

NSW Digital Inclusion Strategy Team
digitalinclusionstrategy@customerservice.nsw.gov.au

Re: Submission to inform the NSW Digital Inclusion Strategy - Carers Advisory Council

Dear NSW Digital Inclusion Strategy Team,

The NSW Carers Advisory Council (the Council) writes to you regarding the NSW Digital Inclusion Strategy.

The Council provides advice to the NSW Government on legislation, policy and other matters relating to carers. For more information, about the Council and our members, the majority of whom are carers, please visit our website at <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/community-inclusion/advisory-councils/nsw-carers-advisory-council.html>.

Following is the Council’s feedback to the questions posed in the NSW Digital Inclusion Strategy Discussion Paper.

Questions from Discussion Paper	Comments from Council members
<p>1. What does it mean for you to be digitally included?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digitally included means technology being available, individuals being technically competent, information being available in digital form, support available to access and to understand the information; and any online tools that provide information need to be able to articulate responses effectively so that carers can easily understand the information that they are being given. • We need to be mindful of the assumption that all carers who want to, are capable of using digital platforms to access services and information. We would like to know how accessible support is going to be provided to carers, providing them with options to learn how to use digital platforms – this needs to be mindful of access, location, range of technologies etc. • We would like to raise awareness that whilst digital may be good for some carers that we must ensure

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	<p>that there are alternatives available for carers, so that they can exercise choice to use it or not. If digital becomes the only option to access services (even some services) then this will disadvantage some groups of carers who may prefer in person support/advice etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can see that there are advantages of digital, for instance it can provide a community sense of belonging within a virtual community and may meet the social needs of some groups of carers. We are interested to know how carers can be consulted to find out which/who groups of carers would like to be involved in discussions about social connection via digital platforms. We also note that this assumes that they have enough bandwidth for this, and have the tools to access digital platforms. We draw attention to carers living in rural and remote areas that need to have boosters for their internet or use satellite services and there is an additional cost to these tools – will these be supported? How will we ensure that carers living in regional, rural and remote areas are not further disadvantaged? • We are mindful of the literacy competency assumptions and support; if people are having issues accessing digital platforms who is going to assist them? Who is going to provide equipment for them? How are the tools that they are using going to be safe and kept up to date? For instance, affording software that keeps them safe in digital platforms; virus scanning software is another expense for carers but is imperative to keep them safe in digital spaces? • How are digital services and platforms going to be regulated for safety and inappropriate behaviours? What will carers do if they feel unsafe, who will they report this to and how will they know who to report this to?
<p>2. What challenges do you face in accessing and using the internet, digital technologies or online services?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For carers in rural/remote areas , they are already disadvantaged with a lack of internet access and can experience slow speeds and drop outs – how will this be improved thinking about the needs of carers and their need to be included? • Also, what will be the plans for including the needs of carers in the format of resources (as not all resources are built for both computers and phones – we raise the issue that some may not be suited to mobiles). • There are assumptions made that carers are familiar with how to find services, and also will know which services are ‘real’ and valid services – how will they

