



Draft

CASEY DIGITAL EQUITY FRAMEWORK

2021-25

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the ways we conduct our lives. Whilst services and activities going increasingly online is not new, 2020 exacerbated and brought to the fore complex and varied *digital inequities* across the City of Casey. The swift migration of services and activities online within government and community sectors accelerated the need to identify and address barriers for those who are not able to participate fully in the digital world.

A future vision of *Digital Equity* in the City of Casey sees all individuals and communities with access to the digital tools, skills and confidence needed for full and ongoing participation in our increasingly online society, democracy, and economy. ‘Equity’ here can be seen as ‘fairness’ – how do we ensure that when systems and processes go online that everyone is appropriately supported to continue accessing them? Changes to payment and booking systems or learning and social opportunities can have a profound impact on one’s life if it is not clear how to continue accessing the services and systems one needs.

Those not able to fully participate in the digital world are digitally excluded and this is an increasing and evolving barrier to everyday life. Digital exclusion is correlated strongly with low family income, disability and long-term unemployment and underemployment. It compounds the socioeconomic disadvantage that marginalised community members already experience. In short, those already excluded become even more so.

Internet access and availability of appropriate devices is critical but, on its own, is not enough. These must be accompanied by digital skills and confidence. A range of new challenges emerge and must be managed along the way regarding online safety and security.

Digital equity lays a foundation for digital empowerment initiatives whether they be digital deliberative engagement or digital democracy. These technological advances and opportunities should be open to all.

The Casey Digital Equity Framework details the major challenges experienced by some with digital participation, the digital inclusion initiatives that can support greater digital participation, and the role that Casey Council and its partners can play in building a digitally equitable future. The value of the Digital Equity Framework is that it will provide a common platform for extending and developing partnerships and codesigning sustainable and effective solutions addressing digital equity creating strategic alignment across not just the Casey Council organisation but also partners so as to avoid lost opportunities, resourcing and implementation shortfalls. The framework contains a number of priority initiatives for Casey and its partners to undertake which are derived from extensive engagement with external and internal stakeholders.

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*”.

2 FOREWARD

<<TO BE COMPLETED POST FINAL ENGAGEMENT>>

3 PURPOSE OF THE FRAMEWORK

The purpose of the framework is to guide Council's approach in addressing digital exclusion and moving the City of Casey towards a state of digital equity. It aims to provide:

- a) a shared and comprehensive understanding of the state of digital equity across Casey and those groups and places most excluded
- b) a consistent and pragmatic basis and direction for Council digital inclusion activities
- c) an ongoing platform for promoting partnerships to increase digital equity in Casey
- d) a set of priorities for action
- e) 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.

This framework responds to a number of strategic priorities in the City of Casey Council Plan 2017-21 namely being *"A leader in applying technology and innovation"*, *"An inclusive, safe and connected community"* and *"A council whose services and facilities are driven by community needs"*.

This framework also aligns with:

- Council's legislated role in improving the health and wellbeing of our community as outlined in its municipal public health and wellbeing plan (2021-25 Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan to be integrated into the *Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-25*).
- The creation of a Casey Digital Equity Framework is also a priority initiative of the *Smart Casey Launchpad 2020*. Endorsed by Council in December 2020, the Smart Casey Launchpad program outlines the Casey Council approach to coordinating and inspiring smart city action at a local and regional level.

4 PRINCIPLES OF THE FRAMEWORK

The following principles will be used to guide Council's intent and implementation of the framework.

- **Equity:** Our ambition is that everyone shares in the benefits of digital technology, but in order for this to happen strategies and support levels 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 where 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 with learning opportunities so they can grow their participation 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.

These principles reflect that this framework is not about forcing people online but creating a Casey where everyone experiences the advantages of becoming digitally enabled.

The framework is consistent with the endorsed City of Casey Diversity, Access & Inclusion Policy and endorsed Inclusive Casey Strategic Framework 2018-21.

5 BACKGROUND

5.1 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	All individuals and communities have the digital tools, skills, and confidence needed for full participation 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 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

5.2 What is Digital Equity and why is it so important?

Digital Equity sees all individuals and communities with 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. The ‘digital by default’ agenda – an increasing reliance on technology and the Internet in the everyday – will compound this exclusion and widen the net of those impacted into the future.

Digital exclusion is correlated strongly with older age, low educational attainment, low family income, those living with disability, as well as long term unemployment and underemployment. It is also strongly linked to places with high levels of entrenched socioeconomic disadvantage. It 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.

A state of digital equity lays the foundation for a fair and inclusive digital future. The potentially beneficial 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.

5.3 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 have been unpacked by the authors of the ADII and it is through the lens of these dimensions that Casey intend to address digital exclusion. See Table 1.

