Australia

Abbreviations

ATO	Australian Taxation Office
DCITA	Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
DSS	Department of Social Services
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ID	Identity Card
IT	Information Technology
NBN	National Broadband Network
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NSW	New South Wales
OASIS	Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards
OGP	Open Government Partnership
SA	South Australia
UNCITRAL	United Nations Commission on International Trade Law
VAW	Violence against Women

1   E-government origins

With the release in 1994 of the Australian Federal Government's Creative Nation Report, there was a broad realization among Australian state governments in general about the range of opportunities and significant benefits the Internet might provide. Though commerce was the overall subject matter of the document, the release of the report marked the genesis of e-government in the country. The Australian government embarked on its journey to leverage digital opportunity in government, and was among the first government globally to explore the various tools the Internet offered. The underlying strategic vision of the Creative Nations Report was to support the emergence of Australia into a competitive nation. Hence, e-government programmes initially focused their attention on the need to educate industry about the digital opportunity for economic growth.

The first significant policy in the Australian context that acknowledged the importance of addressing the new forms of social marginalization in the age of the Internet was the national digital divide policy adopted by the Federal Government in 1996. In an effort to reduce disparities of access to telecommunications infrastructure and services, $351m was allocated to projects across regional, rural and remote areas in Australia through the 'Networking the Nation' scheme launched in July 1997. This was to become the first of a number of large-scale infrastructure investments in Australia. By 2006, Australian policy makers were seeking to address the digital divide from a social exclusion lens. The relevant Australian government department at that time, the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) published the following statement on its website.

"Current research indicates that the 'digital divide' is best understood as part of a socio-economic context and related to the issue of social exclusion. As such, solutions need to go beyond technology. Furthering digital inclusion will require a detailed understanding of the relationship between information, people and technology."[1]

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[1]   DCITA (2006a), cited in Notley, N and Foth, M. (2008), 'Extending Australia s digital policy: an examination of the value of social inclusion and social capital policy frameworks', Australian Social Policy Journal No. 7, http://eprints.qut.edu.au/12021/1/12021b.pdf , Retrieved 12 November 2015.

2 E-service delivery

From the outset, e-government, or online service delivery, as it was previously known, has been a well-coordinated area of development within Australian governments. Both informal and formal governance arrangements have been well established at the State, Territory and Federal level. Offices of Women and educational bodies have been closely involved in informing and developing relevant policies and designing Internet awareness programmes.

During 2013–15, the language employed by Australian governments could be seen in terms of putting citizens at the centre of service delivery, with the understanding that the delivery of this promise requires putting more services online, opening up government, collaborating on policy design and accepting feedback on performance and then acting upon that feedback in a timely, effective and efficient manner.[2] Moreover, the notion of 'digital by default' goes beyond making services available in a digital format to focusing on providing the best range of services for citizens, as emphasized by the South Australian ICT strategic plan, 'SA Connected'.

"The evidence is clear – our customers prefer online services, and increasingly, mobile-ready services. Introducing new services, improving old services, whenever possible, our approach will be 'digital by default'.

This does not mean that services will only be provided in a digital format; the focus will be on providing the best range of services to our customers, giving them choice. Some services cannot be made digital, and some probably shouldn't; however, we will consider whether they can and should, from the start."[3]

Historically, State and Territory Governments have both played a key role in the provision of services, which form a part of their overall responsibility, including in education and health. They also assist individuals in navigating the different tiers of government and their varying departmental structures. This makes the various State and Territory Governments most often the initial point of online contact for those seeking to understand and access government services. Federal, state and territory governments have effectively worked in tandem as well as in the transition to e-government. The Federal or Commonwealth Government and State and Territory Governments have all enacted similar legislative instruments to best advance e-government initiatives and programmes. All have policies and legislation relevant to the present analysis and for the most part these have supplemented and supported each other.

The majority of State and Territory Governments have updated their digital strategies during 2014, and the prevailing language in most of these strategies is 'digital by design'. Some jurisdictions, including South Australia have gone a step further announcing a Digital by Default Declaration,[4] which holds that:

"Digital services will be:

- Available online, mobile-ready, easy to use and accessible
- Designed with our customers
- Offer value for money
- Implemented so that where appropriate, data can be made openly available in support of the government's Declaration of Open Data.

2   NSW Government (2014), DIGITAL + NSW Government ICT Strategy Update 2014 15, http://.www.finance.nsw. gov.au/resources/digital-2014-ict-strategy-update, Retrieved 12 November 2015.

