring relationships and lived local knowledge to make the research possible.

This research forms part of the first round of data collection for the Australian Government-funded *Measuring Digital Inclusion for First Nations Australians* project, aimed at measuring progress on Closing the Gap Target 17. However, due to project timing, the data was collected after other data which was used in the first ‘Counting on Connectivity’ report and Dashboard, launched in November 2025.

This supplementary report provides profiles of each of the ten regional sites with the data specific to each site in the Research Sites section. Following this, the Analysis section provides broader analysis of the aggregate results from all ten sites, with comparison with findings for First Nations Australians living in urban, regional and remote Australia as well as non-First Nations Australians.

The collected data is also provided back to each site as part of our commitment to Indigenous data sovereignty. First Nations communities and organisations can use this locally specific data to inform planning, advocacy and development efforts. We have included summary data within this report, however a full downloadable data set is [available online with the report](#).

We thank the Australian Government for this funding to address the lack of available data to measure Target 17. For the second round, regional sites data will be combined with Ipsos and *Mapping the Digital Gap* data collection to provide a more robust sample for the 2027 measure of First Nations digital inclusion nationally.

***Measuring Digital Inclusion for
First Nations Australians research team***

Closing the Gap Target 17

What is digital inclusion?

Digital inclusion means having reliable, safe and affordable access to the internet and digital technologies along with the skills, confidence, and opportunities needed to participate fully in social, cultural, and economic life.

For First Nations Australians, digital inclusion is more than the mechanics of connectivity. It is about being connected to exercise informed decision-making, cultural agency, and self-determination in a rapidly transforming digital world. Being digitally included ensures individuals, families, and communities can:



Access accurate information to make informed decisions about their own lives;



Maintain strong connections to culture, language, and Country; and



Participate safely and confidently in online education, health, employment, and community life.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap has 19 national socio-economic outcomes and 17 targets. This includes:

Outcome 17

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives.

Target 17 sets out a specific goal:

Target 17

By 2026, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equal levels of digital inclusion.¹

Achieving Target 17 will require sustained partnership, investment and culturally grounded approaches that centre First Nations leadership, support community-led solutions, and build on existing strengths in innovation, resilience and digital capacity across the country.

Digital inclusion in regional towns

Most Australians have access to the internet, with recent research showing that only 2% did not have access in 2024, compared to 16% in 2010.² Those who do not have access or do not use the internet are at higher risk of digital exclusion. The 2025 Australian Digital Inclusion Index found that around one in five Australians are **excluded or highly excluded**.³ However, for First Nations Australians, the rate of digital exclusion doubles to two in five nationally.⁴

The rate of exclusion is primarily shaped by geographic and systemic barriers. Each regional town has its own unique context. Some have high rates of mobility among First Nations residents similar to remote communities or homelands in the region, while others have a more stable population with greater education and employment opportunities.

The types of access to technologies vary, with some having reliable mobile and fixed nbn services, while others have patchy mobile coverage and nbn satellite services, and high reliance on pre-paid mobile and public Wi-Fi.

For these reasons, it is important to understand how digital inclusion rates vary in different locations and contexts in order to ensure solutions are targeted and fit-for-purpose.

About the project

Measuring Digital Inclusion for First Nations Australians

is a three-year project funded by the Australian Government to measure digital inclusion for First Nations people nationally and track changes in the scale and nature of the digital gap relative to non-First Nations Australians.

By expanding on the *Australian Digital Inclusion Index* (ADII) data collection, the project aims to develop a comparative framework for measuring **Closing the Gap Outcome 17** and tracking progress on **Target 17**.

The project adapts the **Australian Internet Usage Survey** (AIUS) used by the *Australian Digital Inclusion Index* (ADII) to measure digital inclusion across three key dimensions of Access, Affordability, and Digital Ability. The adapted survey also includes questions about the use of media and information services and non-digital communication.

First Nations leadership and governance

First Nations leadership and governance are central to the project. The project is co-led by key First Nations staff on the research team, a First Nations steering group, a contracted First Nations survey company, and partnerships with First Nations organisations in targeted regional research sites.

The Measuring Digital Inclusion for First Nations Australians project is guided by the core values and principles outlined in:

- The **NHMRC Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Communities** (2018)
- The **AIATSIS (2021) Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research, Indigenous Data Governance⁵ and Sovereignty⁶**; and
- The **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** (2007)

Part of a larger picture

The project integrates data from the ADII and the *Mapping the Digital Gap* projects to create a comprehensive national picture of digital inclusion for First Nations Australians.

The **Australian Digital Inclusion Index**, established in 2016, is a national survey to track who uses the internet, how Australians benefit from the internet and what barriers exist to its connection and use. The ADII is funded by Telstra and undertaken biennially by RMIT University and Swinburne University of Technology.

In 2021, Telstra funded the ADII research team to undertake **Mapping the Digital Gap**, a separate longitudinal study of digital inclusion and media use in remote First Nations communities in partnership with local First Nations organisations.



Access

Opportunities to gain a reliable internet connection and use various digital devices, along with frequency of online access and data use.



Affordability

The share of a household's monthly income needed to buy an adequate internet and mobile service bundle, informed by composition / remoteness.



Digital Ability

The skills and confidence to use digital tools and applications safely and effectively.



Media and Information

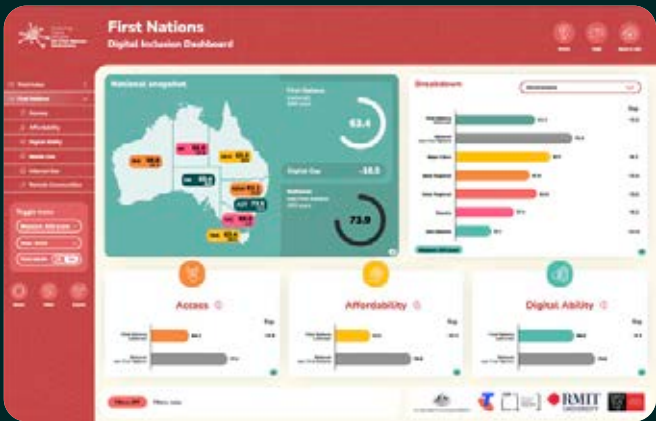
Use of broadcast and digital media services to access news, information and relevant First Nations content.

Data collection

In 2024-25, more than 3,500 surveys were completed with First Nations people aged 18 years and over from urban, regional and remote Australia using three data collection modes.

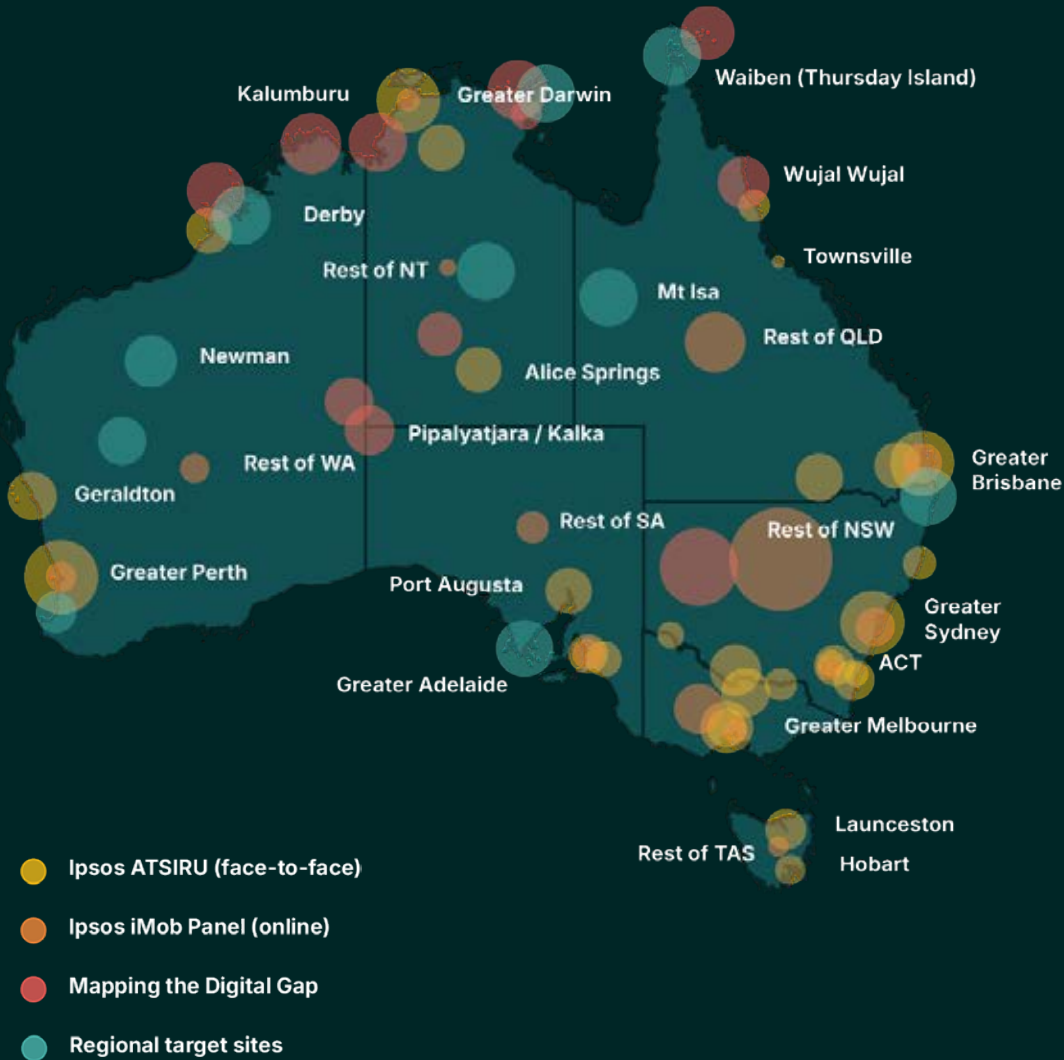
Data collected by First Nations survey partner Ipsos ATSIRU (Mode 1) and the Mapping the Digital Gap project (Mode 2) was weighted and merged with data from the ADII to generate an index of First Nations digital inclusion across Australia.

By comparing results with 3065 surveys collected for the ADII, we derived an accurate national measure of First Nations digital inclusion and the scale and nature of the digital gap for the first time. These findings informed the *Counting on Connectivity: Measuring digital inclusion for First Nations Australians 2025* report and a new First Nations Dashboard on the ADII website.



First Nations Digital Inclusion Dashboard
dashboard.digitalinclusionindex.org.au/FirstNations

Figure 1. Locations, methods, and amount of targeted data collection by research team and partners.⁷



Data Collection Modes

3,065 Respondents to the Australian Internet Usage Survey in 2024, including a small sample of First Nations respondents.

807 **Mode 1**
First Nations survey respondents in remote and very remote communities through the *Mapping the Digital Gap* project.

1,998 **Mode 2**
First Nations survey respondents across urban, regional and some remote areas through the *Measuring Digital Inclusion for First Nations Australians* project.

729 **Mode 3**
First Nations survey respondents in 10 regional sites through partnerships with local First Nations organisations.
These surveys were not ready in time for inclusion in the 2025 Index

Regional sites

Rationale and selection of ten regional and remote towns

To supplement the above modes of data collection and provide more granular data from regional and remote towns, the research team partnered with First Nations organisations to conduct in-person surveys in ten regional towns across Australia. A total of 729 surveys were collected in these locations.

The ten sites were selected based on analysis of the locations of face-to-face survey sites under Ipsos ATSIU and Mapping the Digital Gap data collection to ensure geographic spread by States/Territories and remoteness categories. Selection of willing communities and partner organisations also played a role in selection.

Second round data collection

A second full survey round in 2026-27 will track changes in digital inclusion and media use over time. Round 2 surveys collected in the regional and remote sites will be combined with other national data to provide a more robust national sample for the 2027 Counting on Connectivity report, removing the need for another supplementary report.

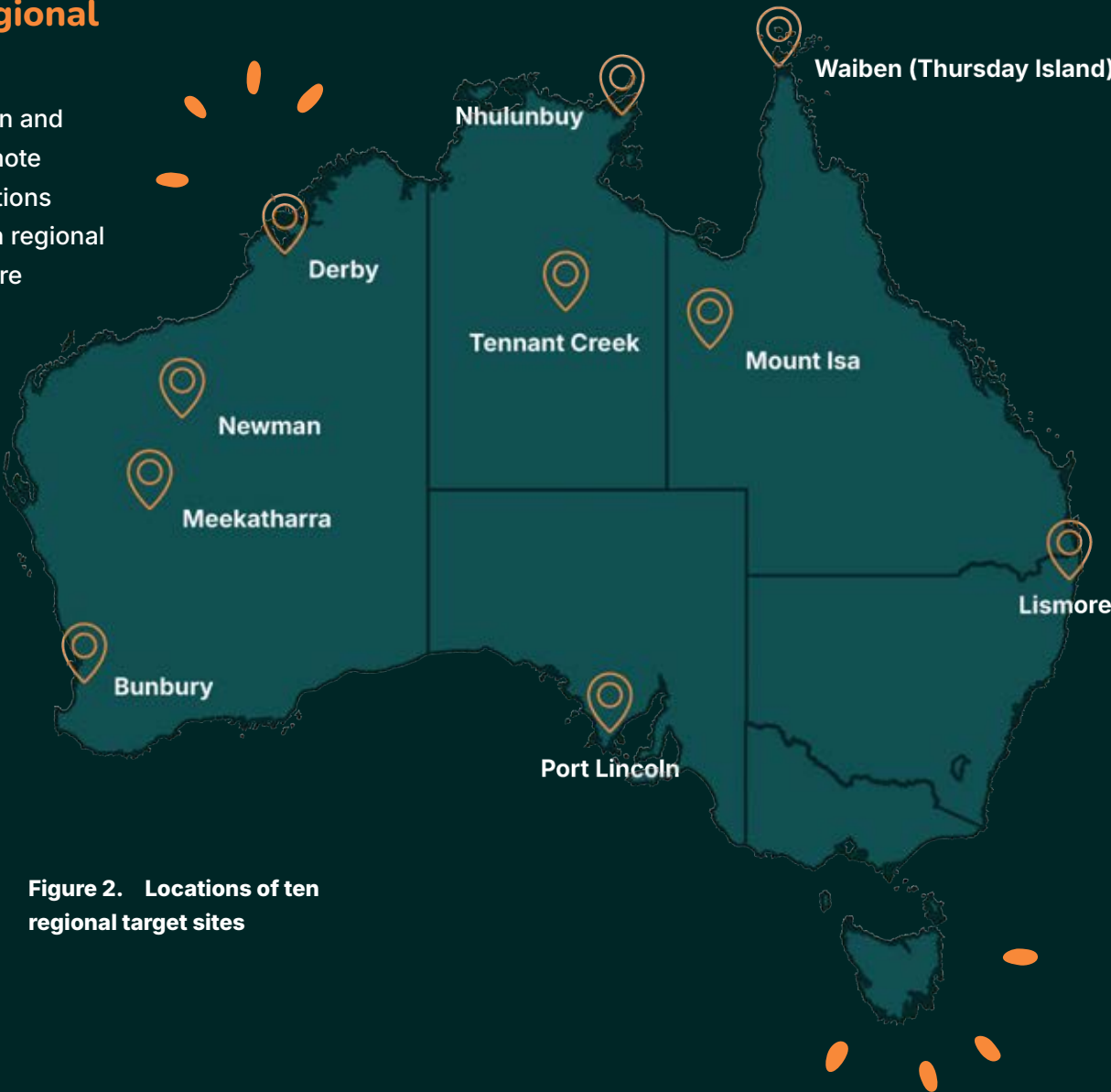


Figure 2. Locations of ten regional target sites

2025 regional site sample size

State	Town	No. of surveys
WA	Bunbury	39
	Meekatharra	57
	Newman	67
	Derby	81
SA	Port Lincoln	80
NT	Tennant Creek	80
	Nhulunbuy	83
QLD	Mount Isa	81
	Waiben (Thursday Island)	82
NSW	Lismore	79

Note on ABS data

To ensure our findings accurately represent the whole community, not just those who participated in the survey, the data has been weighted using population data from the 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census. As this data is now five years old, it may not reflect how communities have changed. The Census is also known to undercount First Nations populations in regional areas due to low participation, mobility or non-disclosure of identity. While we have sought to provide reliable results based on survey data collected, readers should keep these weighting limitations in mind when interpreting results at individual sites.

Why context matters

Of the thousands of remote and regional towns across Australia, there are wide variations in characteristics, including size, remoteness, demographic makeup and availability of services.

The proportion and distribution of the First Nations population also impact on digital inclusion patterns within each town. The description and results for the ten research sites, outlined in the Research Sites section, show the diversity of findings from this research and why context matters.



Regional hubs

Some towns are in proximity to remote communities and homelands, acting as regional hubs especially in NT, WA and QLD. These include Nhulunbuy, Waiben/Thursday Island, Derby, Newman and Tennant Creek. These sites are more likely to have regional government, banking and health services as well as retail options, with fluctuating populations of visitors from communities in the region to access these services. The survey sample in these sites typically includes a larger proportion of remote residents, increasing the variations in digital inclusion levels.



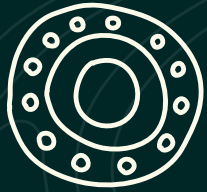
Low or dispersed First Nations population

Some towns have low or dispersed First Nations populations and a limited range of targeted First Nations services (Port Lincoln, Bunbury). Survey findings display characteristics that align with findings for inner regional and urban locations.



First Nations population centres

Some regional towns have high proportion of First Nations populations, including research sites Waiben/Thursday Island (69%), Tennant Creek (55%), Meekatharra (46%) and Derby (42%). These towns typically have a wide distribution in digital inclusion among First Nations residents, with impacting factors including income, employment, education and housing status. Many remote and very remote towns have community living areas or 'town camps' in or around the town (Tennant Creek, Newman) with targeted agency support, or designated communities in close proximity to town (Derby, Lismore). While providing affordable housing and cultural safety, these settlements often have limited on-site services and may have similar living conditions to remote communities, including overcrowded housing and transient populations from communities in the region.



National results

The 2025 Counting on
Connectivity report found that
among First Nations Australians
nationally...



92% used the internet

in the last week and 96% within the last six months



**96% own or share a mobile
phone**



93% use social media

to keep in touch with family and friends



92% used online banking

in the last six months



**86% used online government
services**

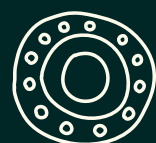
in the last six months



**18-34 year olds have high
Digital Ability**

with a Digital Ability score of **78.8**, 5.0 points
above the non-First Nations average of **73.8**

The digital inclusion gap



Digital Inclusion

63.4 First Nations national

73.9 National non-First Nations

10.5

12.8

13.3

5.3



Access

64.3

First Nations national

77.2

National non-First Nations



Affordability

57.3

First Nations national

70.6

National non-First Nations



Digital Ability

68.6

First Nations national

73.8

National non-First Nations

First Nations Australians are digitally excluded at double the rate of other Australians

Nearly a quarter of First Nations Australians (23%) are considered Highly Excluded with over two in five (41%) rated as Excluded or Highly Excluded.



Figure 3. Exclusion scores for First Nations national average and non-First Nations average

Being digitally excluded means one is less able to access, afford or use digital technologies to meet everyday needs and pursue their aspirations. It means missing out on critical services, communication and opportunities.

Some gap figures may not add up due to rounding (+/- 0.1 variation)

Geographic gap

The digital gap increases significantly with remoteness from 6.2 in major cities to 22.8 in very remote Australia, more than double the national average gap of 10.5. Access to reliable connectivity varies widely in remote and regional areas.

6.2 Major Cities
22.8 Very Remote Australia

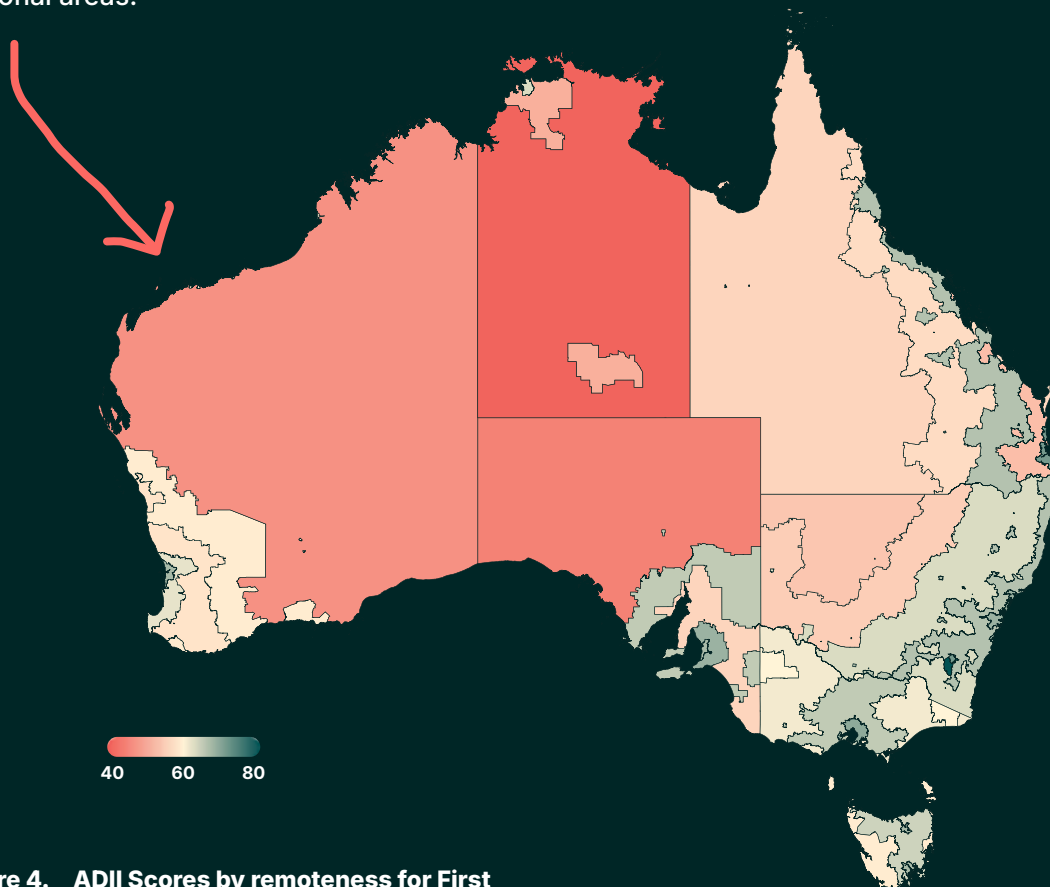


Figure 4. ADII Scores by remoteness for First Nations Australians

The digital gap is spread evenly across most states, however those with a larger remote population have much lower averages.

There is variation in digital inclusion between states, largely related to the proportion of people living in remote and very remote areas. The gaps are greatest in Northern Territory (NT) (average score is 56.6, a 17.3 gap), Western Australia (WA) (avg. 58.8, 15.1 gap), and New South Wales (NSW) (avg. 63.1, 10.8 gap).

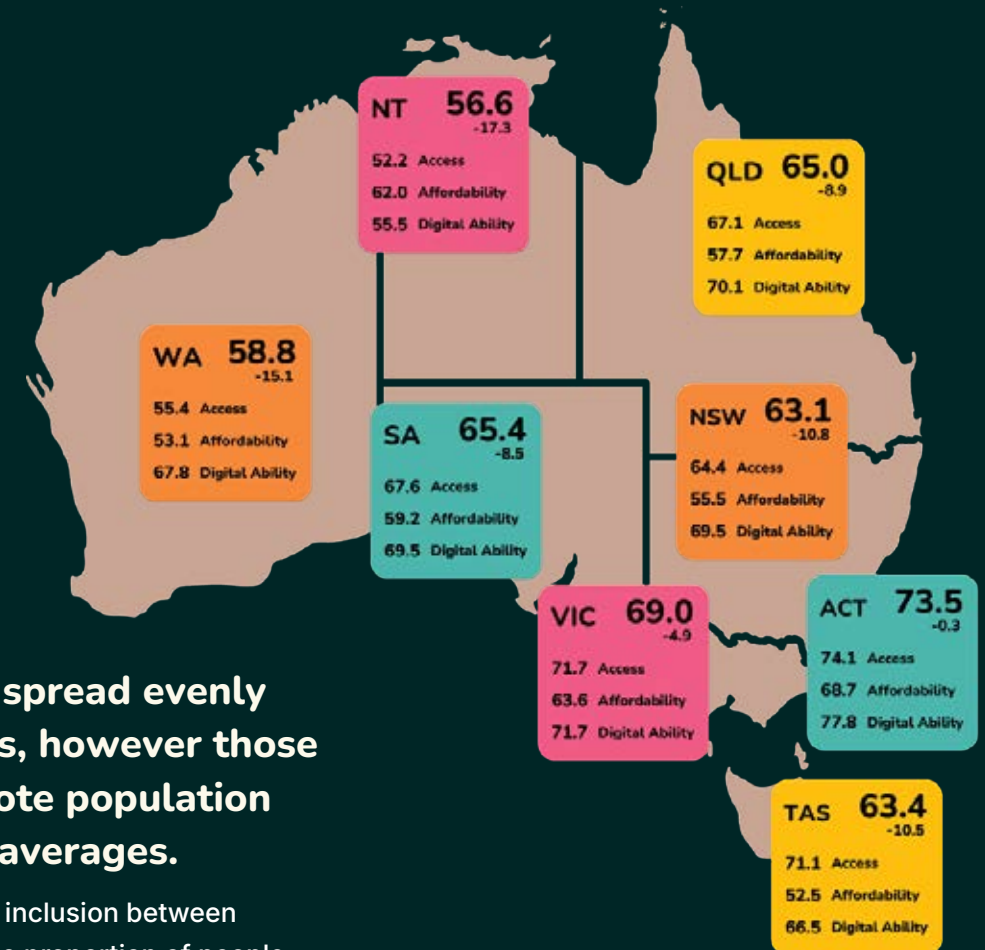
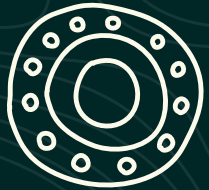


Figure 5. State/territory ADII and Dimension scores, and ADII score gap, for First Nations Australians



Remote and Regional Towns Research

Key Findings



Access



Access refers to opportunities for a reliable internet connection and use of various digital devices to access online services and content, along with frequency of online access and data use.