Table 1: ADII Digital Equity Dimensions

DIMENSION	COMPONENTS
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 analyses of index 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 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.

5.4 Digital Equity in Melbourne's Outer South East

The ADII found that outer south-east Melbourne is the most digitally excluded area of Greater Melbourne. The ADII considers outer south-east Melbourne to include 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:

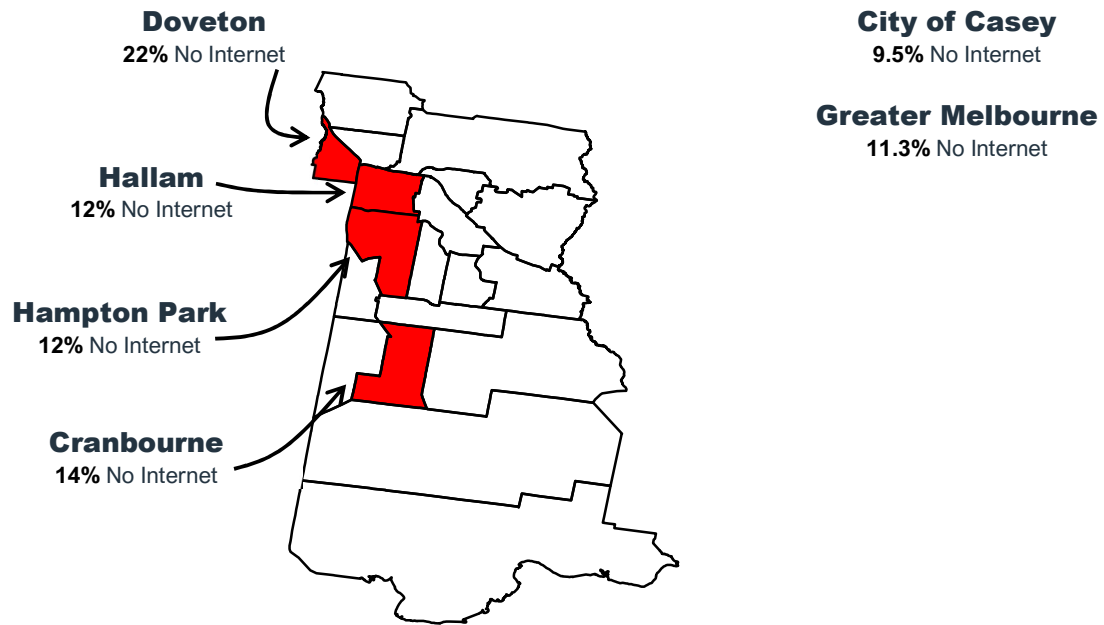
- The Internet is accessed less frequently despite equipment and the Internet being available to a similar degree
- Affordability is a significant issue with households getting less value for the same service expenditure
- Digital ability is the greatest deficit. Skills, attitudes and the variety of 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.

5.5 Digital Equity in the City of Casey

Within the City of Casey, the only straightforward indicator of digital equity available is derived from the Census which asks whether Internet is accessed at home (ABS, 2016). As the ADII has shown, not having Internet access at home limits users to less complex online activities so this is a valuable metric.

What the Census data shows is that of Casey suburbs; Doveton, Hallam, Hampton Park and Cranbourne have lower rates of Internet access at home than the Melbourne average. In particular, Doveton has 22% of households reporting that the Internet is not accessed from the home. This is represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Low rates of Internet access at home in the City of Casey



6 WHAT ARE THE DIGITAL EQUITY BARRIERS AND ISSUES IN CASEY?

6.1 What you told us

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. These responses reflect an escalation of prior digital exclusion experiences, not temporary or of a different type, but the arrival of a new digital reality confronting us 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”

“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”

“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”

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

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

This section is a summary of the *Casey Digital Equity Framework Engagement Report*.

Figure 2 below shows a word cloud composed of all the verbatim comments. Common words were “access” and “device” reflected common issues with lack of access to the Internet or lack of devices. Another was “services”, reflecting that many could not access services that were increasingly becoming online-only. Also common was the word “connection”: participants reported that being online made them and others they knew more or less connected depending on whether people were digitally enabled. The word cloud is also indicative of the engagement findings that highlighted that older residents of Casey and those from CALD communities were particularly digitally excluded.

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

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

"Increased equity for some families around work life balance with the shift to working from home"

There were also particular benefits and challenges per groups as per Table 2 below.

