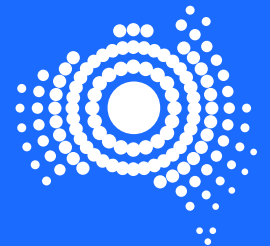




**Low-Income and
Digital Inclusion Forum**
Annual Report
2024



Acknowledgement of Country

nbn acknowledges First Nations peoples and recognises their role as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters across Australia. We are privileged to work across all corners of this vast country and pay our respects to all Elders past, present and emerging.



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CHAIR'S MESSAGE

This inaugural annual report details the achievements and activities of the Low-Income and Digital Inclusion Forum (LIDIF / Forum) for the period from March 2023 to June 2024.

The formation of LIDIF represents a significant step under the Special Access Undertaking (SAU) variation accepted by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) in October 2023, with nbn committed to facilitating LIDIF until at least 2032.

Digital inclusion is a multifaceted and complex issue and presents intricate societal challenges, which necessitate and require collaborative engagement and dedicated effort across multiple sectors to develop and champion effective solutions.

The Forum is uniquely placed to support and facilitate this endeavour and serves as a multi-stakeholder working group with a clear mission:

Actively collaborate across telecommunications industry, not-for-profits, customer advocacy, and government agencies to address access, affordability, and digital ability for digitally excluded people nationwide.

Since its inception in March 2023, nbn has convened six LIDIF meetings, during which our membership has grown to include representatives from 24 organisations. The Forum's initial focus has been on establishing a robust framework for multi-stakeholder collaboration: recruiting its diverse members, establishing the accepted research base, aligning on a common purpose and mission, defining operational guidelines, and setting initial priorities.

Significant initiatives discussed and progressed through LIDIF include the evolution of the School Student Broadband Initiative (SSBI) and foundational efforts to help enable the establishment of a National Device Bank. Additionally, the Forum has facilitated the sharing of critical digital inclusion insights such as the Australian Digital Capability Framework, and WorkVentures' report on "Measuring the Impact of Digital Access for School Students".

nbn's support and commitment to LIDIF aligns with our broader commitments to continue to enhance Australia's digital capabilities. This includes nbn's Accessibility and Inclusion Plan, which focuses on improving services for people with disability,

advancing nbn's sustainability objectives, and working in partnership with the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group (FNDIAG) and the Australian Government to provide community Wi-Fi for First Nations communities.

I acknowledge the valuable contribution of Ken Walliss setting up and leading the Forum while he chaired LIDIF from March 2023 to March 2024. I am grateful to the representatives of each member organisation for their substantial contributions of time, digital inclusion expertise, advocacy for customer vulnerability and commitment to improving and enhancing digital inclusion – and I look forward to our continued collaboration to expand digital opportunities for all.



Rachael McIntyre
LIDIF Chair
Executive General Manager
Stakeholder Relations, nbn

THE DIGITAL INCLUSION CHALLENGE

Digital inclusion means ensuring people can use the internet and technology to improve their daily lives. It is about enabling equitable access to and use of technology to participate in our increasingly digital economy and society.

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) defines digital inclusion in terms of access, affordability and digital ability; an individual facing barriers in one or more of these areas may be considered digitally excluded as they are not experiencing optimal benefits of being online.

While the ADII model allows us to quantify levels of digital inclusion, to compare measures across demographic groups, and to track changes over time, digital inclusion remains inherently complex. This is because:

- It requires coordinated solutions across its three dimensions: access, affordability, and digital ability.
- There is a high degree of intersectionality between socio-demographic groups facing digital exclusion, resulting in compound barriers and needs, that are not suited to a simple, one-size-fits-all approach.
- Accountabilities to lift various aspects of digital inclusion are dispersed across multiple stakeholders, most notably the telecommunications industry, not-for-profit and community organisations, as well as government.

This complexity illustrates the criticality of bringing together diverse stakeholders for cross-industry collaboration via forums such as the LIDIF.

MISSION

LIDIF members have collectively agreed to a mission that is reflective of the digital inclusion challenge and the long-term character of the Forum:

Actively collaborate across the telecommunications industry, not-for-profit organisations, customer advocacy groups, and government agencies to address access, affordability, and digital ability barriers for digitally excluded people nationwide.

The mission also encompasses the specific opportunity for members to:

Provide views and feedback in relation to the potential impact of nbn's prices and any proposed product withdrawals on low-income, vulnerable, and unconnected people.

In the near-term, the Forum works towards fulfilling its mission in three ways by exploring initiatives to:

Support low-income and digitally excluded people to connect to and use the nbn[®] network via Retail Service Providers (RSPs).

Assist low-income and digitally excluded people with targeted measures.

Augment pre-existing initiatives driven by LIDIF members which are aligned to the Forum's mission.

