Submission: The Australian Digital inclusion Index

10 March 2020

National and State Libraries Australia (NSLA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the review of the ADII index and data provision strategy.

NSLA is the collaborative body for Australia's national, state and territory libraries: the National Library of Australia, State Library of New South Wales, State Library of Queensland, State Library Victoria, State Library of South Australia, State Library of Western Australia, Library & Archives NT, Libraries ACT and Libraries Tasmania.

Our members are nine of the 1408 public libraries in Australia that provide services for communities, including more than 13,500 public access internet devices, free wifi, and digital literacy programs.[1]

We appreciate the need for changes to the ADII in response to changes in available technologies, consumer behaviour and sophistication of data collection tools.

Given the role of libraries in enabling digital inclusion, particularly for those who are economically disadvantaged, we are disappointed that the proposed revisions do not include any measures of how and where those people for whom cost or digital skills are a barrier, are gaining access to online content and services. The number of internet access devices provided by public libraries increased by more than 34 per cent in the five years to 2017 to meet increased demand from patrons.[2]

As noted in the consultation paper, the ADII is widely used by the non-profit and business sectors, and by all tiers of government, and has significant impact on policy and practice. Yet the index only reflects digital inclusion in terms of whether or not respondents use their own devices and fund their own access to mobile or fixed internet. To give a full picture of Australia's digital inclusion, the index should include some measure of:

- places of internet access, other than home (proposed for removal altogether from future indexes, though we understand this is now under review)
- whether and where those who have mobile-only access also access the internet from other places (such as public-access computers in libraries)
- levels of participation in free, publicly available digital skills building programs and the effect of these on digital ability and attitudes.

NSLA libraries support the submission of our colleagues at the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). We look forward to the results of ADII 2.0.

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[1] Source: Australian Public Libraries Statistics 2016-17
[2] Ibid p.12