



# **Digitisation of public services in Australia**

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# **Strategic focus and responses to exclusion**

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# Outline:

- Introduction- background and context
- Research questions
- Overview of Australian digitisation approaches
- Academic literature
- Case Study: Tasmanian Public Service



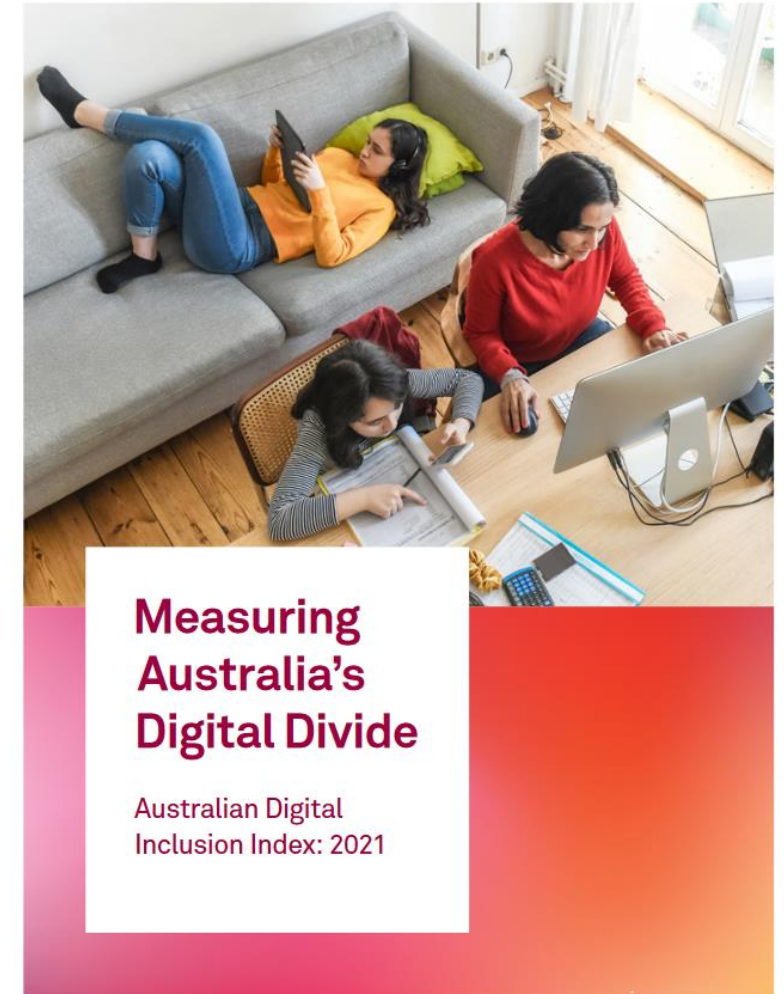
# South Korea and Australia - context

- **Australia is about 78 times *bigger* than South Korea.**
- South Korea is approximately 99,720 sq km, while Australia is approximately 7,741,220 sq km, making Australia **7,663% larger** than South Korea.
- The *population* of South Korea is approx. 51.8 million and Australia is about half with 25 million people living in Australia.



# Introduction: background

- Earlier work (O’Sullivan and Walker, 2018) on impact of digitisation on employment services found:
  - Digital divide narrowing – but depth of gap increasing
  - Digitisation intensifies exclusion for disadvantaged and marginal individuals/communities
- How are agencies and state-wide strategies on the digitisation of public services addressing digital inclusion / exclusion?
- Invited to examine agency approaches to digitisation in Tasmania (2019)



