



Digital Consumer Reference Group: A consumer-led partnership to improve digital inclusion outcomes in Tasmania

2022/2023

TASCOSS BUDGET
PRIORITIES STATEMENT



The Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS) is the peak body for the community services industry in lutruwita/Tasmania.

Our Mission is to challenge and change the systems, behaviours and attitudes that create poverty, inequality and exclusion, to ensure all Tasmanians have equal opportunity to live a good life.

Our Vision is of one lutruwita/Tasmania, free of poverty and inequality, where everyone has the same opportunity.

This Budget Priorities Statement reflects the expertise of our members, community groups and digital inclusion advocates, as well as research and analysis of actions and initiatives in other jurisdictions and the lived experiences of Tasmanian consumers.

INTRODUCTION

The benefits of the digital economy cannot be enjoyed when many members of our community face significant barriers to online participation.

Tasmania has the worst digital inclusion levels in the nation, as measured by the *Australian Digital Inclusion Index* (ADII).¹

While the ADII shows our digital inclusion has slowly improved each year, Tasmania trails behind the rest of the nation and the gap is widening. In comparison to the mainland, Tasmania is going backwards and more needs to be done to bridge the digital divide, especially in the areas of access, affordability and digital ability.

Digital access and the ability to use digital technologies is now an essential part of daily life, in much the same way as other services such as electricity and water.

Education, work opportunities, health and government services, social connections and finding reliable information (especially in times of crisis) are increasingly accessed through digital technologies.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the digital divide in our state that, without coordinated action to address barriers and implement solutions, is at risk of becoming even wider.

As the first state to see the full rollout of the *nbn* network, Tasmania should be making the most of the opportunities that digital technology brings. However, for more than 65,000 Tasmanians these benefits are out of reach. Some don't have access to affordable internet, while others don't have the skills or confidence to use and make the most of digital technologies.

The *Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council's* (PESRAC) Final Report found the current approach to improving digital inclusion in Tasmania is piecemeal. Multiple programs to address specific areas of need are administered by different agencies and organisations. It identified that responsibility for digital inclusion is fragmented and spread across multiple government departments.²

Critical to improving Tasmania's digital inclusion outcomes is understanding the needs of consumers, in particular those consumers experiencing disadvantage and vulnerability, through the establishment of a consumer advisory body.

TasCOSS proposes the creation of a **Digital Consumer Reference Group (DCRG)** to represent the views and needs of all consumers to the Tasmanian Government. The DCRG will elevate the voice of digital consumers to support the Tasmanian Government to deliver its strategic goals and improve digital inclusion outcomes in the state.

A digitally included Tasmania is one where all Tasmanians are able to participate in our digital economy to find and maintain work, access education, health and government services, maintain social connections, and find reliable information, especially in times of crisis.

¹ See Supplementary Figures and Tables: Appendix A for key findings from the ADII (2021).

² Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council 2021, *Final Report*, March, Department of Treasury and Finance, p. 56.

DIGITAL CONSUMER REFERENCE GROUP

Aim

The aim of the DCRG is to elevate the voice of Tasmanian digital consumers for the improvement of digital inclusion outcomes in our state.

The DCRG will bring together a broad range of digital consumers, comprising of stakeholders representing government, industry, community and consumers with a lived experience of digital exclusion.

The DCRG will advise the Tasmanian Government on:

- the barriers to digital inclusion, in particular for consumers experiencing disadvantage or vulnerability;
- the gaps in access, affordability and digital literacy programs across the state;
- the coordination and effectiveness of current government programs designed to address digital inclusion;
- the implementation of key actions under the 'Community' priority area of the *Our Digital Future* strategy and the PESRAC Final Report recommendations relating to digital inclusion;
- setting realistic goals and targets over the short- and medium-terms for lifting Tasmania's digital inclusion levels; and
- initiatives, measures and priority areas for investment to boost digital inclusion outcomes for Tasmanian consumers.

³ See Supplementary Figures and Tables: Appendix B for a description of the PESRAC Final Report recommendations.

⁴ TasICT is the peak body for the ICT industries. The Tasmanian Government established a Digital Services Advisory Group to support, provide advice and recommendations to government agencies in relation to digital strategies, policies, performance and investment.

Policy Context

The DCRG will support and assist the Tasmanian Government to deliver on its strategic goals in relation to improving digital inclusion outcomes for Tasmanians, including:

- the implementation of PESRAC Final Report recommendations 10, 33 and 34;³
- the delivery of actions and objectives under the *Our Digital Future* strategy;
- adding value to the *Digital Ready for Business* and *Digital Ready for Daily Life* programs, including building on the *Digital Ambassador* roles; and
- providing advice on the strengthening of Service Tasmania's role as a single-service delivery agent for Tasmania under the *Government Response to the Independent Review of the Tasmanian State Service*.

Benefit and Need

As the PESRAC Final Report demonstrated, there is a need for much stronger and coordinated action by government, as well as business and communities, to improve Tasmania's digital inclusion levels.

Existing advisory groups, made up of members representing a broad range of interests, provide advice and support to the Tasmanian Government on issues affecting population groups. The Tasmanian Government has an internal Digital Services Advisory Group and the information, communication and technology (ICT) industry has a professional peak body, however, the collective voices of digital consumers are not currently represented.⁴

At present, there is no formal structure for representing consumer interests nor a mechanism for direct input to the Tasmanian Government on digital inclusion issues affecting Tasmanians.

The DCRG will provide consumer-led advice and recommendations to the Tasmanian Government on the strategies, programs and initiatives to materially increase digital inclusion outcomes in Tasmania.

