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CASEY

DIGITAL EQUITY FRAMEWORK

2021-2025

OCTOBER 2021



STATEMENT OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The City of Casey proudly acknowledges the traditional owners, Casey's Aboriginal communities and their rich culture and pays respect to their Elders past, present and future. We acknowledge Aboriginal people as Australia's first peoples and as the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we work and live.

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

The City of Casey is home to a remarkable diversity of cultures, languages, faiths, identities, landscapes, and stories. From our first Australians to our most recent arrivals and every wave between, the City of Casey welcomes and represents all community members and their respective ambitions to live healthy, rewarding, and happy lives. These intersecting and overlapping community stories form Casey's collective identity and contribute to its evolving, rich history. We recognise this diversity as our strength and we aim to share, nurture, and celebrate it.



TIS: 131450 (Translating and Interpreting Service)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Digital technologies ought to add value to people's lives. The benefits such as increased convenience, affordability, or connection to social and civic opportunities can only be achieved through person-centred design of digital systems and platforms.

Who is included – or not included – in the design process will determine who is ultimately excluded from the benefits. Rephrasing the original proposition, digital technologies ought to add value to *all* people's lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted and brought to the fore long-standing barriers to digital access across community. Whilst services and activities had been steadily transitioning to online platforms for years prior to 2020, the pandemic accelerated this trajectory and digital dependence and expectations were rapidly raised.

The equity consequences of this digital shift have been mixed with some finding the transition to digital relatively straightforward (e.g. some older people have made the transition after receiving support). Others have made greater digital connections with broader communities (e.g. some Casey LGBTIQ+ communities reported increasing online networks across the region). Council itself has made greater links with communities already online by simply engaging on platforms communities use (e.g. greater engagement with CALD communities on social media platforms).

Despite these positive experiences, many have struggled with the change. This swift migration of services and activities online within government and community sectors has excluded many and accelerated the need to identify and address barriers for those who are not able, for whatever reason, to participate fully in the digital world.

Digital equity means to embed fairness in the development and implementation of digital systems. It is to recognise that individuals, groups, and communities are situated differently in relation to access, affordability and the skills needed for these digital platforms and systems.

Different strategies must be designed to account for these divergent experiences where digital tools, opportunities for learning and building confidence, as well as information distribution is tailored according to community need. Digital equity in the development of systems leads to equality of community outcomes where all can participate in our increasingly online society, democracy, and economy.

The Casey Digital Equity Framework details who is at-risk of digital exclusion in Casey, how each group is differently impacted, the specific supports required, and the roles Council and partners will play in a digitally equitable future.

The framework provides a common platform for establishing and extending partnerships towards sustainable and effective solutions addressing digital exclusion.

Extensive research and engagement with external and internal stakeholders have informed the framework's evidence-based list of priority initiatives that will support digital inclusion in Casey.

More than ever a digital equity approach is critical in addressing inequality and ensuring those most disadvantaged are not further entrenched through the uncritical development of systems and platforms that suit only a subset of our community. The Digital Equity Framework lays the foundations for fairer service access, more representative engagement, and digital empowerment initiatives that better the lives of all community members. The consequences of not acting on this issue are clear. Digital exclusion leads to digital poverty, or at the very least, further entrenching existing disadvantage. As one engagement respondent said, "we should not leave anyone behind".



PURPOSE OF THE FRAMEWORK

The purpose of the framework is to guide Council through an equity approach in addressing digital exclusion. It aims to provide:

- > a shared and comprehensive understanding of digital equity conditions across Casey and those groups and places most excluded
- > a consistent and pragmatic basis for guiding Council digital inclusion activities
- > an ongoing platform for promoting partnerships to increase digital equity in Casey
- > a set of priorities for action
- > an initial group of internal and external partners to assist in the delivery of the framework, the roles of which will be defined in an associated implementation plan.

COUNCIL PLAN

The framework responds to the three strategic directions and associated objectives of the Council Plan 2021-25:

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1

Drive stronger connections and places

OBJECTIVE 1 Deliver sustainable infrastructure and activate places

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2

Develop platforms for community empowerment

OBJECTIVE 5 Create a resilient, active and connected community

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3

Become a future-ready organisation

OBJECTIVE 7 Create an adaptable, innovative and financially sustainable organisation that delivers maximum community benefit

This framework also aligns with:

SMART CASEY LAUNCHPAD

Smart Casey Launchpad, endorsed by Council in December 2020, wherein the development of a Casey Digital Equity Framework is a priority initiative. The Smart Casey Launchpad program outlines the Casey Council approach to coordinating and inspiring smart city action at a local and regional level.



PRINCIPLES OF THE FRAMEWORK

The following principles were used to guide the framework's development and will continue to be used in its implementation and Council's approach going forward.

These principles reflect an approach that respects the varying digital experience, skills, and access across the Casey community. It is also a positive approach that seeks to educate community on the benefits of digital technologies and provide assistance and guidance, wherever possible, so that everyone experiences the advantages of digital enablement.



EQUITY

Our ambition is that everyone shares in the benefits of digital technology, however, in order for this to happen strategies and level of support must be tailored to the differing circumstances and barriers experienced by individuals, groups, and places. We develop solutions for all (even those who cannot be online) within a rapidly changing digital world.



INTERSECTIONALITY

We recognise and value that people's lives are multi-dimensional and our actions take into account these diverse characteristics, experiences, and behaviours.



ACCESSIBILITY

We will remove barriers to participation wherever possible, aiming for online software and experiences that are within reach of Casey community members of all abilities and circumstances. Information will be made available in a variety of formats according to access needs.



RESILIENCE

We strengthen individuals and communities with preparedness for, and adaptability in, a changing digital world. We support people to become informed, safe, and active participants in the digital world.



INNOVATION

We are bold and progressive in our approach to developing new person-centred solutions in the digital world. We forecast digital exclusion risks and invest in a digitally equitable future.

