



MCKELL INSTITUTE QUEENSLAND

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Digital exclusion is a significant driver of human disadvantage in the modern world.



HON RACHEL NOLAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
MCKELL INSTITUTE QUEENSLAND

Since 1945, with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the advent of the modern welfare state, Western governments have taken huge steps in providing the necessities of life to their citizens through public health, public education and public housing.

Now, we face a new challenge. As economic, social and civic life move increasingly online, the many people who are excluded from the digital world are excluded from modern life.

This is a problem with which governments are only beginning to grapple.

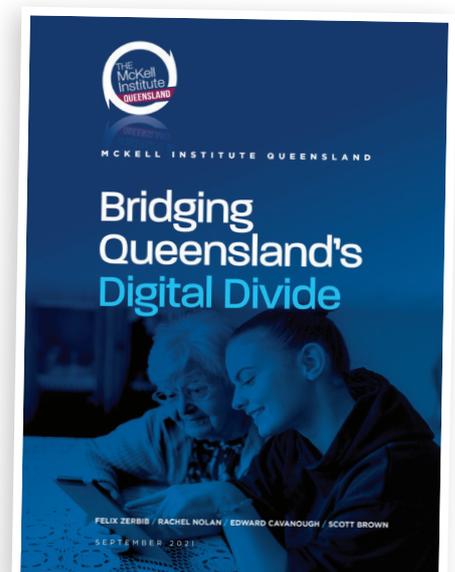
The Mckell Institute Report, *Bridging the Digital Divide* is the first deep exploration of digital exclusion in Queensland.

THE REPORT IS IN THREE MAJOR PARTS -

- An examination of the extent of digital exclusion in Queensland
- An exploration of state and national digital inclusion policy, and
- A series of recommendations for a more digitally inclusive Queensland

The report has been commissioned by Telstra, an organisation which has demonstrated its commitment to digital inclusion for some time through support for the Australian Digital Inclusion Index. The research work has been undertaken by The Mckell Institute in partnership with the Queensland Council of Social Service.

The Queensland Government is currently preparing a 2021 Digital Economy strategy. We hope that this report's recommendations will be considered as an input towards that strategy and that the work laid out here will contribute to a more digitally inclusive Queensland.