The Counting on Connectivity report showed that the national Access gap **increased significantly with remoteness—from 7.8 in major cities to 39.9 in very remote areas.**

While over four in five First Nations respondents in the ten regional and remote towns use the internet daily, **nearly one in ten never use the internet.**

Contributing factors to the Access gap include high rates of mobile-only users for internet access, low household broadband uptake, low household computer access, limited community access facilities and variations in provision of public Wi-Fi services.

Regional results

Across the ten regional sites, more than a quarter of respondents (26%) reported not having enough digital devices to meet household requirements.

Mobile phones are the primary devices used for making and receiving calls for 93% of all respondents, with an average of 2.6 mobile phones per household. Since the shutdown of 3G in October 2024, 5G coverage has expanded across regional Australia, including in nine of the ten sites (excluding Nhulunbuy NT), with 5G now being used by 70% of those surveyed.



83%

regularly access the internet

9% never use the internet



47%

access the internet at houses of friends and or family



27%

access the internet using Wi-Fi in public spaces



93%

use a mobile phone to make and receive calls

91%

use smartphones



26%

said they do not have enough digital devices to support everyone's needs



11%

use a public phone to make and receive phone calls

38%

reported the nearest public phone as being reliable

However, 10% of all respondents do not own or share a mobile phone, and 58% of those on pre-paid services reported running out of data at times. Combined with a lack of household phones (3%), this means that public phones remain a critical safety net for communications including in emergency situations, with 11% reporting making calls via a public phone. Public Wi-Fi also provides a means of internet access for those without mobile coverage or data, with 27% having used public Wi-Fi in the previous six months.

Affordability

The ADII measure of Affordability is based on the share of a household's monthly income needed to buy an adequate internet and mobile service bundle tailored to its composition and remoteness.

The Counting on Connectivity report found that, of the three key elements of digital inclusion, **Affordability was the key contributor to the digital gap with a national average gap of 13.3**. This was relatively consistent across remoteness zones, with a gap of 12.4 in major cities, 15.7 in inner regional and 15.7 in remote Australia.

The gap was greatest for Elders aged 75 and over (29.2), those experiencing unemployment (28.2), people in single person households (27.3), public housing residents (22.4), people who did not complete secondary school (22.4), those on income support (22.4) and people with disability (20.1).

For First Nations households in regional and remote towns, **Affordability is a primary barrier to having sufficient broadband and mobile services, devices and data**.

Despite the importance of connectivity, increasing cost of living pressures are forcing households to prioritise food, rent, power and other essentials over adequate connectivity. This is seen through high rates of pre-paid mobile-only users, with relatively low uptake of post-paid mobile and fixed broadband services.



\$197

average monthly household expenditure
on mobile phone and internet



78%

of mobile phone users use pre-paid services



42%

make compromises on speed and/or data in order to afford the internet

This compares with 38% for First Nations Australians nationally



46%

said they have to sacrifice or cut back on essential costs to afford the internet

Nationally, this number was 42% for all First Nations Australians and 18% for non-First Nations Australians



25%

of those who do not use the internet said:
the cost of internet is a key barrier to use



Digital Ability

Digital Ability refers to the skills and confidence to use digital tools and applications safely and effectively. This ability is often reflected in how people engage with everyday online activities.

Across the ten regional sites we visited, respondents regularly used online banking, accessed government services online, or kept in touch with family and friends online. Online entertainment and shopping is also prominent. It highlights digital participation is well-established, particularly for essential services, communication and entertainment.

Despite the strong level of digital engagement, overall Digital Ability remains low/moderate, with the average Internet Skills Scale score across these regional and remote towns being 19.3 out of 30, suggesting there are still gaps.

The Internet Skills Scale

The Internet Skills Scale score is derived from six key skill categories. Across these six key skill types, **operational basic**, **social**, and **smart technology** skills are the highest. Following these closely are **information search** and **operational advanced** skills, while **creative** skills are notably lower.

However, there are also clear differences between each regional and remote town. Factors such as age, education, and employment play an important role. These intersecting factors will be explored in more detail later in the report to highlight where targeted digital inclusion efforts are most needed.



19.3

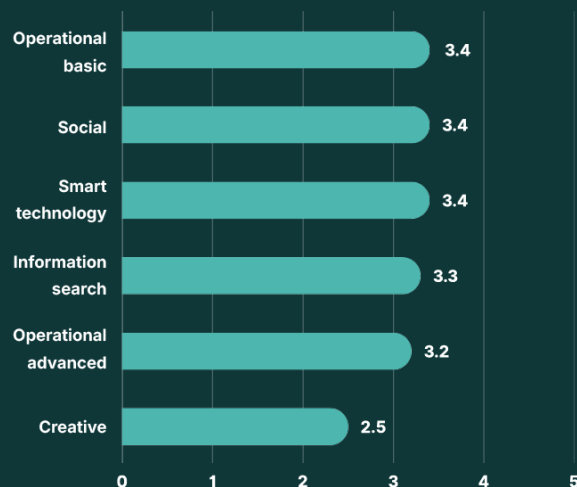
Average measure of digital ability

Out of 30



Internet Skills Scale

Ten regional sites, 2025



86%

use online banking

internet users, last six months



81%

use online government services

internet users, last six months



83%

use the internet to keep in touch with family or friends

internet users, last six months



62%

use online shopping

internet users, last six months



86%

use online entertainment

internet users, last six months



26%

use GenAI tools

internet users, last six months



Media and information



This element is a measure of respondents' use of broadcast and digital media platforms to access news, information, media and streaming content, including by trusted and locally relevant First Nations services.

The inclusion of this element in our survey recognises the ongoing importance of broadcasting and media services in supporting informed decision-making, cultural safety and trust, especially for those with limited or no digital access. This is recognised in Closing the Gap Outcome 17, which includes measures related to access to media and broadcast services, particularly First Nations produced services and content.⁸

Usage data across the regional and remote towns show a similar pattern to national trends towards use of digital platforms and online streaming services, with most TV and media content access via YouTube (44%) and streaming services (43%) rather than commercial TV (32%). Similarly, the primary sources of news and information is Facebook (38%), ahead of commercial TV and First Nations services.

This points to the convenience of individual access and choice via a mobile device over shared access devices (TV and radio). However, reliance on streamed and online content is increasing data usage and household costs, especially via pre-paid services.



55%

listen to First Nations radio services

17% daily

30%

listen to radio via car radio

17%

access radio and music via streaming services

on a mobile phone or tablet



38%

access daily news and information via Facebook

30% commercial TV



58%

accessed emergency information via face-to-face communication

43% Facebook



80%

watch movies or online content via mobile phones



61%

watch movies or online content via smart TV

connected to the internet



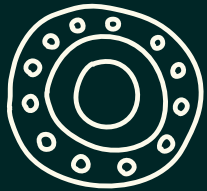
29%

watch YouTube daily

43% streaming services

32% commercial TV





Research Sites

Profiles and results



Bunbury (Goomburrup)

Research
lead

Wayne
Bynder

Bunbury is a coastal city located on the traditional lands of the Wardandi Noongar people. It is the third most populous town in Western Australia, and forms part of the South West Native Title Settlement; the largest native title settlement in Australia at 200,000 square kilometres.

Bunbury has a Services Australia Centre (Centrelink, Medicare and My Aged Care), as well as several post offices and banks. Local council services are provided by the City of Bunbury.

Bunbury participated in the Regional Connectivity Program Round 2 and had two sites upgraded with six new fixed wireless sites deployed in January 2025 to improve broadband service in the region. The Bunbury Visitor's Centre has free Wi-Fi.



Remoteness

Inner Regional

Population

1,402

29,725

Aboriginal and/or
Torres Strait Islander

Total (all persons)

Households

570

3.0

number of
households

avg people per
household

Income

\$505

\$1,343

avg personal weekly
income

avg household
weekly income

Employment

50% In the labour force (45% full-time, 8% part-time, 17% unemployed)

Age

22

Gender

49.9%

median age

female

Language

3.5%

residents who speak
language at home

2.4% Nyungar
0.7% Australian
Indigenous
Languages (other)
0.2% Wajarri

Education

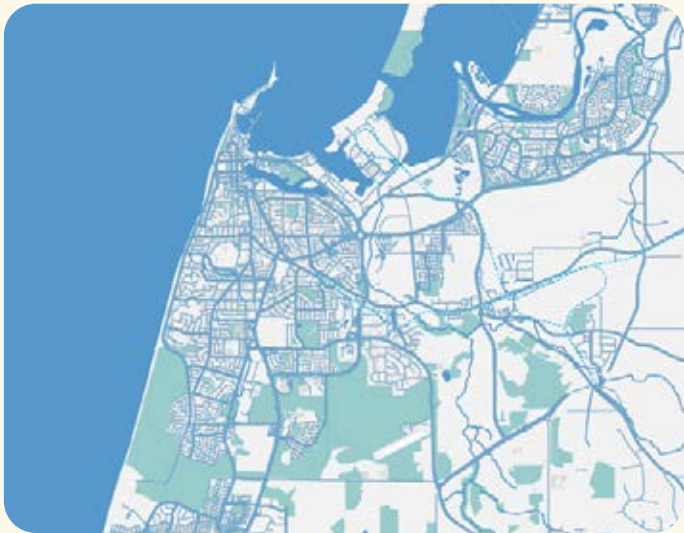
42% Up to year 10

9% Completed high school

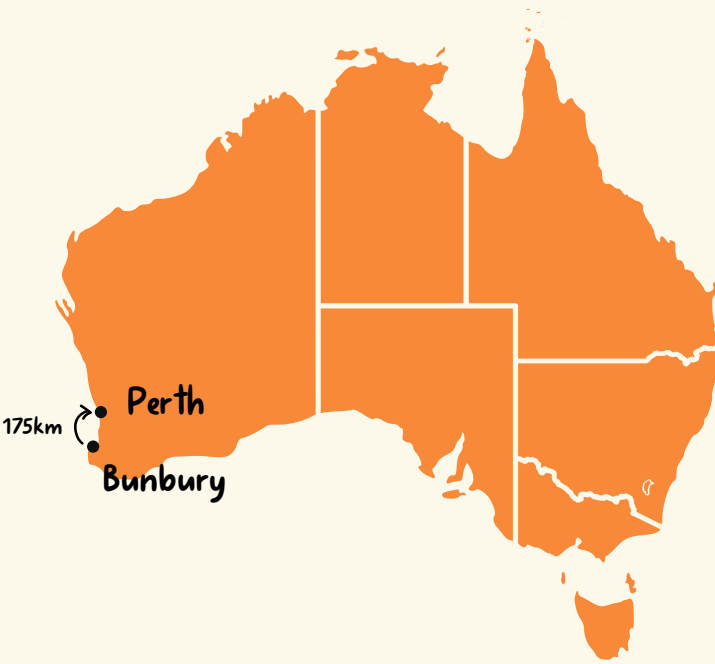
26% Attained tertiary qualification

*Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, ABS 2021

Results may not be wholly reliable due to age of census and challenges with collecting census data in remote areas



Bunbury town map



Communications services available



Mobile coverage

4G / 5G

Telstra / Optus /
Vodafone



Fixed line network backhaul

Fibre optic cable;
fixed-wireless



ADSL

None



Public phones

15



nbn type

FTTN/FTTP



LEO satellite use

Starlink



Access computers

Job centres,
Library



Public Wi-Fi

Library and First Nations
organisations ie.,
SWAMS, Goomburup,
job networks



TV services

Broadcast
(free-to-air)



Radio services

Bunbury Community
Radio 103.7; Hit
95.7FM Southwest;
SEN Spirit 621AM;
Triple M Bunbury
963AM



First Nations radio

Noongar Radio
Available from Perth via
streaming only

Access

 **99.5%**
own or share a mobile phone

 **87%**
of residences do not have
fixed home internet

 **13%**
of residences have nbn home
internet;
46% fixed line
9% fixed wireless
45% Sky Muster

 **48%**
of respondents have a
portable modem or Wi-Fi
device for mobile broadband

 **27%**
are on a post-paid mobile
service

 **72%**
use 5G with their mobile
phone

 **39% have experienced
connectivity or
network issues**
affecting mobile and internet
use in the past six months

 **20%**
reported there are no public
phones available

Affordability

 **\$186/month**
average household
expenditure on phone and
internet services

 **\$134/month**
average household
expenditure on mobile

 **73%**
of mobile users are on
pre-paid plans

 **43% have cut back on
essential household
costs**
to afford internet in past six
months

 **14% have
compromised on
connection speed or
quality**
due to affordability

Digital Ability

 **18 / 30**
Total Digital Ability score

 **75%**
access the internet at least
weekly

 **14%**
have never used the internet

GenAI Use

 **39%**
have used a GenAI tool in the
last six months

 **46%**
of GenAI users used GenAI
to create content for work
or study

 **38%**
of GenAI users have sought
information and advice for
work or study using GenAI

 **60%**
of GenAI users used GenAI to
create content by generating
text

Online Activities

 **90% used online
banking**
in the last six months

 **85% used online
government services**
in the last six months

 **94% kept in touch
with family and
friends online**
in the last six months

 **99% used online
entertainment**
regular users, in the last six
months

Media Use

 **4% listen to Noongar
radio**
each week (available via
streaming only)

 **85% listen to the
radio**
100% of these listen via car
radio

 **75%**
watched movies or online
content via their smart TV
72% via mobile phone

 **59% watch streaming
services**
daily

 **47% watch YouTube**
daily

 **44% watch
commercial TV
services**
daily

News and info

 **41% get daily news
via Facebook**
5% direct and in person daily

 **70% get emergency
information via
commercial TV**
46% Facebook
37% ABC TV
36% ABC radio
29% direct and in person
15% First Nations TV

Note

Research in Bunbury was conducted in an area with low socio-economic outcomes and with a low sample size compared to other sites. Survey results may reflect slightly lower averages than expected for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Bunbury.

Meekatharra (Mikadah)

Research
lead

Wayne
Bynder

The town of Meekatharra is on the traditional lands of the Ngoonooru Wajarri people to the west and the Yugunga-Nya people to the east. Before European colonisation, the area was known as Mikadah by the Yamatji people and means “place of little water”.

At the time of visiting (June 2025) the Services Australia Centre (Centrelink, Medicare and My Aged Care) and bank was closed, leaving the post office as the only provider of in-person government services and driving residents towards online services. The local council is the Shire of Meekatharra.

As part of the Regional Connectivity Program Round 2, the Telstra 4G macro cell base station capacity was upgraded, which provided improved mobile connectivity and access to essential online services.



Remoteness

Very Remote

Population

420*

849

Aboriginal and/or
Torres Strait Islander

Total (all persons)

Households

132

3.0

number of
households

avg people per
household

Income

\$480

\$985

avg personal weekly
income

avg household
weekly income

Employment

29% In the labour force (44% full-time, 14% part-time, 27% unemployed)

Age

25

median age

Gender

52.9%

female

Language

18.8%

residents who speak
language at home

8.1% Wajarri

4.3% Martu Wangka

1.2% Tjupany

Education

44% Up to year 10

12% Completed high school

11% Attained tertiary qualification

*Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, ABS 2021

Results may not be wholly reliable due to age of census and challenges with collecting census data in remote areas



Meekatharra town map. Shire of Meekatharra. <https://www.meekashire.wa.gov.au>



Communications services available



Mobile coverage

4G / 5G

Telstra



Fixed line network backhaul

Fixed wireless;
4 small cell base
stations



ADSL

Yes

ADSL is being phased
out nationwide by
November 2027



Public phones

4



nbn type

Sky Muster
Satellite



LEO satellite use

Starlink



Access computers

Meekatharra
Community
Resource & Visitor
Centre



Public Wi-Fi

Telstra Wi-Fi covering
town, Swimming Pool,
Visitors Centre



TV services

Broadcast, VAST
(free-to-air)



Radio services

Meeka 98.3FM
Community Radio;
ABC, Christian
Radio



First Nations radio

Radio MAMA
available via Meeka
98.3FM Community
Radio

Access

-  **87%** own a mobile phone
-  **45% of residences have a fixed home internet service**
67% nbn Sky Muster
-  **35% have a tablet at home**
21% laptop/notebook computer
8% desktop computer
-  **55% access the internet at the residence of family or friends**
41% community or Shire office (e.g., Centrelink, school, clinic)
39% via public Wi-Fi
28% community access centre

Affordability

-  **\$227/month**
average household expenditure on phone and internet services
-  **\$143/month**
average household expenditure on mobile
-  **84%**
of mobile users are on pre-paid plans
-  **80% have cut back on essential household costs**
to afford internet in past six months
-  **62% have compromised on connection speed or quality**
due to affordability

Digital Ability

-  **18.9 / 30**
Total Digital Ability score
-  **81%**
access the internet at least weekly
-  **5%**
have never used the internet

GenAI Use

-  **33%**
have used a GenAI tool in the last six months
-  **46%**
of GenAI users used GenAI to sought information and advice for entertainment or fun using GenAI
-  **38%**
of GenAI users have sought information and advice for work or study using GenAI

Online Activities

The following refers to regular internet users:

-  **93% used online banking**
in the last six months
-  **93% used online government services**
in the last six months
-  **96% kept in touch with family and friends online**
in the last six months
-  **82% made new friends or reconnected with old friends**
online, in the last six months
-  **87% used online entertainment**
in the last six months
-  **82% played online games**
in the last six months

Media Use

-  **20% listen to Radio MAMA**
daily
-  **86% listen to the radio**
71% of these listen via car radio
-  **75%**
watched movies or online content via their smart TV
73% via mobile phone
-  **31%**
had the VAST Satellite TV service working at their house
33% did not have it installed on their houses
-  **44% watch streaming services**
daily
-  **52% watch YouTube**
daily
-  **23% watch commercial TV services**
daily

News and info

-  **29% get daily news via Facebook**
27% direct and in person
-  **62% get emergency information via commercial TV**
57% direct and in person
44% Facebook
32% ABC TV
32% online news
25% text message from emergency services
19% First Nations TV services
21% First Nations radio (Radio MAMA)

Newman (Parnpajinya)

Research
partner



Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa

The town of Newman is on the traditional lands of the Nyiyaparli people. Newman is primarily an iron ore mining town. There are a number of First Nations organisations providing health, employment and regional services, including Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa (land management, cultural and social programs) and Martu Mili (regional arts enterprise). Employment and programs with these organisations, along with healthcare and shopping, are key drivers for the mobility of people from remote communities in the region in and out of Newman. The Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) for the Newman region is Karlka Nyiyaparli Aboriginal Corporation, which manages mining royalties.

The town has a Services Australia Centre (Centrelink, Medicare and My Aged Care), one bank, two post offices and is serviced by the Shire of East Pilbara. The Round 2 Connectivity Program is in the process of upgrading two Telstra macro cell base stations, deploying one new one and deploying one new small cell base station, with the aim of uplifting connectivity across Newman and Jigalong.



Remoteness

Very Remote

Population

556*

4,239

Aboriginal and/or
Torres Strait Islander

Total (all persons)

Households

198

3.3

number of
households

avg people per
household

Income

\$1,375

\$2,821

avg personal weekly
income

avg household
weekly income

Employment

76% In the labour force (64% full-time, 19% part-time, 6% unemployed)

Age

20

median age

Gender

50.4%

female

Language

10.3%

residents who speak
language at home

8.1% Wajarri

4.3% Martu Wangka

1.2% Tjupany

Education

27% Up to year 10

23% Completed high school

33% Attained tertiary qualification

*Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, ABS 2021

Results may not be wholly reliable due to age of census and challenges with collecting census data in remote areas



Newman town map. Shire of East Pilbara. <https://www.eastpilbara.wa.gov.au/our-region/our-towns>



Communications services available



Mobile coverage

4G / 5G

Telstra
Optus / Vodafone are
4G only



Fixed line network backhaul

Fibre optic cable;
Fixed wireless, two
mobile towers



ADSL

Yes

ADSL is being phased
out nationwide by
November 2027



Public phones

4



nbn type

FTTN



LEO satellite use

Starlink



Access computers

**Newman Youth
Centre**

for young people aged
10-17



Public Wi-Fi

Newman Youth Centre,
Newman Library, Newman
Aquatic Centre (limited),
Airport, Cape Keraudren,
Nullagine



TV services

**Broadcast, VAST
(free-to-air)**

Including Ngaarda TV



Radio services

**Newman Community
Radio 92.9FM;
Ngaarda Radio;
Triple M Radio;
ABC Pilbara; Vision
Christian Radio
96.9 FM**



First Nations radio

Ngaarda Radio
From Roebourne



Access

- 87%** own or share a mobile phone
- 6% of residences have a fixed home internet service**
100% Starlink
- 35%** use the public phone for phone calls
- 3% have access to a laptop/notebook computer at home**
3% tablet
0% desktop computer
- 23%** stated they don't have enough digital devices to support everyone's needs in their household
- 41% access the internet at their place of work or education**
26% public Wi-Fi

Affordability

- \$149/month** average household expenditure on phone and internet services
- \$141/month** average household expenditure on mobile
- 99%** of mobile users are on pre-paid plans
- 44% have cut back on essential household costs** to afford internet in past six months
- 47% have compromised on connection speed or quality** due to affordability

Digital Ability

- 16.7 / 30** Total Digital Ability score
- 84%** access the internet at least weekly
- 7%** have never used the internet

GenAI Use

- 3.5%** have used a GenAI tool in the last six months

Online Activities

The following refers to regular internet users:

- 94% looked for housing or accommodation** online, in the last six months
- 92% looked for work** online, in the last six months
- 91% used online banking** in the last six months
- 82% kept in touch with family and friends online** in the last six months
- 82% used online entertainment** in the last six months
- 83% engaged in online shopping** in the last six months

Media Use

- 3% listen to Ngaarda Radio** each week
- 33% listen to the radio**
67% of these listen via car radio
23% listen via TV/VAST
- 43%** had the VAST Satellite TV service working at their house
- 75%** watched movies or online content via their mobile phone
- 28% watch streaming services** daily
- 32% watch YouTube** daily
- 22% watch commercial TV services** daily

News and info

- 33% get daily news via Facebook**
30% direct and in person daily
- 79% get emergency information direct and in-person**
58% commercial TV
49% ABC TV
45% Facebook
29% First Nations TV services
4% First Nations radio (Ngaada radio)
5% text message from emergency services

Derby

Research
partner



Derby sits within the traditional lands of the Nyikina and Warrwa peoples and is home to, and maintains strong cultural connections with, many Aboriginal language groups from across the Kimberley.

Derby has a bank, a post office, a Services Australia Centre (Centrelink, Medicare and My Aged Care services) and Shire of Derby local services.

With funding through the 2020 Mobile Black Spot Program (Round 2) small cell mobile services were installed at nearby Mt Barnett Roadhouse and Bell Gorge, with the aim to improve mobile connectivity and enable access to essential online services.