3   South Australia Connected: Ready for the Future, http://digital.sa.gov.au/sites/default/files/content_files/ strategy/SA-Connected-Strategic-Directions-Update-Apr2016.pdf

4   The Premier of South Australia, (2014), Digital by Default Declaration, http://dpc.sa.gov.au/digital-default , Retrieved 11 November 2015

The government also recognizes that not all members of the community can access digital services equally and that consideration will always be given to their particular needs."[5]

Key issues for law and policy in e-government development, and the extent to which they have been addressed in Australia, are discussed in Box 1.

BOX 1
KEY ISSUES FOR POLICY FORMULATION IN E-GOVERNMENT DEVELOPMENT

1   Harmonization with human rights treaty obligations: All e-government policy frameworks and programmes are in harmony with Australia's international human rights treaty obligations to eliminate discrimination on the basis of age, race, sex, pregnancy, marital status and disability.

2   Universalizing Internet access: There is a clear policy push for the development of a National Broadband Network to "ensure all Australians have access to very fast broadband as soon as possible, at affordable prices, and at least cost to taxpayers."[6] However, Australia does not guarantee a right to Internet access to its citizens.

3   Technical openness: In Australia there is no mandate to deliver e-services on open technology. There is however, a growing trend towards content openness, which manifests as the use of creative commons licensing on governmental websites.

4   Open government data: Australia joined the Open Government Partnership in 2011.[7] Following this, a central public dataset repository for making public sector information available and reusable by citizens – data.gov.au – was set up. There are Open Data policy frameworks at federal and state levels. State governments have independently taken decisions to release governmental data sets into the public domain, in the public interest.[8] However, open data policy frameworks still function from what could be described as a 'best endeavours' perspective for cost reasons, and do not fully overlap with the right to information or freedom of information frameworks.

5   Citizen charters: There are a range of different charters guaranteeing responsiveness and accountability of government services, including redress mechanisms. However, these are currently managed at a departmental level only.

6   Data security and privacy: Australia has a complex and thorough body of legislation to ensure data security and privacy. One unresolved issue in this policy debate is the storage of metadata of citizens.

7   Service level agreements and data protection agreements: State, Territory and Federal Governments Crown Law officers draft all government contracts and all contracts for e-service delivery, which contain provisions for Service Level Agreements and data protection.

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5   The Premier of South Australia, (2014), Digital by Default Declaration, http://dpc.sa.gov.au/digital-default , Retrieved 11 November 2015

6   Letter from the Minister for Communications to the Executive Chairman NBN Co Limited, dated 8 April 2014.

7   The OGP was launched in 2011 to provide an international platform for countries committed to making their governments more open, accountable and responsive to citizens.

8   For example, recently, the New South Wales Office for Women, took the simple but vital step to make public, extensive data on the socio-economic status of women in NSW

2.1   SINGLE ENTRY PORTALS

The development of single entry portals has been a key strategy for the Australian government, in the transition to 'digital by default'. This is because such portals enable data on government programmes and services to be presented through multiple filters, and make different forms of inter-linkages possible.

The critical role that this strategy plays in the Australian context is evident from the United Nations E-government Survey 2014 which highlights, "The Australian e-government portal offers an extensive A to Z list of e-services and forms, both at the federal and local level, as well as connections to national, local and regional government websites. The portal also offers a section for starting a career or looking for a job online; as well as information on starting a business in Australia." [9]

At the state level too, governments have created single entry portals. For example, the South Australian government website provides information about services offered on its portal (http://www.sa.gov.au). This follows the lead set by the UK DirectGov service. A central organization oversees the content, writing, publishing, quality control and information architecture to ensure that services are logically presented rather than by department only. Strong governance arrangements are in place to manage the accuracy and currency of the materials and information. The portal also provides a directory of services which details information on service eligibility, the documentation required and where available, details of internal government processes. It also has a feedback mechanism to ensure the continued improvement of the site. The feedback received from citizens is collated and provided to the

concerned agencies on all matters including policy issues. Other State and Territory based services similar to that of the portal exist, and some are in the pipeline, as outlined by relevant government digital strategies.

It is important to note that these online services are not isolated from intermediary channels; that is, all are supported in some form or another by both face-to-face interaction and phone-based enquiry services. Further, in Australia there exists a large network of advocacy, NGO and charitable organizations that provide intermediary support to different community groups and/ or individuals, including new migrants and refugees, in accessing all government services. Support for these intermediary organizations is also seen as part of the role of government in so far as resources allow.