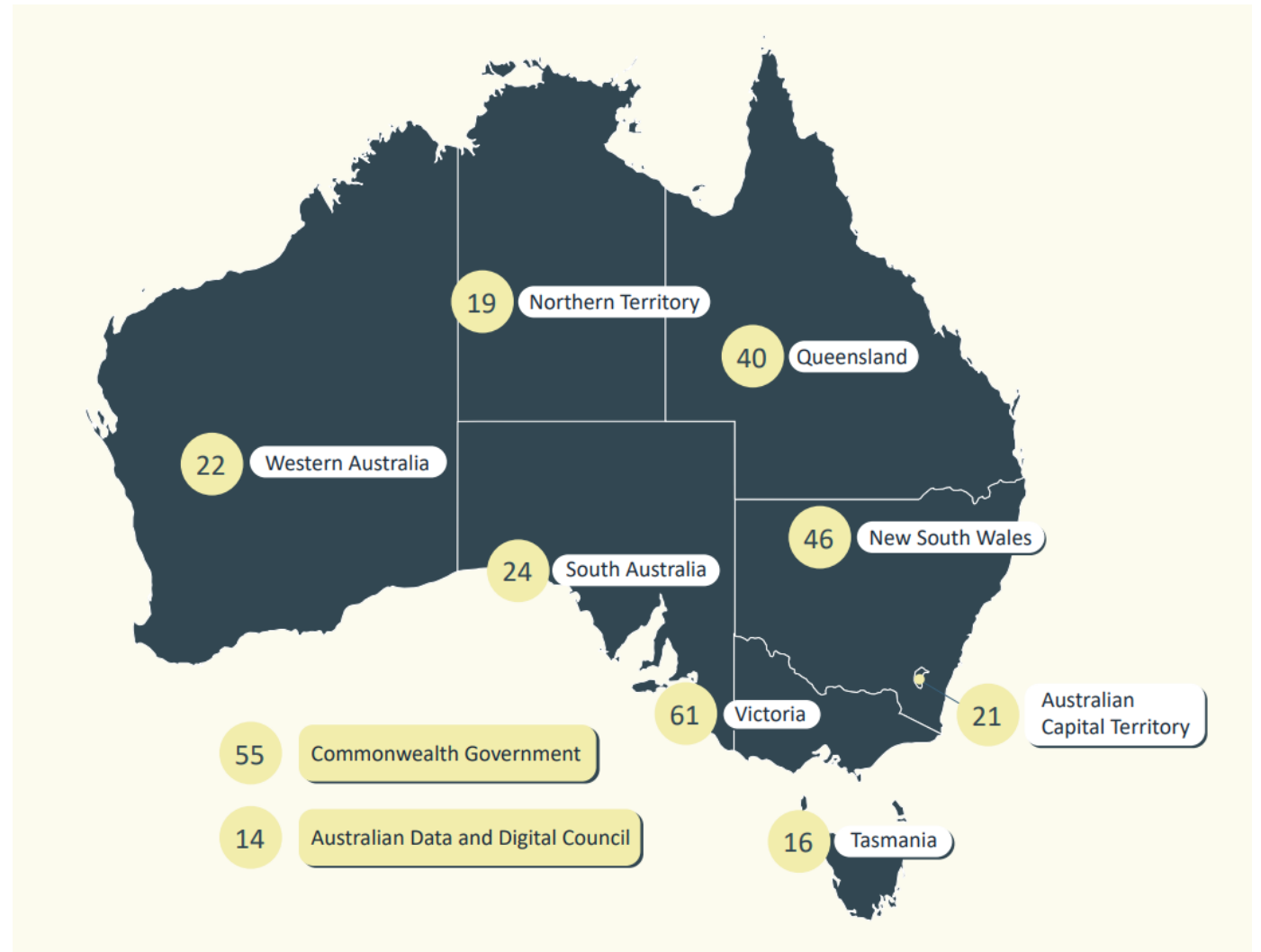
# Research questions

1. What are the **priorities** and primary focus of **state digitisation** (of public services) **strategies**?
2. What factors are states/agencies identifying as **barriers to the digitisation of public services**?
3. What evidence is available that indicates **how agencies address (inclusion strategies)** or seek to overcome the barriers that prohibit individuals and businesses in their take up of digital services?

