Inclusive use of digital and non-digital communications: guidance for CHSP providers

Webinar Presentation 6 & 8 June 2023

Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Land we meet from, the Bunurong People of the Kulin Nations. We acknowledge all first nations peoples and their lands on which we live and work.

We pay our respects to their continuing culture and all Elders, past and present who have taught their children, adults, and communities for over 65,000 years, the oldest living culture in the world.

We commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.

Webinar Program (6 June)

Welcome and overview	11.00am- 11.05am
Project aim and process	11.05am – 11.10am
Research and consultation findings	11.10am – 11.20am
Resource Guide highlights	11.20am – 11.30am
Panel discussion	11.30am – 12.10pm
Audience question and answer	12.10pm – 12.25pm
Wrap-up and next steps	12.25pm – 12.30pm

Webinar Program (8 June)

Welcome and session overview	3.00pm- 3.05pm
Project aim and process	3.05pm – 3.10pm
Research and consultation findings	3.10pm – 3.20pm
Resource Guide highlights	3.20pm – 3.30pm
Panel discussion	3.30pm – 4.10pm
Audience question and answer	4.10pm – 4.25pm
Wrap-up and next steps	4.25pm – 4.30pm

Project aim and process

Undertaken by COTA Victoria Feb-May 2023 as a CHSP Service Support and Development project.

Aim:
To identify and share practical advice on how CHSP providers can best meet the communication needs and preferences of older people who are not well digitally engaged.

Key project activities:

❑ Consultation with older people, peer advocates and consumers
❑ Literature review and discussions with experts and peak bodies
❑ Development of resource guide
❑ National webinars for CHSP providers
❑ Sector feedback

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What do we know about older Australians' digital engagement?

1. **There is no place for reductionist stereotypes of older people as unable or unwilling to embrace digital communications.**

2. **Older Australians have diverse access, skills and comfort with digital communications – a large majority are embracing new technologies to some extent.**

3. **Many face significant barriers and express clear preferences for non-digital alternatives, particularly in service delivery contexts.**

4. Digital disengagement or exclusion may not reflect lack of competence and access to technology does not imply active use.

5. There is a sizeable group of older Australians who feel quite uncomfortable with technology but are open and interested in improving their skills.

6. Factors contributing to lower digital engagement have been consistently identified as: low education, financial insecurity, poor mental or physical health, and disability.

