



**Pre-Budget  
Submission  
2024/25**

Good Things Foundation Australia Submission  
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**Good Things**  
Foundation Australia

## Contents

<b>Summary of key recommendations</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Expand the Be Connected program to other priority groups</b>	<b>4</b>
Women in the workforce	4
People with disability	5
CALD communities	5
First Nations peoples	5
Low income families	6
Recommendation	6
<b>Ensure all Australians have access to affordable digital devices and data</b>	<b>7</b>
Affordable internet access	7
Access to digital devices	7
Recommendation	8
<b>Fund initiatives to help people keep up with emerging technology and AI</b>	<b>9</b>
Emerging tech and AI	9
Digital media literacy and emergency preparedness	9
Online government services	10
Recommendation	10
<b>Fund the creation and implementation of a National Digital Inclusion Strategy</b>	<b>11</b>
National Digital Inclusion Strategy	11
Recommendation	11
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>About Good Things Foundation Australia</b>	<b>13</b>

## Summary of key recommendations

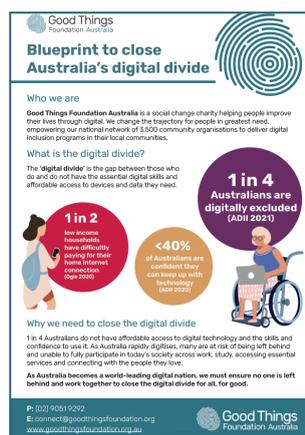
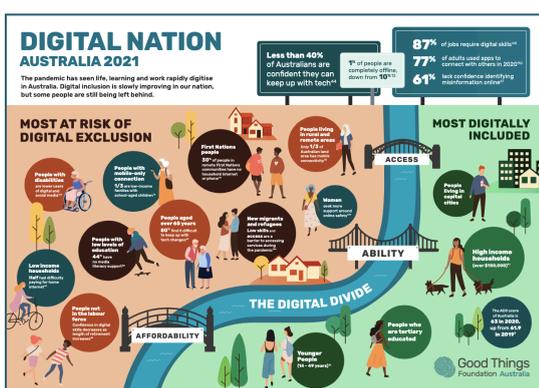
With an ever increasing focus on the importance and impact of Australia’s rapidly evolving technology landscape, investment in digital inclusion initiatives is essential to make sure no one is left behind.

However, 1 in 4 Australians do not have the essential digital skills or affordable access to digital devices they need to fully participate in today’s society.<sup>1</sup>

Good Things Foundation’s key recommendations for funding in the 2024-25 Federal Budget are:

1. **Fund the expansion of the [Be Connected](#) program for over 50s to other priority groups**, investing in tailored digital skills programs and digital media literacy training for adults aged 18-50.
2. **Fund initiatives to ensure all Australians have access to affordable digital devices and data** so they can fully participate in the digital world.
3. **Fund initiatives to help people keep up with emerging technology and AI**, to support people to keep improving their digital skills and navigate new technologies.
4. **Fund the creation and implementation of a government-led national digital inclusion strategy** so all Australians benefit from a coordinated approach.

Read more about key digital inclusion challenges in Australia in Good Things Foundation’s [Digital Nation Report](#), our [Blueprint to close Australia’s digital divide](#) and [Australian attitudes to getting online](#) research.



<sup>1</sup> [Australian Digital Inclusion Index](#), 2023, Thomas, J., McCosker, A., Parkinson, S., Hegarty, K., Featherstone, D., Kennedy, J., Holcombe-James, I., Ormond-Parker, L., & Ganley, L., Melbourne: ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society, RMIT University, Swinburne University of Technology, and Telstra.

## Expand the Be Connected program to other priority groups

In October 2023, the Australian Government announced \$42 million funding in the 2024-25 federal budget to extend the successful national [Be Connected](#) digital skills program for over 50s, through to 2028.

This announcement is good news for Australian seniors, who will continue to access local essential digital skills support in their community. But, it is not just older Australians who need this support. All adults aged 18-50 with low digital skills and confidence need help to keep up with the digital world, particularly those most at risk of digital exclusion.

Expanding Be Connected and investing in tailored digital skills programs and digital media literacy training for adults aged 18-50, delivered in community settings, will help close the digital divide.