## Data and digital initiatives

- Major digital transformation initiatives reported by governments for 2020.
- Grouped under 6 headings – Policy & Strategy, User Experience, Service Enablers, etc.
- Of the 318 initiatives only 3 explicitly targeted digital inclusion (National, WA, TAS)

**Source:** Australian Data and Digital Council (2020), *State of the Data and Digital Nation*. p. 4.



Jurisdiction	Website	Primary Documents
<b>National</b>	<a href="http://www.dta.gov.au">www.dta.gov.au</a> <a href="#">Data and Digital Ministers' Meeting   Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (pmc.gov.au)</a> <a href="http://BeConnected.gov.au">Be Connected (esafety.gov.au)</a>	Australia's Tech Future - Delivering a strong, safe and inclusive digital economy (2018) Vision 2025: Digital Transformation Strategy (2018) State of the Data and Digital Nation (2020) Digital Government Strategy: Accelerating the digital future of our Australian Public Service (2021)
<b>New South Wales</b>	<a href="http://www.digital.nsw.gov.au">www.digital.nsw.gov.au</a>	Designing our digital future (2017) <b>Bridging the digital divide with MyHousing Online Services (2019)</b> Beyond Digital (2019) and the Beyond Digital 2021 Update (2021)
<b>Queensland</b>	<a href="http://www.qgcio.qld.gov.au">www.qgcio.qld.gov.au</a>	DIGITAL1ST - Advancing our digital future. The Queensland Government digital strategy for 2017-2021 (2017)
<b>Victoria</b>	<a href="http://www.vic.gov.au/digital-strategy-transformation">www.vic.gov.au/digital-strategy-transformation</a>	<b>Fixing the Digital Divide - Connecting communities in regional Victoria (2019)</b> A future-ready Victoria. Victorian Government Digital Strategy 2021-2026 (2021)
<b>South Australia</b>	<a href="http://www.dpc.sa.gov.au/responsibilities/ict-digital-cyber-security">www.dpc.sa.gov.au/responsibilities/ict-digital-cyber-security</a>	ICT, Cyber Security and Digital Government Strategy: Plan for 2020 to 2025- Update for 2021 (2021)
<b>Tasmania</b>	<a href="http://www.digital.tas.gov.au">www.digital.tas.gov.au</a>	Our Digital Future - Tasmanian Government strategy for digital transformation (2020)
<b>Western Australia</b>	<a href="http://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-the-premier-and-cabinet/office-of-digital-government">www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-the-premier-and-cabinet/office-of-digital-government</a>	Digital Strategy for the Western Australian Government 2021-2025 (2020) <b>Digital Inclusion in Western Australia: A blueprint for a digitally-inclusive State (Draft) (2020)</b>
<b>Northern Territory</b>	<a href="http://digitalterritory.nt.gov.au">digitalterritory.nt.gov.au</a>	Digital Territory Strategy (2018)
<b>Australian Capital Territory</b>	<a href="http://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au">www.cmtedd.act.gov.au</a>	ACT Digital Strategy (2020)
<b>Aotearoa New Zealand</b>	<a href="https://www.digital.govt.nz/dmsdocument/237~the-digital-strategy-for-aotearoa/html">https://www.digital.govt.nz/dmsdocument/237~the-digital-strategy-for-aotearoa/html</a>	Te Rautaki Matihiko mō Aotearoa - The Digital Strategy for Aotearoa (Inaugural Digital Strategy) - 3 key themes: Mahi Tika — Trust, Mahi Tahi — Inclusion, and Mahi Ake — Growth

# Government Strategies

- Subtle difference in priorities and emphasis exists
  - Digitisation as a way of connecting the entire populous to the internet (Tasmania, WA and the Northern Territory).
  - Digitisation as a whole of Government opportunity that pushes forward a significant agenda of moving services online (NSW).
- A focus on innovation and regular (yearly) updates on how the strategy is progressing (National, NSW and the Northern Territory).
- Every strategy recognises the importance of cyber safety, ensuring that citizen (and government) data is kept safe.