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Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2021
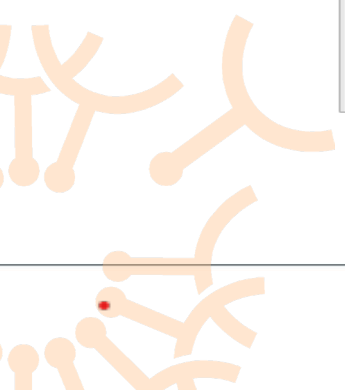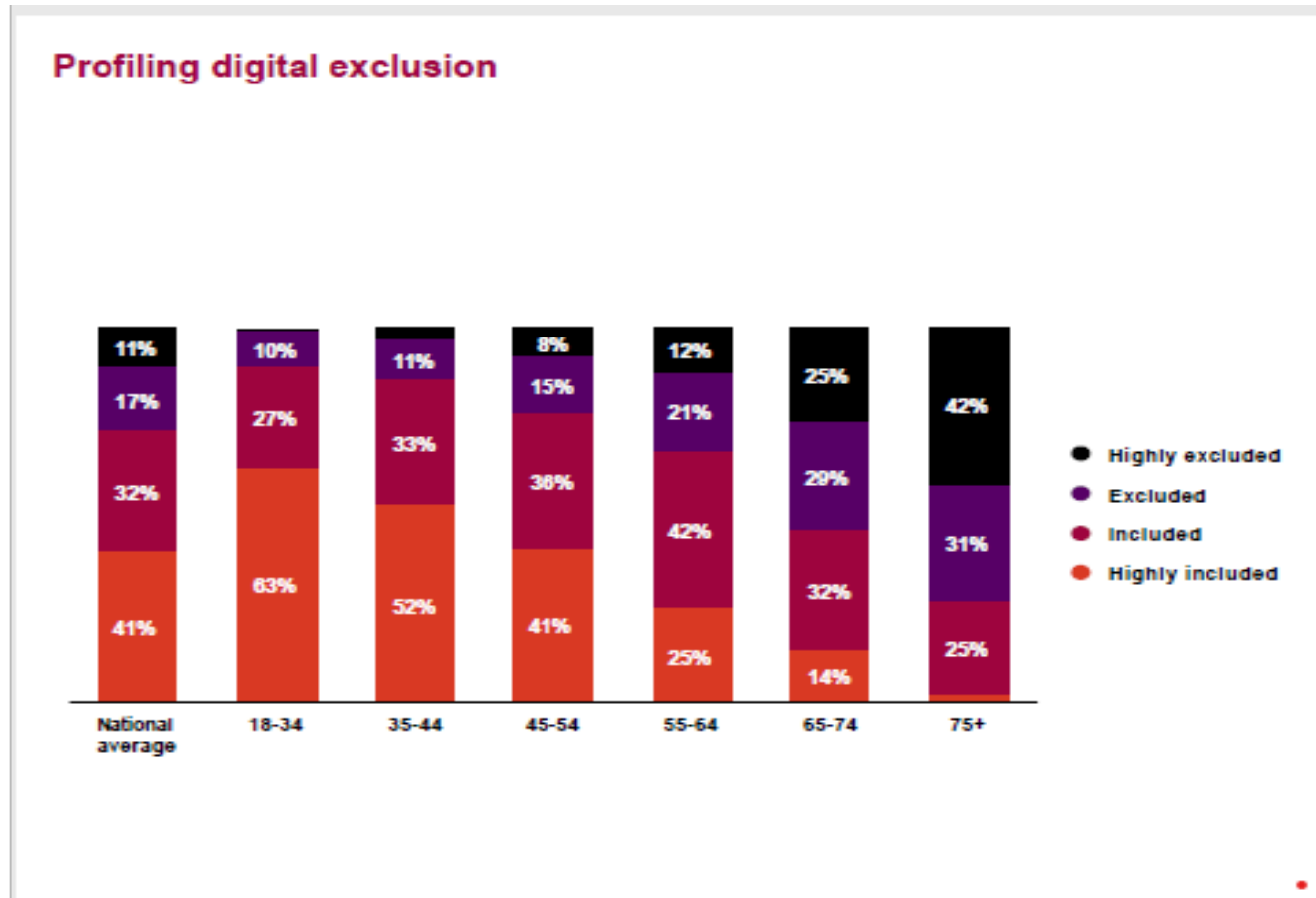
COTA State of the Nation Survey Findings 2023

Low levels of comfort using Digital Communications Technology

score 0–4 on a 10 point scale

8%	**11%**	**11%**	**16%**	**18%**	**15%**
of those 70-79 years	of those 80 years and over	of those over 50 with a disability	of those with poor physical health	of those with poor mental health	of those with low financial security

Poor levels of access to Digital Communications Technology

score 0–4 on a 10 point scale

3%	**7%**	**7%**	**9%**	**13%**	**9%**
of those 70-79 years	of those 80 years and over	of those over 50 with a disability	of those with poor physical health	of those with poor mental health	of those with low financial security

Interest in improving Digital Communications Technology use

57% over 50 years have high level of interest in improving technology skills

16% show little or no interest in doing this.

Feelings about Digital Communications Technology

67%	**29%**	**66%**	**47%**
rely primarily on Digital Communications Technology to keep connected socially and with services	feel left behind in the age of technology	think technology needs to be better designed for older people	feel that it's too hard to keep up with new technologies

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Consumer consultation findings (1)

Older people place high value on responsive communication options in the aged support system.

➢ Most have some confidence with common technologies, but also discomfort with how services rely on digital communications. Many have old devices and use them in very limited ways.

➢ While most recognise the benefits of new technologies, for some the reliance on digital communications "has become a blocker rather than an aid to life".

➢ Consumers think services need to be more alert to the impact of client health on ability to use digital communications and regularly reassess the methods used with each client.

➢ While appreciating providers' effort to support use of digital tools, many say services fail to ask them about their preferences and assume they can access support from families.

➢ There is strong preference for face-to-face or phone communication and continued expectation of paper-based resources.

Above all, consumers want better two-way communication and ability to explain their needs and give feedback to providers.

Consumer consultation findings (2)

➢ Consumer anxieties severely limit willingness to use digital communications, regardless of skill – scams, privacy breaches, "consequences of clicking the wrong button".