2.2   CITIZEN AUTHENTICATION MECHANISMS IN E-SERVICE DELIVERY

Significant barriers to the provision of some services online are security and privacy concerns and specifically the requirement to identify the user. Australia does not have a national citizen identification system or national ID card and the privacy of all Australian citizens is taken seriously. Establishing the requisite level of confidence in a person's identity is a critical starting point for the delivery of a range of government services and benefits. For example, the myGov service delivery portal set up by the Australian government, tackles the issue of online citizen identity through a transparent 'federated technology' approach. This portal is a national initiative of the Department of Human Services, and it allows people to access government services from the national health system (Medicare), welfare payments (Centrelink), child support, the Department of Health, the Department of Veterans'

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[9]   United Nations E-Government Survey (2014), E-government for the future we want, http://unpan3.un.org/egovkb/Portals/egovkb/Documents/un/2014-Survey/E-Gov_Complete_Survey-2014.pdf, Retrieved February 2015.

Affairs and the National Disability Insurance Agency using one user name and password online and via mobile device applications. Users of the myGov resources are made aware from the outset that they are in charge of their information and nothing is shared between different departments by dint of use of the myGov service.

The Australian Taxation Office (ATO) joined myGov in March 2014 through its e-tax product, new web and mobile services. myGov recently added a digital mailbox service to provide a secure electronic mail delivery channel for official correspondence. This service links with the Australia Post Digital Mailbox facility and also has potential to link with commercial providers.

On 23rd January 2015, the establishment of a new Federal Government Office, the Digital Transformations Office, was announced to expand the use of the myGov account site across Federal, State, Territory and Local governments. The then Australian Federal Minister for Communications and incumbent Prime Minister of Australia (a champion of digital/e-government) Malcolm Turnbull highlighted his aspirations for the Digital Transformations Office to be made available at every level of government so that "people could have a single, secure, digital identity that enables transactions from the local council, the state government, so everything from childcare allowances, to your rates, stamp duty, traffic fines".[10]

3   E-government programmes for women

E-government services for women are not developed in isolation, but form an integral part of specific sectorial policies and frameworks. For example, consider the single window portal set up by the South Australian government, sa.gov.au. A search for the descriptor/ key word 'women' through this site, returns some 347 results, which include information about programmes offered by Local Government, the State Government of South Australia and Federal Government, as well as community groups. [11]

Similarly, to encourage civil society organizations to become intermediaries in service delivery for marginalized groups, governments in Australia have focused on specifically reaching out to women's rights organizations. Further, grants supporting gender equality efforts are available from National, State and Territory Governments. Current priorities outlined in the criteria for selection are:

- Reducing violence against women;
- Demonstrating Australian Government leadership on gender equality;
- Increasing opportunities for women to contribute to Australian Government decisions;
- Increasing opportunities for women to undertake valued leadership roles; and
- Creating business and workplace cultures that deliver better economic choices and outcomes for women.[12]

11   http://www.sa.gov.au/search?query=women&collection=sa-gov-web , Retrieved February 2015

12   Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2013), Gender Equality for Women Program Guidelines, https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/06_2013/part_a_-gender_equality_for_women_program_updated_15_may_2013_2_2.pdf , Retrieved 12 November 2015.

10   Minister of Communication, (2015), Press Release.

The prevailing view in Australia is that women's accessibility to services will be taken care of as members of communities in need rather than on the basis of their gender. Social intervention programmes focused attention on those who were disadvantaged because of what was termed the 'digital divide', that is those members of the community who were assessed as less likely to have access to, or ease of use of, digital technologies. Broadly speaking, individuals facing the following issues, irrespective of gender, have been targeted:

- Those with poor access to technical infrastructure
- Those with low levels of digital literacy
- Indigenous communities
- People with disabilities (including intellectual or mental health issues)[13]
- Economic disadvantage
- Those requiring third party assistance generally

ICT access has not been a major concern for women's groups, a trend that is also reflected in the 2009 findings of the Australian Human Rights Commission regarding women's needs.

"The primary issues raised by women were economic, social and cultural rights, gender based violence and access to appropriate housing, health, education, advocacy and support services." [14]

In 1997, after nearly a decade of conservative rule, Australians elected the Australian Labor Party to government. In 1998 the government published Australia's Social Policy No. 7 entitled 'Improving the lives of Australians'. The document comprised two major articles and four social policy notes which included a note entitled "Extending Australia's digital divide policy: an examination of the value of social inclusion and social capital policy."[15] Whilst the note is comprehensive in its examination of identified issues, the paper is silent on the subject of gender. The formulation of e-government policy frameworks therefore reveals an absence of gender-based thinking.