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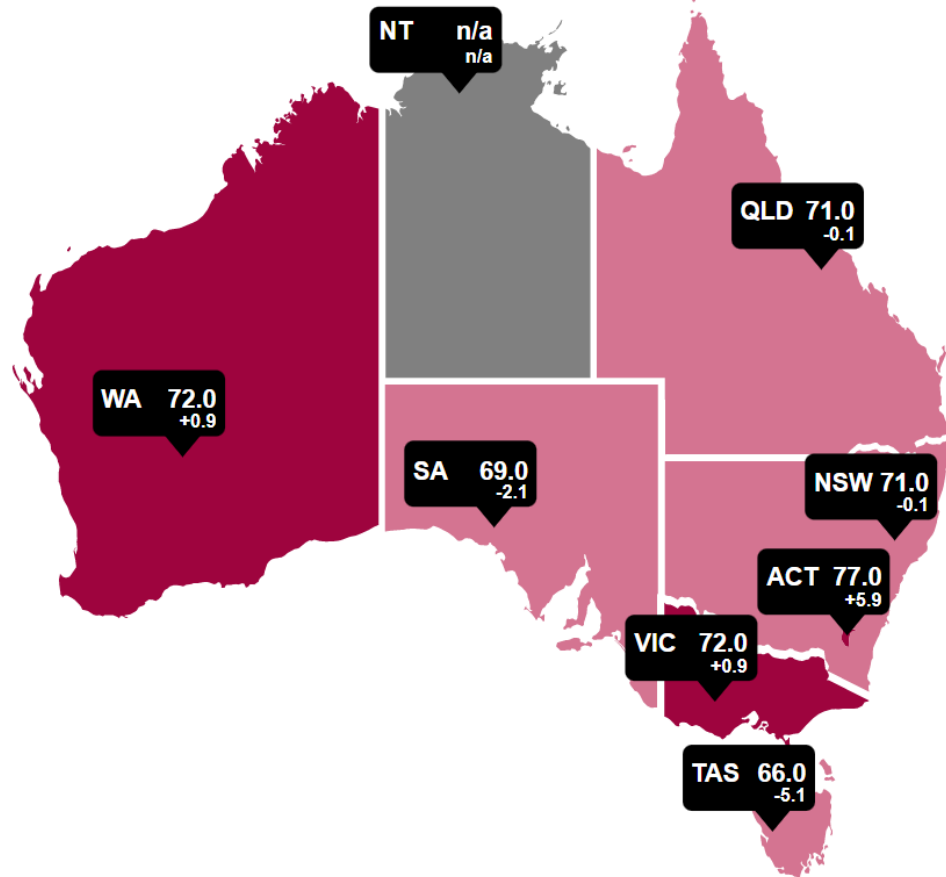
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- Australian Government  
Australian Taxation Office
- controlink
- jobactive  
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- The Personally Controlled eHealth Record System
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- MyAccount  
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- National  
disabilityinsurance  
Scheme



# Digital inclusion

## Digital Inclusion Index 2021



■ Above national average   ■ Below national average   ■ Insufficient sample

- Inclusion measures access, affordability and digital ability.
- Digital inclusion at the national level is improving, increasing from 67.5 in 2020, to 71.1 in 2021.
- Percentage of highly excluded population has declined from 17% (2020) to 11% (2021).
- However, **28% of population** is considered **excluded or highly excluded** – a potential constraint on the increased use of digital systems for social and economic life and a concern for the acceleration of online participation driven by COVID-19.

**Source:** Thomas, J., Barraket, J., Parkinson, S., Wilson, C., Holcombe-James, I., Brydon, A., Kennedy, J. (2021). Australian Digital Inclusion Index: 2021, Dashboard Dataset Release 1. Melbourne: RMIT and Swinburne University of Technology, and Telstra.