Remoteness

Very Remote

Population

1,149

Aboriginal and/or
Torres Strait Islander

3,222

Total (all persons)

Households

330

number of
households

3.3

avg people per
household

Income

\$480

avg personal weekly
income

\$1,327

avg household
weekly income

Employment

35% In the labour force 56% full-time, 24% part-time, 12.3% unemployed)

Age

29

median age

Gender

46.9%

female

Language

13%

residents who speak
language at home

6.6% Kriol

1.5% Walmajarri

0.5% Nyikina

0.4% Worrorra

Education

52% Up to year 10

17% Completed high school

17% Attained tertiary qualification

*Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, ABS 2021

Results may not be wholly reliable due to age of census and challenges with collecting census data in remote areas



Derby town map



Communications services available



Mobile coverage

4G / 5G

Telstra
Optus / Vodafone are
4G only



Fixed line network backhaul

Fibre optic cable;
One mobile tower,
one 30m monopole



ADSL

None



Public phones

9



nbn type

FTTN in town,
Sky Muster
Satellite



LEO satellite use

Starlink



Access computers

**Derby Public
Library**



Public Wi-Fi

**Derby Public
Library**



TV services

**Broadcast
(free-to-air)**



Radio services

**ABC Kimberley
675AM; Triple J
91.9FM; Hit92.9FM;
Vision Christian
Radio 101.1FM**



First Nations radio

**6DBY 97.9FM
Larrkardi Radio**

**Goolarri Media
Enterprises 99.5FM**
(available via streaming
from Broome)

Access

 **82%**
own or share a mobile phone

 **28% of residences have a fixed home internet service**
19% nbn service
2% Starlink

 **10%**
use the public phone for phone calls

 **26% have a laptop/notebook computer at home**
12% desktop computer
18% tablet

 **15% use the free public Wi-Fi for internet access**

 **55% access the internet at the residence of family or friends**
41% place of work/education

Affordability

 **\$164/month**
average household expenditure on phone and internet services

 **\$127/month**
average household expenditure on mobile

 **94%**
of mobile users are on pre-paid plans

 **47% have cut back on essential household costs**
to afford internet in past six months

 **46% have compromised on connection speed or quality**
due to affordability

Digital Ability

 **17.8 / 30**
Total Digital Ability score

 **74%**
access the internet at least weekly

 **14%**
have never used the internet

GenAI Use

 **20%**
have used a GenAI tool in the last six months

 **77%**
of GenAI users used GenAI to create content for entertainment or fun

 **69%**
of GenAI users used GenAI to create content by generating text

 **54%**
of GenAI users had used a chatbot for social connections or conversations

Online Activities

The following refers to regular internet users:

 **89% used online banking**
in the last six months

 **93% used online government services**
in the last six months

 **80% kept in touch with family and friends online**
in the last six months

 **96% used online entertainment**
in the last six months

 **71% used the internet for learning / study**
in the last six months

Media Use

 **55% listen to First Nations radio stations**
each week

 **70% listen to radio via car**
47% listen via a radio at home
13% never listen to radio

 **8%**
had the VAST Satellite TV service working at their house

 **75%**
watched movies or online content via their mobile phone

 **34% watch streaming services**
daily

 **53% watch YouTube**
daily

 **38% watch commercial TV services**
daily

News and info

 **58% get daily news direct and in person**
32% Facebook

 **74% get emergency information via text message**
(e.g. from police or emergency services)
66% direct and in-person
43% First Nations radio
18% ABC radio

Port Lincoln (Galinyala)

Research
partner



Port Lincoln Aboriginal
Community Council Inc.

Port Lincoln is located on the traditional lands of the Barngarla people, and is a port city on the Eyre Peninsula. The traditional name for the area is Galinyala, which means 'place of sweet water' in Barngarla.

There is a Services Australia Centre (Centrelink, Medicare and My Aged Care) in town along with banks and post offices. Port Lincoln City Council provides services for the local population.

There are no planned connectivity upgrades. There is public access Wi-Fi in Port Lincoln but it is reported as unreliable. There is an unfunded service at Port Lincoln Aboriginal Community Council assisting people with online access.



Remoteness

Outer Regional

Population

946* **14,404**

Aboriginal and/or
Torres Strait Islander

Total

Households

406 **3.0**

number of
households

avg people per
household

Income

\$491 **\$1,070**

avg personal weekly
income

avg household
weekly income

Employment

50% In the labour force (32% full-time, 37% part-time, 16% unemployed)

Age

22

median age

Gender

50.9%

female

Language

6.4%

residents who speak
language at home

3.9% Australian
Indigenous
Languages
(undefined)

Education

46% Up to year 10

14% Completed high school

26% Attained tertiary qualification

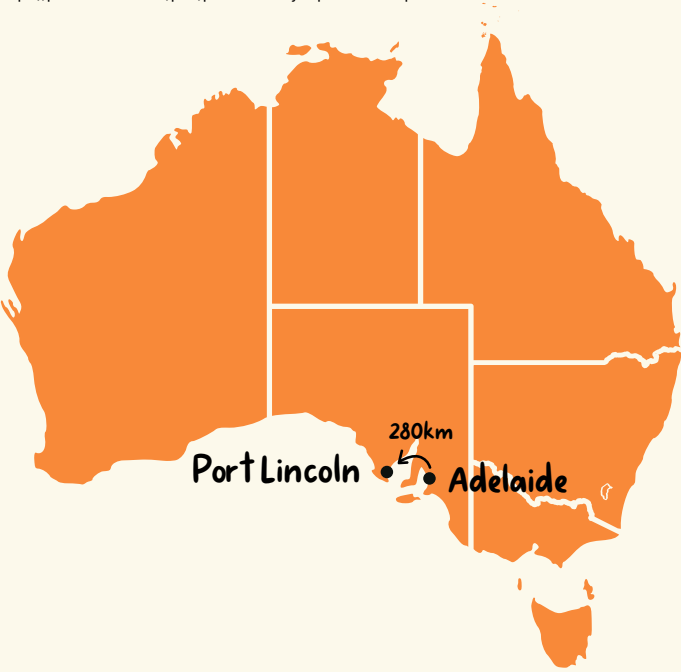
*Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, ABS 2021

Results may not be wholly reliable due to age of census and challenges with collecting census data in remote areas.

PLACC estimate Port Lincoln ATSI population to be roughly 1800.



Port Lincoln town map. City of Port Lincoln.
<https://portlincoln.com.au/plan/port-lincoln-eyre-peninsula-maps>



Communications services available



Mobile coverage

4G / 5G

Telstra / Optus /
Vodafone



Fixed line network backhaul

Fibre optic cable



ADSL

None



Public phones

12



nbn type

FTTP, FTTN



LEO satellite use

Starlink



Access computers

**Port Lincoln Public
Library; PLACC**



Public Wi-Fi

**Library, Port Lincoln Visitor
Information Centre; Port
Lincoln Foreshore (provided
by SA Tourism)**



TV services

**Broadcast
(free-to-air)**



Radio services

**Magic 89.9 FM
5CC (765 AM)
ABC Eyre Peninsula
89.1FM
Kix Country 87.6 FM**



First Nations radio

None local

Umeewarra Radio is
available nearby in Port
Augusta

Other First Nations radio
services are available
online via streaming



Access

- 99%** own or share a mobile phone
- 65% of residences have a fixed home internet service**
59% nbn service
- 18%** use the public phone for phone calls
- 33% have access to a laptop/notebook computer at home**
18% desktop computer
40% tablet
- 61% use the free public Wi-Fi for internet access**
- 64% access the internet at the residence of family or friends**
35% place of work/education

Affordability

- \$174/month** average household expenditure on phone and internet services
- \$117/month** average household expenditure on mobile
- 88%** of mobile users are on pre-paid plans
- 34% have cut back on essential household costs** to afford internet in past six months
- 28% have compromised on connection speed or quality** due to affordability

Digital Ability

- 22.8 / 30** Total Digital Ability score
- 95%** access the internet at least weekly
- 2%** have never used the internet

GenAI Use

- 14%** have used a GenAI tool in the last six months
- 54%** of GenAI users used GenAI to seek information and advice for entertainment or fun
51% for work or study
38% to create content by generating text
- 38% of GenAI users paid to use a GenAI tool** in the past 6 months

Online Activities

The following refers to regular internet users:

- 92% used online banking** in the last six months
- 93% used online government services** in the last six months
- 89% kept in touch with family and friends online** in the last six months
- 87% used online entertainment** in the last six months

Media Use

- 5% listen to First Nations radio stations** daily
- 96% listen to radio via car**
42% radio at home
9% never listen to radio
- 77%** watched movies or online content via their mobile phone
- 55% watch streaming services** daily
- 62% watch YouTube** daily
- 52% watch commercial TV services** daily

News and info

- 74% get daily news direct and in person**
59% Facebook
- 81% get emergency information direct and in-person**
53% text message (e.g. from police or emergency services)
44% commercial TV
35% ABC radio
5% First Nations radio

Tennant Creek

Tennant Creek is on the traditional lands of the Warramungu people. The Aboriginal population primarily reside in seven Community Living Areas (CLAs, colloquially known as town camps) around the town. The population can be transient during significant events in Tennant Creek, which has a limited impact on individual access to communications devices and services.

Tennant Creek is serviced by Barkly Regional Council and has a Services Australia Centre (Centrelink, Medicare and My Aged Care), a post office and a bank. First Nations organisations in Tennant Creek include Julalikari Aboriginal Corporation, Central Land Council, Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre, Papulu Apparr-Kari Language Centre and Anyinginyi Health.



Remoteness	
Very Remote	
Population	
1,707*	3,080
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	Total (all persons)
Households	
420	3.7
number of households	avg people per household
Income	
\$336	\$1,210
avg personal weekly income	avg household weekly income
Employment	
33% In the labour force (51% full-time, 19% part-time, 22% unemployed)	
Age	
24	50.3%
median age	female
Language	
44.8%	2.4% Bandjalang
residents who speak language at home	
Education	
64%	Up to year 10
11%	Completed high school
14%	Attained tertiary qualification

*Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, ABS 2021
Results may not be wholly reliable due to age of census and challenges with collecting census data in remote areas



Tennant Creek town map



Communications services available

 Mobile coverage 4G / 5G Telstra Optus / Vodafone are 4G only	 Fixed line network backhaul Fibre optic cable; fixed-wireless	 ADSL None
 Public phones 10	 nbn type FTTP FTTP for key service facilities	 LEO satellite use Starlink
 Access computers Centrelink (2)	 Public Wi-Fi Community Centres in Mulga, Wuppa and Tingkarli CLAs Hotspots at BRC swimming pool, youth centre, library, and civic centre	
 TV services Broadcast (free-to-air, 16 channels)	 Radio services 10 FM services, 2 ABC AM services	 First Nations radio 8KIN CAAMA and 8CCC Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association

Access

 **82%**
own or share a mobile phone

 **11% of residences have a fixed home internet service**
5% nbn fixed line
3% Starlink

 **21%**
use the public phone for phone calls

 **8% have access to a laptop/notebook computer at home**
4% desktop computer
10% tablet

 **20% use the free public Wi-Fi for internet access**

 **25% access the internet at the residence of family or friends**
21% place of work or education
20% shopping centre, retail, or service business

Affordability

 **\$178/month**
average household expenditure on phone and internet services

 **\$157/month**
average household expenditure on mobile

 **92%**
of mobile users are on pre-paid plans

 **51% have cut back on essential household costs**
to afford internet in past six months

 **46% have compromised on connection speed or quality**
due to affordability

Digital Ability

 **15.9 / 30**
Total Digital Ability score

 **75%**
access the internet at least weekly

 **17%**
have never used the internet

GenAI Use

 **25%**
have used a GenAI tool in the last six months

 **42%**
of GenAI users used GenAI to seek information and advice for work or study
31% used a chatbot for social connections or conversations

 **14% of GenAI users paid to use a GenAI tool**
in the past 6 months

Online Activities

The following refers to regular internet users:

 **88% used online banking**
in the last six months

 **80% used online government services**
in the last six months

 **77% kept in touch with family and friends online**
in the last six months

 **80% used online entertainment**
in the last six months

 **88% played online games**
in the last six months

 **41% used the internet for learning / study**
in the last six months

Media Use

 **20% listen to First Nations radio stations**
each week

 **83% listen to radio via car**
42% radio at home
16% streaming via phone/tablet
25% never listen to radio

 **91%**
watched movies or online content via mobile phone
51% via smart TV

 **31% watch streaming services**
daily

 **40% watch YouTube**
daily

 **27% watch commercial TV services**
daily

News and Info

 **86% get daily news direct and in-person**
20% Facebook

 **91% get emergency information direct and in-person**
17% First Nations radio
42% ABC Radio
21% text message (e.g. from police or emergency services)

Nhulunbuy

Nhulunbuy resides on the traditional lands of the YolŲu-matha people. Nhulunbuy is the main population centre in the East Arnhem Land region and is a private Indigenous-owned town on the eastern edge of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Nhulunbuy has a transient First Nations population due to strong ties with remote First Nations communities and homelands in the region.

The town has a Services Australia Centre (Centrelink, Medicare and My Aged Care), an NDIS office, a bank and a post office. Nhulunbuy is serviced by East Arnhem Regional Council. The Regional Connectivity Program Round 1 (Arnhem Fibre upgrade project, Fibre Backhaul) is expected to upgrade core transmission equipment and increase existing backhaul capacity between Darwin and Nhulunbuy (5Gbps to 100Gbps).



Remoteness

Very Remote

Population

577* 3,350

Aboriginal and/or
Torres Strait Islander

Households

140 3.7

number of
households

avg people per
household

Income

\$395 **\$2,158**

avg personal weekly
income (15+)

avg household
weekly income

Employment

41% In the labour force (62% full-time,
16.4% part-time, 9.9% unemployed)

Age

27

median age

Gender

49.5%

female

Language

59%

residents who speak
language at home

19.4% YolŲu-matha
9.7% Gumatj
7.5% Galpu
6.4% Dhuwaya

Education

48% Up to year 10

19% Completed high school

7% Attained tertiary qualification

*Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, ABS 2021

Results may not be wholly reliable due to age of census and challenges with collecting census data in remote areas



Nhulunbuy town map. Nhulunbuy Corporation. <https://ncl.net.au/visitors/maps>



Communications services available



Mobile coverage

4G

Telstra / Optus /
Vodafone



**Fixed line
network backhaul**

Fibre optic cable



ADSL

None



Public phones

8



nbn type

**FTTP in township;
Sky Muster
satellite**



LEO satellite use

Starlink



**Access
computers**

Library



Public Wi-Fi

**Shopping centre and
cafe, Westpac Bank**



TV services

**Broadcast
(free-to-air)**



Radio services

**Gove 106.9FM; ABC
Darwin 900AM;
Radio 4GGG 648AM;
Rhema Christian
radio station 97.5FM**



**First Nations
radio**

**YolŲu Radio
88.9FM**

Access

- 96%** own or share a mobile phone
- 30% of residences have a fixed home internet service**
 - 10% nbn service
 - 11% other satellite (96% Starlink)
- 35%** use the public phone for phone calls
- 14% have a laptop/notebook computer at home**
 - 4% desktop computer
 - 6% tablet
- 40% use the free public Wi-Fi for internet access**
 - 40% at houses of friends and family
 - 26% place of work/education

Affordability

- \$193/month** average household expenditure on phone and internet services
- \$154/month** average household expenditure on mobile
- 98%** of mobile users are on pre-paid plans
- 66% have cut back on essential household costs** to afford internet in past six months
- 57% have compromised on connection speed or quality** due to affordability

Digital Ability

- 14.4 / 30** Total Digital Ability score
- 63%** access the internet at least weekly
- 19%** have never used the internet

GenAI Use

- 26%** have used a GenAI tool in the last six months
- 73%** of GenAI users used GenAI to create content for entertainment or fun
- 73%** of GenAI users used it to create content by generating new audio

Online Activities

The following refers to regular internet users:

- 63% used online banking** in the last six months
- 54% used online government services** in the last six months
- 78% kept in touch with family and friends online** in the last six months
- 82% used online entertainment** in the last six months
- 84% played online games** in the last six months
- 77% used the internet for learning / study** in the last six months

Media Use

- 37% listen to YolŲu Radio** each week
- 14%** had the VAST Satellite TV service working at their house
- 46% watch YouTube** daily
- 38% watch streaming services** daily
- 21% watch commercial TV services** daily

News and info

- 67% get daily news direct and in-person**
 - 37% YolŲu Radio
- 78% get emergency information direct and in-person**
 - 72% YolŲu Radio
 - 21% ABC radio
 - 5% text message (e.g. from police or emergency services)

Mount Isa

Research
partner



Mount Isa is located on the traditional lands of the Kalkadoon people and the Indjalandji-Dhidhanu people. It is the largest city in the western interior of Queensland and a major administrative, commercial and industrial centre for the region.

Mount Isa has a Services Australia Centre (Centrelink, Medicare and My Aged Care) and three post offices. It is serviced by Mount Isa City Council.

The Regional Connectivity Program Round 1 deployed a new Telstra 4GX small cell base station to Lake Moondarra, an important meeting point for the community. It aimed to improve tourism and retail services, water supply management and public safety communications at the lake.



Remoteness

Very Remote

Population

4,020* **18,727**

Aboriginal and/or
Torres Strait Islander

Total

Households

1,521 **3.0**

number of
households

avg people per
household

Income

\$556 **\$1,521**

avg personal weekly
income

avg household
weekly income

Employment

52% In the labour force (58% full-time, 18% part-time, 16% unemployed)

Age

24

median age

Gender

50.9%

female

Language

2.7%

residents who speak
language at home

0.7% Australian
Indigenous
Languages (other)

0.6% Alyawarr

0.2% Lardil

Education

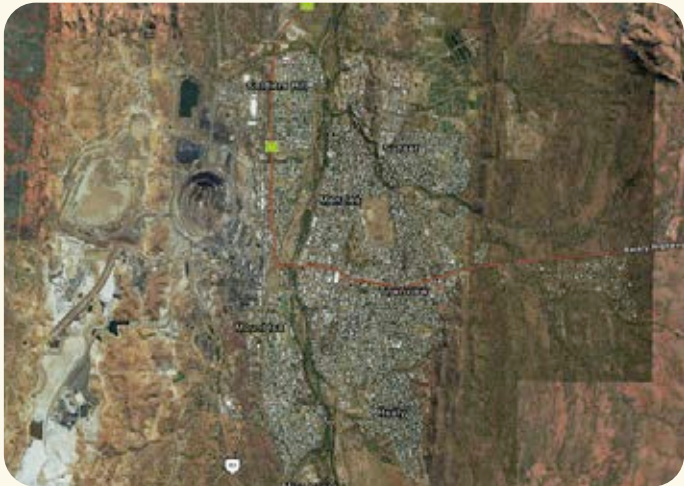
39% Up to year 10

17% Completed high school

23% Attained tertiary qualification

*Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, ABS 2021

Results may not be wholly reliable due to age of census and challenges with collecting census data in remote areas



Mount Isa town aerial view. IsaMapView, ArcGIS.
<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/0adc629ed3034918b31f3773891c5d1e>



Communications services available



Mobile coverage

4G / 5G

Telstra / Optus /
Vodafone



Fixed line network backhaul

Fibre optic cable



ADSL

None



Public phones

29



nbn type

FTTP, FTTN

Satellite in regional
areas



LEO satellite use

Starlink



Access computers

**Mount Isa City
Library; Mount Isa
Neighbourhood
Centre**



Public Wi-Fi

Yes

Mount Isa City Library; Mount Isa
Airport; Outback at Isa (visitor
information centre); Services
Australia Agent (Centrelink)



TV services

**Broadcast
(free-to-air)**

ABC; SBS; 7, IMPARJA
10, NITV



Radio services

8

Including 4LM 666AM; HIT
102.5FM; Narrowcast -
87.6 MHz Adventist Radio
Australia; 88.0 MHz Vision
Christian Radio; 101.7 MHz
ABC Classic FM - ABC;
102.5 MHz hit102.5 Mount
Isa - Southern Cross
Austereo; 103.3 MHz



First Nations radio

Mob FM (100.9)

Mt Isa Aboriginal Media
Association (MIAMA)

Access

- 76%** own or share a mobile phone
- 40% of residences have a fixed home internet service**
 - 39% nbn service
 - 1% Starlink
- 35%** use the public phone for phone calls
- 14% have access to a laptop/notebook computer at home**
 - 4% desktop computer
 - 8% tablet
- 40% use the free public Wi-Fi for internet access**
- 40% access the internet at the residence of family or friends**
 - 26% place of work/education

Affordability

- \$198/month** average household expenditure on phone and internet services
- \$137/month** average household expenditure on mobile
- 88%** of mobile users are on pre-paid plans
- 45% have cut back on essential household costs** to afford internet in past six months
- 48% have compromised on connection speed or quality** due to affordability

Digital Ability

- 21.1 / 30** Total Digital Ability score
- 95%** access the internet at least weekly
- 2%** have never used the internet

GenAI Use

- 25%** have used a GenAI tool in the last six months
- 68%** of GenAI users used GenAI to seek information and advice for work or study
 - 51% for entertainment or fun
 - 45% to create content by generating text
- 19% of GenAI users paid to use a GenAI tool** in the past 6 months

Online Activities

The following refers to regular internet users:

- 82% used online banking** in the last six months
- 82% used online government services** in the last six months
- 83% kept in touch with family and friends online** in the last six months
- 82% used online entertainment** in the last six months
- 72% played online games** in the last six months
- 57% used the internet for learning / study** in the last six months

Media Use

- 28% listen to Mob FM** each week
- 85% listen to radio via car**
 - 31% radio at home
 - 22% streaming
 - 8% never listen to radio
- 72%** watched movies or online content via their mobile phone
- 45% watch streaming services** daily
- 38% watch YouTube** daily
- 19% watch commercial TV services** daily

News and info

- 51% get daily news via Facebook**
 - 37% other social media
 - 32% direct and in-person
- 81% get emergency information direct and in-person**
 - 53% text message (e.g. from police or emergency services)
 - 44% commercial TV
 - 35% ABC radio
 - 5% First Nations radio

Thursday Island (Waiben)

Research
partner



Thursday Island (Waiben) is on the traditional lands of the Kaurareg people. The town is the administrative and commercial centre of the Torres Strait Island region. The name Thursday Island refers to both the 3.5 square kilometre island and the town located on the southern end. It is classified as Very Remote and is located 39kms north of Cape York Peninsula in Far North Queensland.

Thursday Island is accessible by ferry from Horn Island, upon which is the primary airport for the Torres Strait Island region.

The Shire of Torres services Thursday Island, while the Torres Strait Island Regional Council (TSIRC) is the local government for the wider Torres Strait Island area. There is a Services Australia Centre (Centrelink, Medicare and My Aged Care) and a post office. An upgrade of nbn services to fixed wireless broadband is underway, funded under the Round 3 Regional Connectivity Program.