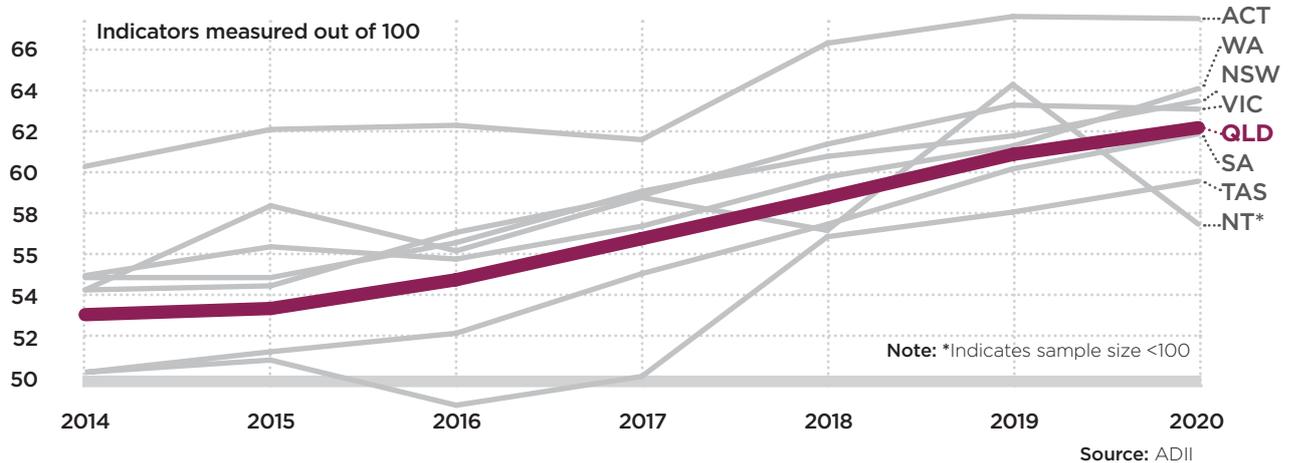


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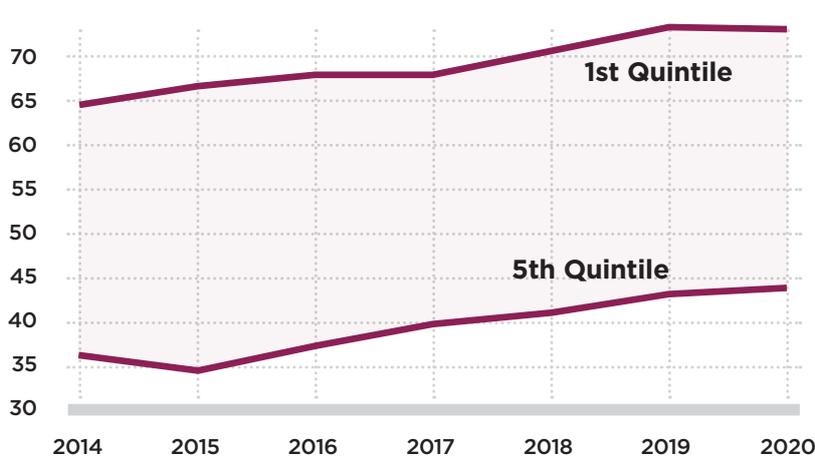
Digital Exclusion in Queensland In 4 Graphs

On key digital inclusion measures, access to technology, digital affordability and the ability to use technologies **Queensland ranks fifth of the Australian states.**

1. Digital Inclusion by State



2. Digital Inclusion by Income Quintile

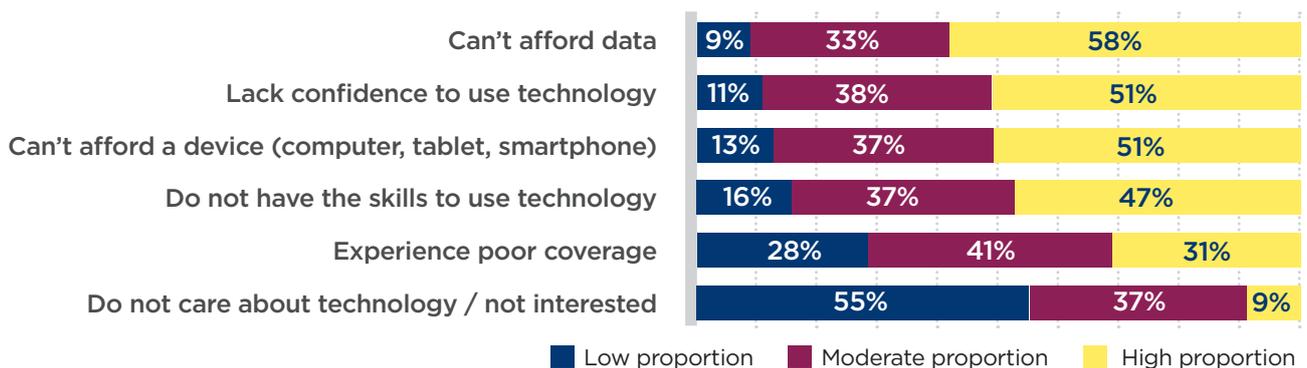


Digital exclusion closely tracks income with the digital inclusion gap between high and low income households growing since 2014. And in Queensland, geography is a factor with people in North West Queensland (including Cape York) being less likely to use digital technologies and people in Coastal Queensland (Mackay to Gympie) spending a higher proportion of their income on digital technologies, particularly when compared to people in South East Queensland.

3. Data Affordability is the Key Barrier for Queenslanders Experiencing Marginalisation

For this McKell Institute report, the Queensland Council of Social Service undertook a detailed survey of community sector workers across Queensland. Those workers report that **data affordability is the leading driver of digital exclusion.**

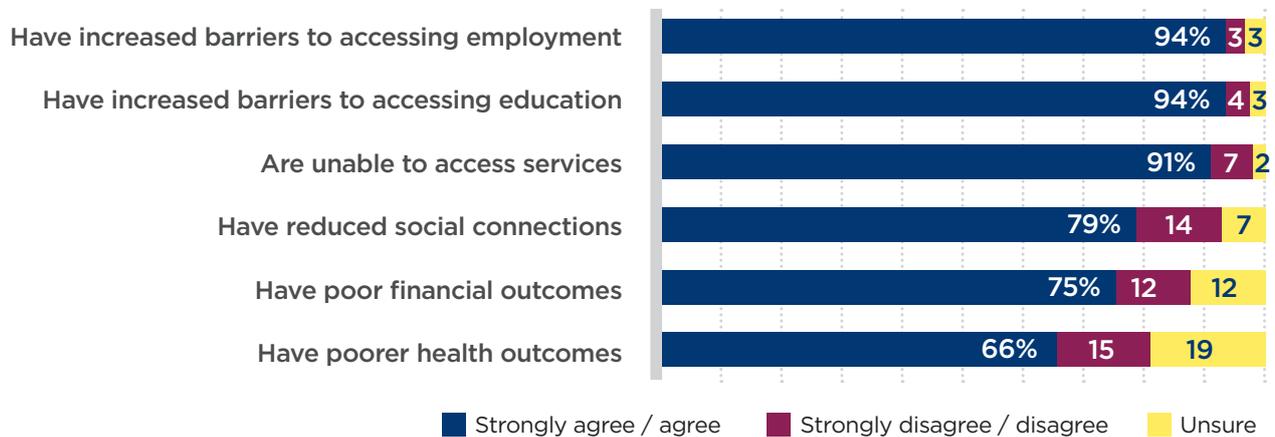
“WHAT PROPORTION OF YOUR CLIENTS EXPERIENCE THE FOLLOWING BARRIERS TO DIGITAL INCLUSION?”, QCOSS 2021