The National Commission of Audit[16] was established in October 2013 as an independent body with a 'broad remit' to review and report on the performance, functions and roles of the Commonwealth government. Phase One of the report which was released in February 2014 made a number of recommendations, including recommendation 62 on e-government. The Commission recommended that the Government accelerate transition to online service delivery through a) a digital strategy; b) consolidating the e-government effort through a single team under the leadership of a Chief Digital Officer and c) appointing a senior minister to champion the digital by default agenda. [17] In May 2015, the Government allocated $95.4 million Aud of the 2015 budget to establish the Digital Transformation Office (DTO), with the aim to lead the "design development and enhancement of government services, and better link online, telephone and face-to-face delivery channels". [18] However, with regards to the gender dimension, a gender analysis of the first six months of operations of the newly

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13   For those individuals with vision impairments, the Australian government adheres to to World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) international web accessibility standards or their predecessors.

14   Elizabeth Broderick (2009), Speech, Advancing women's rights and gender equality, Sex Discrimination Commissioner and Commissioner responsible for Age Discrimination, Australian Human Rights Commission, Human Rights Law Resource Centre, https://www.humanrights.gov.au/news/speeches/advancing-women-s-rights-and-gender-equality. Retrieved 28 July 2015.

15   Notley, N and Foth, M. (2008), 'Extending Australia s digital policy: an examination of the value of social inclusion and social capital policy frameworks', Australian Social Policy Journal No. 7, http://eprints.qut.edu.au/12021/1/12021b.pdf , Retrieved 12 November 2015.

16   http://www.ncoa.gov.au Retrieved 14 March 2016

17   http://www.ncoa.gov.au/report/phase-one/recommendations.html Retrieved 14 March 2016

18   http://www.minister.communications.gov.au/malcolm_turnbull/news/investing_in_digital_transformation#.VuX-icdU1sM retrieved 14 March 2016

established Digital Transformations Office by the University of Sydney observed,

"It is difficult to conceive, in its current trajectory, that Australia's Digital Transformations Office will contribute much to gender equality and empowerment. A commitment to these objectives is not built into the shape of Australia's information policy, let alone its proposals for online government service design or delivery."[19]

The following discussion provides a snapshot of programmes for women that deploy technology for information and services outreach.

3.1 E-GOVERNMENT EFFORTS THAT FOCUS ON ENHANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

AppointWomen (Australian Government Boards), BoardLinks (Australian Government Office for Women)

These programmes provide information on Australian Government board memberships, including vacancies and the Australian Government's policies, which promote diversity in board membership. They also provide guidance for women interested in becoming a member of a board.

BOX 2
WOMEN ON BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT

A major policy focus in Australia comes from Offices for Women. In recent years it has been well recognized that in Australia there is a need to address the issue of the small number of women sitting on boards of management. This initiative is both multi-pronged and multi-jurisdictional.

The links below provide the best information about this work. Participating organizations have assessed these programmes as having had good outcomes with direct economic benefits relating to the employment of women.

The following programmes are managed and/or were initiated by the Australian Government Office for Women.

- AppointWomen is a Register that gives women an opportunity to be considered for appointment to a variety of Australian Government boards and other decision-making bodies.

- Australian Government Boards provides information on Australian Government board membership, vacancies and the Australian Government's policies to promote board diversity. It gives guidance to those interested in being a member of an Australian Government Board and allows applicants to express an interest in advertised board vacancies.

- BoardLinks improves women's opportunities to gain their first board appointment. The BoardLink network forms connections between the Australian Government and women seeking board positions.

19   Martin, F and Goggin, G., (forthcoming), Digital Transformations?: Reconstructing the Ubiquitous End-User. The New Politics of Gender and Media Policy in Digital Government Services.

Women in Global Business (Australian Trade Commission)

This is a joint Australian, State and Territory Government initiative offered through Austrade, which connects women across Australia who are interested or otherwise involved in international trade and investment possibilities. The programme offers women a central source of information and resources, support and connection. It includes a mentoring programme that connects businesswomen with little or no international experience with businesswomen who already have substantial experience in international trade and investment.

Workplace Gender Equality Agency

This agency promotes, articulates and seeks to improve gender equality in Australian workplaces. It works in collaboration with Australian employers and provides online practical advice, tools and continuing education to assist employers in improving their gender performance capacities.

3.2 E-GOVERNMENT EFFORTS IN THE AREA OF COUNSELING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Family Relationships online

This online service provides all families (whether together or separated) with relevant information and advice about family relationship issues. This service is linked to 65 Family Relationship Centres that have been established throughout Australia, with funding from the Federal government.[20] The centres are both a

source of information and a source of confidential assistance – and services are offered on a sliding scale, according to sources of income. All centres offer free Internet access.