Good Things Foundation research shows that 1 in 5 Australians feel overwhelmed by the constant changes in technology, with 63% not feeling confident that they can keep up.<sup>2</sup>

This 'digital divide' between those who can and can't keep up affects some groups of people in Australia more than others. People on low incomes or with low levels of education, people with disability, First Nations people, new migrants and refugees, low income families, and people over the age of 65, face the greatest risk of being left behind in our digitised world.<sup>3</sup>

### Women in the workforce

Our research indicates that 1 in 4 women say that they need more support to keep up with tech changes and 1 in 5 feel overwhelmed by constant changes in technology.<sup>4</sup> Investing in improving digital capabilities can enable women to return to the workforce after periods outside of it and participate in the digital economy in the way they choose. There is also a need for women to improve their digital skills to maintain existing jobs, participate in growth industries such as in aged care, healthcare, social services, and disability support services, and be resilient to emerging tech. Beyond digital skills, women are more likely than men to struggle with affordable access to tech and data.<sup>5</sup> Support should be targeted towards women with low or no digital skills, in low income families, who are unemployed or migrants and refugees, in caring roles, or in workplaces at risk of automation or newly requiring digital skills.

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<sup>2</sup> [Australian Attitudes to Getting Online](#), 2023, Good Things Foundation Australia

<sup>3</sup> [Australian Digital Inclusion Index: Digital Nation Australia 2021](#), 2021, Good Things Foundation Australia

<sup>4</sup> [Australian Attitudes to Getting Online](#), 2023, Good Things Foundation Australia

<sup>5</sup> [Australian Attitudes to Getting Online](#), 2023, Good Things Foundation Australia

## People with disability

People with disability are more likely to be digitally excluded in Australia.<sup>6</sup> The Australian eSafety Commission has reported people with disability being more likely to experience online safety issues such as cyber-bullying, harassment, image-based abuse and technology facilitated abuse.<sup>7</sup> Our research shows that while 19% of Australians report that they have to make hard choices between paying for the internet or phone and other essential bills like food or housing, this number jumps to 31% of people with disability, showing a critical affordability divide.<sup>8</sup> People with disability were also more likely to report feeling overwhelmed with constant changes in tech than the general population. As the needs of people with disability vary, tailored programs and support reaching different audiences are needed. For example, our pilot program for young people with intellectual disability saw the creation of resources in easier English, whereas our pilot program for people with low vision had a greater emphasis on digital and print accessibility tips and resources.

## CALD communities

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, particularly newly arrived migrants or refugees, could particularly benefit from community-based, culturally appropriate digital inclusion support as the economy transforms. For newly arrived migrants and refugees in CALD communities, digital exclusion can have significant impacts on successful settlement in Australia, including their ability to find and maintain work or establish small businesses and participate in professional development and training opportunities.<sup>9</sup> Trusted support in familiar community environments would assist to reduce the digital skills divide for this priority group and improve employment outcomes.

## First Nations peoples

Lower levels of affordable access and online participation<sup>10</sup> means that First Nations people in Australia are more likely to experience exclusion from our digital society. Equal digital inclusion of First Nations people has been recognised as essential to Closing the Gap, being identified as one of the 17 national targets to ensure equal access to information and services in the National Closing the Gap Agreement.<sup>11</sup>

The establishment of the Government's First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group and the 2023 release of the Government's First Nations Digital Inclusion Plan is welcomed and will accelerate progress towards closing the digital divide for First Nations people. It recognises that more needs to be done to ensure Indigenous Australians can benefit from the digital world and that First Nations people face significant barriers to digital inclusion,

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<sup>6</sup> [Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: Australian Digital Inclusion Index: 2023](#), 2023, Thomas, J., McCosker, A., Parkinson, S., Hegarty, K., Featherstone, D., Kennedy, J., Holcombe-James, I., Ormond-Parker, L., & Ganley, L., Melbourne: ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society, RMIT University, Swinburne University of Technology, and Telstra

<sup>7</sup> [Protecting voices at risk online](#), 2020, eSafety Commissioner

<sup>8</sup> [Australian Attitudes to Getting Online](#), 2023, Good Things Foundation Australia

<sup>9</sup> [Supporting the Digital Inclusion of New Migrants and Refugees](#), 2021, Settlement Council of Australia & Good Things Foundation Australia

<sup>10</sup> Thomas et al (2020)

<sup>11</sup> Australian Government, Closing the Gap in Partnership (2020), [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#)

particularly in remote areas. Achieving equal levels of digital inclusion is critical for First Nations Australians to receive economic and social opportunities such as employment, social connectedness, and to access online services such as financial services, telehealth and education. Additional funding is now required to develop culturally appropriate, co-designed programs to close the digital skills gap for First Nations people.

## Low income families

Research led by QUT has shown that low income families need additional digital inclusion support, including for affordable tech and data as well as digital skills.<sup>12</sup> This research identifies that there are no broadly accessible community-based digital skills programs for this audience and recommends a 'Be Connected program' style approach to closing the digital skills divide for this community. Supporting families has the added benefits of supporting young people to equally access education and employment opportunities, setting them up for post-school life.