Remoteness

Very Remote

Population

1,936* **2,805**

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Total (all persons)

Households

518 **3.7**

number of dwellings avg people per household

Income

\$693 **\$1,918**

avg personal weekly income avg household weekly income

Employment

65% In the labour force (60% full-time, 24% part-time, 6% unemployed)

Age

25.5

median age

Gender

52%

female

Language

59%

residents who speak language at home

52% Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole)
2% Kalaw Kawaw Ya/Kalaw Lagaw Ya
1% Meriam Mir
2% Aboriginal English

Education

38% Up to year 10

27% Completed high school

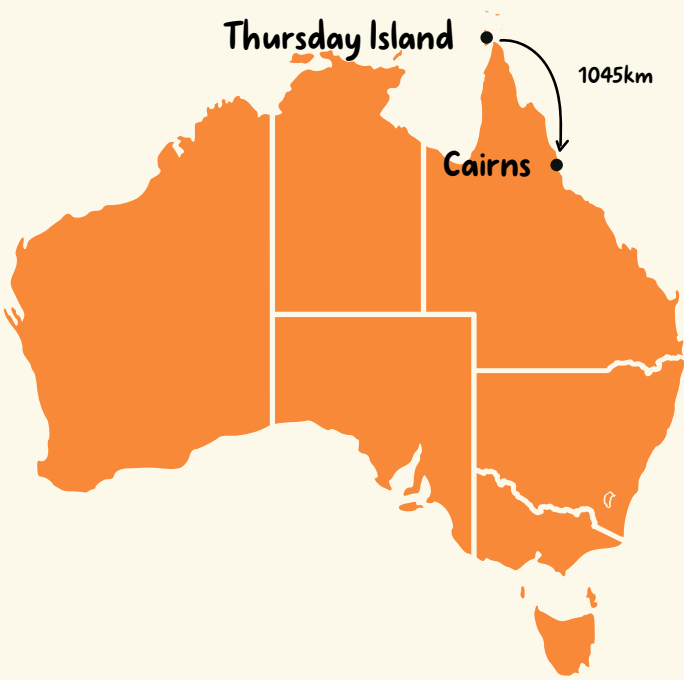
28% Attained tertiary qualification

*Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, ABS 2021

Results may not be wholly reliable due to age of census and challenges with collecting census data in remote areas



Thursday Island map



Communications services available



Mobile coverage

4G / 5G

Telstra / Optus / Vodafone



Fixed line network backhaul

Fixed-wireless; nbn satellite



ADSL

Yes

ADSL is being phased out nationwide by November 2027



Public phones

5



nbn type
Sky Muster Satellite



LEO satellite use

Starlink



Access computers

Internet café at the Torres Shire Council Library



Public Wi-Fi

No public Wi-Fi

Free Wi-Fi available at Mura Kosker Sorority and Frankie's Cafe



TV services

Broadcast, VAST (free-to-air)



Radio services

AM: ABC Far North; TSIMA



First Nations radio

Radio 4MW TSIMA

Thursday Island (Waiben)

Key survey findings

Research
partner



Access

 **100%**
own or share a mobile phone

 **57% of residences have a fixed home internet service**
16% nbn Sky Muster
9% ADSL
10% other satellite (93% Starlink)
14% unsure

 **6%**
use the public phone for phone calls

 **16% have a desktop computer at home**
35% laptop/notebook computer
40% tablet

 **21% use the free public Wi-Fi for internet access**
60% at houses of friends and family
41% place of work/education
25% shopping centre, retail, or service business

 **12%**
of low/non users describe lack of internet access as a barrier

Affordability

 **\$293/month**
average household expenditure on phone and internet services

 **\$189/month**
average household expenditure on mobile broadband

 **75%**
of mobile users are on pre-paid plans

 **54% cut back on essential household costs**
to afford internet in past six months

 **58% compromised on connection speed or quality**
due to affordability

Digital Ability

 **20.9 / 30**
Total Digital Ability score

 **92%**
used the internet in the last week

 **0%**
have never used the internet

GenAI use

 **45%**
have used a GenAI tool in the last six months

 **35%**
of Gen AI users have sought information and advice for work or study using GenAI tools in the past 6 months
33% created content for work or study
42% created content by generating text

 **33% of GenAI users paid to use a GenAI tool**
in the last six months

Online Activities

 **89% used online banking**
in the last six months

 **77% used the internet for learning / study**
in the last six months

 **77% used online government services**
in the last six months

 **95% kept in touch with family and friends online**
in the last six months

 **82% made new friends or reconnected with old friends**
online, in the last six months

 **89% used online entertainment**
regular users, in the last six months

 **84% played online games**
in the last six months

Media Use

 **39% listen to TSIMA 4MW**
each week

 **41% watch YouTube**
daily

 **45% watch streaming services**
daily

 **43% watch commercial TV services**
daily

 **5% watch NITV**
daily

News and info

 **40% get daily news through commercial TV**
30% via First Nations radio
28% ICTV
26% direct and in person daily
26% First Nations newspaper daily (+18% weekly)

 **37% get daily news via Facebook**

 **55% get emergency information via Facebook**
47% commercial TV
39% ABC TV
32% online news services
28% First Nations
27% direct and in person
28% text message (e.g. from police or emergency services)

Lismore (Bundjalung)

Research
partner



Lismore is located on the traditional lands of the Bundjalung people.

Lismore City Council services the region and the town has several banks, post offices and a Services Australia Centre (Centrelink, Medicare and My Aged Care). While Lismore now have 5G services, there are calls for improved mobile connectivity and resilience across the surrounding region.

Lismore has been beset by extreme flooding over the last four years. On 28 February 2022, it experienced its highest flood with a height of 14.4 metres. Further floods caused damage in both March 2025 and March 2026.



Remoteness

Inner Regional

Population

2,596* **44,334**

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Total population

Households

1,244 **3.0**

number of households avg people per household

Income

\$558 **\$1,427**

avg personal weekly income avg household weekly income

Employment

56% In the labour force (45% full-time, 36% part-time, 11% unemployed)

Age

24 **49.7%**

median age female

Language

4.8%

residents who speak language at home

Education

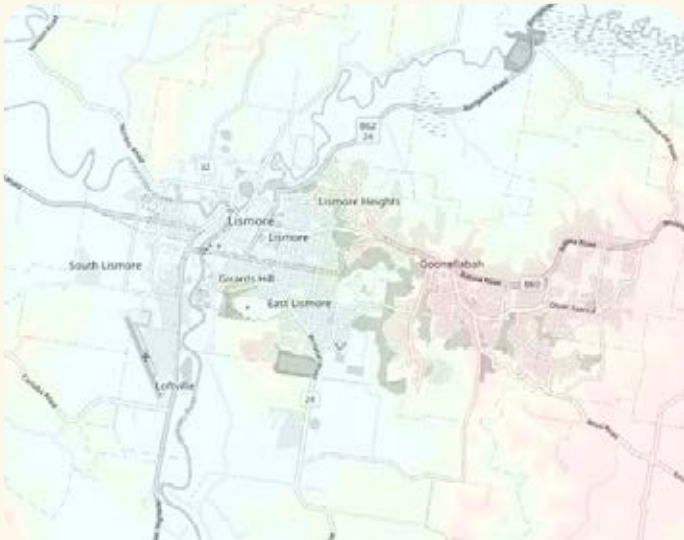
31% Up to year 10

14% Completed high school

41% Attained tertiary qualification

*Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, ABS 2021

Results may not be wholly reliable due to age of census and challenges with collecting census data in remote areas



Lismore topographic street map. Lismore City Council, topographic-map. <https://en-au.topographic-map.com/map-qv118/Lismore-City-Council>



Communications services available



Mobile coverage

4G / 5G

Telstra / Optus / Vodafone



Fixed line network backhaul

Fibre optic cable; fixed-wireless



ADSL

None



Public phones

37

20+ located in town



nbn type

FTTP, FTTN, Skymesh



LEO satellite use

Starlink



Access computers

Goonellabah Library



Public Wi-Fi

Goonellabah Library, some cafes, community hubs, Lismore Transit Centre (limited), and Southern Cross University for visitors



TV services

Broadcast (free-to-air)



Radio services

6

Including FM - ABC (e.g. ABC North Coast 94.5FM; Triple J 96.1FM) and SBS Radio streams online; Commercial (Triple M Northern Rivers 107.1FM and Hit Northern Rivers 100.9FM); Community (River FM92.9)



First Nations radio

None

Access

 **99%**
own or share a mobile phone

 **59% of residences have a fixed home internet service**
58% nbn service
1% Starlink

 **1%**
use the public phone for phone calls

 **23% have access to a laptop/notebook computer at home**
4% desktop computer
24% tablet

 **34% use the free public Wi-Fi for internet access**

 **55% access the internet at the residence of family or friends**
19% place of work/education

Affordability

 **\$172/month**
average household expenditure on phone and internet services

 **\$122/month**
average household expenditure on mobile

 **80%**
of mobile users are on pre-paid plans

 **20% have cut back on essential household costs**
to afford internet in past six months

 **10% have compromised on connection speed or quality**
due to affordability

Digital Ability

 **23.4 / 30**
Total Digital Ability score

 **93%**
access the internet at least weekly

 **4%**
have never used the internet

GenAI Use

 **18%**
have used a GenAI tool in the last six months

 **67%**
of GenAI users used GenAI to seek information and advice for entertainment or fun
35% for work or study
35% to create content for work or study

 **17% of GenAI users paid to use a GenAI tool**
in the past 6 months

Online Activities

The following refers to regular internet users:

 **88% used online banking**
in the last six months

 **82% used online government services**
in the last six months

 **70% kept in touch with family and friends online**
in the last six months

 **88% used online entertainment**
in the last six months

 **77% played online games**
in the last six months

 **72% used the internet for learning / study**
in the last six months

Media Use

 **0% listen to First Nations radio stations**
each week (no First Nations radio available in Lismore)

 **83% listen to radio via car**
17% streaming via phone/tablet
18% never listen to radio

 **88%**
watched movies or online content via their Smart TV
64% via mobile phone

 **54% watch streaming services**
daily

 **56% watch YouTube**
daily

 **50% watch commercial TV services**
daily

 **31% watch NITV**
weekly

News and info

 **57% get daily news via commercial TV services**
45% Facebook
31% via commercial and/or community radio
28% direct and in-person

 **91% get emergency information via text message from emergency services**
43% commercial TV
26% Facebook



Access

While First Nations Australians are active users of digital technologies and internet, Access is constrained for First Nations people living in regional and remote towns.

This can be due to availability of services and devices, affordability, housing tenure and primary reliance on pre-paid mobile phones for connectivity.

The 2025 Counting on Connectivity report found a national gap in Access scores for First Nations Australians of 12.8 relative to non-First Nations Australians and this gap increases substantially for those living in remote (21.2) and very remote areas (39.9). The gap narrowed slightly to 10.9 for those living in inner regional and 10.1 in outer regional.



Access

Four in five respondents are using the internet daily but nearly one in ten are non-users

Almost all Australians are now using the internet, with 95% going online daily and only 2% being non-internet users.⁹ However, for First Nations respondents in the ten regional and remote towns, **internet use is less regular with daily use at 82% and 9% not having been online in the past six months in 2025**. This compares with 88% average daily usage among First Nations people living in outer regional Australia (4% non-internet users), 84% in remote Australia (5% non-users) and 73% in very remote (9% non-users) (see Figure 6).

This continued high rate of non-use indicates **significant digital exclusion among some cohorts**. This is primarily driven by limited access to diverse digital devices and the high cost of pre-paid data. Choices are determined by income, availability of services and awareness of connectivity options. It highlights the ongoing barriers to achieving reliable and consistent internet access for First Nations people living in regional and remote Australia.

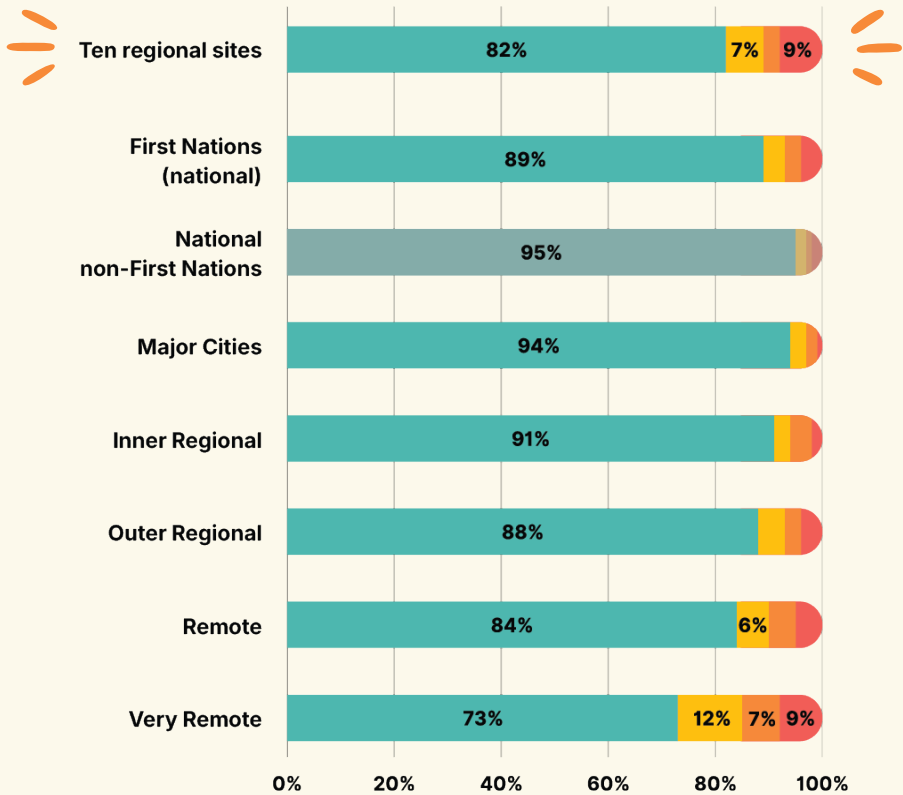


Figure 6. Regularity of internet use for the ten regional sites compared to national averages and First Nations remoteness averages

- Constant to daily
- Frequent
- Infrequent
- Not an internet user

There is no Telstra store in Derby and when they request identification or documents it can make it difficult as the nearest store is 230km away (survey comment)

It's hard to activate a new SIM [so I have to go] on the bush bus [to] Telstra shop [which] is in Alice Springs (survey comment)

I don't have a mobile phone [at the moment], I have to borrow Mum's phone (survey comment)



Access



One third of households have fixed internet

Internet access is primarily via mobile with only 35% of respondents across the ten research sites having fixed household connectivity (e.g. nbn connection, satellite or ADSL). This compares with 90% for non-First Nations Australians nationally and the 69% First Nations national average, falling between the average rates for First Nations remote (53%) and very remote households (20%).

The low rates of household connectivity are often due to affordability, with many low-income households considering post-paid billing a risk among high costs of living. Other factors include availability of service types, with many remote and very remote towns being satellite-only under nbn zoning. There are also systemic challenges such as housing tenure, challenges with application processes and credit rating approval.

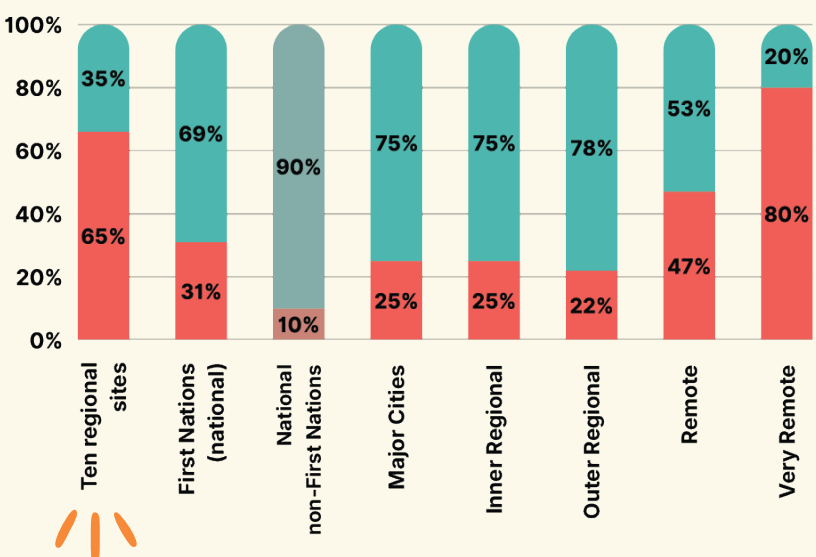


Figure 8. Rate of fixed home internet use amongst the ten regional sites

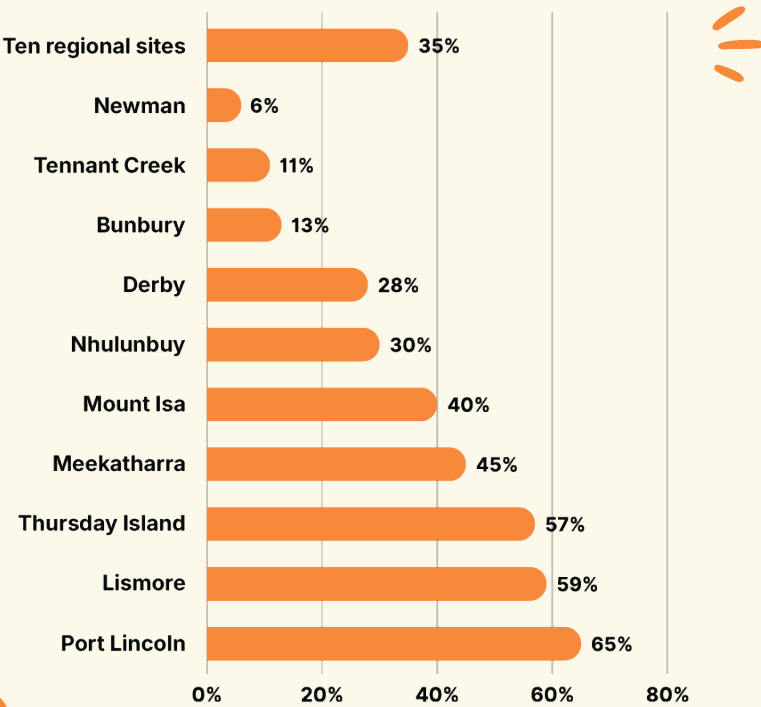


Figure 7. Rate of fixed home internet use in the ten regional sites compared to national averages and First Nations remoteness averages

● Has fixed home internet
● No fixed home internet

Our Homeswest public house doesn't have an nbn connection. We've been trying to get this installed so that we can have better access to the internet (survey comment)

Fixed household connectivity varies significantly across each site, ranging from 6% in Newman to 59% in Lismore and 65% in Port Lincoln. The lowest household connection rates were in the very remote towns of Newman (6%) and Tennant Creek (11%), below the very remote average of 20%. The inner regional town of Bunbury had only 13% of its households with fixed connectivity, well below the average for inner regional First Nations households of 75%. Low sampling in Bunbury (40 surveys) a factor.

nbn services are the most common means of household connectivity in the ten research sites. 25% of households had an nbn service, with 79% of these being fixed line (fibre-to-the-node or fibre-to-the-premises), 4% fixed wireless and 3% Sky Muster. ADSL remains in use in sites without nbn fixed line or fixed wireless, including Thursday Island (9%) and Meekatharra (6%), however this is planned to be phased out by Telstra by November 2027.¹⁰

Average household uptake of Starlink Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite is relatively low across all research sites (3%), with high rates in Meekatharra and Nhulunbuy (both 11%) and Thursday Island (10%). This aligns to a national trend of rapid Starlink uptake since 2022 in locations under nbn satellite zoning. However, this is contributing to a localised digital divide between those who can afford the premium service and those who cannot.¹¹

Access



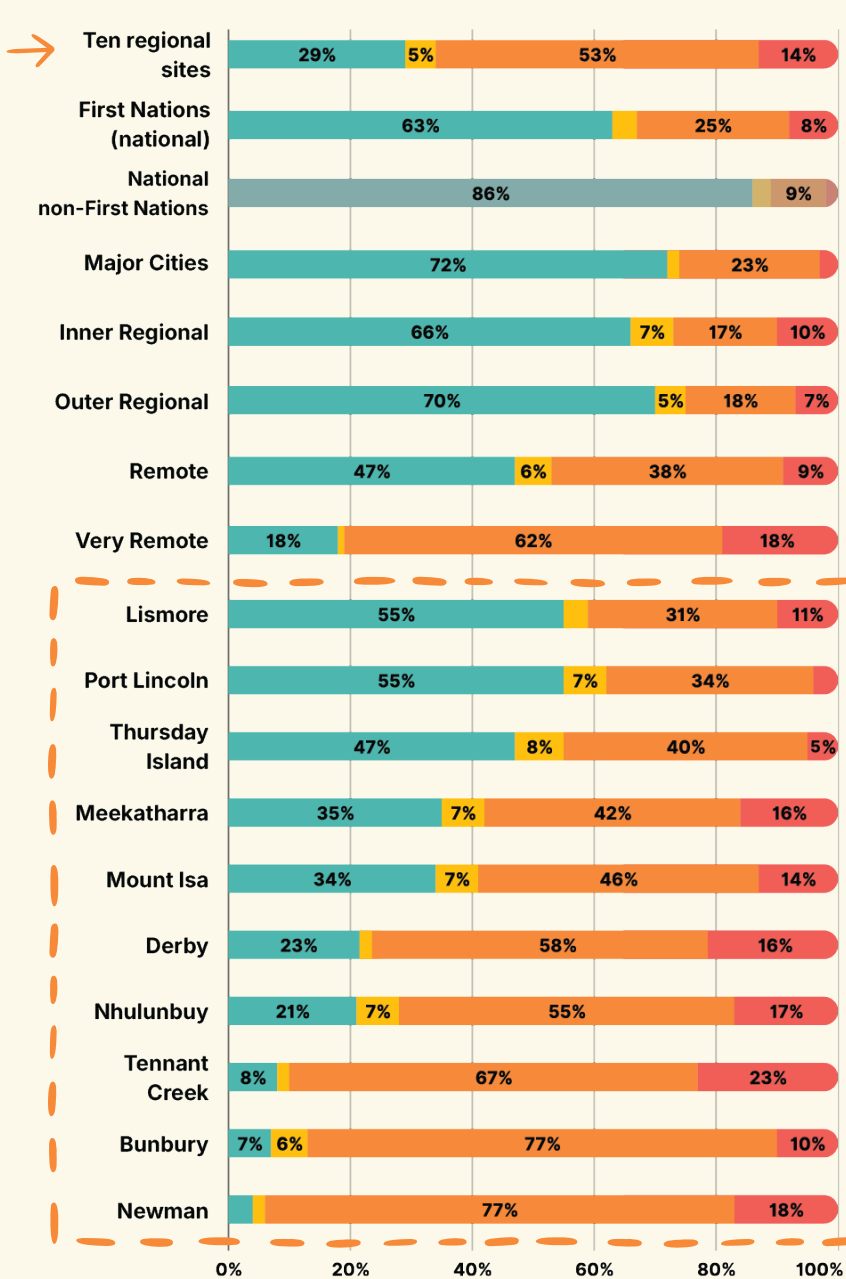
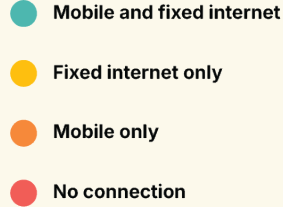
Over half of those surveyed are mobile-only internet users with one in seven having no internet access

The ADII considers access to both mobile and fixed internet a pre-requisite for effective digital inclusion. **However, only 29% of households in the ten research sites have both mobile and fixed internet.** This is one third of the national non-First Nations average rate of 86%, and less than half the First Nations national average (63%).

The low rates of household connectivity among First Nations households in the research sites indicates **high reliance on mobile services for internet access.** Across the ten sites, 53% of those surveyed had mobile-only access, 44% higher than non-First Nations nationally (9%).

I'm waiting to buy a mobile phone because the grandchildren got my phone (survey comment)

Figure 9. Rate of mobile and fixed internet use the ten regional sites compared to national averages and First Nations remoteness averages



Some regional towns have relatively high rates of fixed and mobile connectivity, including Lismore and Port Lincoln (55%), Thursday Island (47%), Derby (35%) and Mount Isa (34%). A common factor with these sites is high rates of employment compared with other sites, **with fixed household services more likely in households with reliable income.**

In sites with low rates of mobile and fixed household connectivity—such as Newman (4%), Bunbury (7%), Tennant Creek (8%)—there are full mobile service and fixed line services available. This indicates that **demographic factors**—such as employment, age, education, housing type and tenure—are **stronger determinants of digital access** than remoteness or available infrastructure.

For those sites with high rates of mobile-only use, such as Newman and Bunbury (both 77%) and Tennant Creek (67%), there is a stronger correlation with lower Digital Ability scores than other First Nations people in the same remoteness category, demonstrating the importance of household broadband access to build Digital Ability (see page 53).

Concerningly, **14% of respondents across the ten regional sites have no internet connection**, compared with only 2% for non-First Nations Australians nationally. There are very high numbers of respondents with no internet connection in some sites, including Tennant Creek (23%) and Nhulunbuy (17%). This highlights significant disparities in digital connectivity, with implications for work, education, health and access to critical online services.

Access

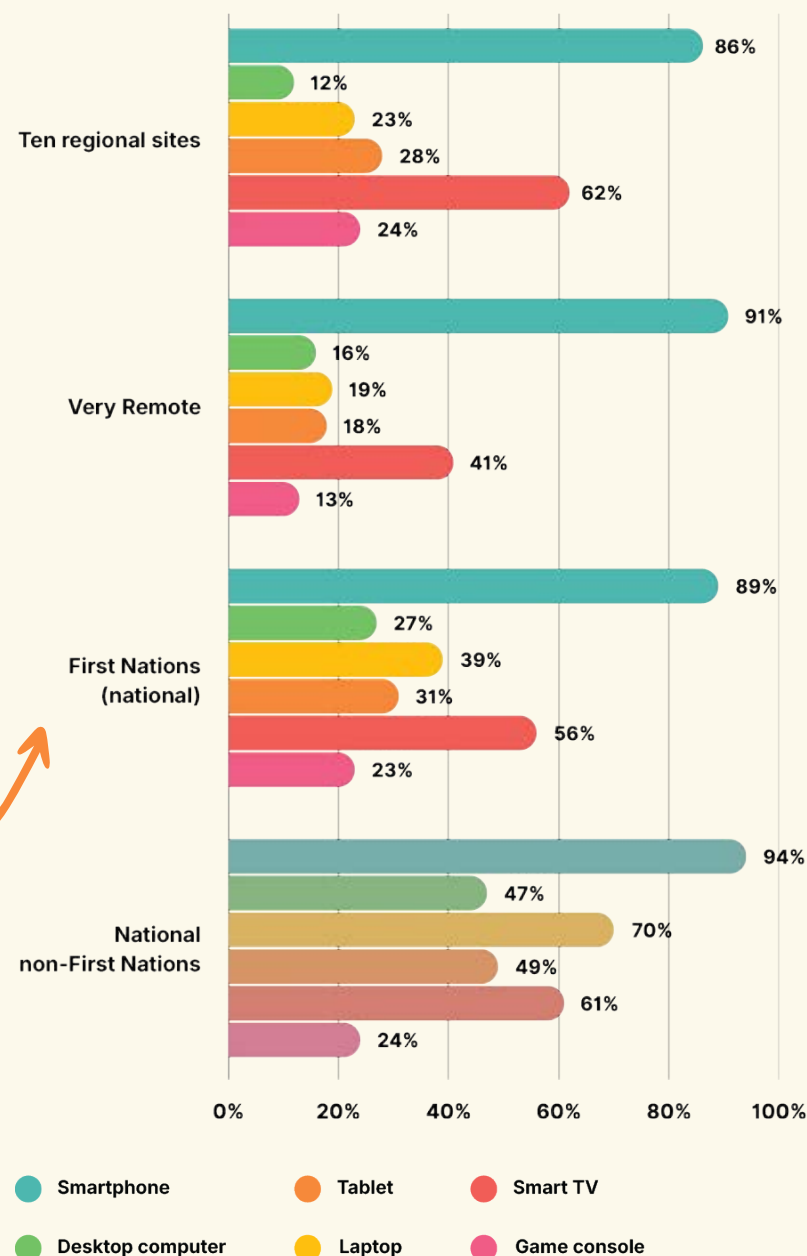


Internet access is primarily via mobile with only one in five households having a computer or laptop

Smartphones are the primary device used for internet access, with 86% of those surveyed using a smartphone for internet access, while only 12% use a desktop computer and 23% a laptop computer. While this high level of smartphone use is consistent with both First Nations and non-First Nations usage patterns, 53% are mobile only users. While smartphones are portable and multi-functional, they are not well suited for all tasks, including many applications used for work or study.