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	<p>know this? What is the government going to do to check there are not fake services being offered? Or services that are operating outside of regulatory practices that will put carers at risk?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The digital environment can be overwhelming, there can be too much information and not enough direction. We believe that, for carers, there is a need for navigation support; this could be human or technological. • Credibility/reliability, confidence/trust. • We don't know what we don't know. • Not recognising personal need for information. • Privacy and confidentiality concerns for carers about sharing their information online and being assured that their privacy is secure. • Cyber security and scam risks, as raised before are highlighted by carers and we would like to know how they can be assured of reducing risk in this area? • Cultural/norms and communications moving to digital reduce social interaction for carers who are already marginalised and stigmatised. We would like to discuss how services will also maintain a 'person centred' approach and have 'real' people also available. • Carers share that there can be too many steps with some digital processes, for instance not all forms are available to fill in online, they require the carer to download, print, sign, before uploading and resending documents – this can be both time consuming and costly; it also assumes that carers have access to printers to fill in forms and the capability to scan and upload a file in the correct format. • Reduce the barrier of what???? • Not all carers recognise their need, one of the issues is that some carers don't identify as a carer so don't look for the carers information – how can we support them to have more awareness and how will this be done online as we see this as a major risk? • Information overload/ navigation of a system/ human resourcing. • Peer networks that connect you – support the process. • Power – inconsistent supply – • Technical issues during disasters/ information regarding reconnection. Communication regarding that. • Trust and confidence/ working and updated/ Confidentiality/ Storage and access.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effective language issue and barriers / literacy/ culturally – • Respecting privacy of individuals who may not want to use digital.
<p>3. What specific aspects of digital inclusion are most important to you and your community? For example access to the internet, digital skills training, affordable devices. What challenges do you anticipate in the future?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carers living in areas where there are natural disasters are at higher risk and higher need. During the last flooding crisis carers living in these areas talk about their access during the crisis e.g. flood or fire and having no phone or internet for three plus weeks, in these circumstances not only are they disconnected they cannot keep in touch because of the loss of devices, no information on how to get it back. • How is this project going to advocate for, and ensure consistent and affordable internet and phone subsidies for those on low income? The more services transition to digital then the more people will need to change and update their devices and tools to be included in digital platforms. • Affordable devices and understanding how to access. • There are some significant concerns about services moving to digital and carers raise the issue of trust as part of the process when accessing services. Carers talk about the trauma of retelling their stories about their needs. This raises complex issues for both carers and people online who may suffer vicarious trauma – this is well documented. Furthermore, the risks for carers may not be adequately reflected when providing their stories online to people especially if they don't feel safe. • For carers who have a mobile phone but are also challenged with their own issues, it may be often hard to read or use various platforms on a mobile – how will this be accommodate for if this is their only device? • Technology is changing rapidly, and keep up to date is difficult. Carers are concerned about being able to keep up with changes and protocols for online platforms – how can they be updated on major changes in an accessible way? <p>FUTURE CHALLENGES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are concerned about the monopoly of providers noting that in some areas, for example rural and remote areas carers have no choice of service providers.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We raise a general issue for carers about new technology/AI and carers not being able to know what's the truth (saw a comment that by 2025, 90% of digital content will be touched by AI). • Carers are concerned about scams/phishing – as more services are online, easy to get misled especially with large volumes of information. • Carers are at risk of having to put private information online e.g. date of birth, NDIS number, Centrelink number, phone number etc. We would like to be assured of how information will be secured and protected? • We would like to raise the issues of digital poverty being faced by carers, there is a concern about the affordability of devices and internet services. • We would like to know if there is going to be policy addressing needs of carers especially relating to subsidisation for most vulnerable of carers. For instance, there are concerns raised about the cost barriers to connectivity for carers to access services online. We provide the example of libraries having internet however Carers tell us that this is not all free and some charge for internet access especially if the service is not a government one – noting that many of the support services for carers are in the not for profit sector not government. There is also the cost of computer plus programs which adds further burdens to carers. • We suggest that the carers payment could include free internet?
<p>4. What do you think should be the top priorities for improving digital inclusion in NSW?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility is an issue for carers and we would like to ensure that there are alternatives and support if carers can't easily access digital services • Digital trust and safety is also raised and we suggest that carers would like to see improved validation 'tell us once' so that carers don't need to keep on 'proving' their situation. This would greatly decrease stress on families. • We raise concerns about connectivity for carers, we would like to know how we can –ensure that we keep improving services for carers in regional, rural and remote areas. • Awareness of cybersecurity scams, we would like to be assured of how personal details and banking details will be kept secure for carers who are required to provide this information when liaising with services. At the macro level, what are organisations doing to keep our information safe and secure?