A Thousand Tides has become a temporary home to some of Western Port's unusual plants and creatures. Put on your explorer cap, collect a field guide and see how many you can find.

An artist's studio is not too different from a scientist's lab. Both are spaces for investigation, where ideas are generated, tested and trialled. Vera Möller's place where she experiments with ideas, where she tries different techniques to...

You are invited to join in and use the artist's lab. Using the plasticine, from your own imagined underwater...

Underwater Creatures Lab open

Tuesdays 2.00 PM – 4.00 PM

Fridays 10.00 AM – 1.00 PM

Saturdays and Sundays 11.00 AM –

School holidays:

Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays 11.00 AM –

BACKGROUND

KEY DEFINITIONS

The following are key definitions underpinning the Digital Equity Framework.

device	A piece of portable electronic equipment that can connect to the Internet, such as a smartphone, tablet, or laptop computer
digital	Involving or relating to the use of computer technology, particularly the Internet
digital equity	Embedding fairness in the development and implementation of digital systems, where digital tools, opportunities for building skills and confidence, as well as information distribution is tailored according to community need, such that all can participate in our increasingly online society, democracy, and economy
digital inclusion	Provision of the activities, strategies and tools necessary for all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, to have access to, and use of, information and communication technologies
digital literacy	The extent to which one is able to safely and confidently use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills
digital poverty	Poverty resulting from, or exacerbated by, a lack of access to information technology, particularly the Internet

WHAT IS DIGITAL EQUITY AND WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT?

Digital equity is embedding fairness in the development and implementation of digital systems for the benefit of all.

Digital Equity is to embed fair access and benefit in digital systems through recognising and identifying the particular digital needs of different communities.

It is an approach that aims for all individuals and communities to have the digital tools, skills and confidence needed to participate in our society, democracy, and economy. Striving for digital equity is a vital ambition in our increasingly online, technologically dependent society. If digital equity is ignored, certain groups and places across Casey will continue to be disproportionately excluded from the increasing social and economic opportunities that digital platforms provide. The push by governments to transition services and information to online platforms for increased efficiencies (termed the *digital by default agenda*) has accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic. The problem – often an afterthought in digital transformation strategies – is that without appropriate measures to assist communities in this transition to ubiquitous online delivery, those already digitally excluded will be further digitally impoverished without ready access to services and information.

Digital exclusion is correlated strongly with older age, low educational attainment, low family income, those living with disability, as well as the long-term unemployed and underemployed (ADII, 2020). It is also strongly linked to places with high levels of entrenched socioeconomic disadvantage.

Digital exclusion adds another layer of exclusion by extending marginalisation into digital spaces.

This additional type of poverty is known as digital poverty. In response, an active focus on *digital inclusion* is required. Digital inclusion refers to the activities, strategies, and infrastructure that address digital exclusion. It involves tailored approaches according to need, with the goal that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to, and use of, information and communication technologies.

Inclusion strategies are complex with exclusion experiences often multifaceted involving lack of appropriate devices, adequate and affordable Internet available in the home or neighbourhood, digital skills and learning opportunities, as well as attitudes and motivation to adapt to change. An ambition of digital equity lays the foundation for a fair and inclusive digital future. The advances that digital empowerment initiatives offer in areas such as deliberative engagement and digital democracy must benefit all of community, otherwise we risk excluding and disenfranchising communities in new ways. For some this would compound existing barriers, for others this would present a new experience of social exclusion. There is great opportunity now to plan for a digitally inclusive future.

DIGITAL EQUITY IN AUSTRALIA

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) measures the extent of digital inclusion in Australia and has been published annually since 2014 in a partnership between Telstra, RMIT University and the Centre for Social Impact, Swinburne University of Technology.

The different dimensions of digital equity are unpacked through the ADII and it is through the lens of these dimensions that Casey intends to address digital exclusion.

ADII DIGITAL EQUITY DIMENSIONS

● ACCESS

Internet Access

Frequency, places, and number of access points

Internet Technology

Computers, mobile phones, mobile broadband, and fixed broadband

Internet Data Allowance

Mobile and fixed Internet

● AFFORDABILITY

Relative Expenditure

Share of household income spent on Internet access

Value of Expenditure

Total Internet data allowance per dollar of expenditure

● DIGITAL ABILITY

Attitudes

Notions of control, enthusiasm, learning, and confidence

Basic Skills

Mobile phone, banking, shopping, community, and information skills

Activities

Accessing content, communication, transactions, commerce, media, and information

From analysis of ADII reports over the period 2014-2020 the following insights can be drawn:

+ A significant proportion of the community are still not online

As of March 2020, when data collection for the last report occurred, more than 2.5 million Australians were offline, despite the infrastructure being physically available to almost all Australians.

+ Affordability is a key issue

While the absolute cost of Internet data has decreased, households are spending more money on Internet services due to increasing usage. Expenditure on these services has generally increased faster than household income over this period. In particular, the proportion of household income spent on Internet access by those in the lowest household income quintile (lowest 20%) has increased every year since 2014. There is a widening gap in affordability between the lowest and the highest income quintile households.

+ Mobile-only users are less digitally included

More than four million Australians accessed the Internet solely through a mobile connection. Around one in five also have no access to a personal computer at home and thereby rely on mobile devices (smartphones or tablets) when using the Internet. Being mobile-only poses particular difficulties with online activities such as remote working and learning, often demanding higher data allowances and device capabilities.

+ People aged 65+ continue to be amongst Australia's most digitally excluded communities

These results indicate many older Australians are not able to use the Internet as an alternative to face-to-face for social and service interactions.

+ Indigenous Australians are significantly more digitally excluded than Non-Indigenous Australians

Affordability is a key issue, driven by a disproportionately high use of mobile-only and prepaid connectivity, which carries higher costs per gigabyte than fixed connections.