3.3 E-GOVERNMENT SERVICES THAT TACKLE VAW

The Department of Social Services runs programmes and services specifically to help reduce violence against women and children. One such major initiative, 'Our Watch', is provided in the box below.

BOX 3
OUR WATCH

Our Watch is a not-for-profit organisation, that was set up by the Victorian state government and the Commonwealth government of Australia, in 2013, to facilitate a "sustained and constructive public conversation with the aim of improving the public's awareness of violence against women in Australia, ...growing the primary prevention movement...and encouraging people to take action to prevent violence against women and their children."[21]

Our Watch uses a combination of traditional and new social media outreach, and community events, to create an alternative discourse on gender and sexuality, and break the silence on domestic violence. Currently, it implements the following projects:

- A national media engagement project funded by the Commonwealth Government to improve reporting through media capacity training, website-based resources, a national award scheme and a national survivors' media advocacy programme.

http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au/Services/FRC/Pages/default.aspx, Retrieved 12 November 2015

http://www.ourwatch.org.au/, , Retrieved 12 November 2015

- The Line, a primary prevention youth social marketing campaign, initially developed by the Commonwealth Government, focusing on changing attitudes and behaviors that condone, justify and excuse violence against women by engaging young people in the age group of 12 to 20 years.

- Respectful Relationships Education in Secondary Schools in Victoria which will support up to 30 schools to deliver new curriculum guidance, and embed a whole of school approach to promoting respectful relationships.

- Strengthening hospital responses to family violence in two Victorian hospitals to ensure that doctors, nurses and other staff know how to respond confidently and sensitively when they treat women and their children who have experienced violence.

- Partnering with local organizations to develop tailored violence prevention programmes for two culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Victoria.[22]

3.4   ICT INITIATIVES IN WOMEN'S HEALTH

 Women's health provides links to information on women's health issues such as menopause, osteoporosis, pregnancy, sexual health, breastfeeding and breast diseases, and gynecological problems. Healthdirect also provides links to some of Australia's most authoritative health organizations and their websites.

4   Digital literacy efforts

Under the management of State and Territory Governments, digital literacy programmes were rolled out from the late 1990s onwards. A major issue, which continues to confront Australia today, is the country's complex geographic make-up. The Australian population is concentrated in its capital cities and along its coast. Distance combined with a sparse population has disadvantaged regional and remote communities generally, with respect to ICT access. Therefore, digital literacy programmes have focused on addressing the concern of proper access to technical infrastructure for these communities, along with helping them gain exposure to the advantages the Internet provides.

Digital literacy programmes in regional areas have been a key policy priority. And these programmes have mainly comprised subsidized and assisted access to computers through an extensive network of public libraries. Public libraries are funded by State and Territory and Local Governments and managed by Local Governments. Local Governments have also provided, and continue to provide, low cost digital literacy training courses. Low cost computers are also made available to the public in libraries and library staff are available to assist in the use of the computers if required.

At a national level, to complement the roll out of new broadband connectivity, new sets of resources in support of digital literacy have been released. These include two community-based programmes. The first entitled 'The Digital Hubs programme' aims at equipping community members in gaining the necessary digital literacy skills to effectively participate in the digital economy. The second, The Digital Enterprise programme has sought to help small-to-medium businesses and not-for-profit organizations improve the way they do business online and to encourage participation in the digital economy.

22   http://www.ourwatch.org.au/Who-We-Are/Our-Publications, Retrieved 12 November 2015

These programmes have been supported by The Internet Basics website which provides a point of entry for Internet novices and seeks to encourage the building of relevant skills and the necessary confidence needed to get online. The website is designed specifically for those people who are new to the Internet and its use. The website has enabled people who are looking to learn a little more about the Internet, to become confident and also learn about how to stay safe whilst online.

Digital literacy efforts have focused on women by including them in efforts to reach out to members of remote and rural communities. However, despite programmes among aboriginal communities to address the digital divide, a complex set of social issues arising from the social marginalization of these communities contributes to the persistence of a digital divide. In fact, "Indigenous people are 69 per cent less likely than non-Indigenous people to have any internet connection and are half as likely to have broadband access".[23]

5   Internet access and citizen uptake of services

5.1   CITIZEN DEMAND FOR SERVICES

According to the most recent Australian Federal Government study on Australians' use and satisfaction with e-government services, by 2011, two thirds of those surveyed had used e-government channels to contact government.[24]

More recent survey data from Boston Consulting (2014) places the use of online government services by Australians as currently much higher.[25] According to the Boston Consulting survey, Australians use online government services more than citizens in any other country, but satisfaction with those services continues to lag behind that of the United States and the UK. The organization surveyed nearly 13,000 users in twelve countries – including the US, UK, France, The Netherlands, Denmark, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Russia – about their experiences with 37 different online government services in 10 categories.