➢ Common concern at the lack of or difficulty accessing appropriate "help desk" type support.

➢ Many feel digital communications ignore challenges facing older people – eg typing skills, concentration, patience, volume control, visual acuity.

➢ Digital communications seen to lack necessary capacity for repetition and checking with users on their comprehension (although some do this well).

➢ Some digital communications seen to use more jargon and technical terms, with less sensitivity to cultural differences.

➢ Concern about the way traditional communications are used, such as "being swamped with paper forms" and phone contact that involves long waiting times.

➢ Training seen as often more technical than required and not based on clients' own identified needs (including emotional and socialisation elements).

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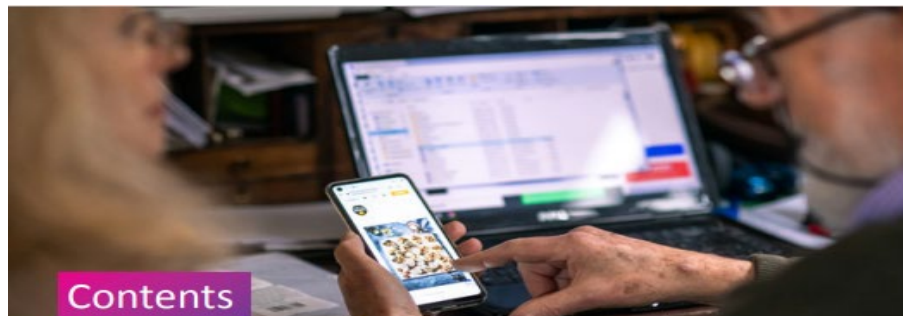VICTORIA

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Resource guide

Resource guide - overview

➢ Stand-alone document providing overview of issues and suggested solutions plus a one page "tip sheet"

➢ Targeted to CHSP staff involved in management, service delivery and communications.

➢ Not a detailed "how-to" manual but practical advice on how to approach the challenge in various aspects of service delivery.

➢ Aims to inform agency review and planning, with clear relevance to Aged Care Quality Standards.

Resource guide - content

Contents

About us

Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria is the leading not-for-profit organisation representing the interests and rights of people aged over 50 in Victoria. For over 70 years, we have led government, corporate and community thinking about the positive aspects of ageing in the state.

Seniors Rights Victoria (SRV) is a program of COTA Victoria and the key state-wide service dedicated to advancing the rights of older people and the early intervention into, or prevention of, elder abuse in our community.

We fund our activities and services through the support of government, members, philanthropic trusts, businesses, and the public.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work. We pay respect to elders past and present and those who continue the journey. We recognise the rich Indigenous heritage and culture of this country.

Acknowledgment

COTA Victoria acknowledges the financial support provided for this initiative by the Australian Government through the Commonwealth Home Support Program – Service Support and Development program.

Resource guide - content

Inclusive use of Digital and Non-Digital Communications

Tips for Commonwealth Home Support Program Providers

Older Australians are generally embracing new technology well, but many CSHP clients remain digitally excluded or uncomfortable in relying on these technologies to access services. Providers need to carefully consider how they use the right mix of digital and non-digital communications.

Basic things to remember include:

1. Proactively engage with clients on their preferred methods of communications as early as possible and be prepared to provide information in multiple forms

2. Be alert to the need for assistive technology or support person to facilitate use of digital communications especially where the client has a known disability

3. Assure clients that concerns such as privacy breaches and scams - while very real - are relatively uncommon in this context and that protections are in place.

4. Help transition clients to greater use of digital communications over time with the help of a range of training and self-learning activities.

5. Apply principles of good communication for older people regardless of the technology - eg repetition and reinforcement, minimal visual and auditory distraction, diagrams and pictures, varied speed of delivery.

6. Allow time to accommodate different modes of communication - eg longer appointments for individuals who require more time to use slower, non-digital methods

7. Remember communication is a two-way process so whatever vehicle is used needs to allow for the client to both understand information presented and respond effectively (possibly using different technology)

8. Be alert to signs from clients that communication methods used may not be suitable - eg asking repeated questions, frustration, anxiety or lack of engagement in activities.