DIGITAL INCLUSION IN VICTORIA

Across Victoria the following table illustrates the divergent digital inclusion experiences for different populations across income, employment, educational attainment, and age. A higher score indicates greater digital inclusion and a lower score indicates lower digital inclusion (or higher digital exclusion). Particularly low scores have been shaded to highlight the cohorts of most concern.

Table 1: ADII Victorian Scores Across Digitally Excluded Cohorts (lower numbers denote greater digital exclusion), 2020

	HOUSEHOLD INCOME QUINTILES					EMPLOYMENT STATUS			EDUCATION			AGE GROUPS				
	Q1 (high)	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5 (low)	Employed	Unemployed*	Not in labour force	Tertiary	Secondary	Less	14-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65+
● ACCESS																
Internet Access	94	94	91	82	76	93	87	80	91	86	78	89	92	94	90	75
Internet Technology	85	87	84	79	72	85	80	76	84	81	77	81	85	87	83	72
Internet Data Allowance	64	68	60	53	45	64	62	47	61	57	49	60	70	66	56	39
	81	83	78	71	64	81	76	68	79	75	68	77	82	82	76	62
● AFFORDABILITY																
Relative Expenditure	86	63	48	26	10	59	47	47	60	46	47	55	56	58	57	45
Value of Expenditure	72	72	68	64	58	69	69	63	70	65	63	65	71	71	68	58
	79	67	58	45	34	64	58	55	65	55	55	60	63	65	62	52
● DIGITAL ABILITY																
Attitudes	57	55	50	44	37	54	58	44	54	47	36	62	61	54	44	36
Basic Skills	67	70	60	51	45	66	62	46	66	56	41	58	70	67	57	40
Activities	54	55	48	38	32	52	52	35	53	39	28	47	59	53	41	28
	59	60	53	44	38	57	57	42	58	47	35	56	63	58	48	35
DIGITAL INCLUSION INDEX SCORE																
	73	70	63	53	45	67	64	55	67	59	53	64	70	68	62	49

*Sample size <150, exercise caution in interpretation.

LOW INCOME, LOW EDUCATION, THOSE NOT IN THE LABOUR FORCE AND OLDER PEOPLE ARE **MOST LIKELY** TO EXPERIENCE HIGH RATES OF **DIGITAL EXCLUSION** ACROSS VICTORIA.



DIGITAL EQUITY IN MELBOURNE'S OUTER SOUTH EAST

The ADII found that outer south-east Melbourne is the most digitally excluded region of Greater Melbourne. ADII's outer south-east geography includes the LGAs of Casey, Cardinia, Greater Dandenong, Frankston, Mornington Peninsula and the southern section of Kingston.

When compared to the rest of Greater Melbourne, in the outer south-east:

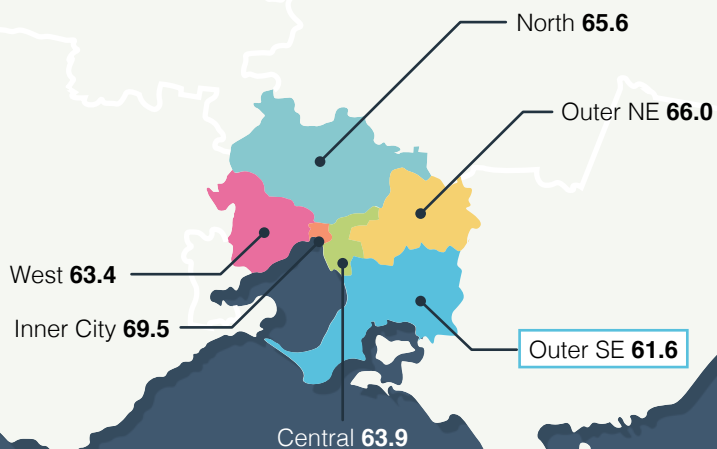
- > The Internet is accessed less frequently despite equipment and the Internet being available to a similar degree
- > Affordability is a significant issue with households getting less value for the same service expenditure
- > Digital ability is the greatest deficit. Skills, attitudes and the variety of activities successfully conducted online all trail behind other areas of Greater Melbourne. In this regard, the outer south-east more closely reassembles a rural area, likely indicating socio-economic factors.

Table 2: ADII Scores for Victorian regions, 2020

	Australia	VIC	Rural VIC	Gtr. Melbourne	GREATER MELBOURNE					
					West	North	Inner City	Central	Outer NE	Outer SE
● ACCESS										
Internet Access	87.9	88.3	84.8	89.1	90.6	89.7	91.4	87.8	89.9	86.9
Internet Technology	82.1	82.0	79.6	82.6	84.2	82.0	81.1	81.7	82.5	83.5
Internet Data Allowance	58.7	58.5	54.6	59.5	55.6	60.7	65.6	59.8	57.9	59.6
	76.3	76.3	73.0	77.1	76.8	77.5	79.3	76.4	76.8	76.6
● AFFORDABILITY										
Relative Expenditure	54.7	54.3	44.9	56.7	56.1	57.4	56.6	57.0	60.1	54.2
Value of Expenditure	67.0	67.1	62.5	68.4	66.5	67.8	69.6	65.8	72.5	70.5
	60.9	60.7	53.7	62.5	61.3	62.6	63.1	61.4	66.3	62.4
● DIGITAL ABILITY										
Attitudes	50.3	51.2	45.9	52.6	53.4	53.7	60.3	53.0	53.1	46.2
Basic Skills	59.4	59.0	54.3	60.5	56.8	62.9	75.4	61.3	63.3	52.4
Activities	46.1	46.3	40.1	48.0	45.8	53.8	62.0	47.0	48.5	38.4
	52.0	52.2	46.8	53.7	52.0	56.8	65.9	53.8	55.0	45.6
DIGITAL INCLUSION INDEX SCORE										
	63.0	63.1	57.8	64.4	63.4	65.6	69.5	63.9	66.0	61.6



DIGITAL
INCLUSION
INDEX SCORE



OUTER SOUTH
EAST: **61.6 DIGITAL
INCLUSION SCORE**
IS THE **LOWEST**
FOR GREATER
MELBOURNE

Figure 1: ADII Victorian Regions (*Sample size <150, exercise caution in interpretation)

DIGITAL EQUITY IN THE CITY OF CASEY

Inferences can be drawn from the Australian and Victorian findings above regarding the local experience of digital inclusion and exclusion across the City of Casey. Table 3 displays groups more likely to experience digital exclusion across Casey suburbs based on the above ADII analysis. The suburbs of Doveton, Hallam, Cranbourne, and Hampton Park have the highest rates of populations likely to experience digital exclusion.