## Recommendation

Good Things Foundation Australia recommends that funding is allocated in the 2024-25 budget to:

1. **Fund the expansion of the [Be Connected](#) program for over 50s to other priority groups** – including under 50's, low income families, people with disability, First Nations peoples, refugees and migrants, low income families, and women – investing in tailored digital skills programs and digital media literacy training for adults aged 18-50.

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<sup>12</sup> [Digital Inclusion is Everyone's Business: Key Findings from the ARC Linkage Project Advancing digital inclusion in low-income Australian families](#), 2023, Dezuanni, M, Osman, K, Foth, M, Mitchell, P, McCosker, A, Notley, T, Kennedy, J, Marshall, A, Tucker, J, Hourigan, A, Mamalipurath, J, & Mavoa, J Digital Media Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology

## Ensure all Australians have access to affordable digital devices and data

Affordability of devices and data is a significant barrier to full and equal participation in the digital economy for many Australians, and with the cost of living crisis this is only getting worse.

Research with the Good Things Foundation network indicates that 75% of community organisation partners are concerned that their digital skills learners do not have access to the internet because they are lacking digital devices to use at home.<sup>13</sup> Our network have also identified that an absence in competition of internet and data providers in regional Australian locations means that the lowest cost carriers and plans are not available to everyone.

### Affordable internet access

The Australian Government's School Student Broadband Initiative to provide free broadband to school children is a welcome addition to the digital inclusion landscape, but is funded only in the short term and does not support people without school aged children. Good Things Foundation Australia, alongside over 25 other organisations, have pledged support for ACCAN's No Australian Left Offline policy proposal for affordable NBN for all.

Under this, low income families would be eligible to access unlimited high speed broadband internet at home at a wholesale price. If implemented, ACCAN estimates the policy would be Federal budget neutral, while low income households would pay only \$30 per month to be connected to unlimited, high speed internet connections. This initiative could be applicable at a state level through a subsidy system.

### Access to digital devices

As part of the Be Connected program, [Digital Devices Grants](#) are offered periodically to enable community organisations to create device loan libraries that older people can access. This grant has shown to have benefits in providing temporary support to digital skills learners who are considering if a device is right for them before they commit to a purchase, or who otherwise would not have access to a device to use at home.

Distributing digital devices through the community sector means that people have access to a suitable device and are supported to use the device in a trusted environment. Building in the option of funding for digital device provisions into grants for community-led digital skills and inclusion initiatives would create comprehensive and efficient programs.

National device banks are also a solution. In the UK, Good Things Foundation recently launched the [National Device Bank](#), which aims to provide 2 million households with

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<sup>13</sup> [Media Release: New Grant](#), 2020, Good Things Foundation

refurbished donated devices free of charge. These devices are donated by businesses nationwide and then distributed via local community organisations.

National device and data banks in Australia could go far in connecting Australians without internet access. This requires investment from major telecommunications companies, businesses and government to create a sustainable data and device bank system.

To ensure that all Australians have an equal opportunity to be confident and capable digital citizens, it is vital that we bring together free connectivity, refurbished devices, and digital skills for those most in need.

## Recommendation

Good Things Foundation Australia recommends that funding is allocated in the 2024-25 budget to:

2. **Fund initiatives to ensure all Australians have access to affordable digital devices and data** so they can fully participate in the digital world. This includes funding to:
  - a. Expand current School Student Broadband Initiative to enable free NBN connections for other priority groups, such as people on income support.
  - b. Work with Good Things Foundation Australia to develop a nation-wide digital device and data bank.

## Fund initiatives to help people keep up with emerging technology and AI

Good Things Foundation research indicates that many Australians are struggling to keep up with tech as it rapidly changes. 1 in 5 people said they felt overwhelmed with constant changes in technology and 1 in 4 saying they need more support to keep up.<sup>14</sup>

We believe the following topics are particularly important areas for government to play a role in funding, creating and implementing support initiatives.

### Emerging tech and AI

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is an emerging technology that has the potential to support people to build digital skills and confidence and make our lives easier. But, like lots of new technologies, it also has the potential to do harm if not used responsibly or ethically, if it is not developed with inclusion in mind and if it is not used equally across the population. While a definition of AI literacy has not yet been established ready for digital skills programs to adopt, we know that it will take a combination of digital media literacy, digital literacy and literacy to keep up with this emerging tech. With the rapid development of emerging tech like AI, digital skills programs are needed to cover this topic so more people don't get left behind.