The establishment of the DCRG also aligns with strategic priorities and actions under the *Community Services Industry Plan (2021–31)* that the Tasmanian Government is supporting through its investment in our industry’s workforce development.⁵

The Industry Plan identifies digital technology as a key opportunity for driving changes in the community services industry in Tasmania, but also highlights digital access and skills as key areas to address for both service providers and service users.

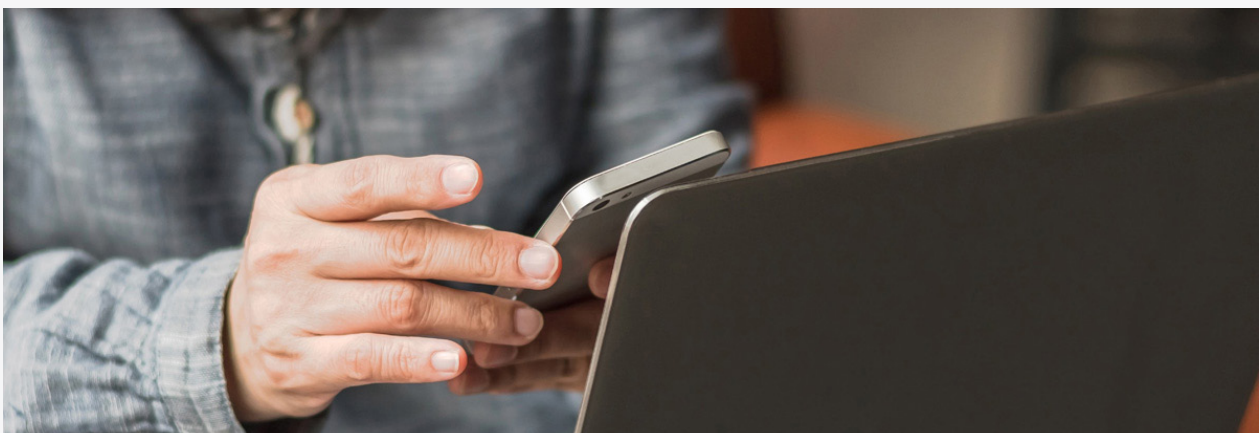
The community services industry can also support greater digital inclusion through a range of initiatives that complement the Tasmanian Government’s digital inclusion strategic goals.

Role and Activities

The DCRG will bring together a broad range of stakeholders across government, industry and the community. Members will draw on their expertise to share their knowledge, experience and past successes to represent the needs of Tasmanian digital consumers, as well as develop strategies and advice for improving digital inclusion.

As an expert, independent, representative body of digital consumers, the DCRG will develop and undertake its work program in consultation with the Tasmanian Government and key stakeholders.

Project activities will relate to the broad responsibilities of informing, guiding and monitoring Tasmanian Government strategies, programs and initiatives to increase digital inclusion outcomes in Tasmania. The DCRG will deliver this by undertaking research, conducting consultation processes and consumer surveys, identifying case studies, providing regular reports to the Tasmanian Government and publishing its findings and recommendations.



⁵ TasCOSS 2021, *Community Services Industry Plan (2021–31)*, A Community Services Industry Built for Tasmania’s Future.

ESTABLISHING THE DIGITAL CONSUMER REFERENCE GROUP

Through new funding provided by the Tasmanian Government, TasCOSS will:

- establish the DCRG;
- act as Chair with responsibility for secretariat and administration support;
- coordinate the group's work program and activities, including establishing the roles and responsibilities of the group, consumer advocacy and facilitating outcomes;
- consult with key stakeholders, consumers and local communities to identify and represent their needs and solutions to digital inclusion;
- consider a sustainable funding model for the continuation of the DCRG; and
- undertake research to identify:
 - the barriers to digital inclusion in Tasmania;
 - opportunities to boost existing digital inclusion programs, in particular those targeting workforce participation, education and training, and cohorts experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage; and
 - successful programs and initiatives in other jurisdictions that may be replicated in or adapted to Tasmania.

Membership

The size of the DCRG will be developed in consultation with the Tasmanian Government and key stakeholders. Representation will be selected from a broad range of industry and end-user experience, including:

- digital consumers with lived experience (non-salaried);
- consumer advocates;
- the business community;
- the community services industry;
- the ICT industry;
- academics and researchers;
- telecommunications providers; and
- government.⁶

Members will be required to draw on their expertise, knowledge and lived experience to engage with consumers, identify key issues that impact digital inclusion in the sectors they represent and advise on policy and program responses to improve digital inclusion outcomes in Tasmania.

⁶ See Supplementary Figures and Tables: Appendix C for a list of potential stakeholders.



Funding

Funding of \$170,000 over two years will be required for TasCOSS to establish the DCRG and support its membership and operations.

YEAR 1

| | |
|---|------------------------|
| Admin, secretariat support and research | \$78,060 |
| Meeting costs (\$500 x 5 meetings) | \$2,500 |
| Sitting fees (non-salaried) * | \$1,000 |
| Communications and advocacy | \$2,000 |
| <i>Sub-Total (Year 1)</i> | <i>\$83,560</i> |

YEAR 2

| | |
|---|------------------------|
| Admin, secretariat support and research | \$80,400 |
| Meeting costs (\$500 x 4 meetings) | \$2,000 |
| Sitting fees (non-salaried) * | \$820 |
| Communications and advocacy | \$3,000 |
| <i>Sub-Total (Year 2)</i> | <i>\$86,220</i> |

Total Investment Required

\$169,780 over two years

* 2x members remunerated at the rate of \$30 per hour, based on two hour meetings plus one hour preparation time (three hours) and a \$100 allocation for travel/other attendance costs incurred.

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