MEMBERSHIP

The Forum was launched in early 2023 on an opt-in basis. 22 members of the Forum signed on initially and there are 24 members as at the end of June 2024. The ACCC, although not a member, has also started attending the Forum in an observer capacity, commencing in March 2024. nbn is the chair of LIDIF and provides the secretariat function.

LIDIF membership is open to not-for-profit groups, consumer advocacy groups, government agencies, and access seekers (including RSPs). Members are:

Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN)

Better Internet for Rural, Regional & Remote Australia (BIRRR)

Good Things Foundation

QUT Digital Media Research Centre

Victoria State Government

Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance (ADIA)

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

Government of Western Australia

Telstra

Vocus

AGL

First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group

Launtel

The Smith Family

Western Sydney Community Forum

NSW Telco Authority

TPG Telecom

WorkVentures

Anglicare Australia

Infoxchange

Optus

Aussie Broadband

Good360

Queensland State Government



LIDIF's membership base is expected to evolve. More information on how to become a member can be found [on the nbn website](#).

PROCEEDINGS

Since its inception, the Forum has met on a quarterly basis. It is supported by smaller working groups to advance LIDIF's work, made up of relevant subject matter experts drawn from the Forum's member base. Such working groups regularly report back to the Forum. The LIDIF and its working groups use independent research insights and members participate in meetings on a voluntary basis such that each LIDIF member can engage as they deem appropriate given their level of interest and resources.

The Forum is committed to collaboration and transparency, and demonstrates its progress and how nbn has taken into account the views and feedback from the Forum, for example through the publication of an annual report on nbn's website each financial year.

LIDIF MEETINGS

A total of six quarterly LIDIF meetings have been held between March 2023 and June 2024, via hybrid formats – hosted at nbn's Sydney or Melbourne offices, with most attendees joining online via video conference.



WORKING GROUPS

LIDIF members are encouraged to actively contribute to working groups set up to discuss and progress initiatives aligned to the direction and areas of focus defined by the Forum. In the first year of operation, there were two separate working groups:

- The Augmentation Working Group focuses on identifying ways to enhance already established digital inclusion initiatives, improving their scale, impact, or executional efficiency. Initiatives are tabled by LIDIF members for discussion, feedback, contribution, or collaboration. nbn provides program support to facilitate the discussion and progress of such initiatives.
- The New Opportunities Working Group focusses on longer-term, strategic digital inclusion priorities. Members come together to identify and define new, practical initiatives which could contribute to uplifting digital inclusion for people in Australia.

Across both working groups, 10 meetings were held since the first occurrence in August 2023. Both working groups' output enhances the discussions and recommendations at the quarterly LIDIF meetings. Their contribution to the Forum's work is summarised in this report.

UPDATES FROM MARCH 2023 TO JUNE 2024

As part of facilitating the Forum, and in pursuit of the Forum’s mission, nbn offered members the opportunity to provide views and feedback in relation to:

1 Possible targeted initiatives to improve access to the nbn® network for low-income, vulnerable, and unconnected people

2 The potential impact of nbn’s prices and proposed product withdrawals on such people

nbn sets out below an update on the progress of such initiatives and on how nbn has taken into account the views and feedback received from LIDIF on such matters.

nbn also sets out below information on other work of the Forum in that period (see: Section **3**).

1 Targeted Initiatives

Throughout the reporting period, LIDIF members have worked collaboratively on initiatives in support of uplifting digital inclusion for people in Australia, covering:

**THE SCHOOL STUDENT
BROADBAND INITIATIVE
(SSBI)**

Committed through to 31 December 2025

**SUPPORTING SSBI
FAMILIES AT THE END OF
2025**

**A NATIONAL DEVICE
BANK**

THE SCHOOL STUDENT BROADBAND INITIATIVE

The SSBI is an Australian Government program providing access to free nbn broadband, via participating RSPs, for up to 30,000 families with school-aged children and no active nbn broadband internet at home.

The SSBI service is available until 31 December 2025 for eligible families who register before 31 December 2024. The program aims to boost educational opportunities and support households struggling with cost-of-living pressures. nbn has engaged nominating organisations across Australia, including education authorities, national charities, not-for-profits, local community organisations, and schools, to identify eligible families through their existing programs and contacts – and in the case of the National Referral Centre (NRC), to provide a self-nomination avenue.

Progress report

The SSBI was launched in February 2023, and the total number of families benefiting from the SSBI has since grown to 13,285 as at 13 June 2024, while the number of nominating organisations has increased to 60. In November 2023, the Australian Government announced that the program and the free nbn broadband would be extended to 31 December 2025, with the nomination period being extended to 31 December 2024.

A significant development in the program was the establishment of the NRC in October 2023, run by Anglicare Victoria, to support families from nomination to connection and to allow families to nominate themselves for the program directly, making it easier for them to connect to SSBI.