Computer use rates are concerningly low across the ten sites, sitting below the very remote First Nations average for desktop computer use (16%) and nearly 50% below the non-First Nations average for laptop use (70%). Of the ten sites, Newman respondents had the lowest access to a desktop computer (0%), laptop/notebook (3%) and tablet (3%).

Figure 10. Household device access in the ten regional sites compared to national averages and First Nations Very Remote averages



Computer access is essential for many daily activities that smartphones cannot support, including participating in online education, completing online forms, creating and editing word documents, and creative or cultural projects requiring a large screen. For this reason, smartphones are described as a "second-class mode of primary access" (Mossberger, 2012, p. 2520).

There is a need for improved computer access to drive progress toward Target 17. Low household access to computers especially impacts children's education, limiting access to the tools needed for online learning, completing school assignments, and developing essential digital skills.¹² This in turn exacerbates educational inequalities and hinders safe and confident engagement with the digital world and use of new technologies. Computer access also underpins broader workforce and economic participation, making it foundational to sustaining and advancing progress across other Closing the Gap targets.



Access

Voice calls are primarily via mobile however public phones remain important

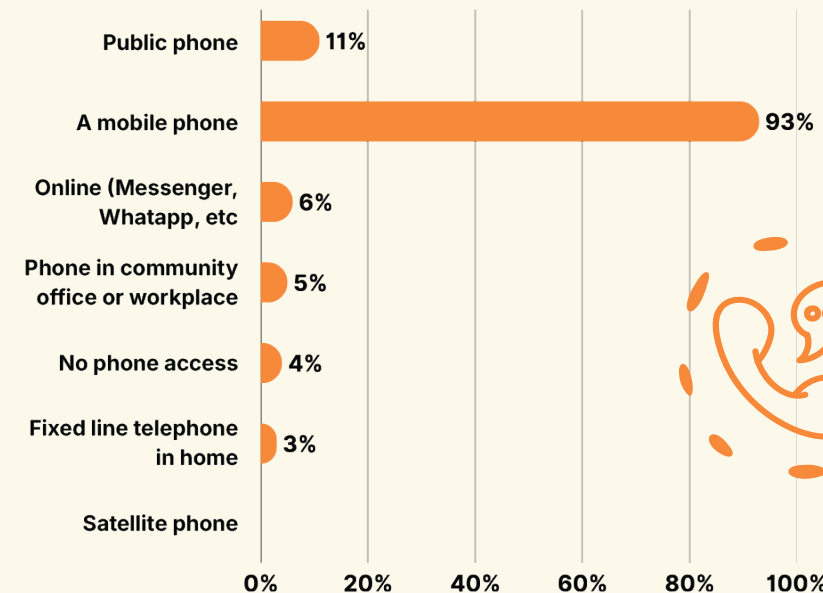
Most phone calls are made via a mobile phone, making reliable coverage critical, with public phones also providing a critical safety net.

93% of those surveyed in the ten regional and remote towns make phone calls using a mobile phone (either a personal or shared device). Device sharing is common in low-income households, with 2% of those surveyed sharing rather than owning a device. The rate of device sharing was highest in Newman (10%), followed by Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy (both 4%).

With only 3% of those surveyed using a fixed line telephone at home, there is very **high reliance on the mobile service being reliable and affordable**, especially in emergency situations.

Our house is in a valley and has no Telstra mobile reception. I can wait for half an hour to get a service. They won't pay for a booster. I do work for SES and can't get emergency messages by phone, only pager by satellite (survey comment)

Figure 11. Primary device used to make / receive phone calls for the ten regional sites



11% of those surveyed also use public phones for calls, **particularly in locations with limited or no mobile coverage, or by those without a device**. With calls from Telstra public phones free since August 2021, and many now Wi-Fi enabled, public phone use has more than tripled since that time.¹³ Public phones also provide an important safety net for voice and/or data access for those without mobile credit or waiting to recharge and in emergency situations. However, of those surveyed in the ten sites, 38% said that the public phone was reliable, 15% said it was not reliable, and 10% said they did not have access to a public phone.

You use your phone and data for contacting family and keeping safe. I'm often sick and need to be able to call the police or ambulance (survey comment)

It would be good to get another phone line at home but ants get in the line (survey comment)

The number of public phones nationally has reduced substantially from 86,000 in 1990 to 14,400 in 2024,¹⁴ with reduced access for many First Nations residents in regional and remote towns and concerns about further reduction. Regular maintenance of public phones is also critical, with our research team regularly finding non-functioning public phones in regional and remote sites due to damage or technical issues.

Access



Mobile and internet reliability issues impact many towns and households

Despite recent nbn and 5G upgrades, many respondents reported having limited or patchy mobile coverage or regular internet outages or dropouts where they live.

19% of respondents reported often or always experiencing connectivity or network issues in the past 6 months that impacted their mobile or internet use, with a further 38% sometime experiencing issues. The sites with the highest reporting of issues were Thursday Island (39% often or always, 34% sometimes), Derby (39% often or always, 28% sometimes), Nhulunbuy (24% often or always, 41% sometimes) and Mount Isa (19% often or always, 35% sometimes).

While the types of connectivity issues vary, the key concerns raised were patchy or congested mobile coverage, regular outages and dropouts in mobile and fixed services, and weather or power impacts.



27% of those who had changed mobile or broadband providers in the last year gave the reason of **wanting better reliability**, with the highest rates in Meekatharra (68%), Port Lincoln (55%) and Mt Isa (45%).

With increasing incidence of cyclones, flooding, fire and power outages impacting communications services at critical times, greater resilience is required.

Broadband and mobile connectivity is listed as one of five top infrastructure gaps in regional areas,¹⁵ highlighting the need for continuity of investment though the Mobile Black Spots Program, Regional Connectivity Program and State and Territory co-investment and a range of network hardening programs to improve coverage, in-fill and resilience of mobile networks.

The nbn internet drops out about 50 times a day. I've reported it and changed providers multiple time[s] but it's still not fixed (survey comment)

I have poor reception in the house. Phone calls and streaming can only be done outside for a stronger connection (survey comment)

Signal of Wi-Fi is slow and we sometimes don't have any access for couple days (survey comment)

We had an internet outage last Saturday that lasted a whole day and affected the whole street (survey comment)

Access

Limited digital access in small communities and homelands increases reliance on regional hubs for critical services

Many remote towns act as regional hubs for surrounding remote First Nations communities, providing critical services such as banking, government services, healthcare and retail. Regional hubs involved in this research include **Nhulunbuy, Thursday Island, Derby, Newman** and **Tennant Creek**. Many small communities and homelands, especially in NT and WA, are too small to sustain local services such as schools, clinics or shops, and they rely on regional hubs and outreach support instead.

There should be more reception on the road from Derby to Fitzroy crossing when travelling on the roads and in the Kimberley (survey comment)

However, the shift to online service delivery is driving a reduction in banks, service centres, specialty shops and other physical service delivery, increasing the need for reliable connectivity and the associated skills and support to access these services online.

Of the 1505 remote communities and homelands nationally, **796 do not have a mobile service currently (2024) and most are homelands**. While more homelands now have Wi-Fi access under a range of Federal and State programs, many are still reliant on a single public phone or have no reliable communication at all.

However, many communities and homelands face restricted access to vehicles or road access after rain, with some cut off for many months during wet season. **This makes reliable communications services more critical especially during cyclones or other emergencies.**

Without mobile or internet access, residents may be less prepared to stay on the homelands, especially young people and those requiring health support. Over five years of remote area research, we have observed a **population shift towards larger communities and regional towns with reliable mobile services.**

I need help to learn to use online banking. They've made it hard to use our banking nowadays. It's like they've closed a door but not opening the other door to access services (survey comment)

I have adapted to working in remote places without reception although for safety purposes improving the reception on major highways in the Kimberley would be better and safer (survey comment)

Signal in the isolated communities is not good, it's very poor sometimes. If we call and people answer it just cuts out (survey comment)



With ABS data showing increasing First Nations populations in regional and remote towns, there is increased pressure on housing and services, particularly in town camps, community living areas and public housing areas.

To avoid a growing digital divide within these towns, targeted communications solutions are needed to ensure reliable and affordable mobile and household services, along with support for local solutions such as public Wi-Fi and computer access facilities.

There have been programs to increase Wi-Fi access in town camps and nearby communities in several towns, including Alice Springs and Tennant Creek in NT and Fitzroy Crossing in WA, which had very limited connectivity and low household broadband uptake. Since 2022, local organisations in Tennant Creek have been installing Wi-Fi networks or hotspots in the town's seven community living areas, along with Barkly Regional Council facilities, to improve affordable internet access close to home and reduce reliance of young people on Wi-Fi hotspots in the town centre.

While funding programs have been set up for Wi-Fi services in remote communities, it is often challenging for agencies in regional towns to access funding to establish and maintain Wi-Fi facilities. More flexibility is needed in the Regional Connectivity Program or other programs to support locally managed services.

Community access facilities and libraries also play an important role in supporting internet and computer access as well as digital support. Public libraries provide an important and well utilised location for access to computers and information services. Several states also support digital service centres in regional towns, including the Community Resource Centre in WA, Rural Transactions Centres in NSW, and Indigenous Knowledge Centres in more remote locations in Queensland.

Many First Nations organisations in regional towns also provide community access computers and Wi-Fi access to ensure a culturally safe space to access services and learn digital skills. Funding support is needed to expand this means of access, as well as Wi-Fi services.

The services in town that offer free Wi-Fi should let the community know that they offer this free service for safety and convenience. The hospital should also offer free Wi-Fi to ease the long wait times with sick children and families (survey comment)



Affordability

The affordability of connections, devices, and data is a significant concern for many First Nations people living in regional and remote Australia.

First Nations households spend a high percentage of their income on connectivity, largely due to heavy reliance on pre-paid mobile and low uptake of household broadband connections.



Affordability



Rising living costs make affordability of connectivity and devices a key barrier

While the cost of living in Australia continues to increase, inflationary pressures are disproportionately affecting First Nations households and are expected to intensify further, due to factors unique to remote and regional communities.¹⁶ For those households dependent on social security payments, the lack of indexation increases to keep up with rising costs has made the cost of communications a key barrier to staying connected.

The lack of affordable connectivity in remote and regional Australia **undermines progress toward Closing the Gap Target 17 and other targets** relating to access to healthcare, education, employment and services.

Credit is becoming more expensive to buy. If we can't afford to recharge we stay home on the Wi-Fi
(survey comment)

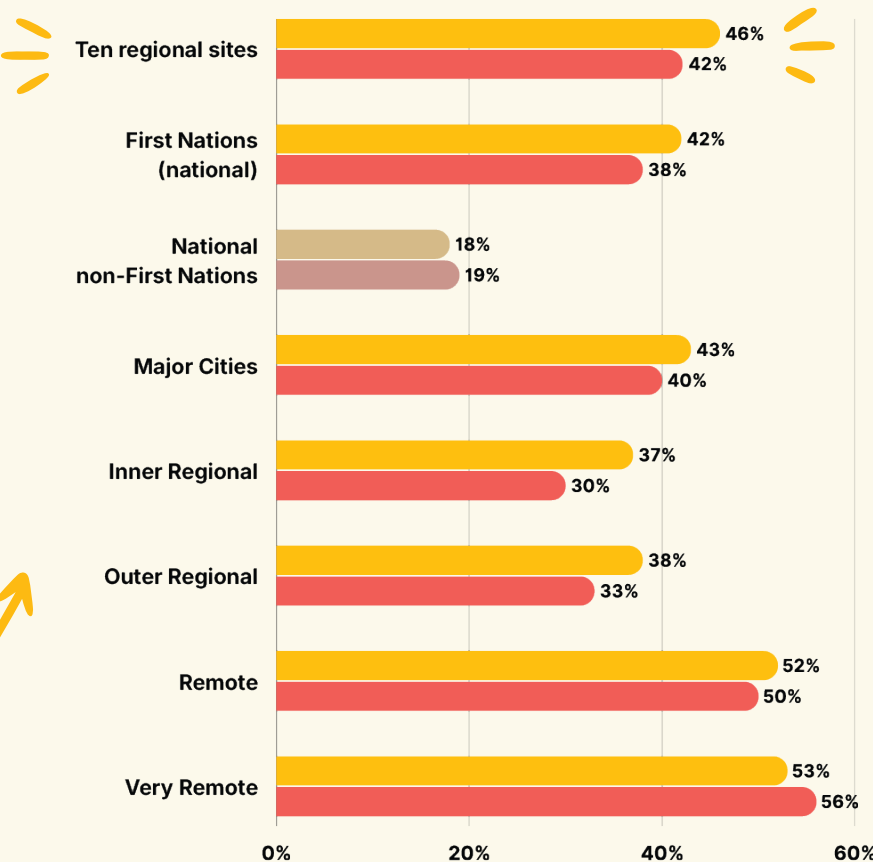
Nearly one in two have cut back on food and essentials to afford connectivity

46% of respondents **had cut back on food and essentials due to connectivity costs** sometimes in the last six months, with 10% of those cutting back often or always. This is well above the rate for non-First Nations Australians (18%) and above the rates for First Nations people living in Inner Regional areas (30%) and major cities (40%), pointing to differences in cost of living and income opportunities. Affordability pressures increase with remoteness, rising to over half of households (56%) in very remote areas.

I go through 4 Telstra vouchers a week and 4 modem top ups. It's too much for a single Mum (survey comment)

Almost half (42%) of respondents said they had compromised on internet speed and/or data allowance due to affordability. Again, this rate is well above that for non-First Nations Australians (19%) and above the rates for First Nations people living in Inner Regional areas (30%) and major cities (40%). This points to differences in cost of living and income opportunities. The rate of compromise increases with remoteness, with those in very remote areas at 56%.

Figure 12. Rate of sacrifice and compromise due to internet service costs in the last six months of the ten regional sites compared to national averages and First Nations remoteness averages



I often have to ask for an extension on my Wi-Fi [home internet] and phone bills
(survey comment)

- Have cut back on essentials to pay for phone / internet
- Have compromised on service speed / data due to cost

Affordability



One in four households do not have enough digital devices

26% of respondents reported not having sufficient digital devices to meet household needs. This includes phones, computer/laptops and connectivity devices. The rate varied widely between sites from 11% in Bunbury to 69% in Nhulunbuy. While there is high demand for individual smartphones, the reality is that due to high turnover and replacement cost, device sharing within households is very common. This adds complexity for accessing online services such as MyGov, where accounts are restricted to a single individual using a single mobile device.

The average number of mobile phones per household was 2.6, ranging from 1.8 per household in Derby to 3.5 in Nhulunbuy. Given this heavy reliance on mobile connectivity, the cost of replacing and maintaining an adequate number of devices represents an ongoing affordability challenge.

Need more money to feed ourselves and a laptop to be online in the house (survey comment)

We have Starlink but not everyone has a device (survey comment)

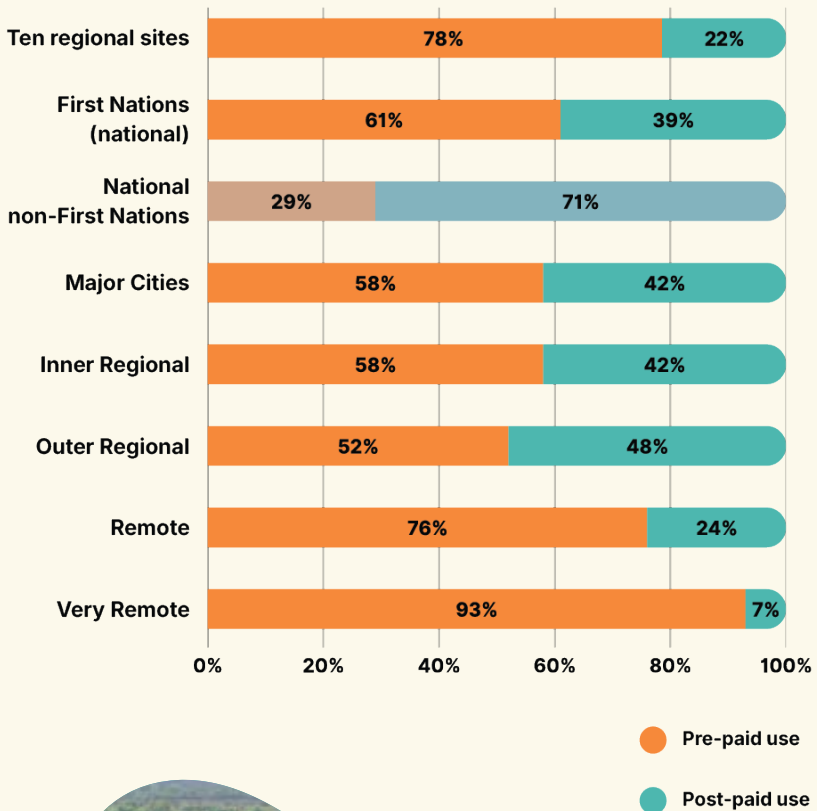
About four in five mobile users are using pre-paid, far exceeding the rate for non-First Nations Australians

The high rate of pre-paid mobile plan use in the ten sites is higher than the national average for First Nations Australians (61%), and almost three times the rate for non-First Nations Australians (29%). The high reliance on pre-paid mobile is common among low-income households, without the financial security to use post-paid services. The relatively high cost of data (\$2.60 per GB for a \$39 Telstra recharge)¹⁷ and increasing data usage means that many First Nations households are spending a large proportion of their income on prepaid phone recharge.

I have to keep paying \$59 recharge every couple of days for the grandkids to watch and play games on the phone (survey comment)

Another constraining factor in signing up for post-paid services is the requirement for identification documents and credit approval. Many customers are also wary of signing up to post-paid plans or bundles following penalties for unconscionable sale practice issued by ACCC to both Telstra and Optus in the last five years.

Figure 13. Rate of use of pre-paid and post-paid mobile services of the ten regional sites compared to national averages and First Nations remoteness averages



Affordability

Mobile costs make up about three quarters of average expenditure, but monthly costs vary widely between sites

Expenditure on mobile services dominates total household internet expenditure across all ten sites at 74% of total cost. The proportion of monthly mobile expenditure ranged from \$189 out of \$293 in Thursday Island (64%) to \$141 out of \$149 in Newman (95%). However, the primary reliance on pre-paid mobile means that households are paying a premium rate for data, whereas high or unlimited data allowances are provided through post-paid broadband or mobile plans. **Unless this 'poverty premium' inequity is addressed through targeted solutions**, a growing Affordability gap will drive an **increased digital divide** for First Nations Australians.

Targeted measures are needed to address Affordability barriers and ensure connectivity

There are few initiatives that address affordability in regional areas compared to remote areas such as free community Wi-Fi networks and hotspots, Wi-Fi phones in homelands, and a targeted Telstra Community Pre-Paid Mobile plan.

Across regional areas, larger towns have greater choice of infrastructure types and service providers, enabling customers to take advantage of lower cost broadband and mobile plans and devices. However, smaller regional and more remote towns often have fewer options with a single mobile provider and reduced connectivity and device options available.

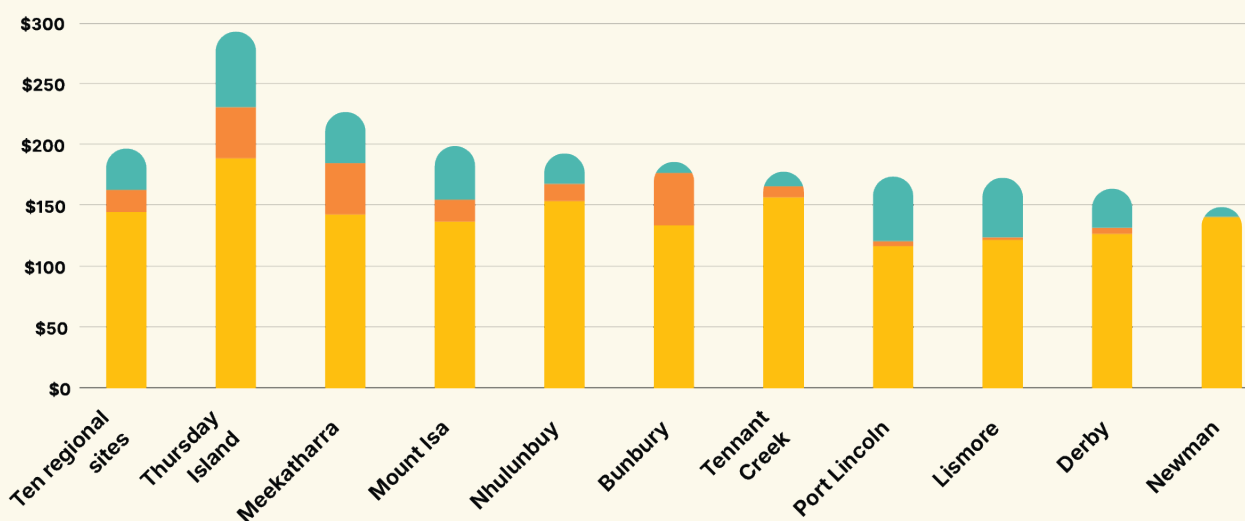


Figure 14. Average household expenditure on mobile and internet expenditure across the ten regional sites, 2025

- Mobile expenditure
- Mobile broadband expenditure
- Fixed home internet expenditure

I'd like to see Wi-Fi in every camp living area CLA and in our community, camps on northern have it but not southern end (survey comment)

We should get free Wi-Fi in public housing in Derby (survey comment)

Some examples of initiatives that are making a difference include free voice calls via Telstra public phones, with many of these now Wi-Fi enabled; public Wi-Fi hotspots in many community centres, libraries, Centrelink agencies and shopping centres; and the nbn School Student Broadband Initiative, which enabled eligible low-income households with school age children to receive free nbn connectivity to 30 June 2028.

With affordability a critical and ongoing barrier to digital inclusion, measures like these are welcome. However, **innovative policies such as free Wi-Fi access and the inclusion of broadband as part of social housing provisions** would go further to improve digital inclusion and reduce affordability stress in regional and remote towns.



Digital Ability

As digital technologies are now embedded in everyday life, Digital Ability has become an important aspect of engaging effectively and safely with various online devices, applications and services.