These same suburbs also have the highest negative response rates to the 2016 Census question: *'Does any member of this household access the internet from this dwelling?'* (ABS, 2016). This Census question (now discontinued and not asked in 2021) is the only direct indicator currently available to assess internet access and availability in small areas such as suburbs and neighbourhoods. Doveton's rate of no internet access from home is notably very high at 22% of households, the ninth highest rate of the 308 SA2s across Greater Melbourne.

Table 3: Rate of Digitally Excluded Populations Across City of Casey

● Well above average ● Above average

		Socio-economic disadvantage*	Low household income (<\$650 per week)*	65+ population (ABS, 2019)	Low education (did not finish high school)*	Profound disability (2020)^	Not in labour force (March 2021)†	No internet access from home*
1	Berwick-North	1,059	16%	19%	41%	2%	12%	11%
2	Berwick-South	1,060	9%	8%	36%	1%	14%	5%
3	Doveton	826	26%	15%	48%	6%	33%	22%
4	Hallam	946	17%	14%	41%	4%	25%	12%
5	Narre Warren North	1,084	8%	14%	40%	1%	14%	6%
6	Endeavour Hills-North	1,002	14%	14%	37%	3%	19%	10%
7	Endeavour Hills-South	1,009	14%	16%	35%	3%	17%	9%
8	Narre Warren-North East	1,024	12%	11%	43%	2%	16%	9%
9	Narre Warren-South West	975	16%	13%	44%	3%	19%	11%
10	Cranbourne	940	18%	13%	51%	5%	20%	14%
11	Cranbourne East	1,038	10%	6%	36%	1%	18%	8%
12	Cranbourne North	1,002	11%	7%	41%	2%	17%	8%
13	Cranbourne South	1,060	11%	11%	49%	2%	12%	9%
14	Cranbourne West	997	10%	5%	41%	2%	18%	7%
15	Hampton Park	927	16%	10%	41%	3%	23%	12%
16	Lynbrook-Lyndhurst	1,039	6%	6%	30%	1%	17%	5%
17	Pearcedale-Tooradin	1,031	14%	14%	55%	2%	9%	10%
18	Narre Warren South (East)	1,058	8%	9%	41%	2%	13%	5%
19	Narre Warren South (West)	996	10%	8%	40%	2%	19%	6%
	City of Casey	1,004	13%	10%	41%	2%	18%	10%

* ABS Census, 2016 ('socioeconomic disadvantage' drawn from ABS SEIFA IRSD where a lower score indicates greater disadvantage in an area)

^ Department of Social Services, 2020

† Small Area Labour Markets, Dept of Education, Skills and Employment, 2021.

A MORE CONNECTED, BOLD AND RESILIENT COMMUNITY.

CITY OF CASEY SUBURBS

- 1 Berwick-North
- 2 Berwick-South
- 3 Doveton
- 4 Hallam
- 5 Narre Warren North
- 6 Endeavour Hills-North
- 7 Endeavour Hills-South
- 8 Narre Warren-North East
- 9 Narre Warren-South West
- 10 Cranbourne
- 11 Cranbourne East
- 12 Cranbourne North
- 13 Cranbourne South
- 14 Cranbourne West
- 15 Hampton Park
- 16 Lynbrook-Lyndhurst
- 17 Pearcedale-Tooradin
- 18 Narre Warren South (East)
- 19 Narre Warren South (West)



Source: Casey Tech School

Figure 2: Geographic key of Casey SA2s

WHAT ARE THE DIGITAL EQUITY BARRIERS, ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN CASEY?

As part of the development of this framework there was extensive engagement from March to May of 2021 with individual community members, community groups, education and training providers and not-for-profit organisations from across Casey.

This engagement involved face-to-face focus groups, online focus groups and surveys. Participants drew on experiences and challenges faced during and post COVID-19 restrictions when many were required to be online either for the first time or had to undertake more complex digital tasks.

WHAT YOU TOLD US

This section represents the barriers, issues, and opportunities that the digital world presents for Casey's diverse community. Whilst much of the feedback related to the challenges of digital access, there were several positives for groups that can be built upon such as decreased loneliness, increased access to services (e.g. telehealth), increased government engagement on platforms used by CALD communities, and increased social networks for LGBTIQ+ communities. These benefits and opportunities are listed on page 18.

Despite these positives, many responses reflected an escalation of prior digital exclusion experiences, not temporary or of a different type, but the arrival of a new digital reality confronting our community years earlier than anticipated.