4. The Impact of Digital Exclusion on Queenslanders Experiencing Marginalisation

The research showed that digital exclusion further precludes people from **accessing employment, education, services, social contact** and **even ultimately health**.

“WHEN YOUR CLIENTS EXPERIENCE DIGITAL EXCLUSION, WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES?”, QCOSS 2021



Digital Policy – How Queensland Fares Alongside Other States

Queensland Policy

Since the release of the strategy *DIGITALIST: Advancing Our Digital Future* in 2017, the Queensland Government has recognised digital inclusion as a policy priority and has developed a number of initiatives to improve digital inclusion.

KEY PROGRAMS INCLUDE -

- **Tech Savvy Seniors** - a training program for over 65s (the most digitally excluded group) delivered through public libraries and Indigenous Knowledge Centres in 32 local government areas. The program is a partnership with Telstra.
- **Deadly Digital Communities** - a State Library of Queensland and Telstra program to support people in indigenous communities to access online health, education and financial services. Accessed by 5,300 people in four years.
- **Digital Professional Workforce Action Plan** - a COVID-19 economic response to upskill 10,000 new digital workers, including neuro diverse people and First Nations people to meet rapidly growing demand.
- **Regional blackspot coverage funding** - direct funding programs and co-investment funding with industry to expand and improve network coverage in regional and remote communities across Queensland.

What’s Happening in Other Australian Jurisdictions?

The Federal Government, which has lead responsibility for telecommunications policy and regulation, has rolled out the National Broadband Network and partnered with industry, state and local governments on network co-investment programs to expand and improve coverage in regional and remote communities across the country.

Among Australian states New South Wales is recognised as the digital leader, having committed \$2.1 billion across the last two state budgets for digital transformation and inclusion including a major fund to ‘close the digital gap between regional and metropolitan schools through better integration of digital into the curriculum and infrastructure’.

Victoria has major digital initiatives including the \$626m ‘Digital Future Now’ package which aims to improve digital service delivery by government. It recently announced a Digital Jobs package for 5,000 Victorians to undertake digital skills training.

Following consultation on a draft digital inclusion blueprint in 2020, the Western Australian Government released earlier this year their *Digital Strategy 2021-2025*, which includes ‘Digitally Inclusive’ as one of its four pillars.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The McKell Institute makes a number of recommendations. All are practical measures designed to contribute to a more inclusive Queensland.

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Queensland Government recognises that accessing the internet and digital media enables the realisation of protected human rights

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Queensland Government develop a 10 year Digital Inclusion Roadmap in consultation with industry, social service providers and the community

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Queensland Government pioneer the development of a digital capability framework to improve the consistency and success rate of government and industry funded digital inclusion programs

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Queensland Government increase funding for digital literacy programs to evolve and scale existing successful programs and develop new programs targeting other digitally excluded cohorts, in consultation with industry and social service providers

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Queensland Government audit infrastructure, digital equipment and resourcing needs of public libraries, Indigenous Knowledge Centres and community and neighbourhood centres to fully enable them to act as digital access and support hubs

RECOMMENDATION 6

The Queensland Government increase existing funding to more significantly invest with industry, councils, businesses and communities to address regional and remote telecommunications blackspots, coverage quality and network resiliency

RECOMMENDATION 7

The Queensland Government, as it increasingly delivers services online, ensures it is delivering a consistent, inclusive and accessible online experience across all government websites

RECOMMENDATION 8

The Queensland Government ensures all low income, vulnerable and remote students can access suitable connectivity and devices at school and at home

RECOMMENDATION 9

The Queensland Government lobby the Federal Government to create a permanent, affordable NBN consumer plan for households receiving government income benefits

CONTACT THE MCKELL INSTITUTE QUEENSLAND

EMAIL rachel.nolan@mckellinstitute.org.au

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