Table 2 : Summary of online benefits and challenges for different groups

GROUP	BENEFITS/POSITIVES	CHALLENGES
Older People	• Reduced loneliness for many • Increased use of telehealth • Reduced petrol costs travelling to meetings and appointments • Embracing online shopping for first time	• 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
Low Income ^{#1}	• Increased access for those that may not be able to travel due to geographical location (e.g. those with disability) • Improved collaboration between service providers benefiting clients accessing multiple services • Flexibility to access mock and real interviews with employers	• Complexity of online service and application processes for benefits and employment • Compliance with ongoing government service requirements are increasingly online • Homelessness
People with a Disability	• Created new accessible social groups • Technology assisted those with sensory issues • 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 on-line 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
LGBTIQA+ community	• More local and regional opportunities to collaborate on projects online • More regional, national, and global digital opportunities to connect with other LGBTIQA+ people and events • More information now about LGBTIQA+ tailored information and services	• 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.

GROUP	BENEFITS/POSITIVES	CHALLENGES
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 - Could hold sessions targeting CALD group over a larger geographic area with strong attendances and later viewings - 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 - Accessing 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'
Women	- 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	- 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
Children and Young People	<i>*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)*</i>	- Digital inequity of school children from vulnerable families leading to broader family stress. Families lacked devices (none or insufficient), lacked Internet connections and 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 by young children of online safety

GROUP	BENEFITS/POSITIVES	CHALLENGES
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 customers – 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 to 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

^{#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.

Some notable findings:

- 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 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
- Health conditions a barrier to digital use, including poor eyesight and mental health conditions such as anxiety/depression (brought about due to lack of face-to-face support)
- LGBTIQ+ community members 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.

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

- Use of simple 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 equity assistance needed via non online means 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 and Council staff assisting
- The need for ongoing 'offline' options for Casey Community members who either will never be online or need 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 what services and activities people wanted to access online drove digital skill development. This was found common across different groups that 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.

6.2 What does this mean?

Different people have 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 Internet access nor somewhere local to access it. Some households lacked devices or particularly enough devices in a COVID-19 situation where multiple family members were suddenly working or studying online. Others had devices but lacked the financial means to access sufficient Internet data. For others it was a lack of digital skills or particular fears regarding privacy or security or a lack of motivation due to not seeing the benefits that was holding them back. 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 well as building the capacity of Casey community members it is also clear that Casey Council needs to have a non-digital safety net for its own services and activities and advocate that other levels of government and service providers do the same.

7 WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN HAPPENING

7.1 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 and Smart City and Innovation teams developed the Digital Activation Program. The team identified three critical barriers to digital equity: Internet access, device access, and digital literacy skills; aligned to the ADII Digital Equity Dimensions.

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

7.1.1 *Get Connected*

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the City of Casey's Direct Care Workers, who work with approximately 3,770 people over the age of 70, reported that community members, especially those living alone without digital technology have 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 with 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 Workers.
- **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 learning their topic of interest, supporting device navigation in-person and providing homework tasks between sessions. The unique one-on-one relationships, in which careers were also developing their own digital skills, meant participants could working at their own pace. They were able to build confidence towards using technology pay bills order medication and chat to family members.

7.1.2 *Kinder Connect*

A continuation of the *Bridging the Gap* program, *Kinder Connect* was a program that connected older Casey residents with kindergarten children. *Kinder Connect Video* was used during *Kinder Connect* to continue to enable older and younger residents to share stories, knowledge and connection during COVID-19, with the aim of decreasing feelings of loneliness being experienced for all involved.

7.1.3 Shopping Online

In response to COVID-19, the shopping services supporting older or vulnerable people was digitised 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 their autonomy.

7.2 Casey Cardinia Libraries Digital Literacy Programs

During the 2019/20 financial year Casey Cardinia Libraries ran the following digital equity programs by themselves or in partnership with others.

- Casey Cardinia Libraries secured grant funding through the Federal Government *Be Connected* program to deliver online training to community volunteers to become skilled in delivering digital literacy classes to others, helping seniors to learn technology and digital literacy skills.
- The Ucan2 project supported adults with low levels of prose and digital literacy and was predominately funded by State Library of Victoria through the 2019 Adult Literacy Innovation Grants. The target participants were disadvantaged parents and 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. 48 classes were held across the region and there were 125 attendances.
- 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.

7.3 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

8 PRIORITY INITIATIVES

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

8.1 Immediate

Initiatives for the 2021/22 financial year.