A snapshot of this feedback highlights the range of experiences and concerns:

"People with some skills, awareness adjusted quickly while most of the refugees and people seeking asylum remained isolated and excluded"

"Increase of mental health issues due to a disconnect with community and sense of belonging"

"We had many parents who did not speak or read English and really struggled with supporting their children learning from home. If there was more than one child requiring a device to access different curriculum and activities, that was often impossible"

"Loneliness – husband died. Children moved away. Rarely see grandchildren. Friends passed away"

"Women living in family violence were further isolated and trapped in abusive relationships as they lost their former support face to face services"

"In terms of mental and physical health, elders and immigrants have neglected their health as [they are] not competent to log on to join telehealth consultation, therefore, acute health conditions became chronic"

Across different groups common challenges were identified:

- > Lack of Internet Infrastructure in new estates or slow Internet speeds
- > Lack of knowledge of where public Wi-Fi was available

- > Cost of appropriate devices (many households required additional devices for the family to work and study at home)
- > Cost of Internet both connection and data

- > Lack of knowledge of digital literacy options across the municipality. Different people need courses at different times of day and different locations due to having limited transport options.
- > Lack of digital skills and confidence

"Better connection and engagement between metro and rural ethnic leaders and groups as we bridged the geographic divide"

"We have seen a lot of connection via WhatsApp (which surprised me!). In particular, an Afghani community spread messages [of] support far and wide"



Figure 3: Word Cloud composed of words and phrases from the Casey Digital Equity Framework engagement (derived from verbatim comments)

Some notable findings from the engagement included:

- > The degree of tension raised between parents and their school-aged children resulted in regular requests for counselling due to children questioning why their parents were unable to help them
- > Inaccurate assumptions that younger people have a high level of digital skills; young people embarrassed to reach out for help for this very reason
- > Some tertiary education providers unable to identify any positives about online education, only negatives. Concerns expressed about the degree to which tertiary education will continue online post COVID-19 and how that will affect teaching and the personal development of young adults, particularly those who are struggling with learning
- > poor eyesight and mental health conditions such as anxiety/depression (brought about due to lack of face-to-face support)
- > LGBTIQ+ communities felt more included than ever before as there was more local and regional opportunities to collaborate on projects online, more regional, national and global digital opportunities to connect with other LGBTIQ+ people and events and more information about LGBTIQ+ tailored information and services
- > One-on-one digital training support – either by trained staff or peer-to-peer community members – proved the most effective approach to increasing digital skills.

SURVEY FINDINGS

A specific survey was also conducted asking what could be done to make Casey's digital presence more inclusive. Common themes were:

- + Use of plain English when writing web and social media content
- + Greater use of accurate translations
- + More pictorial representations and multimedia (audio-video) rather than text
- + The use of the 'listen and translate' feature on the home page was difficult to use as the button text written in English. A pictorial representation as well as text and placement would be beneficial
- + Promotion of Casey online offerings, platforms and digital assistance needs to also take place via offline communications methods and via locations and groups not directly associated with Council like schools, shopping centres, neighbourhood houses, kindergartens or via paper communications like rates notices.
- + Public access computers or tablets could be placed in strategic locations throughout the city - Customer Service, Community Hubs and centres, etc. with the web page open and navigable at all times with Council staff assisting
- + The need for enduring 'offline' options for Casey Community members who either will never be online or need significant time to transition to digital platforms.

There were a number of interventions or responses to digital challenges that were shown to be working:

- > Across different groups purpose drove interest. Finding the services and activities people wanted to access drove digital skills development. This was common across different groups where purpose drove commitment to learning.
- > Loan device programs not only addressed an immediate need but also enabled reluctant purchasers who could afford devices to try before they bought their own. This was particularly common amongst older people
- > Free public Wi-Fi was beneficial, particularly for young people
- > For the most digitally excluded and inexperienced, one-on-one support leads to greater learning outcomes.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Different people experience different or multiple barriers and a variety of approaches will be needed to tackle them. If not addressed, existing disadvantage will be entrenched. This was expressed in a number of comments:

"Difficulties experienced by people searching for private rental – most now applied for online."

"We saw some families enter into agreements for contracts with phone and Internet providers that were not sustainable financially"

"Many did not understand how to access online reporting to ensure compliance with Centrelink and job activities"

"Compromised employment opportunities- unable to access on board procedures"

"I know when my son went to an employment agency many of the people had no computer skills or a computer"

"Stuck in a digital divide rut (much like poverty circle)"






Some did not have mobile or home Internet access nor somewhere local to easily access it. Some households lacked sufficient devices, particularly during COVID-19 lockdowns where multiple family members were suddenly working or studying from home online. Some had devices but lacked the financial means to access sufficient Internet data. For others it was either a lack of digital skills, fears regarding privacy or security, or a lack of motivation due to not seeing the benefits of getting online. For those lacking motivation now, increasing numbers of services being digital only means further marginalisation on the horizon (e.g. in the case of CALD traders, declining business as 'cashless' economy grows).

As well as building the capacity of Casey community members it is also clear that Casey Council needs to maintain a non-digital safety net for its own services and activities and advocate that other levels of government and service providers do the same.



“PURPOSE DRIVES
COMMITMENT AND
MOTIVATION TO LEARN
NEW **DIGITAL SKILLS**”

SUMMARY OF ONLINE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS

	 <p>Older People</p>	 <p>Low Income¹</p>	 <p>People living with Disability</p>	 <p>LGBTIQ+ community</p>	 <p>Women</p>
BENEFITS/POSITIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Reduced loneliness for many > Increased use of telehealth > Reduced petrol costs travelling to meetings and appointments > Embracing online shopping for first time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Increased access for those who may not be able to travel due to geographical location (e.g. those with disability) > Improved collaboration between service providers of benefit to clients accessing multiple services > Flexibility to access 'mock' and real interviews with employers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Created new accessible social groups > Technology assisted those with sensory issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > More local and regional opportunities to collaborate on projects online > More regional, national, and global digital opportunities to connect with other LGBTIQ+ people and events > More tailored information and services available for LGBTIQ+ communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Previously socially isolated CALD women benefited from being digitally connected by attending short courses and activities for the first time > Increased equity for some women around work life balance with the shift to working from home
CHALLENGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Lack of motivation to gain digital skills due to not seeing benefits or need > Physical /biological barriers > Digital literacy classes being at times and places that are not accessible > Neglecting of health due to inability to use telehealth leading to health conditions becoming chronic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Complexity of online service and application processes for government benefits and employment > Compliance with ongoing government service requirements are increasingly online > Homelessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Lack of NDIS funding to provide online support to people with a disability > Lack of funding for devices, support staff and Internet costs > Carers not having knowledge or confidence to go online themselves so could not help their clients go online > Lack of awareness of where to go for help with device access or learning digital skills > Online meetings not catering for the particular technology needs of people with different disabilities attending the meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Abusive comments online, including on Casey Council social media > Online forms and surveys not having enough space to put things in your own terms rather than having to check a predetermined box. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > CALD women excluded by husbands preventing them using devices or going to digital literacy classes particularly if mixed gender > Women not being able to participate in classes to learn digital skills because they are held in areas where there is poor public transport or because there is no occasional care > Conflict between work and home schooling due to time but also device shortages > Women living in family violence in 2020 were further isolated and trapped in abusive relationships as they lost access to their former face to face support services