The survey found 96% of Australians have used online government services in the last two years, with 26% of respondents saying they access online government services at least once a week. The Australian average of 9.2 services used over the past two years was the highest among developed countries. 72% of Australian

23   Dukes, K. (2015), Bridging the digital divide in indigenous communities, http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/voice/bridging-the-digital-divide-in-indigenous-communities-20150205-3pjfp.html , , Retrieved 12 November 2015.

24   Department of Finance and Deregulation-Government of Australia (2011), Australians Use and Satisfaction with government services, http://www.finance.gov.au/publications/interacting-with-government-2011/ , Retrieved 12 November 2015

25   Carrasco, M. (2014), Digital Government: Turning the Rhetoric into Reality. The Boston Consulting Group, https://www.bcgperspectives.com/content/articles/public_sector_center_consumer_customer_insight_digital_government_turning_rhetoric_into_reality/, Retrieved 28 July 2015.

respondents said they would like to receive more government communications online, while 57% said they would like to use digital channels for voting in parliamentary elections. Other in-demand government services include applications and renewals of passports, driver licenses, concession cards, employment services, healthcare and pensions.

When e-government initiatives first came to prominence, the government was in a position to lead by example by educating the public and demonstrating what is possible. The current position in Australia is that demand far outstrips supply. Penetration of smart phones in Australia is the highest in the world. Some commentators are of the view that it is approaching 90%.[26] According to Deloitte's consumer media survey it was already at 81% in 2014.[27] Where good services are available, smartphone use extends to government services. By way of example, 65% of South Australians renew their motor vehicle registration online and more than 20% of these transactions are performed via mobile devices.

5.2   ONLINE ACCESS: SEX-DISAGGREGATED DATA

In 2012–13, 83% of people in Australia, were Internet users.[28] Compared to other age groups, the 15 to 17 years age group had the highest proportion of Internet users (at 97%). Those 65 years and above comprised the lowest proportion of Internet users (at 46%). See Figure 1 for details.

FIGURE 1
INTERNET USERS BY AGE GROUP (2012-13)[29]
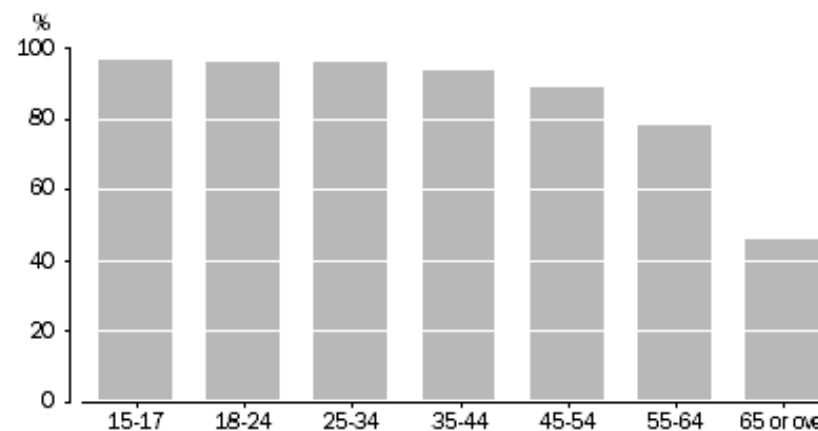
(a) As a proportion of total persons in age group.

The proportions of men and women accessing the Internet were found to be almost even, at 84% and 83% respectively[30]. A further breakdown of data indicates that gender differences become apparent for the age group 65 years and over. In 2012-13, 46% of older persons were Internet users and 44% accessed the Internet from home in the previous 12 months. Despite there being a higher number of females than males in the older persons age group, a greater proportion of male older persons (50%) accessed the Internet at home compared to female older persons (38%). The four most popular types of online activities of older persons were paying bills or banking (55%), accessing government services (50%), social networking and calls over the Internet (both at 30%). Breakdown by sex is shown in Figure 2 below.