1. **Map freely accessible public Wi-Fi hotspots and Internet locations across the municipality (both Council and external connections) Internet**
2. **Map digital learning opportunities across Casey with a focus on varied learning models. Identify gaps in learning models and locations where learning occurs.**
3. **Promote 1 & 2 through multiple channels ensuring inclusive communication methods**
e.g. Rates notices, leverage Casey Connect & Learn website content in digital and paper form
4. **Continue to develop Council's digital equity research and understanding of local issues and best practice responses and share these learnings with community organisations in Casey.**
Evidence base to be improved through integration within Annual Community Satisfaction Surveys and relevant Council engagements.
5. **Encourage and support community organisations and groups to seek Council and external funding for digital equity programs that:**
 - a) Provide access to new and second hand devices for use and hire
 - b) Enable the offering of more digital literacy classes to those of different ages, genders, backgrounds and skills levels:
 - i. tailored to reflect the different motivational, access and physical barriers that contribute to digital exclusion
 - ii. where possible provided by ethnic community organisations in a linguistic and culturally appropriate way
 - iii. aimed at more inclusive opportunities for women, including addressing the barriers to uptake like occasional care
 - iv. making use of train the trainer and mentoring models to provide 1: 1 support where needed
 - v. addressing barriers to uptake like lack of occasional care
 - c) Promote digital safety programs
 - d) Assist community groups moving online by sustainably incorporating digital equity awareness into Council's annual not for profit training workshops focussing particularly on developing digital champions
 - e) Address the most digitally excluded areas in Casey

6. **Develop a sustainable model based on the Get Connected program to target digital inclusion of older people**
7. **Undertake a digital equity pilot in Doveton , by extending public free Wi-Fi within the Autumn Place precinct and then maximising its use in the internal and external areas of the precinct by promoting the Wi-Fi and the precinct more broadly as a place for increasing digital literacy**
8. **Ensure that Casey Council continues to have a non-digital safety net options for**
 - a) its own services and activities, and
 - b) advocates to other levels of government and service providers to do the same
9. **Formalise cross Council working groups to continue making the Casey digital presence**
 - a) more accessible for those with cultural and linguistic needs and those living with disability
 - b) a safe and inclusive online experience for all community (e.g. LGBTIQ+, women and older people)

8.2 Life of the Framework

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

10. **Increase free public Wi-Fi locations, prioritising digitally excluded areas of Casey**
11. **Investigate sustainable solutions to address the lack of affordable and appropriate devices in Casey** including hire models and more options for recycling and enhancing old digital devices and smartphones including potential social enterprise opportunities
12. **Drawing on the lessons of the Doveton Digital Equity Pilot, explore and implement opportunities to best configure and promote informal community spaces for digital use and digital literacy** (e.g. in community hubs)
13. **Engage carers, support workers and those with a lived experience to increase understanding of the digital technology needs of people living with disability and design appropriate digital inclusion programs utilising accessible technologies and formats**
14. **Investigate and implement ways to encourage groups that have low motivation to embrace digital technology to see the benefits of being online, particular older people and CALD business traders, ensuring they are ready for a world that will have even more services and activities exclusively digital**
15. **Advocate for:**
 - a) improved Internet reliability and signal quality in growth areas
 - b) increased NDIS funding to provide online support to people with a disability
16. **Research the opportunities and risks presented by digital technologies with regards to social isolation and loneliness**
17. **Assess by the end of these framework, using the learnings coming from these initiatives, whether there is a need for a dedicated Casey Digital Equity Action Plan.**

9 HOW WILL THIS FRAMEWORK BE IMPLEMENTED?

9.1 Role of the City of Casey

The City of Casey is committed to addressing digital exclusion and moving Casey towards a state of digital equity.

Casey Council will take an integrated 'whole-of-organisation' approach to addressing digital exclusion across its own operations recognising while there are residents that are digitally excluded, its broader commitment to equity, access and inclusion means that for the foreseeable future non-digital ways of accessing information, programs and services will need to continue for those who need them.

It is important that digital equity be also embedded as a priority within:

- the next Council Plan
- the 2021-25 Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (2021 – 2025)
- the next Gender Equality Plan 2021-2025 to tackle digital exclusion of women, particularly in CALD communities
- next Casey Disability Plan
- future Cultural Diversity Action Plan

9.2 Roles of Partners

It will implement this approach by initiatives of its own but also working with partners in the community on joint initiatives or initiatives it funds via its grants programs. To successfully create a digital equitable Casey will involve a variety of stakeholders in a spirit of co-operation and collaboration. Council sees itself as taking a proactive role in building and supporting that collaborative arrangement.

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 creating strategic alignment across not just the Casey Council organisation but also partners so as to avoid lost opportunities, resourcing and implementation shortfalls.

9.3 Funding

Via the implementation of the Smart Casey Launchpad, Casey Council are already implementing initiatives that address digital equity. Where additional operational or capital funds are required to deliver the priority initiatives 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.

9.4 Governance and Monitoring

Following the endorsement of this Framework, an Implementation Plan will be developed to refine the approach to delivering these priorities initiatives and to embedding the framework across all of Council. Oversight of this implementation plan will be the responsibility of an implementation steering committee. The steering committee will include key internal and external stakeholders committed to delivering the Framework.

9.5 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

10 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.
digital 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

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