In addition, nbn sought to support the implementation and promotion of the program by:

- Working with education authorities in each State and Territory to promote the SSBI through their school communities;

- Running a social media campaign targeted at 10 low socio-economic status Local Government Areas in each state, supported by activity from community organisations and Members of Parliament;
- Trialling targeted face-to-face engagement during April 2024, with 10 events in 10 days in the City of Greater Dandenong, Victoria; and
- Engaging First Nations communities – working closely with local stakeholders in Alice Springs / Tangentyere and Areyonga in the Northern Territory, as well as Palm Island and Torres Strait Islands in Far North Queensland.

LIDIF members have supported the SSBI's progress by raising awareness of the program through their own networks and channels, supporting the nomination of eligible families, and being the Retail Service Provider for the free nbn broadband.

Feedback and response

LIDIF member organisations have provided feedback to nbn on the SSBI experience from the perspective of their own organisations.

In particular:

- Not-for-profit groups noted families come from diverse backgrounds and it takes time to build awareness and trust of new programs like SSBI. Challenges experienced by families included understanding the process to select an RSP and ordering a nbn service, and whether free services would continue after the initial 12-month period.
- Member organisations, including RSPs, noted that there was a great opportunity to promote the initiative more widely and target communications for different audiences and languages.

Based on feedback received through the Forum and day-to-day delivery of the SSBI, nbn worked with the Australian Government and other organisations to take the steps outlined in the progress report – including to establish the National Referral Centre, simplify and tailor SSBI communication materials, extend the nomination period to 31 December 2024 and free services until 31 December 2025 consistent with government policy; and promote the SSBI to a broader audience. The feedback provided will also inform nbn's work on options to support SSBI families at the end of 2025 (see below).

SUPPORTING SSBI FAMILIES AT THE END OF 2025

When announcing the extension of the SSBI to 31 December 2025, the Australian Government noted that it was considering options to support participating families at the end of 2025, including by seeking input from nbn and LIDIF.



Progress report

nbn in consultation with LIDIF members has commenced consideration of the potential options for fulfilling the Australian Government's request; this advice is expected to be completed and provided by nbn to the Government by July 2024.

Feedback and response

nbn has sought feedback from LIDIF members on options to support participating SSBI families at the end of 2025. At the time of publishing this report, nbn is in the process of receiving and considering such feedback with a view to providing advice on potential transition options to the Australian Government for consideration in the new financial year. The June 2025 LIDIF annual report will provide further insights on the feedback provided and how nbn has taken it into account.

NATIONAL DEVICE BANK

The National Device Bank initiative, led by LIDIF members WorkVentures and Good360, is aimed at creating a ‘bank’ of refurbished, donated digital devices (e.g. personal computers, laptops, tablets, and mobiles) for those who struggle to afford an appropriate device to participate in the digital world.

The National Device Bank would rely on surplus devices donated by corporate and government organisations once they have reached their initial end of life. Devices would be professionally reset, cleaned, and sanitised before being donated to recipients. To be set up as a commercially sustainable model, a subset of refurbished devices would be sold for a profit to fund devices being made available free of charge to people in need without needing to draw from grant funding.

In addition, the FNDIAG has highlighted the establishment of a National Device Bank as a key recommendation to help achieve Target 17 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equal levels of digital inclusion by 2026).

Progress report

In the past year:

- The Forum has provided WorkVentures with the opportunity to promote the National Device Bank concept: informing members of the nature and purpose of the program and seeking member support.
- The Forum has discussed how the scale of device donations could be increased.
- LIDIF members including nbn have:
 - provided support by making device donations and/or committing to future device donations;
 - contributed input on related grant applications; and
 - supported the National Device Bank to trial effective device distribution mechanisms particularly in First Nations communities.

Feedback and response

LIDIF members provided feedback on the National Device Bank program. In particular:

- Members expressed interest in understanding the selection of First Nations communities as the pilot cohort. It was explained that this was due to the FNDIAG recommending the establishment of a National Device Bank in its [Initial Report](#) to Government. Additionally, First Nations people facing economic and financial vulnerability were highlighted by LIDIF as a digitally excluded cohort which would benefit from targeted measures to improve digital inclusion.
- Members highlighted that accessibility needs should be a consideration when providing devices to people with disability. It was noted that specific work on accessibility needs has been done to ensure that people are not given devices that do not meet their accessibility needs and that this can be further addressed in the co-design of the device distribution trial in First Nations communities.



Read the full First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group [Initial Report](#).

2 Impact of nbn's prices and proposed product withdrawals

nbn's prices and product withdrawals are subject to regulation by the ACCC, including under nbn's SAU. The following sections of this report provide transparency regarding how nbn has taken into account the views and feedback of the Forum on such matters, as part of the consultative approach adopted by nbn.