# Key themes – strategies

## **Key themes from the grey literature:**

**People at the centre**

**Digital inclusion is essential**

**Security and trust**

**Data driven, innovative and agile policies**

**Training for public servants is essential – digital, AI, data analytic skills**

**Cutting red tape (reducing the administrative burden)**

# Academic literature

- Risk that digitisation and a digital divide may further marginalise already vulnerable people due to:
  - Stratified levels of technological literacy and access to computers (often related to socio-economic status and age) (Attewell, 2001; Allmann and Blank, 2021; Helsper, 2012; van Deursen and van Dijk, 2011; 2020; Hargittai and Dobransky, 2017).
  - Reduction in access to staff.
  - Infrastructure limitations with internet and mobile phone network provision (van Deursen and van Dijk, 2011).
  - Greater burden on the client to carry out administrative tasks (O'Sullivan and Walker, 2018).
- Digitisation has allowed agencies to address issues of service access, flexibility and responsiveness to client needs and circumstances (Allmann and Blank, 2021).

# Academic literature

- Diminished processing and transaction times (Abie et al., Kennedy, 2016).
- Benefit of driving operational efficiency (O'Sullivan and Walker, 2018).
- Digitisation and data sharing strategies have underpinned progression of 'joined up' and coordinated government service reform (McGuirk et al., 2015).
- Limited discussion of COVID:
  - 'The internet defines this era; the Covid-19 pandemic has only further affirmed the reality that the internet has become a foundation of our interactions regarding jobs, government, entertainment, shopping and more. The digitization of basic services worldwide, from banking to welfare to job applications, means that **'using digital technologies is no longer optional; it is a requirement for full participation in social, economic and civic life'** (Allmann and Blank, 2021, p. 634).

# Academic literature

- Digital exclusion has been brought to the fore under the current COVID pandemic.
- The recently published New Zealand Digital Inclusion Strategy (2020-2021) estimates that at least one in five New Zealanders:

**'lack at least one of the four elements needed to be digitally included – motivation, access, skills or trust. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the realities of the digital divide for New Zealanders who struggle to connect, communicate and get access to essential services.'**

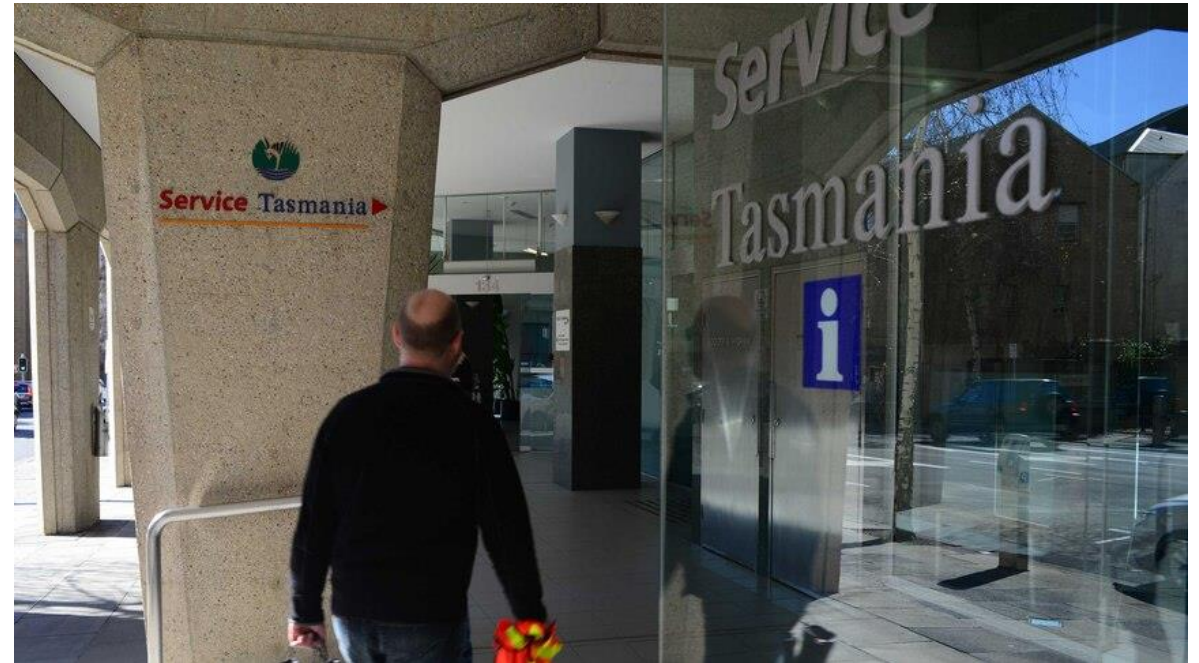
[Digital Inclusion Action Plan 2020–2021 | NZ Digital government](#)