Derby co-researcher Aaron
Shadforth on phone



Digital Ability



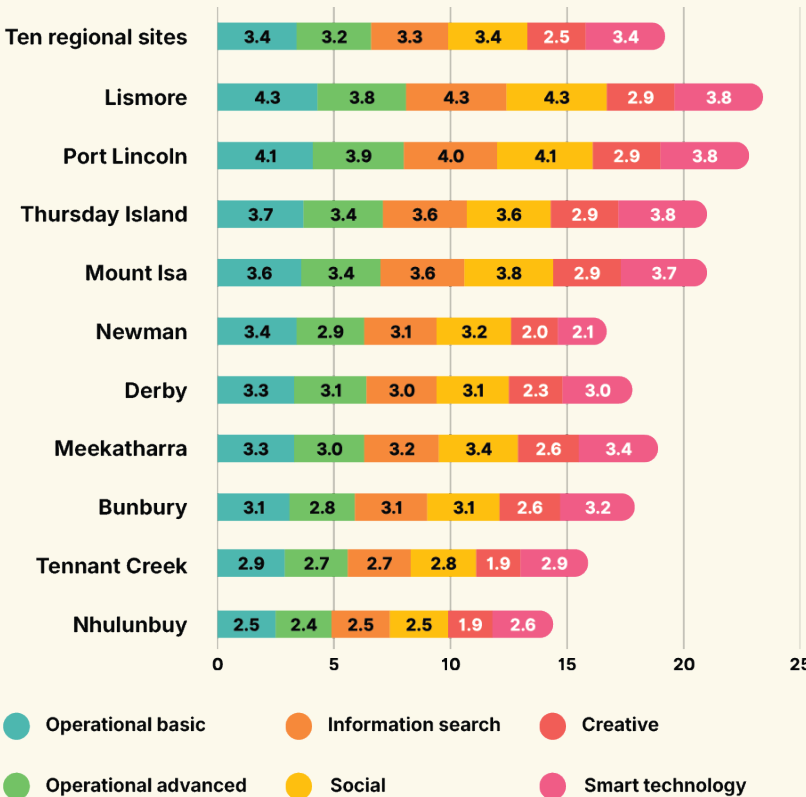
Digital Ability scores vary widely across the ten research sites

Digital Ability levels also vary widely across the ten sites, **reflecting uneven access to connectivity, devices and support**. The ADII measures Digital Ability based on a series of questions around digital skills, confidence and use of online activities. Instead of an Index score, we have derived from survey results an Internet Skills Scale score out of 30 across six skill areas—**Basic operational skills** (e.g. device use, file download, basic search, online forms), **Advanced operational skills** (e.g. managing security settings, installing software), **Information navigation** (e.g. saving files, search and verify credibility of online information), **Social skills** (online communication and social media use), **Creative skills** (media creation, manipulation and posting), and **Smart skills** (smart device use and settings).¹⁸

Across the ten regional sites, **the average Internet Skills Scale measure was 19.3 out of 30**, with scores ranging from 14.4 in Nhulunbuy to 22.8 in Port Lincoln and 23.4 in Lismore.

The average scores across five of the six skill areas were relatively consistent for each research site, with all having the lowest score in creative skills. This covers creation, manipulation and sharing of digital media content (these types of applications are more difficult to navigate on a mobile device than a computer or tablet).

Figure 15. Internet Skills Score by skills category for ten regional sites (out of 30), 2025



These Digital Ability results provide a **clear representation of the impact of remoteness and contextual factors for regional and remote towns**, with the flow-on effects of Access and Affordability also reflected. This helps point to the locations where resourcing for digital ability programs is most needed.

Demographic gaps show a localised digital divide

While most regional and remote First Nations people are highly digitally engaged, **some cohorts have limited digital skills**, including Elders, people with disability, and those with limited education and employment opportunities. Comparison of total results for the Internet Skills Scale (out of 30) shows significant demographic gaps among respondents across all ten sites.



Age gap

16.4 (out of 30) difference between young people aged 18-34 (23.6) and Elders aged 65 or over (7.2).



Education gap

7.0 gap between those who had completed secondary school (23.1) and those had not (16.1). The gap increased to 9.3 for those who completed a certificate level.



Computer access gap

6.9 gap between those with computer access (24.1) compared to those without computer access (17.2).



Employment gap

4.7 gap between those who are employed (23.4) and those not in employment (18.7). The gap widened to 16.8 for those who are retired or on a pension (6.6).

Digital Ability

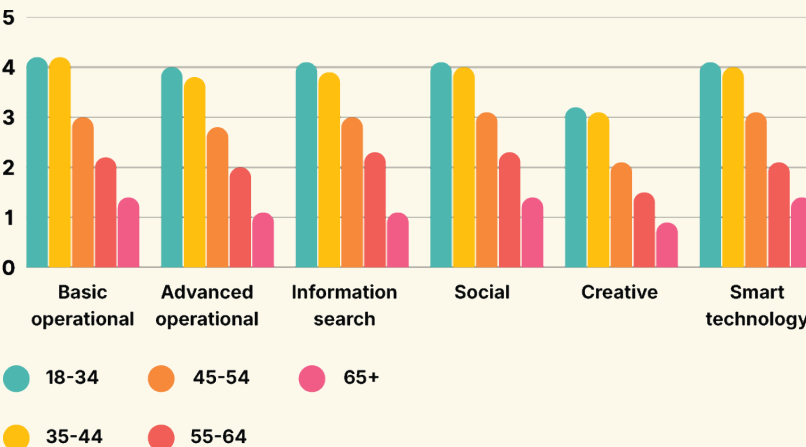


Digital ability declines significantly with age

Age is a key factor in digital ability nationally. **However, the age gap is more pronounced for First Nations Australians in remote and regional areas** where digital technologies have been introduced relatively recently, with very low uptake by many Elders. Like other older Australians, Elders often face challenges using digital devices and completing complex online tasks, with limited opportunities for supported digital engagement exacerbating the digital ability gap.¹⁹ Trust can also be a factor in the slow transition to online services. Many Elders prefer the familiarity and support of face-to-face services, often due to concerns about scams, device sharing and financial abuse risks. Community-led, culturally safe and hands-on training that focuses on everyday tasks may help build and maintain digital skills over time.

Aggregate results across the ten sites show digital skills are highest across all skill areas for young people aged 18-34 (23.6 out of 30), closely followed by the 35-44 age group (22.9). However, the scores rapidly drop off for those in the 45-54 age group who did not grow up with mobile and internet access. There is also a substantial drop in the overall digital ability skill scores for those aged 55-64 (12.2 out of 30), 11.4 points below the 18-34 age group, suggesting digital exclusion risk rises significantly from mid-life. The same age change pattern spans all six skill categories, with Creative skills the lowest scoring category across all age groups.

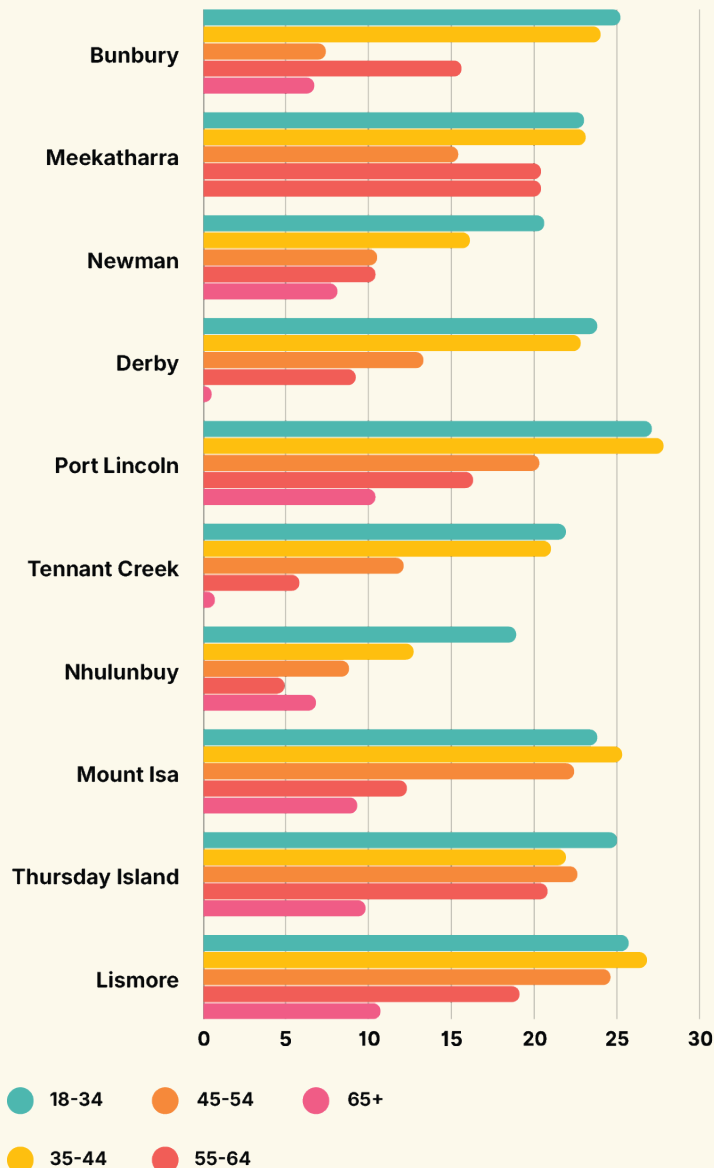
Figure 16. Internet Skills Score by skills category for ten regional sites by age, 2025



My granddaughter helps me with everything on my phone, she will set it all up and show me how to use it (survey comment)

Digital skills scores vary widely with age across all sites, however central Australian sites (e.g. Tennant Creek, Meekatharra) and those with high rates of transience from remote communities (e.g. Nhulunbuy, Derby, Newman) have the lowest scores for Elders 55 and over. As a result, Derby, Meekatharra and Tennant Creek have very high age gaps (difference between 18-34 and 65+ age groups) of 23.3, 23 and 21.2 points respectively.

Figure 17. Internet Skills Score for ten regional sites by age, 2025



Digital Ability



Lismore, Mount Isa and Port Lincoln have relatively high scores, with the 35-44 age groups scoring slightly higher than the 18-34 age groups in each. Along with Thursday Island, the drop off by age is not occurring until the 55-64 or 65+ age groups, which is off trend with the other sites. Nhulunbuy and Newman have much lower scores among younger age groups.

Factors influencing this may include education and employment levels along with longer life period of familiarity with mobile connectivity and digital technologies in these larger regional centres. The inner regional town of Bunbury shows unusual trends, with scores for the 55-64 age group above those 45-54 years, likely a factor of low sampling (n=40) rather than other factors.

Remoteness intersects with age to compound digital skill gaps, with those communities with higher population movement from remote communities and homelands tending to have lower rates of Digital Ability (see the Mapping the Digital Gap 2025 Outcomes Report²⁰ for further analysis).

Family help me learn. I am careful about scammers and sharing phone, might lose my money (survey comment)

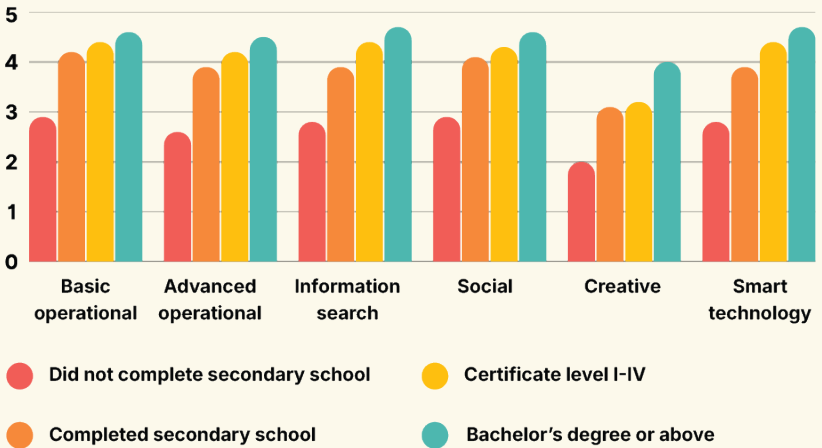
Education is closely linked to stronger digital competence

Across the ten regional sites, educational attainment is closely aligned with digital skill scores, which is consistent with national results. The increased use of digital technologies and online resources in schooling, especially at secondary school and tertiary level, is a key contributing factor. Respondents who have completed secondary school score 7.0 points higher than those who have not completed secondary school (average 16.1/30), and this relative gap increases for those who have completed a certificate course (8.9) or bachelor degree or above (11.0).

This points to the need for targeted digital skills support outside of schooling to address the disparity, given that 53% of the adult population across the ten sites had not completed secondary school (ABS weighted). In comparison, 19% had completed secondary school, 15% have a vocational certificate and 6% have a Diploma or higher tertiary qualification.

While the pattern for educational attainment is consistent across the skill types, Creative skills show the widest education divide. Those with a bachelor degree (4.0/5) scored double the rate of those without secondary qualifications (2.0/5).

Figure 18. Internet Skills Score by skills category for ten regional sites by education, 2025



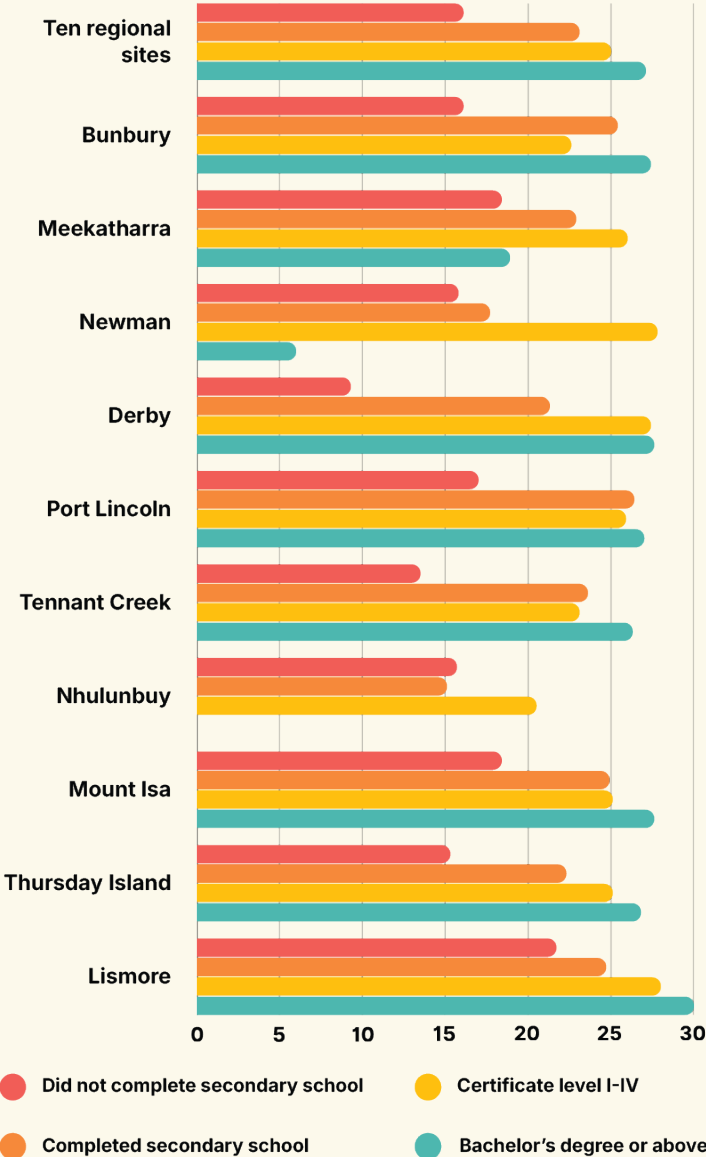
As emerging technologies like AI increasingly reward creative and digital capabilities, uplifting skills across all educational levels can support employment and economic opportunities, particularly in regional and remote areas.

While secondary schooling clearly fosters digital ability, those with certificate qualifications have even higher scores. This shows that vocational training may provide a supplementary or alternate learning pathway to schooling, with the potential for on-the-job training and support in the use of relevant digital tools and applications. Those with a bachelor degree or above had higher Digital Ability scores across all skill areas, with a total of 27.1, 2.1 points above those with certificate training.

Digital Ability



Figure 19. Internet Skills Score for ten regional sites by education, 2025



Most of the ten regional sites show the same trend of total Internet Skills Score increasing with educational attainment, however minor variations are likely a result of limited sample sizes. Those with a vocational qualification had consistently high scores—from 20.5 in Nhulunbuy to 27.4 in Derby and 27.8 in Newman—while there was more variation between sites for those with secondary qualifications. However, due to low samples of those with a bachelor degree, these results vary in Meekatharra and Newman, with Nhulunbuy having no sample.



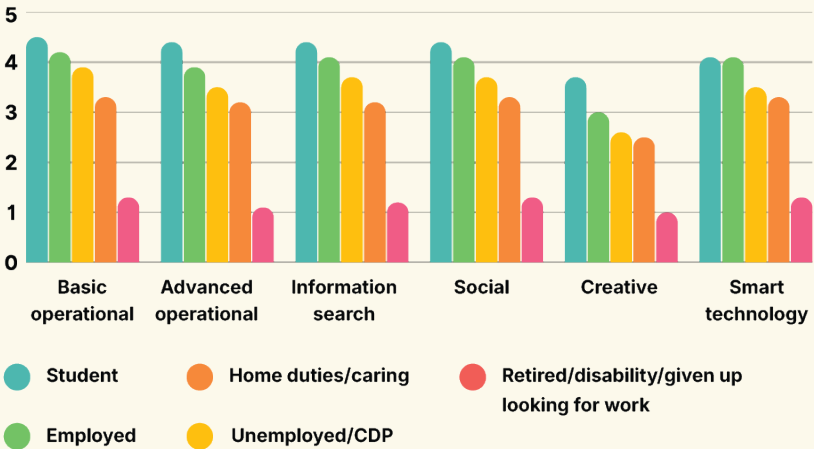
The relationship between digital ability and education works both ways

As education and training increasingly involve online applications and research capability, a lack of access to reliable and affordable internet and/or devices can limit engagement in further education.²¹ Even those with high levels of education can face structural and systemic barriers to Digital Ability, requiring targeted supports to address barriers to access, affordability and culturally relevant skills support.

Digital ability increases with employment and economic participation

Across the ten regional sites, **students** (25.4/30) **and those in employment** (23.4/30) **demonstrated the highest digital ability scores**. Respondents who were currently in employment (full-time, part-time, casual or self-employed) scored 4.7 points higher than those not in employment or participating in CDP or work readiness programs (18.7). Those in home duties or caring roles sat between the two (20.9). There was a very low average score of 7.1 for the combined grouping of those who had retired or withdrawn from the labour market, along with people with disability. This is a large gap of 16.3 points below those in employment, pointing to a need for targeted support for these cohorts.

Figure 20. Internet Skills Score by skills category for ten regional sites by employment and skill type, 2025



Digital Ability



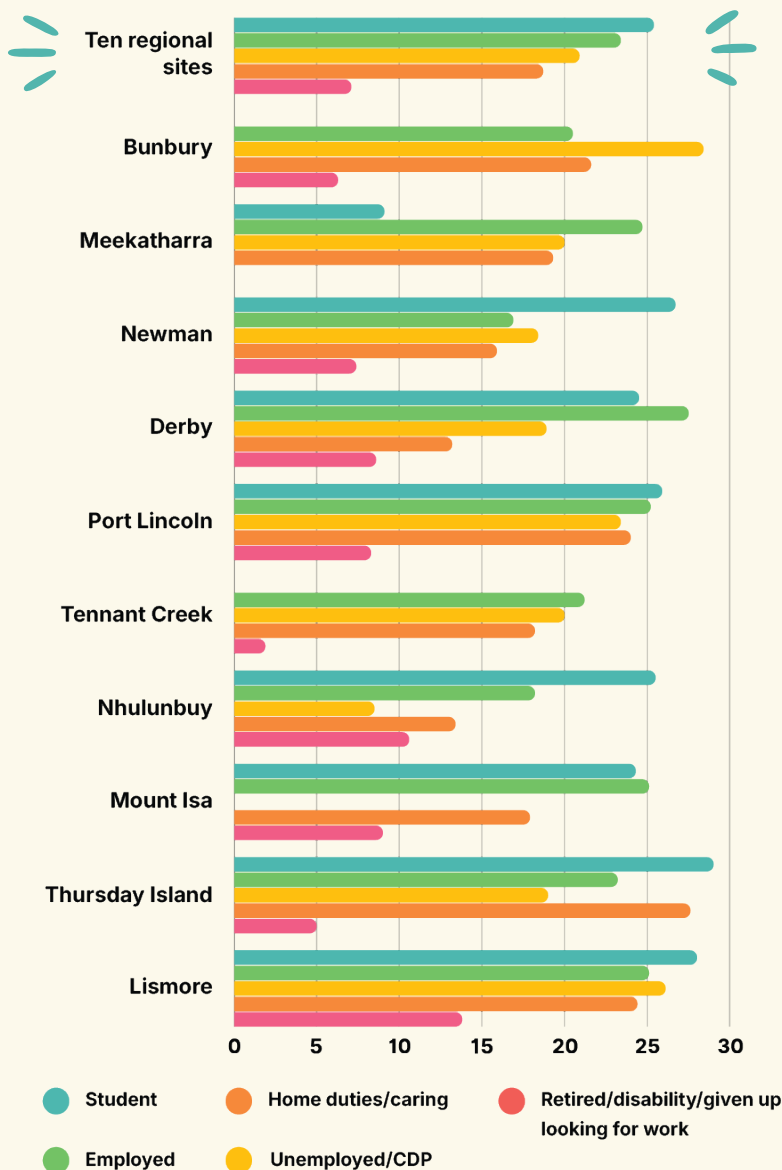
The trends by employment status are relatively consistent across the six digital skill types, with the lowest rates in creative skills. The difference highlights the important role of ongoing engagement in work, study or training in maintaining digital skills.

Across the sites, the combined score for those who are retired, not in the labour market, or had a disability range from 1.9 in Tennant Creek to 13.8 in Lismore. This points to the uneven availability of accessible technology and inclusive service design across locations.

The pattern of Internet Skills Scores against employment status generally follows similar trends across the ten sites, but is not as clearly defined in some with sample sizes in some categories (especially students and home duties/caring) being a primary factor. Those employed in Nhulunbuy (18.2), Bunbury (20.5) and Newman (16.9) all scored well below the average (23.4).

The employment gap is widest in Derby, where those in employment (27.5) scored 14.3 points above those not in employment (13.2), likely reflecting the contextual factors of high transient populations from remote communities, the mining industry as a key employer, and limited pathways to digital skills development.

Figure 21. Internet Skills Score for ten regional sites by employment and skill type, 2025



In a reversal of trend, those not in employment on Thursday Island scored 27.6, 4.4 points above those in employment and 9.1 points above the average for those not in employment (18.5). Similarly in Bunbury, those not in employment scored 1.1 points higher than those in employment.

The greatest variations were among those in home duties or caring roles, with this cohort outperforming the employed in Bunbury (by 7.9 points), Lismore (by 1.0) and Newman (by 1.5). Together, these patterns suggest that access to and motivation to use digital technologies are important drivers of digital ability, not employment status alone.

Over four in five use online banking and government services

Respondents across the ten regional sites showed strong overall use of online services and applications within the previous six months, with high usage rates for online banking (86%) and government services (81%), 62% having used online shopping and 60% having done online learning or study. There were relatively low rates of looking for work or housing online, as well as accessing health information or booking medical appointments online, with a preference for using face-to-face services for these activities.

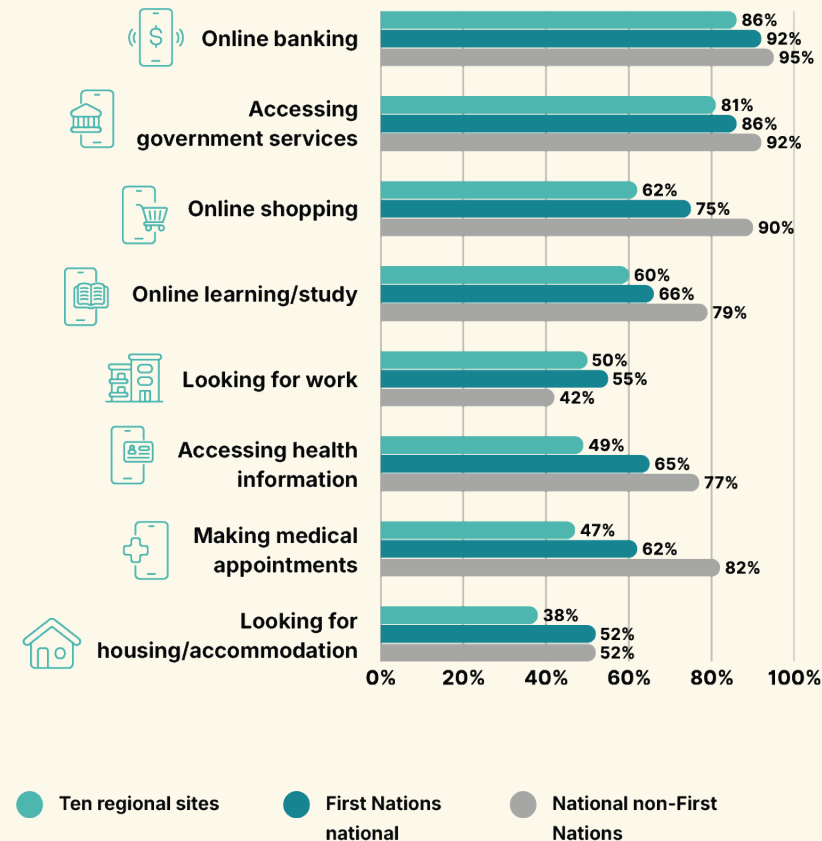
As expected, online activity engagement is consistently lower than the national First Nations and non-First Nations averages, with the greatest variation between the ten research sites and non-First Nations averages in online shopping.