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How secure is the service website and will there be universal standards/policies for organisations to follow? • Will there be alternatives for carers, so that they have an ability to opt out of providing some information? • Transparency from websites that our data not breached/hacked. • Informed consumers / rights/ • We also note that how can we limit the number of questions being asked of carers and the quality implementation of privacy legislation - Why are you collecting this piece of information and can they say no – as often then this does not allow you to progress on a form etc?
<p>5. How can we collaborate to make digital inclusion a reality for everyone in NSW? How can different parts of the community, such as local businesses, schools and non-profits, collaborate to address these challenges?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinking about carers, we would like to know the difference between access to online resources and support and the right support/information at the right time? • We would also like to focus on system/device needs first for carers so that they are not marginalised further by inability to access. • We would like to note that it is difficult to answer this question as we believe that the question is ambiguous and there could be two answers. • Why is the Telco Authority reviewing this information? Other agencies need to be involved to generating a collaborative approach so that all carers needs are considered and their voices are heard – the Council is willing to provide lived experiences of carers and work with the Telco Authority to ensure that carer perspectives are fully understood and considered. • Also about where information lives. • Carers work across numerous sectors, so we believe that cross sector collaboration is required for large scale systems change to occur. Other agencies across government and the community sector should be involved as we all need to build a better system for carers to navigate. • Health/education/transport collaboration – automatic triggers. • Inclusion across NSW – eg NDIS website – alternative navigable sites eg the education website – make navigation for people is easy/ uses simple language. • We should ensure that any resources developed are more visual/language friendly for carers of different abilities, languages etc.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We would like to know how accessible standardisation will occur during this process, how will you know that carers are understood, and their needs are accommodate for? • We would like to raise the issue of carers from the CALD population and suggest that any campaign should feature multiple languages as this encourages engagement with the information. • Plus, we suggest the use of visual engagement – buttons for translations (like google) and accessible simplified versions available for carers and furthermore adaptations for auditory / visual learning carers.
<p>6. What initiatives or partnerships would you like to see in place to support digital inclusion efforts?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiative - more computerised workstations in branches including mobile service units supported by enough of competent staff. • Advertise digitisation. • Could be a partnership with the sunflower lanyard people? • Visual, auditory and kinetic learners – how to make sure every type of person can learn. • Partnerships with the community sector and how to work with them. • We would like to know the people of private businesses in supporting and assisting carers during this process? Could Telstra etc make phone available at discounted costs to carers? • Reviews - include information. / Shared work spaces/ empty government spaces • We believe that Service NSW should provide an area for internet access for carers. • Partnership for all disease specific NFPs get them together to provide supports for carers. • Utilising alternate platforms to reach in deliverable format.
<p>7. How do you think new and advanced technologies can be used to make sure everyone in our community can easily use digital tools and be a part of the online world?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regarding accessibility for carers, we need to be mindful that not everyone will be able to use digital platforms and technology. There are many vulnerable carers who need support, outside of digital, to access services. The key to helping carers is giving them access to services and the supports they need, when they need it. We would like to raise that digital is not always the answer, especially for carers who are already isolated and need connection with others. • Affordability is an issue for carers, and we must ensure that there are no additional or cost barriers

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	<p>for carers to accessing internet services. This is particularly important for carers in regional, remote and rural areas. These carers may not have or may need phone and alternative access points to use digital.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We do believe that for some carers increased use of digital platforms provides an opportunity to reduce their isolation and increase networks with carers. • Barriers/ even free technology has costs. • We would like carers to be provided with options for example, paper copies easily available of information which is digital. • We are interested to know how AI will be used to assist carers, for example to assist them to-read stored information and fill in forms? • We would like to know the considerations for services like Counselling/ psychology to be delivered online and • For CALD carers there needs to be available options for language translation in a simpler format on digital platforms. • Email should be an option for carers to share information. • Success – ability to advocate for themselves and their person to improve outcomes and quality of life for both is important. • Whatever the tool is, it enables carers to better advocate for themselves and the people they care for.
<p>8. How can digital technology benefit Aboriginal communities, and what barriers should be addressed as a priority?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Nations carers want platforms to be inclusive around a safe space – this is very important for them and we would welcome the chance to provide further information about this. • Carers need to be able to share relevant information that could or would be read from a language issue so the language must be simple and accessible so it is easy to interpret. • Carers need information that is effective and timely – smart goals are important for the development of such platforms. • Yarning needs to be considered in the digital space – how can this occur and how can it happen meaningfully? • Concerns are raised that First Nations carers may be concerned that technology may take information away from carer who may not necessarily share ; this is a high priority. • It will be more difficult on digital platforms to ascertain real concerns, for instance First Nations

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	<p>carers could write 'I need support with transport or safety' but then this may impact parenting or positive relationship.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal people engage in visual concepts and communication and this must be designed/built into digital platforms to engage them. • This is the reason behind conflict over the phone because it is not visual which is a need for them and these approaches support trauma for families and carers missing out on essential services. • How can we benefit Aboriginal isolated communities to engage with possible services when they do not have a visual welcome experiencing. • Alternate languages for First Nations peoples must be included. • Carer Passport that can brief services with relevant information would be a good addition in digital spaces, for Aboriginal carers and more generally for all carers. • There should be consideration of the needs for First Nations carers in the provisions of training and support so carers can engage with digital services. • Aboriginal Education Officers in inner Sydney schools could be good support for their communities in digital transitions. • Aboriginal people may prefer to talk to person of same gender and how can this be accommodated in digital spaces – there is also an issue here of masculine language being used which will distance some people from using that platform.

On behalf of the Council and carers across NSW, I ask that you review our feedback taking into consideration needs and the role of carers. We also give permission for our submission to be published.

If you wish to discuss this further, please contact me on 0405849568 or at NSWCarersAdvisoryCouncilSecretariat@dcj.nsw.gov.au.

Sincerely,



Dr Melanie Bournell
Chair – NSW Carers Advisory Council