¹ Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities did not reveal any culturally specific barriers to access. The major barriers were financial resources for accessing devices, data, and digital skills. As such, interventions should focus on these financial barriers and more research will need to be conducted to develop these interventions in culturally appropriate ways.



CALD Communities

- > Enhanced linkages with communities overseas bringing information and reducing isolation
- > Secure chat communications that have capacity to reach large, but also specific cohorts
- > Improved connection between ethnic leaders in metropolitan and rural areas
- > Sessions could be held targeting CALD groups over a larger geographic area with strong attendances, as well as subsequent viewings of recordings
- > Previously socially isolated CALD women benefited from being digitally connected by attending classes for the first time

- > Compared to migrants across the whole of Australia whose digital inclusion is often greater than the general population, many of those affected by digital exclusion in Casey were from people seeking asylum and refugee backgrounds
- > Language and literacy as barriers to accessing online services and activities. Many CALD illiterate in own language. Older CALD community members have been losing English skills due to less face to face contact which then affects understanding of online content
- > Many accessing Internet only via mobile phones leading to limited capacity to engage in range of complex online activities
- > Control by men not allowing women to use the computer or access Internet
- > Online services not only requiring one-time interactions but keeping up with further communication via online means
- > Addressing traditional attitude issues to build trust and rapport with government difficult online with CALD community members
- > CALD young people having to pivot to remote/online access for information rather than just 'turning up'



Children and Young People

The only subgroup within this section who could identify a benefit/positive was LGBTIQ+ young people who had positive experiences (covered in the LGBTIQ+ section)

- > Digital inequity of school children from vulnerable families leading to broader family stress. Families lacked devices (none or insufficient number), lacked Internet connections and had parents without digital skills
- > People making incorrect assumptions younger people have digital skills and therefore embarrassed to reach out for help
- > The concerns about the degree to which tertiary education will continue online and how that will affect learning outcomes and personal development
- > Lack of knowledge amongst young children of online safety



Small Business

- > Real estate and professionals taking advantage of digital
- > Berwick small businesses went successfully online to survive during COVID-19 (but other suburbs being left behind due to lack of motivation)

- > Businesses not willing to go online to broaden customer base – wanting to stay face to face businesses using predominantly cash
- > Businesses less able to adapt to challenging conditions due to no ability to independently communicate with customers
- > CALD food businesses most affected and only paper communications reach them



Community Groups/Faith Groups

- > Increased use of technology making groups more effective and accessible

- > Older members struggling to access online meetings and activities (including faith communities)
- > Declining group memberships, as members did not get back involved after COVID-19

WHAT IS ALREADY HAPPENING

CASEY COUNCIL DIGITAL ACTIVATION PROGRAM

During the COVID-19 pandemic the need for older residents to interact with family and friends and access critical online services, including online shopping and banking, increased significantly. To overcome this challenge, Council's Connected Communities department and Smart City and Innovation team developed the Digital Activation Program. Three critical barriers were identified to digital equity, aligned with the ADII Digital Equity Dimensions: Internet access, device access, and digital literacy skills.

The following solutions directly tackled these barriers, whilst promoting partnerships across the organisation.

GET CONNECTED

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic Casey Council's Direct Care Staff, who work with approximately 3,770 people over the age of 70, reported that community members – especially those living alone without digital technology – had increased feelings of loneliness. The team pivoted existing service delivery models and were supported by redeployed staff to establish the following:

- > **A device borrowing system** with 20 iPad and 20 Samsung Tablets available for community members to borrow for up to 3 months. Approximately 35 devices are provided with mobile data plans for those who are financially disadvantaged and or do not have Wi-Fi access or ability to hot spot.
- > **1:1 community support** via both in-person and telephone support to ensure continuity – The Online Shopping or Get Connected programs from Direct Care Staff.
- > **Digital literacy tools** to support community members when a support worker is not available with both hard and soft copies to increase their online confidence and skills including online navigation and cybersecurity modules.

Care workers spent time with participants to identify their topics of interest, supporting device navigation in-person and providing homework tasks between sessions. The unique one-on-one relationships, in which Direct Care Staff were also developing their own digital skills, meant participants could working at their own pace. They were able to build confidence towards using technology to pay bills, order medication, and chat to friends and family members online.



KINDER CONNECT

A continuation of the *Bridging the Gap* intergenerational program, *Kinder Connect* sought to connect older Casey residents with kindergarten classes during COVID-19 lockdown. Older persons and kindergarten classes first exchanged letters and drawings whilst the program was being developed and appropriate checks conducted. Older people were then supported to video call their matched kindergarten class. *Kinder Connect* enabled isolated older people to connect with younger people to share stories, knowledge and connection during COVID-19, with the aim of decreasing feelings of loneliness for older persons as well as aid the young persons' development through intergenerational relationships.



SHOPPING ONLINE

In response to COVID-19 barriers, shopping services supporting older or vulnerable people was transitioned online to help participants obtain their groceries without needing to go to the supermarket during the pandemic. The program developed skills to order groceries online, which can be transferred to other digital challenges, to ensure the safety of participants and maintain their autonomy.