Digital Ability



There was also variation in learning or study, accessing health information and booking medical appointments. One exception is online employment search, with usage across the ten sites and First Nations Australians higher than non-First Nations usage.

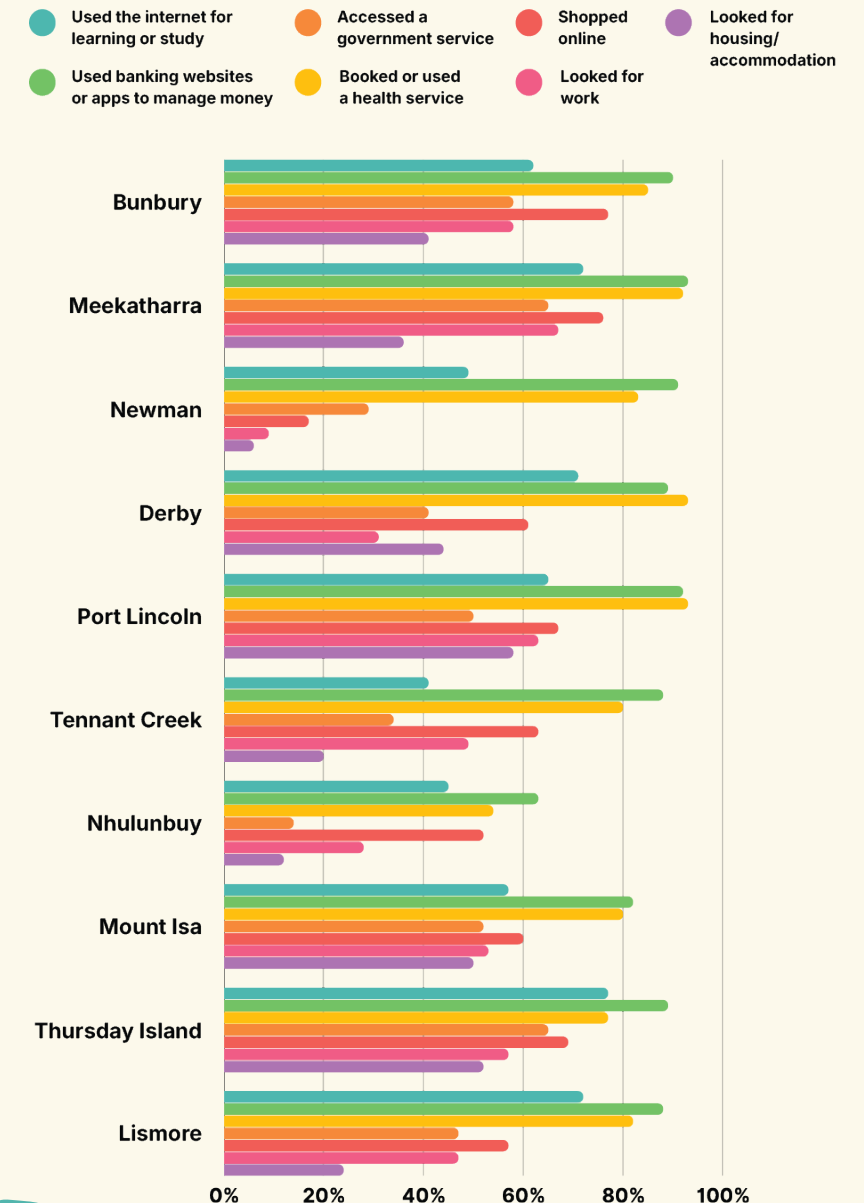
Figure 22. Rate of engagement in online activities for the ten regional sites compared to national averages, 2025



Across the ten regional sites, online activity usage varied considerably. Meekatharra recorded the highest use of online banking (93%) and government services (92%) with usage driven by necessity due to not having a physical bank or Centrelink agency available. Newman and Nhulunbuy, both regional hubs for service access by remote communities, had the lowest rates of online activity use. In Newman, online shopping (17%) was 49% below the average across the ten sites, with online job search even lower at 9% (41% below average). Nhulunbuy also had low usage rates for booking health services online (14%, 33% points below average), and accessing government services (54%, 27% below average) and online banking (63%, 23% below average).

Common contributing factors include limited reliable connectivity, device access, training and support options, as well as availability of in-person services. Some community members, especially Elders, people with disability, language speakers and those with limited formal education, continue to rely on face-to-face services or family members for help with tasks such as online banking and government services. While family support plays an important role, it can bring privacy and financial risks, including Elder financial abuse. This underscores the importance of maintaining accessible face-to-face services alongside ongoing investment in digital skills and support across regional and remote communities.

Figure 23. Rate of engagement in online activities for the ten regional sites, 2025



Digital Ability

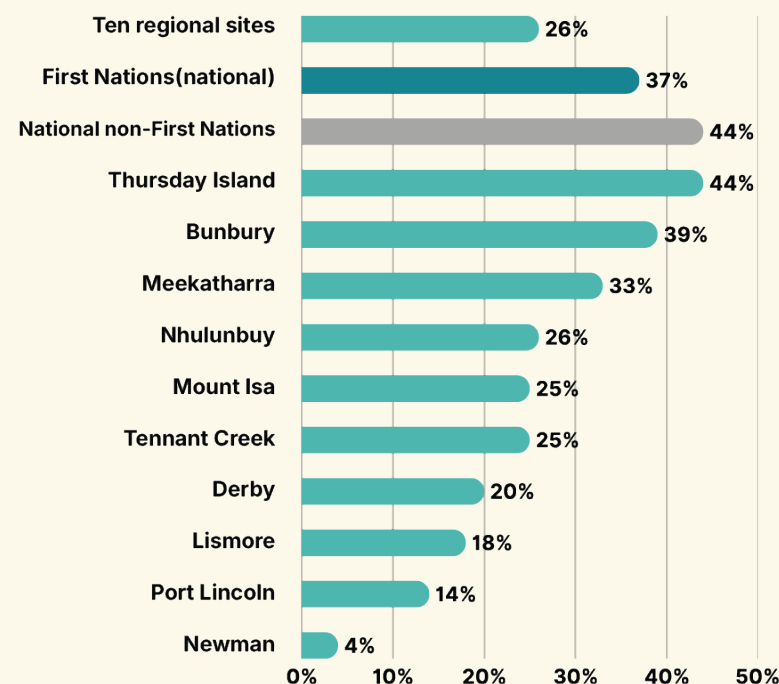


About one in four had used Generative AI tools, but usage varied across the ten sites

Nationally, nearly half (46%) of Australians had used Generative AI (GenAI) tools in the last six months in 2025, compared to a 37% average for First Nations Australians.²² Across the ten regional sites 26% of respondents had used Gen AI tools. However, usage varied widely, ranging from 44% in Thursday Island to 4% in Newman. Gen AI use was near the national First Nations average in Bunbury and Meekatharra, but well below in Port Lincoln, Lismore and Derby.



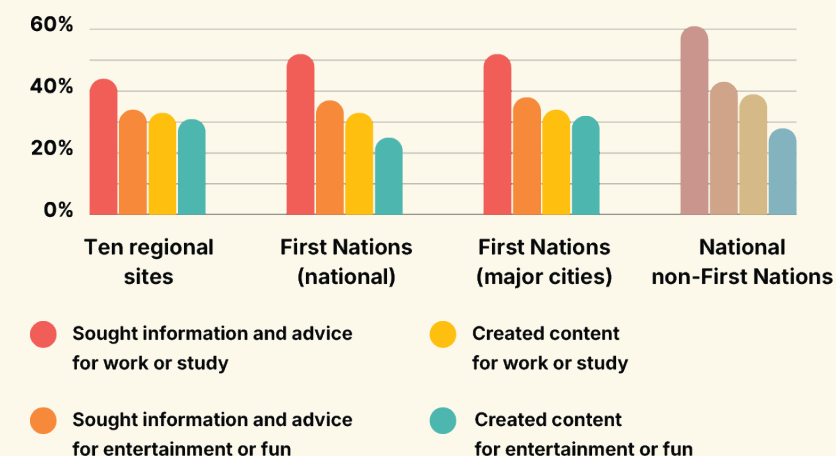
Figure 24. Rate of GenAI users in the ten regional sites compared to national averages, 2025



Among GenAI users in the ten sites, the highest use was to seek information for work or study (44%), consistent with the preferred use by both First Nations (52%) and non-First Nations (61%) nationally. Other uses of GenAI tools included: seeking information and advice for entertainment and fun (34%); creating content for work or study (33%); and creating content for entertainment or fun (31%).

These results align with the usage preferences for both First Nations and non-First Nations Australians nationally, however there is higher non-First Nations usage of GenAI to create content for work and study (39%).

Figure 25. Primary GenAI uses within the ten regional sites compared with national averages, 2025



Chatbot use

Among GenAI users across the ten sites, 18% had engaged with a chatbot for social connections or conversations, twice the national non-First Nations average (9%). The highest rates of chatbot use were in Derby (54%), Tennant Creek (31%) and Port Lincoln (27%). While further analysis is needed to understand the nature of this usage, it reflects a level of digital confidence and exploration of use of GenAI tools via smartphone and verbal engagement to bypass the need for typing.

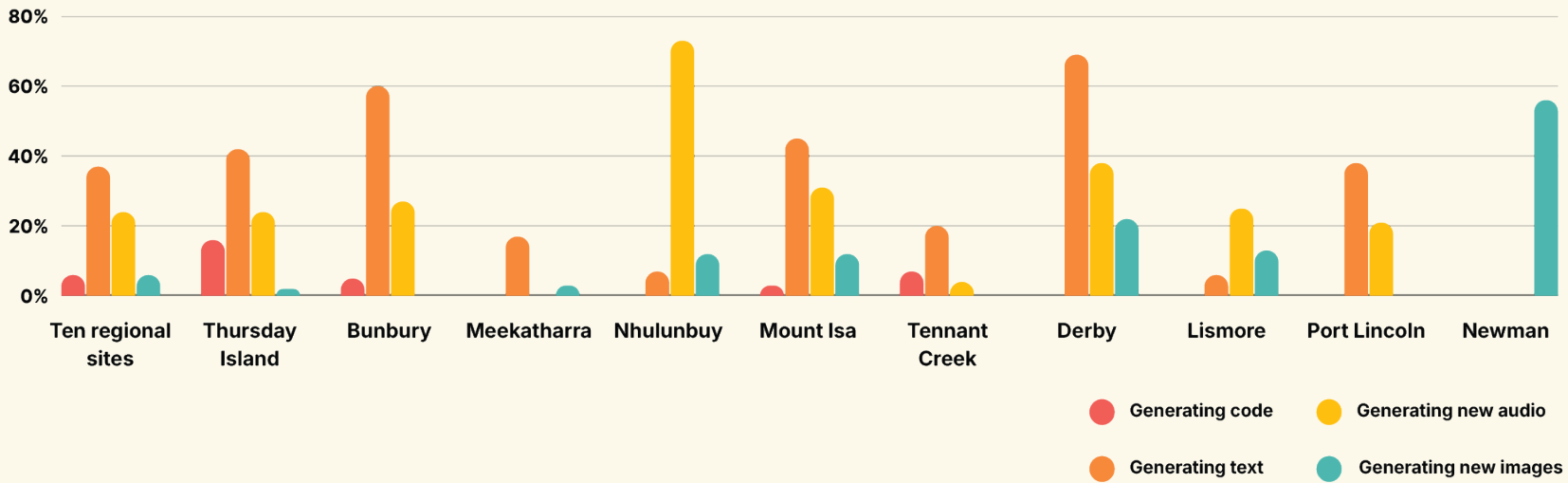


Digital Ability



37% of content being created using GenAI tools across the ten sites is text content, compared with 24% for creating new audio and 6% each for creating images and code. However, there are wide variations in types of content creation between sites, with the primary use in Newman being to create images (56% of users) and in Nhulunbuy to create music (73% of users), while in Derby (69%) and Bunbury (60%) text creation was the primary content type. Thursday Island had the highest rate of code generation (16%), suggesting more sophisticated IT skills in the town.

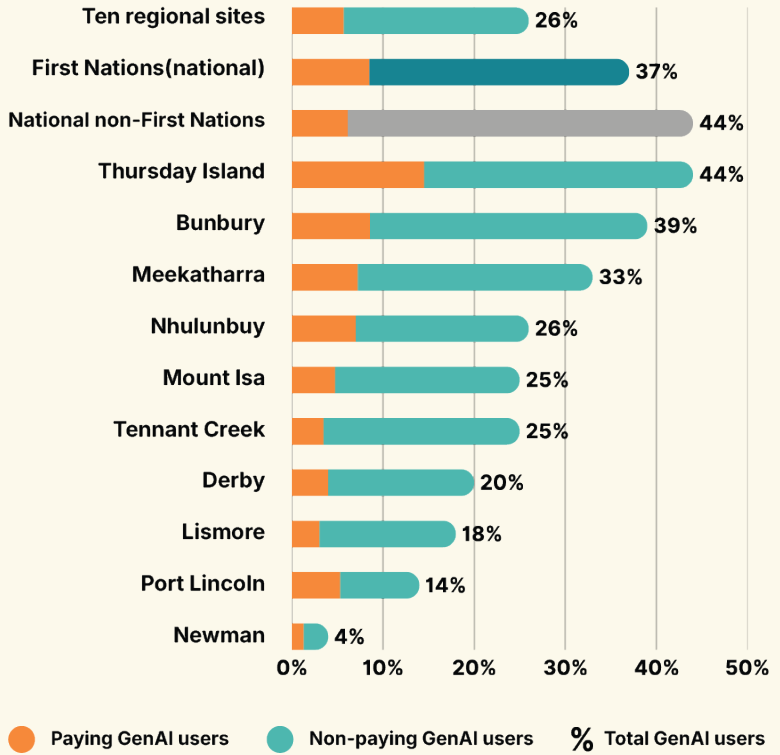
Figure 26. Primary content type created with GenAI within the ten regional sites, 2025



Among GenAI users in the ten sites, 22% paid for an app or subscription. This is comparable to the national First Nations average (23%) and 8% above the national non-First Nations rate. The highest rates of paid use were in Port Lincoln (38%), Thursday Island (33%) and Nhulunbuy (27%), with engagement in these sites primarily for workplace or learning applications. By contrast, only 2% of users in Derby paid for use, with the highest use being for entertainment and chatbot social engagement.



Figure 27. Proportion of paying GenAI users in the ten regional sites compared to national averages, 2025



There is currently wide variation in rates of engagement with GenAI tools. However, without training and support in how these tools can be safely used for relevant purposes such as search, learning and content creation, **there are early signs of a potential growing divide in GenAI use.**

Digital Ability



Addressing Digital Ability needs

Digital Ability is impacted by other elements of Access and Affordability, providing an indication of broader systemic and structural inequalities. Low Digital Ability levels limit access by First Nations people in regional and remote towns to critical online services, learning, employment and participation in economic, social and cultural activities.

Outside of workplaces and public libraries, **there is limited access to computer and IT facilities**, formal training programs and digital support across many of the towns visited. While many Western Australian towns have Community Resource Centres to provide digital services and support, and Rural Transaction Centres in NSW offer a range of services, most government funding programs to support digital access have reduced since the 2000s.

Some First Nations service providers have computers or Wi-Fi access available to clients as a supplementary support. While these are suitable locations due to existing engagement and cultural safety, without targeted funding to upgrade equipment and software and provide digital support, these facilities may not be sustainable.

Informal support from family members, peers and service providers currently remains the primary means of assistance. Mainstream programs such as the Be Connected Program, which supports a national network of volunteer mentors to provide digital supports to those over 50, are important but have seen relatively low First Nations engagement.

To ensure culturally appropriate delivery and community engagement, there is a need for a similar **First Nations digital mentor program to provide local support for people to learn to use digital technologies**, set up and navigate online services, and promote awareness of scams and online safety risks.

The data shows that **everyday engagement through work and study is a key driver of digital ability**, and that vocationally trained First Nations respondents across several sites matched or exceeded the digital ability of those with tertiary education, pointing to the strength of non-formal and vocational learning as a foundation for digital capability.

Demand for skills training and support delivered in language remains especially strong among older residents and people with disability to address significant skill gaps in managing devices, navigating online services and staying safe online. These findings point to the value of community-led strategies and engagement to deliver digital support that is practical, targeted and relevant.



I want to learn more about phone and internet. I would like to get an app that monitors my heart rate
(survey comment)

We need more digital skills training and on the job for workplace skills. Literacy and numeracy is an issue too
(survey comment)

We need people to be more educated on these things, so technology can be useful for us
(survey comment)



Media and information

How First Nations Australians access news, information and media services is an important component of Closing the Gap Outcome 17 as it contributes to informed decision-making, community participation and cultural safety.

Derby co-researchers Aaron Shadforth (left) and Owen Burns (right) completing a survey



Media and information

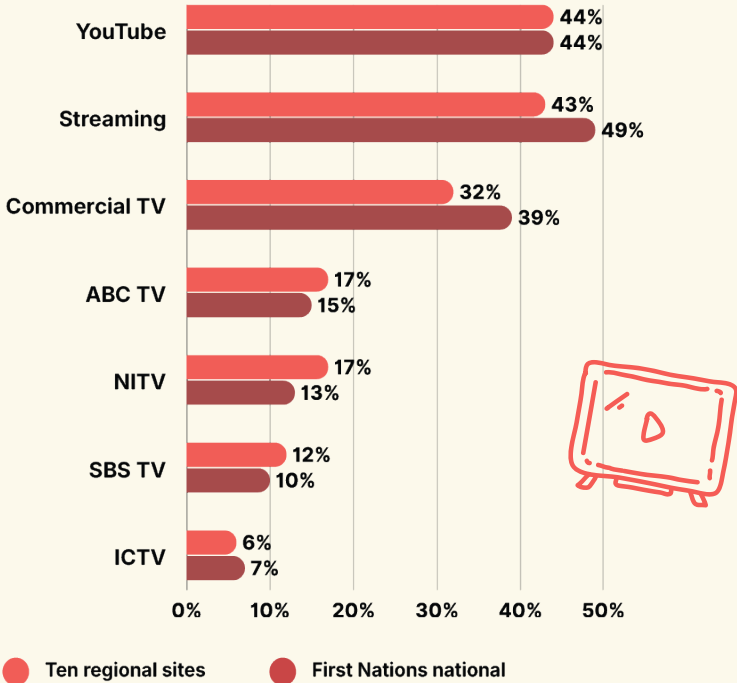


YouTube and streaming services are key media sources, but free-to-air and First Nations TV and radio provide trusted news and content

Digital platforms, online streaming and subscription services have become key sources of media and entertainment across the regional and remote towns, similar to national trends. Across the ten sites, 44% of respondents use YouTube as a daily source of TV and media content, with 43% using streaming services (Netflix, Prime, Disney, etc.). There is lower use of free-to-air TV services, with daily use of commercial TV at 32%, and NITV and ABC TV services at 17%.

However free-to-air radio and television broadcasting services are still well used, particularly by those with limited broadband or mobile connectivity and low-income households. With a reduction in the number of regional TV services and newspapers, First Nations media services are an increasingly important source of trusted and locally relevant news and information.

Figure 28. Rate of daily TV and media consumption in the ten regional sites compared to the national First Nations average, 2025

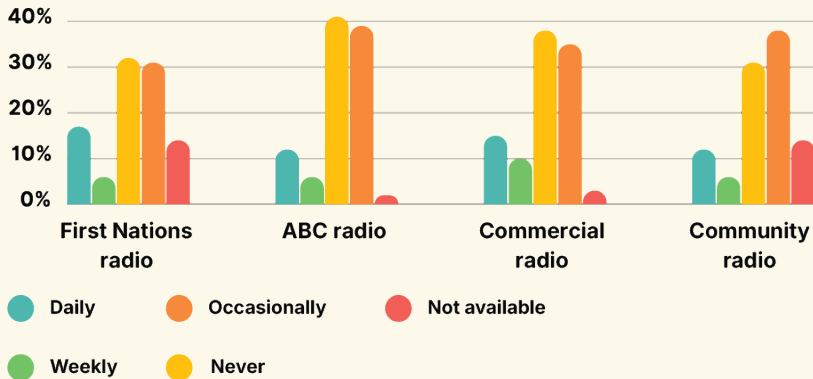


Radio listenership remains high with most listening in the car

First Nations audiences in remote and regional towns are following the national trend towards primary use of online and on-demand content, **however there are still relatively high rates of radio listenership**. Our survey found that 17% of respondents listen to First Nations radio services daily and a further 6% weekly, followed by commercial radio (15% daily/10% weekly), and ABC and community radio services (both 12% daily/6% weekly).

The primary means of radio access was by car radio (82%) with low rates of home radio listening (30%). Online radio streaming is increasing (17%), with some users listening to live radio via an FM radio app on Android mobile phones.

Figure 29. Regularity of radio listening by radio type for the ten regional sites, 2025



Media and information



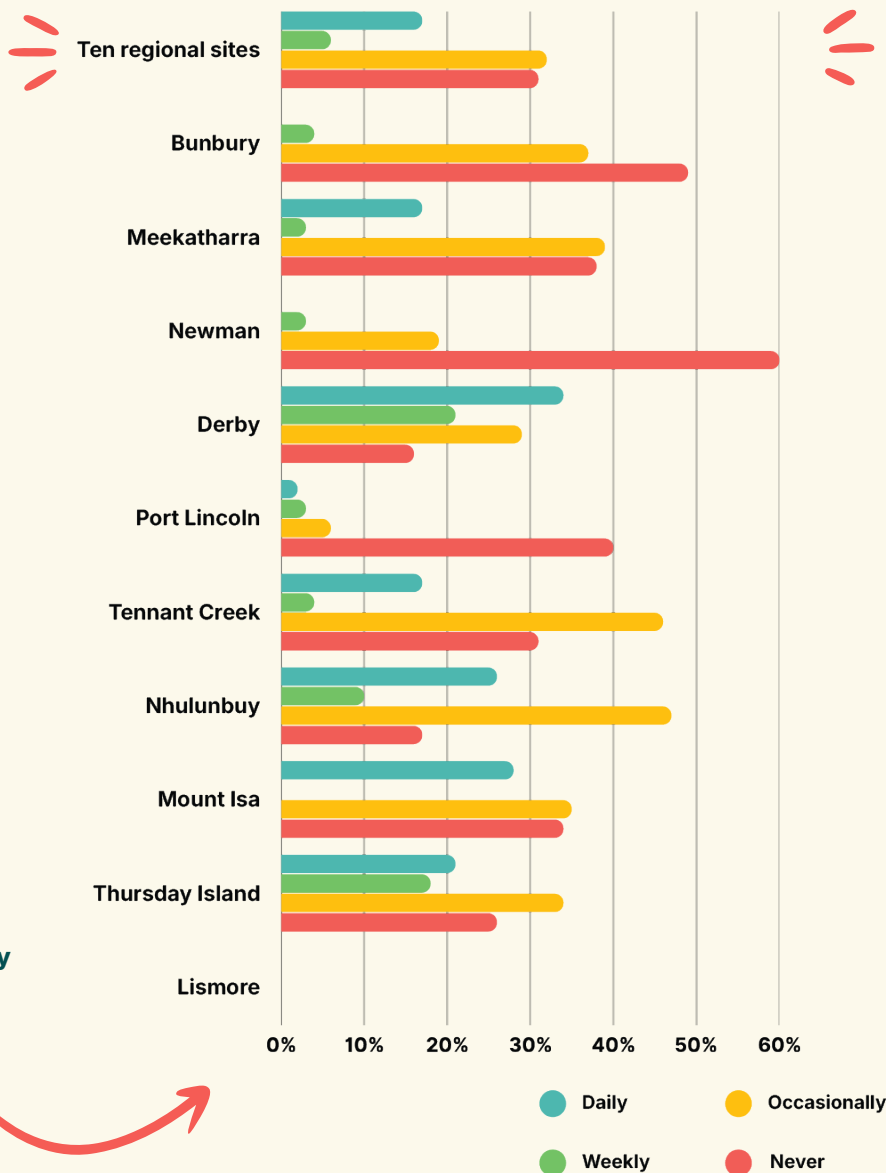
First Nations radio services remain trusted sources of locally relevant news, information and entertainment in regional Australia

They have played an important role during emergencies, including recent cyclones and flooding, with messages in local First Nations languages where needed. First Nations radio was also a critical source of reliable, trusted and culturally safe information during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Voice Referendum, which saw increased online misinformation, racism and hate speech.