PRICES

nbn provides opportunities for LIDIF members to provide feedback on how nbn's wholesale prices may (via RSP retail charges) impact low-income, vulnerable, and unconnected people in Australia. nbn also engages with stakeholders including access seekers and RSPs on pricing outside of the Forum.

In FY24, two responses on such matters were provided to nbn through the Forum:

- That a particular member organisation had no further feedback on pricing to provide to nbn, as it had provided such feedback during the recent SAU variation process; and
- that some LIDIF members consider nbn's \$5 charge for access component reactivations as an impediment to RSPs offering pre-paid nbn services with daily disconnect / reconnect mechanisms.

nbn notes the response received on the first matter.

In relation to the second matter, nbn discussed with LIDIF members that the charge reflects costs associated with reconnecting customers, such as the cost of replacing a missing or damaged Network Termination Device (NTD) and the cost of potential truck rolls. nbn acknowledges the basis for the concerns raised and will continue to work with RSPs to remove impediments to offering nbn services to digitally excluded people.

nbn appreciates member feedback on such matters and looks forward to receiving feedback on future initiatives, including during consultation with LIDIF.

PROPOSED PRODUCT WITHDRAWALS

LIDIF is a forum in which members can provide views and feedback on proposed product withdrawals – and in particular, on the potential impact of any proposed product withdrawals on low-income, vulnerable, and unconnected people. This is a feature of nbn's SAU variation, as accepted by the ACCC in October 2023. nbn has provided information to LIDIF members on such matters, who will have an opportunity to provide feedback on such matters in 2024. The June 2025 LIDIF annual report will provide further insights on the feedback provided and how nbn has taken it into account.



3 Other work of LIDIF

Beyond the affordability support for unconnected families with school children through the SSBI, the Forum collectively explored other digitally excluded target groups identified by the ADII and other relevant digital inclusion research.

In line with LIDIF's focus on targeted rather than broad-based initiatives, the LIDIF explored the benefit of affordability support specifically for social housing residents and First Nations people facing economic and financial vulnerability. It was considered that these two customer groups face significant affordability challenges (they have the third and fourth lowest ADII affordability scores out of 48 individually reported cohorts) and would benefit from the social and economic opportunities of improved nbn connectivity and digital inclusion.

Beyond social housing residents and First Nations people facing economic and financial vulnerability, the LIDIF identified other customer cohorts that would benefit from access to more affordable fixed broadband, including: JobSeeker Payment recipients, Parenting Payment Single recipients, people with disability, low-income seniors, Health Care Card holders, carers, and newly arrived refugees.

The Forum will work across its diverse member base to identify and consider targeted solutions to support these target groups' digital inclusion needs.

NOTABLE RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

The Forum grounds its work in digital inclusion research, including the comprehensive and well-accepted ADII, which highlights trends and changes in digital inclusion in Australia over time.

Thanks to their expertise on the topic of digital inclusion, the LIDIF member organisations have also published related materials in the reporting period (March 2023 to June 2024):

ADII 2023 report



The Australian Digital Inclusion Index uses survey data to measure digital inclusion across three dimensions of Access, Affordability and Digital Ability. The 2023 report is based on 5,132 Australian Internet Usage Survey responses collected between June and December 2022.

ADIA

A Digital Inclusion Approach to Device Donation and Reuse



The Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance highlights access to an affordable digital device as a fundamental part of being digitally included. This paper covers associated challenges and opportunities, and potential policy levers.

ADIA & Future Skills Organisation

We need a common language for digital skills



The ADIA and FSO describe the rationale for a common language on what it means to be digitally capable in 2024. The paper introduces the Australian Digital Capability Framework, created by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, as the benchmark to assess various levels of digital proficiency.

WorkVentures

Measuring the Impact of Digital Access for School Students



KPMG prepared a report on a pro bono basis on behalf of WorkVentures, revealing the challenges faced by students without access to a computer outside of school – and the opportunities for improvement when students are given access to appropriate digital devices.

Accenture, commissioned by nbn

The social network: nbn customers reflect on healthier, happier, more enriching quality of life



Social impact research was undertaken to measure the social impact of the nbn network for overall wellbeing (life satisfaction) and wellbeing across five domains: employment and income; education and skills; health; social and community connection; and environment.



APPENDIX

Special Access Undertaking (SAU)

nbn's SAU provides for nbn to establish a 'Low-Income Forum', being a multi-stakeholder working group to identify possible targeted initiatives to improve access to nbn's network for low-income, vulnerable, and unconnected persons. nbn implements that obligation through facilitating the LIDIF – and first convened the LIDIF in March 2023 (in advance of nbn's SAU being varied in October 2023 to require the establishment of the forum).



The SAU is available on the [nbn website](#).

For any enquiries related to this report or the Low-Income and Digital Inclusion Forum,
please contact LIDIF@nbnc.com.au.



nbn.com.au