26   Rogers Freeman, Emily (2015), Survey: Australian Smartphone and Tablet Usage , Haptic Generation, February 6, http://www.hapticgeneration.com.au/survey-tells-us-how-australians-use-smartphones-and-tablets/

27   Deloitte (2014), Media Consumer Survey 2014, Australia media and digital preferences, 3rd edition http://landing.deloitte.com.au/rs/deloitteaus/images/Deloitte_Media_Consumer_Survey_2014.pdf?mkt_tok=3RkM-MJWWfF9wsRonuK%2FPd%2B%2FhmjTEU5z16uUpWaGzi4kz2EFye%2BLIHETpodcMTcVnN77YDBceEJhqyQJx-Pr3CKtEN09dxRhLgAA%3D%3D

28   'Internet users' refer to people aged 15 years and over, who accessed the Internet from any site within the previous 12 months. Australia Bureau of Statistics (2014), 8146.0 Household Use of Information Technology, Australia, 2012-13, http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/8146.0 Chapter12012-13

29   Australia Bureau of Statistics (2014), 8146.0 Household Use of Information Technology, Australia, 2012-13

30   Data from Australia Bureau of Statistics.

FIGURE 2
OLDER PERSONS ONLINE ACTIVITIES AT HOME(A), BY SEX(B), 2012–13[31]
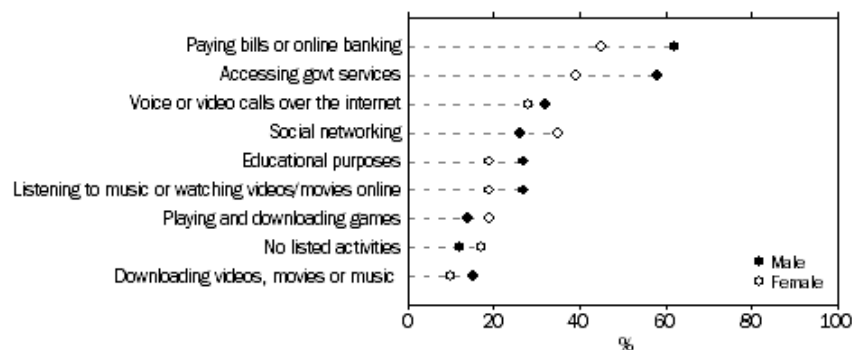
(a) Ranked by total older persons activity popularity.
(b) As a proportion of total older persons with home internet access.

It is clear that older persons, especially older women, are at greater risk of being unable to access online government services, due to their low levels of familiarity in accessing online information about public services. Members of remote and rural Australian communities constitute another key constituency that run the risk of digital exclusion.[32]

Connecting SA is an initiative that has attempted to expand people's access to public information, as highlighted in Box 4 below. This is a critical service, as it follows the steps of other policy frameworks that have foregrounded the importance of access to public information for people's well being. [33]

BOX 4
CONNECTING SA

SA Community is South Australia's (SA) community information directory. Its purpose is to enable citizens to find out about the help available to them from government, non-government and community services throughout SA and find out how citizens can best connect with, and get involved in their community.

Content available through the directory is crowd sourced and moderated by the SA Community team and ultimately its resources are then made available for reuse through open data licensing. SA Community is also integrated with the official South Australian Government website and portal, thereby connecting its users to government resources without it necessarily being under the care and control of the government. In return the portal is able to extend its community outreach with less constraint than is appropriate when publishing from within formal government channels. The Government of South Australia initiated this work and the portal is already well viewed internationally as an exemplar service.

In a paper published by the Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (OASIS), that organization cited sa.gov.au as an example of best practice. In early 2012 the model was approved by OASIS as the international standard for government transformation.[34]

31   Australia Bureau of Statistics (2014),8146.0 Household Use of Information Technology, Australia, 2012-13.

32   Broadband for the Bush Alliance (2014), Building a better digital future, http://broadbandforthebush.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Broadband-for-the-Bush-Forum-III-COMMUNIQUE-July2014.pdf, Retrieved 18 November 2015.

33   Clark, J. (2010), Social inclusion in the digital age Housing advice for everyone, Project report. 2010 Shelter

34   OASIS, (2012),Transformational Government Framework Primer Version 1.0, http://docs.oasis-open.org/tgf/TGF-Primer/v1.0/TGF-Primer-v1.0.html ,Retrieved 28 July 2015.

This work is relevant to women's empowerment for a number of reasons including the following:

- Its high use by older women, who are the only Australian female demographic that doesn't have the same Internet adoption rate as men.

- Its use by persons associated with the community and those supporting NGOs and other volunteer organizations. In fact, women in Australia are both recipients of and strong contributors to the volunteer and NGO sectors.

6 Citizen participation

Online engagement, consultation,[35] and eDemocracy all form part of the Australian Government's current digital strategy. This ranges from the use of technology in the co-design of services, to wider digitally enabled public consultation methodologies such as citizen juries. The Australian Government Commission of Audit has noted these as areas where there is scope for future development.

"Improved collaboration among government agencies on data and infrastructure can facilitate innovation and increased productivity. Shared service platforms can reduce duplication, achieve economies of scale and reduce support and maintenance overheads.