### Digital media literacy and emergency preparedness

Those who are most at risk of digital exclusion and those with low levels of understanding of misinformation and online harms require tailored essential digital skills programs and support. 61% of adults in Australia lack confidence identifying misinformation online.<sup>15</sup> We know misinformation can cause real world harms, ranging from health and safety to electoral integrity.<sup>16</sup> In order to reduce online harms for vulnerable groups, and help people with low digital media literacy skills to navigate and find reliable information, an effective, funded community education based approach is required, in line with the ACCC's recommendations.<sup>17</sup>

This is particularly important when it comes to activities like emergency preparedness and digital resilience in a crisis. Support must be provided to people at risk of digital exclusion on state based emergency apps (including Emergency+), websites, sources of reliable information, support and recovery services (such as Small Business Disaster Hub) and what to do when the internet goes down.

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<sup>14</sup> [Australian Attitudes to Getting Online](#), 2023, Good Things Foundation Australia

<sup>15</sup> [Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences and Needs](#), 2021, Notley, T Chambers, S Park, S Dezuanni, M. WSU, QUT and University of Canberra

<sup>16</sup> [Misinformation and news quality of digital platforms in Australia: A position paper to guide code development](#), 2020, ACMA

<sup>17</sup> [Digital Platforms Inquiry, Final Report](#), 2019, ACCC

## Online government services

Community based and targeted digital literacy support programs for essential online government services would increase digital ability across Australia, particularly supporting the adoption of digital services within hard to reach populations. The Australian Government has a range of apps targeting varying audiences including children in out of home care, parents of school students, small businesses, renters and social housing tenants, and government employees. These audiences have intersections with people more at risk of digital exclusion. Investment in awareness and education support for people to learn about and use these apps is needed to support their uptake.

## Recommendation

Good Things Foundation Australia recommends that funding is allocated in the 2024-25 budget to:

3. **Fund initiatives to help people keep up with emerging technology and AI**, digital media literacy, emergency preparedness and recovery, and support to use online government services.

## Fund the creation and implementation of a National Digital Inclusion Strategy

To close the digital divide and create a stronger, more inclusive and sustainable digital economy, digital inclusion must be incorporated into policy as well as funding decisions.

### National Digital Inclusion Strategy

A National Digital Inclusion Strategy will ensure no one is left behind. It should sit alongside strategies for digital transformation of government services and the future of work and be considered by the Economic Inclusion Advisory Group. The Strategy must provide a common set of goals for all levels of government to plan, support and fund digital inclusion initiatives in a coordinated manner.

To be effective the National Digital Inclusion Strategy must be developed and implemented in consultation with federal and state governments, corporate and community sectors, and people who are most at risk of digital exclusion.

### Recommendation

Good Things Foundation Australia recommends that funding is allocated in the 2024-25 budget to:

4. **Fund the creation and implementation of a government-led national digital inclusion strategy** so all Australians benefit from a coordinated approach.

## Conclusion

Digital inclusion is a requirement for full participation in our digital society and economy, enabling people to access essential government, education, social and health services. While there are many committed organisations working in this area and some excellent digital inclusion programs available across Australia, not everyone is able to access this support and gaps still exist.

Overall, to close the digital ability, affordability and access divide, Good Things Foundation's key recommendations for inclusion in the 2024-25 Federal Budget are:

- 1. Fund the expansion of the Be Connected program for over 50s to other priority groups**, investing in tailored digital skills programs and digital media literacy training for adults aged 18-50.
- 2. Fund initiatives to ensure all Australians have access to affordable digital devices and data** so they can fully participate in the digital world.
- 3. Fund initiatives to help people keep up with emerging technology and AI**, to support people to keep improving their digital skills and navigate new technologies.
- 4. Fund the creation and implementation of a government-led national digital inclusion strategy** so all Australians benefit from a coordinated approach.

Good Things Foundation Australia thanks the Australian Government for the opportunity to make this submission to the 2024/2025 Federal Budget.

We would be pleased to discuss our proposed initiatives with you, so that together we can close the digital divide for all, for good.

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## About Good Things Foundation Australia

Good Things Foundation Australia is a social change charity, helping people improve their lives through digital. We work with thousands of community organisations across Australia to support those hardest to reach, to improve their digital skills.

We coordinate and deliver the Australian Government-funded Be Connected program for over 50s and build capacity in community organisations through digital mentor training and resources, grants and program support.

We develop and deliver a range of specialised digital inclusion programs for people who are most at risk of being left behind in our online world, including women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with a disability, low-income families, and migrants and refugees.

Each year we host Get Online Week - our national digital inclusion campaign supporting millions of Australians to get online and improve their digital skills.

Our programs are community-led, delivered at scale and create maximum social impact. We advocate for the 1 in 4 Australians who are digitally excluded and raise awareness of the importance of closing the digital divide for all, for good.

Learn more about our work: [www.goodthingsfoundation.org.au](http://www.goodthingsfoundation.org.au)

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