CASEY CARDINIA LIBRARIES DIGITAL LITERACY PROGRAMS

A snapshot of 2019/20 digital equity programs run by **Casey Cardinia Libraries (CCL)** included:

- > Online training to community volunteers to become skilled in delivering digital literacy classes to others, helping seniors to learn technology and digital literacy skills (CCL secured grant funding through the Federal Government's Be Connected program).
- > A laptops and tablets borrowing library was established for members to assist with families who required additional devices for home schooling and work.
- > The Ucan2 project supported socioeconomically disadvantaged parents with low levels of prose and digital literacy. Library staff encouraged them to participate by offering topics that related to their children's digital learning and technology skills. By participating in the classes, parents would learn more about the things their kids are able to do online and keep up with them. The program ran at four branches over six weeks. Each participant received a 'swag bag' containing library information, library card, folder for session notes, USB stick and basic English readers. In total 48 classes were held across the region and there were 125 attendances (predominately funded by State Library of Victoria through the 2019 Adult Literacy Innovation Grants).
- > University of the Third Age (U3A) Casey approached the Bunjil Place Library team and developed a plan to showcase their programs, free to library members, to encourage longer term participation. Together they were able to offer more learning opportunities for seniors, including digital literacy education, armchair travel chats, and brain-training techniques.
- > Book a Librarian sessions - where members can get one on one assistance from a library staff member on a technology issue, either on an ad hoc basis, or via a pre-booked appointment.
- > Regular digital literacy programs ran throughout the year for both adults and children with a range of topics offered.

NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSES

The following Neighbourhood Houses currently run digital literacy classes:

- > Balla Balla Community Centre
- > Cranbourne Community House
- > Doveton Neighbourhood Learning Centre
- > Endeavour Hills Neighbourhood Centre
- > Foundation Learning Centre
- > Hampton Park Community House
- > Hallam Community Learning Centre
- > Merinda Park Learning and Community Centre
- > Oakgrove Community Centre

More information about digital literacy classes can be found at **caseyconnectlearn.com.au**

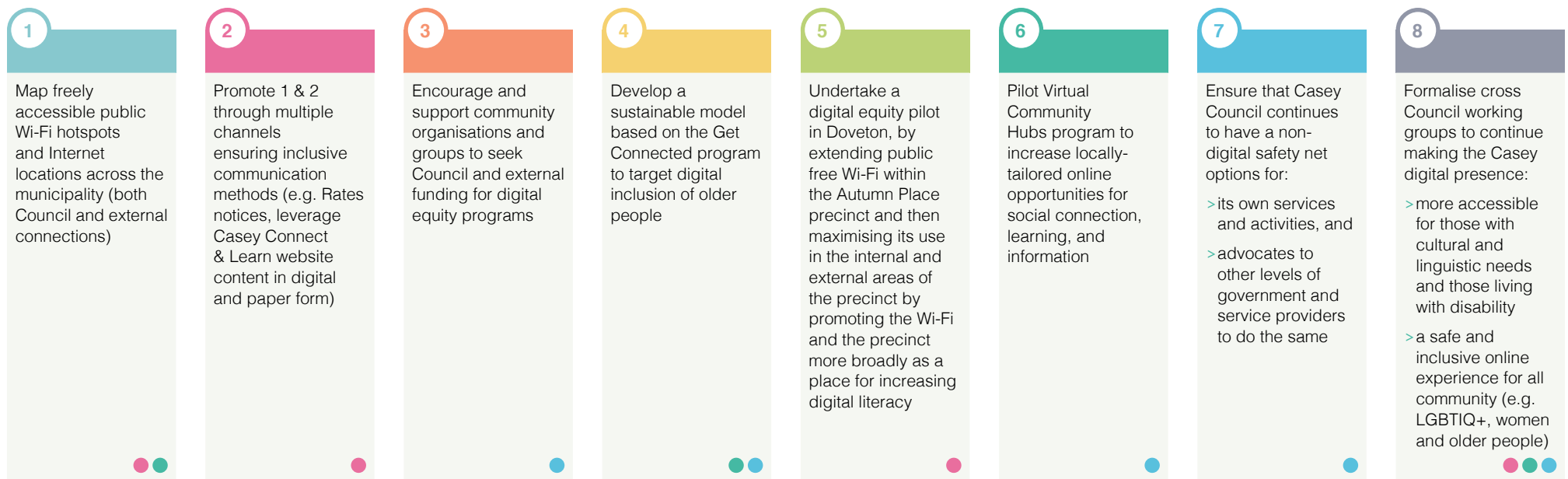
PRIORITY INITIATIVES

Planning for these initiatives, including roles, responsibilities, timeframes will be detailed in the associated implementation plan.

IMMEDIATE

Initiatives for the 2021/22 financial year.

● Access ● Affordability ● Digital Ability



INCREASING FAIR **DIGITAL ACCESS,**
AFFORDABILITY AND **ABILITY** FOR
ALL IN CASEY.

LIFE OF THE FRAMEWORK

Initiatives for 2022/23 – 2024/25 financial years.

● Access ● Affordability ● Digital Ability



HOW WILL THIS FRAMEWORK BE IMPLEMENTED?

ROLE OF THE CITY OF CASEY

Casey Council will plan for and capitalise on the present and future benefits that digital technologies provide community. Central to this planning is an acknowledgement that some within community – many of whom are our most disadvantaged – require the additional provision of non-digital options for accessing information, programs and services. Council is committed to addressing digital exclusion through a digital equity approach. This commitment will see 'whole-of-organisation' change within internal operations, support for external organisations and groups, as well as advocacy across the external environment.