## In summary:

- The digitisation of public services is a priority of federal and state governments
- Digitisation presents an opportunity to enhance service access, flexibility and responsiveness to clients needs
- There is a need to address inclusion, ensuring that the 'digital divide' does not deepen
- Limited evidence of explicit state strategies that target inclusion/exclusion

# Case Study - Tasmanian Public Service

- Methodology:
  - A qualitative study
  - Interviews with Tasmanian public servants and service providers (14 interviewees representing nine departments) – thematic analysis
  - Govt seminars and industry presentations (NSW and Tasmania – CEDA), launch of state digitisation strategy (Tasmania)



# Case Study - interviewee responses: key themes

- **People at the centre**

- *We're going to move your stuff digitally, but we're not going to leave anyone behind and we're trying to...provid[e] better support, better information on the web, and I think overall, that will position us to be a better client service provider.*
- *I think clients expect more from government. In the sense that they expect...a digital transaction opportunity.*
- *...all of it's driven by customer demand as well because as people become more digitally inclined, they want to be able to do those services online. They don't want to have to come in to a site, so a lot of it's customer driven.*

- **Digital inclusion is essential**

- *I'd say it's a mix rather than...radically redesigning the services to digital and changing the way things are done.*

- **Data driven, innovative and agile policies**

- *...better compliance, better data, comes out of being able to say to the community, no, we don't do paper anymore. And that brings better efficiencies. We can get better data...*



# Case Study - interviewee responses: barriers

- **Low literacy rates**

*You've got people with literacy issues and I think they find it very challenging that there's so much that goes online. I still think there's very much a place for face-to-face customer service.*

- **Accessibility**

- *... there's always going to be a proportion of the population that require one-on-one and you need to do that. You can't put everything digital and there's nothing that we do that's all digital.*
- *Accessibility...goes to how you ensure that there is not a digital divide where those who don't have reliable mobile or internet connection or device are still able to consume services in a way that suits their need.*



# Case Study - initial findings

- Participants raised the following issues:
  - Concern for digital exclusion an ongoing matter. Noted in 2018 IT Strategy.
  - With the completed rollout of National Broadband Network there's a shift in focus from infrastructure to people who use it.
  - A high proportion of Tasmanians live in social disadvantage (37%. ABS).
  - Digital exclusion is well researched: TASCROSS, 2019, *Understanding Digital Inclusion in Tasmania*



# Case Study - approaches to inclusion

- **Libraries** are a very important site of assistance with accessing digital services and teaching digital skills –Other Tasmanian services addressing digital inclusion include:
  - **Digital Ready/For Daily life** – interactive map to locate local support services. [Digital Ready for Daily Life | Digital Ready](#).
  - **Tasmanian Neighbourhood and Community Houses** – free Wifi and computer access, staff provide informal support where possible.
  - A range of **Tasmanian community groups** provide digital training:
    - Mathers House: free and low cost digital training, one-on-one and small group.
    - School for Seniors/U3A's across Tasmania.
    - OPEN Computing (Older Persons Electronic Network, Launceston).
    - 26Ten Adult literacy and numeracy including digital technologies.



Launceston Library, 1979

## In conclusion

- Key themes from the grey literature align with interviewees' observations.
- The digitisation of public services is a priority of federal and state governments.
- Digital exclusion (the 'digital divide') is an ongoing issue and there appears to be limited action by governments.
- Digital exclusion is variable and shaped by social, economic and service issues specific to locations. Responses from government need to be broad based but also account for the unique local conditions.
- Understanding amongst interviewees that face-to-face services will always be necessary – cannot be fully replaced by online options.
- Covid has accelerated digitisation of public services and increased the importance of public service agencies identifying and responding to digital exclusion.

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