Figure 30 shows that daily listenership to First Nations radio services is significantly higher in those towns with First Nations broadcast services available in Derby (34%), Nhulunbuy (26%), Mt Isa (28%), Waiben/Thursday Island (21%), Tennant Creek (17%) and Meekatharra (17%). Despite the option of streaming services, sites without a First Nations radio service had very low listenership, pointing to the local relevance of these services.



Figure 30. Regularity of First Nations radio listening for the ten regional sites, 2025



Where there is no First Nations radio service, community radio tends to be a preferred service. Port Lincoln, which had only 2% First Nations radio listenership, had relatively high daily use of community radio (29%), followed by commercial radio (21%) and ABC (6%). ABC Radio services are popular in Derby and Mt Isa (both 19% daily), Meekatharra (15%), and Waiben and Tennant Creek (both 12%), whereas the preference in Lismore was commercial radio (33%).

Derby research team in the 6DBY studio: left to right - Owen Burns, Julian Thomas, Luke Johnston (station manager), Daniel Featherstone, Kalinda Palmer (research support), brothers Brad and Aaron Shadforth and their Dad Brad Shadforth Senior on mic in foreground

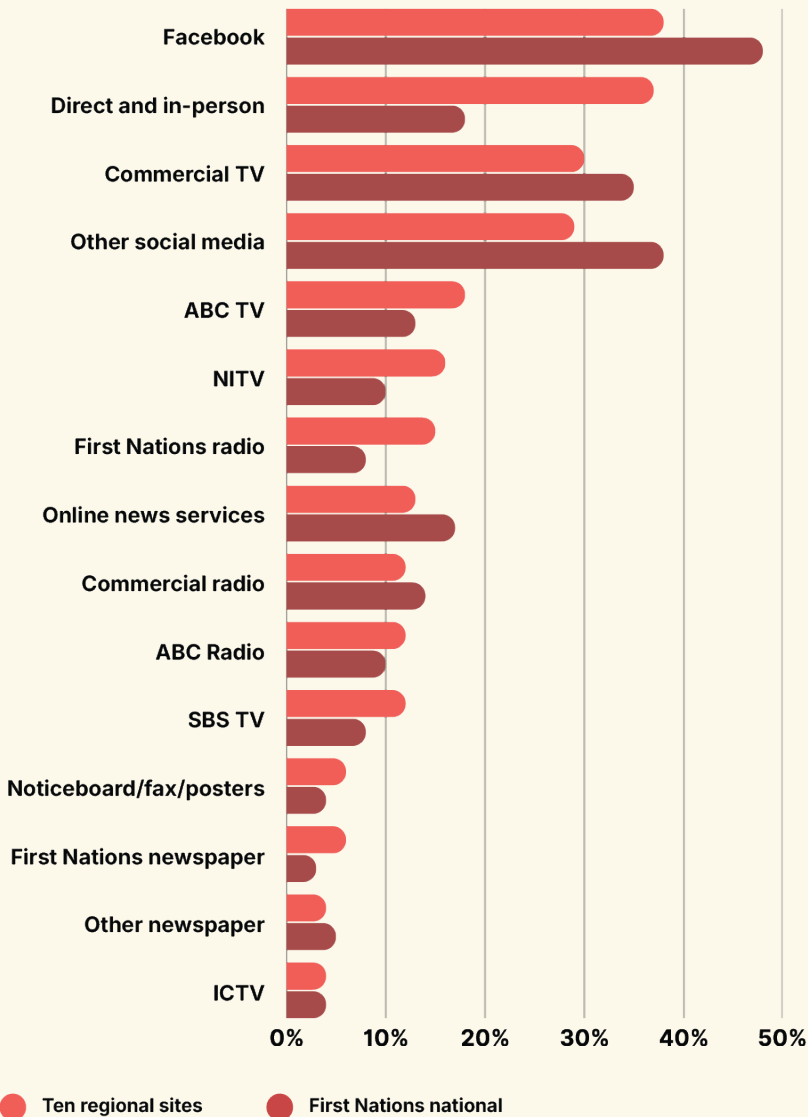
We should have an Aboriginal radio station here [Lismore NSW] (survey comment)



Media and information



Figure 31. Source of daily news and information by ten regional sites and national First Nations average



News and information services

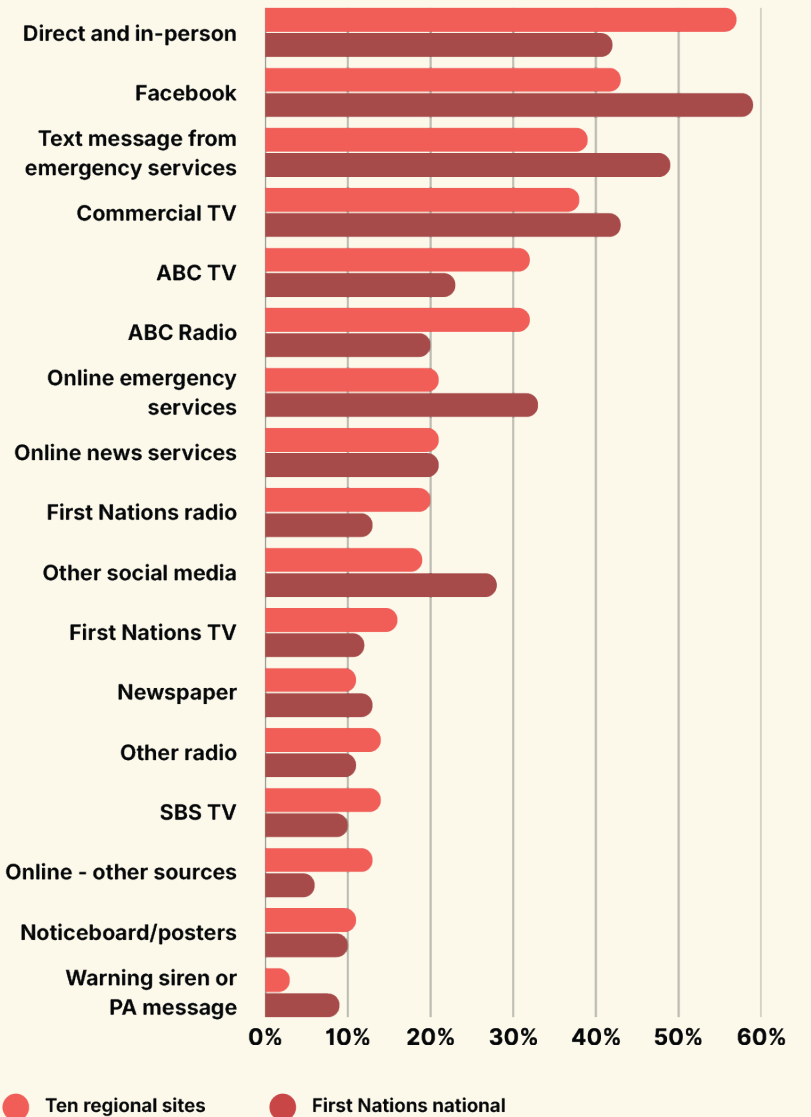
Facebook is the primary means of accessing news and information, followed by in-person communications and TV and radio services. Across the ten towns, the most common means of accessing news and information is via Facebook (38%), followed by direct and in-person communications (37%), commercial TV (30%), other social media platforms (29%), ABC Television (18%), NITV (16%), First Nations radio (15%) and online news (13%).

I get most of my news and information from my family (survey comment)

Emergency information is primarily received direct and in-person or via Facebook

Despite the array of digital and broadcast sources of emergency messaging, our survey found that 57% of respondents in the ten sites get emergency information directly or in-person, similar to those in remote communities. Other key sources are Facebook (43%), text message (39%), commercial TV (38%), ABC TV and ABC radio (32%), online news or emergency services (both 21%) and First Nations radio (20%).

Figure 32. Source of emergency information by ten regional sites and national First Nations average



Next steps

Ongoing measurement of First Nations digital inclusion is essential to understanding and addressing the gap identified under Closing the Gap Target 17. Continued data collection, analysis and reporting monitors the trajectory of change and impact of current policy and programs. This will provide the evidence needed to guide future First Nations-led initiatives and coordinated policy responses by government, industry, communities and the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group.

The Australian Government has provided funding for two rounds of data collection under the 'Measuring Digital Inclusion for First Nations Australians' pilot project. **The second round of data collection is being undertaken in 2026**, including the following data sources:

- **National**
Ipsos ATSIU data collection conducting 2000 surveys in urban, regional and remote sites, including 1350 face-to-face surveys in 35 sites and 650 iMob panel surveys (September to November 2026)
- **Remote communities**
Mapping the Digital Gap data collection in nine very remote communities (600-700 surveys collected from March to July 2026)
- **Regional and remote towns**
720 surveys to be collected in the same ten regional and remote towns with First Nations partner organisations and co-researchers (June to November 2026)

The data from over 3300 First Nations surveys will be weighted against ABS data and merged with the 2026 ADII data (over 3000 surveys nationally) to generate Index scores for the 2027 ADII report. Findings from the comparative First Nations results will be presented in a second 'Counting on Connectivity' report and updated Dashboard in September 2027. The timing of the regional sites data collection will align with other data collection modes in 2026, contributing to an expanded First Nations sample. As such, the **regional and remote towns analysis will be included in the next report and Dashboard**, removing the need for a second supplementary report.

Our team will continue to share research findings with First Nations communities and organisations, government and industry stakeholders, as well as through academic outputs. The aim is to foster coordinated, evidence-informed responses that strengthen digital inclusion outcomes through data-driven, community-led strategies across Australia.

Methodology is key to meaningful outcomes from First Nations research. The *Mapping the Digital Gap* research has demonstrated the value of place-based Aboriginal Participation Action Research (APAR) research, First Nations leadership and community partnerships to support capacity building and positive change.

Using a mixed methods approach, combining survey data with interviews with community leaders and stakeholders, local knowledge and voices are foregrounded and community-led solutions prioritised. The progress against local digital inclusion plans for the 12 communities involved in Phase 1 of the Mapping the Digital Gap project are highlighted in the [2025 Outcomes Report](#).²³

Context matters

While this national research is primarily quantitative, a similar place-based and partnership model has helped to promote community engagement in the research and ownership of the findings. **By supplementing each town's survey results with a snapshot of geographic, demographic and communications information**, the report provides a richer understanding of how local context impacts digital inclusion.

Drawing on Indigenous Standpoint theory, **future research in regional towns should be grounded in Indigenous ways of being, doing and knowing.** This approach privileges local Indigenous voices and is accountable to local priorities through strengthening relevance, ethical integrity and research impact. This could also include case studies of successful community-led projects or activities, which focus on targeted areas of identified community need.

Summary and considerations

This supplementary report aims to inform targeted digital inclusion policy and strategies for First Nations people living in remote and regional towns across Australia.

It builds upon the national findings in the 2025 *Counting on Connectivity Report* and *Dashboard*.

This report highlights that digital inclusion for First Nations Australians living in regional and remote towns varies widely. Every town is different and an understanding of the contextual factors—**geographic, demographic, economic and cultural**—can help inform appropriate solutions to address to close the digital gap.

While there are high levels of digital engagement, many people in the ten research sites face compounding barriers in Access, Affordability and Digital Ability, with **many households sharing similar barriers to those living in very remote communities**.

Population growth in regional towns—particularly in town camps, community living areas and public housing—has increased demand on already constrained infrastructure and services. Without targeted intervention, there is risk of deepening localised digital divides, even where baseline connectivity exists.

Many marginalised groups are particularly likely to face challenges in using digital technologies and online services, particularly Elders, people with disability, language speakers and those without employment or with limited schooling. These groups are also at most risk of online harms. Targeted programs to support these cohorts will help move the dial towards progress on Target 17.

The report is accompanied by a [spreadsheet of survey results](#), providing site-by-site comparison, as well as a document with site audits for the ten regional and remote towns.

This full data set is available for download with this report as part of our commitment to Closing the Gap [Priority Reform 4²⁴](#) and Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles. It also provides locally specific data to support local planning, with fit for purpose solutions guided by community and cultural knowledge, and local needs and priorities.

Summary and considerations

Expanded policy approach needed

Current policy measures are primarily focused towards addressing the very high rates of digital exclusion in remote First Nations communities and homelands. This includes the recently funded programs to provide community-wide Wi-Fi networks in 76 remote communities. Further investment is needed to address the barriers faced by digitally excluded residents in regional and remote towns. Without targeted support, many people are currently having to fend for themselves during a time of rapid digital transformation.

As such, this report highlights the need for expanded policy attention for regional communities, building on existing work by the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group including the 2024 Roadmap, to address the urgent needs of digitally excluded First Nations Australians, wherever they live.

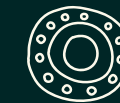
Equitable household broadband access is a key priority to reduce reliance on mobile-only connectivity. As service delivery, employment, education and health services shift online and data requirements increase, affordable connectivity and computer access are critical next steps to addressing the localised digital divide.

Technological change is accelerating. As decisions increasingly rely on automated and online systems, people need the capability to safely and confidently engage with these systems. Digital services and technologies can widen and simplify participation but may also deepen inequalities, with Gen AI accelerating potential benefits, but also possible risks. Our measurement will keep evolving so that indicators capture emerging realities and risks.

Programs that build skills and online safety remain vital. Many First Nations people in regional and remote towns lack the digital skills required or support available to learn to use online services and tools safely and confidently. While many First Nations organisations and service providers are seeking to address community demand for digital support, this is mostly unfunded and impacts on primary service delivery. Targeted investment is needed to ensure First Nations peoples are not left behind in this period of digital transformation, through delivery partnerships with community organisations.

Community-led solutions are needed

There are no one-size-fits-all solutions to digital inclusion. The research findings point to several key principles:



Place-based design

Solutions must reflect the specific social, geographic and service contexts of individual communities



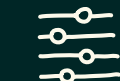
First Nations leadership

Local organisations and workers are central to effective delivery, sustained engagement and long-term capacity



Integrated investment

Infrastructure, affordability, devices and skills must be addressed together



Sustainable funding models

Short-term or pilot-based programs are insufficient to address long-term structural gaps.

Program considerations

Based on the findings from this and related research, there are **several key areas for consideration** to improve digital inclusion in regional and remote towns.



Address affordability through targeted and structural measures

Affordability remains a persistent barrier, particularly in smaller regional and more remote towns with limited provider choice and higher effective costs. Suggested strategies include:

- Introduce low-cost broadband products tailored to low-income and prepaid households
- Provide more affordability initiatives to increase First Nations household broadband participation
- Embed connectivity as a standard inclusion within social housing provision, recognising internet access as an essential service
- Continue and extend free public access options, including Wi-Fi-enabled public phones and community Wi-Fi.

Short-term subsidies are helpful, but structural and sustainable affordability measures are needed to reduce ongoing cost burdens.



Strengthen community-based access infrastructure

Evidence from multiple towns shows that local Wi-Fi networks and community access facilities are critical entry points for digital participation, particularly where household connectivity is low. Suggested strategies include:

- Continue to invest in community-wide Wi-Fi networks and/or hotspots in town camps and community living areas, ideally providing in-house access
- Expand funding eligibility within Wi-Fi funding programs to include regional and remote towns
- Support culturally safe community access facilities (e.g. libraries, community centres, First Nations organisations) with reliable internet, computers, and on-site assistance
- Provide ongoing operational funding, not just capital investment, to ensure sustainability
- Ensure public housing are equipped for nbn connectivity

Importantly, these measures will reduce reliance on informal and often unsafe access points and bring connectivity closer to where people live.



Improve household device access

Limited access to appropriate devices—particularly computers—continues to constrain meaningful use of online services and opportunities for economic participation.

- Provide low-cost laptops for school students to support educational engagement
- Expand device bank and refurbishment programs into regional and remote towns
- Resource community organisations to maintain and upgrade shared computer facilities.

Device access is a critical enabler of education, economic participation, health and welfare and broader digital participation. Therefore, this must be addressed alongside connectivity.

Program considerations



Invest in First Nations-led digital capability support

Low digital ability reflects not just skills gaps, but systemic barriers to access, education and training and culturally appropriate support.

- Deliver informal, community-based digital skills programs through existing and culturally safe settings
- Develop locally relevant cyber-safety and scam awareness initiatives, including delivery in language where appropriate
- Provide practical guidance on choosing and using devices, mobile services and broadband plans
- Build upon the pilot First Nations digital mentor program to increase availability of mentors in regional and remote towns

Evidence shows that informal, relational and community-led learning models are more effective than standardised training programs.



Target infrastructure gaps within and around towns

Even in towns with mobile and broadband services available, there are often significant gaps in coverage and service quality in First Nations population areas.

- Deliver targeted mobile infrastructure and in-fill programs focused on town camps, fringe areas and community living zones
- Use fine-grained, community-informed data to identify priority locations for upgrades, rather than relying on broad coverage maps.

Improving reliability and speed in these areas is essential to support both mobile-only users and broader service access.



Expand First Nations media services

In line with calls for action by First Nations Media Australia,²⁵ there is a need for expanded coverage and resourcing for First Nations broadcasting and media services in regional and remote towns. These services deliver locally relevant and culturally appropriate news, information and community messages via broadcast and online platforms. If resourced, First Nations media organisations can also play a key role in supporting digital inclusion initiatives through expanded use of facilities and staff, targeted messaging and awareness raising.

Appendix 1: Measuring Digital Inclusion for First Nations Australians project

Objectives

The objectives of the Measuring Digital Inclusion for First Nations Australians project are to: accurately measure progress on digital inclusion and media use among First Nations Australians nationally relative to other Australians (Closing the Gap Target 17); track changes in digital inclusion and media use in 2024–25 and 2026–27; ensure First Nations leadership, governance and partnership in all aspect of the project; and ensure data collection and access align with Closing the Gap Priority Reform 4 and principles of Indigenous data sovereignty. The project will provide the first robust, comparative measure of digital inclusion for First Nations Australians across all regions, enabling accurate reporting on progress toward CTG17 and informing future policy and program design.

First Nations research principles, leadership and governance

This project is guided by the core values and principles outlined in:

- NHMRC Guidelines for 'Ethical Conduct in Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Communities' (2018)
- AIATSIS (2021) Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research with four key principles: Indigenous self-determination; Indigenous leadership; impact and value; sustainability and accountability

- principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty (Kukutai and Taylor 2016), in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008)
- the FAIR and CARE data principles, supporting Indigenous data governance and community control of information.

Methodology

This project builds upon the existing methodologies of survey data collection by ADII and *Mapping the Digital Gap* projects. The survey tool is an expanded version of the Australian Internet Usage Survey (AIUS) with additional questions on media and information services relevant to align with Outcome 17 indicators. First Nations leadership and governance is a key element of the project through the oversight of First Nations team members (see below) and the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group as steering committee. The Methodology is outlined in more detail in the Project Plan (admscentre.org.au/measuring-digital-inclusion-for-first-nations-australians).

Data collection

Primary data collection is being undertaken in two tranches—the first in 2024/25 and the second in 2026/27—to begin a time series to measure CTG17. First Nations company Ipsos' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Unit (ATSIRU) were contracted to collect 2000 national surveys in each using tested research methods, a mix of face-to-face surveys using a national co-researcher network and an existing iMob panel to

recruit participants. Participants are remunerated for their time.

In addition, 807 surveys were undertaken in partnership with local organisations and co-researchers in 11 remote and very remote communities under the *Mapping the Digital Gap* project to ensure a geographically representative First Nations sample. The ADII project team also undertook face to face data collection in 10 targeted regional towns in 2025 in partnership with local First Nations organisations. The results of this collection were not ready for inclusion in the 2025 report and will be reported separately in early 2026. The second round of targeted regional site data collection will contribute to the second CTG17 report and dashboard update in mid-2027.

Data management and governance

All research activities are conducted under approved Human Research Ethics protocols through RMIT University, ensuring culturally appropriate, safe and respectful engagement with First Nations participants and communities. We abide by Indigenous data governance principles in all aspects of data collection, analysis, management and access. Survey participation is voluntary and based on informed consent, with participants' privacy protected through de-identification and secure data storage.

Survey results from this project are de-identified, merged and weighted with ADII and *Mapping the Digital Gap* results to generate comparative Index scores, between First Nations Australians and other Australians, by ADII dimension, geography and demographic groups. Small area estimates

Appendix 1: Measuring Digital Inclusion for First Nations Australians project

processing enables disaggregated regional results for Indigenous Regions (using ABS zoning) across the country.

All results are publicly available on a new First Nations dashboard on the ADII website, designed for easy access by First Nations communities, organisations, peak bodies and individuals in accordance with Priority Reform 4. Data files are downloadable from the ADII website. The ADII dashboard and website have been developed and maintained by partner organisation Dassier, with a dedicated First Nations interactive dashboard and website section built for this project. Design work for the project logo and icons have been undertaken by First Nations graphic design company Ingeous Studios.

ADII and Mapping the Digital Gap linkage

Comparability of data collected relies on national ADII data collection, undertaken by ADM+S and funded by Telstra. This includes 3065 surveys collected in 2024 by ADII partner Social Research Centre, with the 2024 ADII report and dashboard launched on 5 November 2025.

The Telstra-funded *Mapping the Digital Gap* project is a supplementary ADII project to undertake place-based qualitative and quantitative research in remote and very remote First Nations communities. communities and towns over 2022 to 2024. Telstra funded a second phase of the project, to visit a further 8-10 communities from 2025 to 2027.

The twelve participating communities were chosen in consultation with First Nations community leaders and community-controlled organisations. The research team has

partnered with local or regional agencies for each research site to ensure the project adheres to local policies and cultural protocols, has community trust and engagement and provides tangible research outcomes to the community.

More detail can be found in the *Mapping the Digital Gap* [Background Paper](#).

The research team

The ADII team, comprised of members from RMIT and Swinburne Universities, has worked at the forefront of digital inclusion research and initiatives since 2016 with expertise in culturally appropriate engagement with First Nations communities.

This project has built upon the existing team from the ADII and *Mapping the Digital Gap* projects—see profiles at mappingthedigitalgap.com/about/#team—with dedicated First Nations leadership from Principal Research Fellow, Dr Heron Loban, and Project Manager, Alison Barton. The ADII data collection, weighting and Small Area Estimate modelling derived from the research team's index scores is carried out by the Social Research Centre.

Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/national-agreement-closing-the-gap/7-difference/b-targets/b17>
- 2 Bureau of Communications, Arts and Regional Research. (2025). Digital exclusion in Australia: Evidence from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey Commonwealth of Australia. <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/digital-exclusion-in-australia-report.pdf>
- 3 Thomas, J., McCosker, A., Parkinson, S., Hegarty, K., Featherstone, D., Kennedy, J., Ormond-Parker, L., Morrison, K., Rea, H., & Ganley, L. (2025). *Measuring Australia's digital divide: 2025 Australian digital inclusion index*. <https://apo.org.au/node/332322>
- 4 Featherstone, et al (2025) Counting on Connectivity: Measuring digital inclusion for First Nations Australians (add full citation)
- 5 Rose, J., Langton, M., Smith, K., & Clinch, D. (2023). Indigenous data governance in Australia: Towards a national framework. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 14(1). <https://10.18584/iipj.2023.14.1.10987>; Commonwealth of Australia. (2024). Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data.
- 6 Kukutai, T. and Taylor, J. (eds) (2016). *Indigenous Data Sovereignty: Toward An Agenda*. ANU Press, Canberra.; Maïam nayri Wingara 2018, *Indigenous Data Sovereignty: Key principles*, Maïam nayri Wingara Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Sovereignty Collective
- 7 For an interactive version of this graphic including all locations and survey completions, please visit <https://www.admscentre.org.au/measuring-digital-inclusion-for-first-nations-australians>
- 8 <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/national-agreement-closing-the-gap/7-difference/b-targets/b17>
- 9 Thomas et al, 2025
- 10 <https://www.telstra.com.au/support/internet-and-home-phone/can-radio-adsl-exit>
- 11 <https://theconversation.com/how-starlink-is-connecting-remote-first-nations-communities-and-creating-new-divides-271086>
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- 13 Source: <https://www.telstra.com.au/exchange/an-iconic-shape-containing- tales-of-connection--telstra-public-p>
- 14 <https://thecityjournal.net/data-journalism-2021/the-slow-disappearing-act-of-public-payphones>
- 15 <https://www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/evaluations/mobile-telecommunications-coverage-regional-and-remote-areas>

Endnotes

16 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-03-06/nt-remote-communities-residents-struggling-to-afford-food-costs/106408694>

17 This was the rate at the time of the survey in 2025. The cost of a basic 28-day Telstra recharge voucher increased from \$39 to \$44 on 5th May 2026, with data allowance increased from 15GB to 20GB

18 The ADII's Digital Ability dimension is based on the internationally recognised Internet Skills Scale (ISS), developed by researchers Alexander van Deursen, Ellen Helsper, and Rebecca Eynon

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Website

digitalinclusionindex.org.au

Dashboard

dashboard.digitalinclusionindex.org.au/FirstNations/Home



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