Government collects and holds a large amount of data for administrative purposes. Greater use could be made of this data to inform policy and decision-making and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of programme and service delivery.

Emerging digital technology, including cloud-based services, offers great potential for the government to improve online service delivery and public interaction. E-Government also has the potential to deliver significant efficiencies in service delivery."[36]

There is clearly a move towards re-conceptualizing the user's role in e-government as that of an active collaborator, rather than as a recipient/client to whom services are delivered. However, recent studies reveal that there is no explicit mention of gender analysis in the requirements to be followed by government agencies when designing their portals and online services. The consideration of

35 Government 2.0 Taskforce (2010), Engage: getting on with Government 2.0, http://www.finance.gov.au/publications/gov20taskforcereport/doc/Government20TaskforceReport.pdf, Retrieved 12 November 2015.

36 Australian Government National Commission of Audit (2013), Towards Responsible Government, http://www.ncoa.gov.au/report/appendix-vol-2/10-23-technology.html, Retrieved 28 July 2015.

the participant-user is strictly a gender-neutral one, as Martin and Goggin (forthcoming) highlight, in their analysis of e-government frameworks in Australia:

"There is no explicit mention of gender awareness or analysis in the mandatory requirements for Australian Government agencies to consider when developing and maintaining their online presence, or in the Government 2.0 Primer, which provides participatory scenarios and tools for government agencies. The Access and Equity in Online Information and Services policy has linguistic and cultural diversity as its meter of accessibility and disadvantage. It also mentions disability, but again gender is not discussed".[37]

The Australian Government Digital Transformation Office in the months following this analysis has established a suite of policies and guidelines for government agencies. Whilst continuing to remain silent on the issue of gender it might be argued that risks of gender inequality associated with digital modalities are addressed through its Digital Service Standard.[38] The Standard outlines a user centric agile development methodology supported by design guides, which addresses the importance of intermediaries.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

In Australia, policy frameworks focusing on services to the public have the citizen at the forefront of service delivery. Open data and transparency in government are clear goals. Nonetheless as noted by the most recent Federal Government National Commission of Audit report,[39] real deliverables still lag behind aspirations. In response to this audit report and other reviews[40] the Australian Government Digital Transformation Office was established in July 2015 as an executive agency and part of the Prime Minister's portfolio.

The priority for governments in Australia is moving services online with high quality usability design. The public demand for services now outstrips availability. With a strong environment of intermediary community support networks, be they through formal government channels or the NGO sector, the continued investment in quality online delivery should proceed in a manner that does not disadvantage any sector of the Australian community. One of the main barriers to particular services going online is that of creating effective user authentication mechanisms in the absence of a national identity programme. This is being addressed at the national level by the expansion of the myGov facility, which is currently being shaped as a mechanism for authentication that can be used for integrated service delivery.

The default use of technology in service delivery is an important step towards good governance in the information society, but it cannot be the only strategy for inclusive governance. Older women

37   Martin, F and Goggin, G., (forthcoming), Digital Transformations?: Reconstructing the Ubiquitous End-User. The New Politics of Gender and Media Policy in Digital Government Services.

38   https://www.dto.gov.au/standard/ , Retrieved 8 March 2016

39   Australian Government National Commission of Audit (2013), Towards Responsible Government, http://www.ncoa.gov.au/report/appendix-vol-2/10-23-technology.html , Retrieved 28 July 2015

40   https://www.communications.gov.au/who-we-are/department/corporate-plan, Retrieved 14 March 2016

and indigenous populations lag behind in technology access and require investments that are not merely technological. Given that projects on ICTs and gender in aboriginal communities indicate active participation by women and girls[41], an impetus for reaching women from these communities can be a critical intervention for social inclusion.

The public sector is struggling to accommodate the organizational change impact of new technologies on its operations. There is at times a tension between the technical and business units within departments. With new technologies such as cloud computing, more and more ICT programmes are coming from within business units. This will inevitably accelerate the range of tools available to address gender issues in service delivery and at the policy level. While the role of dedicated ICT professionals in organizational change may give short-term results, the institutionalization of gender-inclusive e-government depends very much on capacities of front line public servants and attention to gender-based research on user experiences.

There is a huge opportunity for governments in Australia to use a combination of strong infrastructure, sound policy and effective legislative frameworks to seize the digital opportunity for women's empowerment and gender equality.

ANNEX I
ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

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41   See for example, the work of David Vadiveloo (recipient of the 2005 Australian Human Rights Commission Award for his work with indigenous and marginalized youth) http://www.communityprophets.com/