At the same time, be careful not to:

1. Assume a client will have a support person to help them use digital technologies or that they are comfortable asking a family member to help

2. Swamp clients with excessive paperwork as the only alternative to receiving electronic online information and forms

3. Assume that clients are actively using email, SMS or social media even if you know they have access to these

4. Appear to judge clients for a lack of skill or unwillingness to use modern technology, or for expressing anxiety about issues like privacy and scams.

5. Overcompensate for diminished client capacity – physical or cognitive – by resorting to "simpler" communication platforms when this entails loss of functionality and nuance.

6. Compromise use of inclusive, non-discriminatory language by relying on communication platforms that do not give these issues the attention they need

7. Allow the cost or immediate availability of assistive technologies to dominate decisions on the most appropriate and preferred communication platform.

8. Use negative feedback from some clients as an excuse for not investing in and applying improved digital or non-digital communication tools for your wider client group.

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For more detailed advice on these issues refer to COTA Victoria's new resource available at www.cotavic.org.au/information/how-to-guides

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Resource guide - content

Assessing agency performance on inclusive communications

The following indicators are suggested for inclusion in an overarching self-assessment of your agency's progress in ensuring inclusive use of alternative communication technologies.[4] They can be mapped against various elements of the Aged Care Quality Standards

Indicator 1: Public commitment
Has the service's Board and Senior Management Team given explicit visible public commitment to deliver services in a way that accommodates a variety of needs and preferences in relation to digital and non-digital communications?

Indicator 2: Information and data collection
Does the service draw on and collect a range of data that helps in understanding the communication platform needs and preferences of its current and prospective client group, including local demographic factors that impact on digital literacy and engagement?

Indicator 3: Inclusive communication review
What percentage of individual client programs or activities offered have undertaken a structured design or review process that addresses inclusive methods of communication?

Do quality assurance processes in the agency (including those focused on equity and inclusion for different client groups) incorporate a focus on use of appropriate communications technologies and platforms?

Indicator 4: Staff training
What proportion of staff have undertaken some form of training on effective and responsive selection and use of communication technologies and platforms, especially as this relates to older people and disability?

What proportion of staff have competence to support clients to build their skills and capacities in using digital communications technologies?

Indicator 5: Client engagement
Have service development and review processes included people with diverse communication support needs, reflective of the profile of local area populations and utilising inclusive and accessible means for capturing feedback?

Indicator 6: Monitoring and evaluation
Do agency monitoring and evaluation tools incorporate ways to measure how well communication methods match client needs? Measures should ideally include:

- Proportion of clients who agree that their communication needs and preferences were responded to sensitively and effectively.
- Proportion of older people in the local population who face barriers to use of digital communications who access agency programs.

[4] These indicators have been adapted from a Scottish Government resource, Principles of Inclusive Communication: An Information and self-assessment tool for public authorities [see ref 11].

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Panel Discussion (6 June)

Panel members:

- Sallenna Skye – Social Inclusion Coordinator, City of Monash
- Ruth Hosking OAM – retired geriatric nurse, aged care advocate, COTA peer educator
- John Doutch – COTA peer educator and advocate
- Torgeir Aleti – Shaping Connections Project, RMIT University

Key Questions:

1. How well are community aged care services currently doing in tackling issues of digital inclusivity?

2. Where are the gaps for consumers and who's being left behind? What works best for individuals from diverse communities?

3. What are the most important things community aged care services can do to improve in this area?

4. What further support do CHSP providers and staff need to deal with these issues effectively?

Panel Discussion (8 June)

Panel members:

❑ Gayle Osmond – Bridges Connecting Communities
❑ John Doutch – COTA peer educator and advocate
❑ Susan Newman – COTA Tasmania
❑ Bernardo Figueiredo – Shaping Connections, RMIT University
❑ Lisa Du – ReadyTechGo

Questions:

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Audience Q&A

We are keen to hear your thoughts and respond to your queries including:

➢ Questions or comments on panel member inputs

➢ Questions on the COTA Victoria project and resource

➢ Experiences to share on your efforts to improve inclusive communications

Wrap-up and next steps

➢ A **feedback survey** will shortly be sent to you via email. We want to hear your response to this webinar so we can improve these types of events.

➢ A link to access a **recording of this webinar** will be sent out separately within the next week.

➢ This will also provide an advance copy of the **Resource Guide** and a survey to provide feedback on the product and ideas for further action.

➢ Thank you all for your participation.