As detailed in the above purpose section the present framework is aligned with the strategic directions of the Council Plan 2021-25 and Council's health and wellbeing planning. It will be critical to embed the framework learnings and digital equity approach in whole-of-organisation enterprise planning, as well as strategy and policy relating to diversity and inclusion, technology, digital, engagement and communications.

REPORTING TO THE COMMUNITY

- > Council's corporate reporting system will provide the framework for the quarterly internal monitoring and reporting of priority initiatives
- > Progress on the priority initiatives will be reported publicly via an annual update on the website

ROLES OF PARTNERS

While Casey Council will implement this approach and many of the priority initiatives through internal operations and projects, some of the most valuable work will happen in collaboration with partners on joint initiatives and initiatives funded via Council's grants program. To successfully bring about a digitally equitable Casey, a range of stakeholders will need to come together in the spirit of co-operation and collaboration. Council sees itself as taking a proactive role in building and supporting that collaborative environment.

The value of the Digital Equity Framework is that it will be a common platform for extending and developing partnerships and codesigning sustainable and effective solutions addressing digital equity. The framework will drive strategic alignment across not just Council but also partners so as to avoid lost opportunities and shortfalls in resourcing and implementation.

FUNDING

Via the implementation of the Smart Casey Launchpad, Council are already implementing initiatives that address digital equity. Where additional operational or capital funds are required to deliver the priority initiatives listed in this framework, budget submissions will be considered as part of Council's annual budget process. External support will also be sought from State and Federal Government for both Council and its partners.

GOVERNANCE AND MONITORING

A Digital Equity Working Group was formed to oversee the framework's development and this group will refine the approach and map delivery of the implementation. Smart Casey Launchpad will report on the framework's development.

Oversight, monitoring, and evaluation of the framework's implementation will be the responsibility of an implementation steering group. The steering group will comprise key internal and external stakeholders committed to delivering the framework, particularly interested members of two Community Reference Groups: Inclusive Communities Reference Group and Smart City and Innovation Reference Group.

GLOSSARY

Bridging the Gap	Bridging the Gap is a partnership program to bring about sustainable improvements in the quality of maternity and early childhood health care for families of refugee background.
CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse. Often refers to migrant communities that are more recent and/or disadvantaged.
community	A group of people who have a particular characteristic (such as geography, age, interest, or belief system) in common.
community resilience	A measure of the sustained ability of a community to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations.
consumers	Clients of Council direct care services.
Council	Means Casey City Council, being a body constituted as a Municipal Council under the Victorian Local Government Act 2020.
Council Plan	As required by the Victorian Local Government Act 2020, each Council must prepare a Council Plan defining the strategic direction of the Council and strategic objectives for achieving that direction.
Community Hub	A multi-purpose Council building enabling a range of community services and activities.
deliberative engagement	Describes a series of engagement practices that demonstrate promise of community influence over policy and decision-making; participation that is representative of the community and inclusive of diverse viewpoints and values; and open dialogue and discussion, access to information and movement towards consensus.
device	A piece of portable electronic equipment that can connect to the Internet, such as a smartphone, tablet, or laptop computer.
digital	Involving or relating to the use of computer technology, particularly the Internet.

digital ability	A term for both the confidence with which the Internet and associated technologies are used and also encompassing the attitudes, skills and diversity of online activities.
digital democracy	The pursuit and the practice of democracy using digital means.
digitally empowered	A digitally empowered individual or community is in control over the availability and influence of the Internet, smart devices and other technology in their lives.
digital equity	All individuals and communities have the digital tools, skills, and confidence needed for full participation in our increasingly online society, democracy, and economy.
digitally enabled	Person who has developed the skills and knowledge to effectively use the Internet and other digital technology.
digitally excluded	Not having convenient, reliable access to affordable, accessible digital devices and an Internet connection, and who cannot confidently use them in their day-to-day life.
digital inclusion	Provision of the activities, strategies and tools necessary for all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, to have access to, and use of, information and communication technologies.
digital literacy	The extent to which one is able to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.
digital poverty	Poverty resulting from or exacerbated by a lack of access to information technology particularly the Internet.
direct care	Council service delivering domestic assistance, personal care and respite care.

equity	A fair approach in the distribution and provision of services and resources according to needs, rights and eligibility.
Internet (the)	A global system of networked computers around the world that allows people to share information and communicate with each other.
intersectionality	The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.
NDIS	The National Insurance Disability Scheme (NDIS) provides support to eligible people with intellectual, physical, sensory, cognitive and psychosocial disability. Early intervention supports can also be provided for eligible people with disability or children with developmental delay.
neighbourhood house	Community run and based organisations that support social, educational, recreational and support activities.
online	Being connected to the Internet.
quintile	Any of five equal groups into which a population can be divided according to the distribution of values of a particular variable.
smart city	A smart city applies digital technology, data and innovative practices to improve liveability, sustainability, collaboration and economic opportunities.
Wi-Fi	Wi-Fi is a wireless networking technology that allows devices such as computers (laptops and desktops), mobile devices (smart phones and wearables), and other equipment (printers and video cameras) to connect with the Internet.
USB	Computer hardware you plug in to your computer to save (and transfer) files.
University of the Third Age	Volunteer groups that provide lifelong learning to people who are retired or semi-retired by a peer-to-peer model.

REFERENCE LIST AND FURTHER READING

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FURTHER READING

The City of Casey is committed to delivering community value through innovation and has a range of resources.

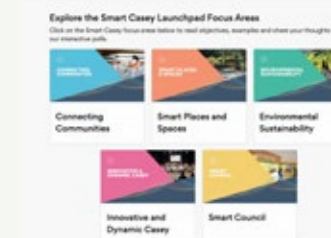
Digital Empowerment Insights Paper



Smart Casey Launchpad



Smart Casey Launchpad Community Hub



GET INVOLVED

If you would like to discuss a partnership with Casey or want to learn more about Digital Equity and Empowerment, email **smartcity@casey.vic.gov.au**





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