Australian Government
Digital Transformation Agency

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Ms Rebeka Mills
Inquiry Secretary
Standing Committee on Petitions
Department of the House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Mills

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission to the Inquiry into aspects of the House of Representatives petitioning system relating to security and accessibility.

The Digital Transformation Agency's (DTA) submission firstly provides an overview of the Australian Government's:

- Digital Identity program

- Digital Service Standard, and

- Service Design and Delivery Process (SDDP).

The submission then sets out how these programs could support the petitioning system regarding security and accessibility, in line with the Committee's Terms of Reference.

The Australian Government's Digital Identity program

Digital Identity provides a simple, accessible and secure way for individuals to verify their identity online. The program has made significant progress in building a nationally consistent digital identity system with over 2 million Australians already using their Digital Identity to access 75 services. Digital Identity is voluntary and if a person can't use Digital Identity, or doesn't want to, they can keep accessing services through existing methods.

Creating a Digital Identity is like doing a 100-point identification check. With the addition of face verification, Digital Identity provides higher levels of assurance while also removing the need to visit a government office with identity documents. This will allow services requiring a higher level of identity proofing to be delivered online and be available whenever and wherever people and business need to access those services.

Digital Identity does not create a unique identifier, nor does it allow tracking of online activities. It provides a means for a person to verify their identity online. An individual 'owns' their identity in this model rather than a unique number 'owned' by government. Each time a person uses Digital Identity, they will be asked to give consent before any details are shared.

A Digital Identity can be re-used across a range of services, saving people time and effort. Research shows that the uptake of Digital Identity has the potential to reduce identity crime, which is estimated to have an annual economic impact in Australia of over $3.1 billion[1].

Digital Identity is a whole of government and whole of economy solution. It is a federated system which is designed to protect users' privacy[1], while allowing access to the broadest range of services possible. The DTA is working collaboratively across Australian states and territories and the private sector to ensure Digital Identity meets user needs at a national level.

The Australian Government's Digital Service Standard

The DTA is responsible for the Australian Government's Digital Service Standard (see: https://www.dta.gov.au/help-and-advice/about-digital-service-standard). This is a set of best-practice principles for designing and delivering government services. Application of the Digital Service Standard results in services that are easy to access, simple to use and meet the needs of users, regardless of whether they are delivered digitally and through other channels. The Digital Service Standard also includes a specific focus on accessibility and inclusion.

The DTA also promotes the use of the Service Design and Delivery Process or SDDP, which is an approach to the design and delivery of services in government. The SDDP is an agile and user-centred approach that ensures service teams solve the right problems for users and deliver value early and often. This approach minimises risk, increases visibility, and allows for greater adaptability.

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[1] Identity Crime and Misuse in Australia 2019 Report, Australian Institute of Criminology, August 2020 (https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/sr/sr29)

The SDDP guides teams to develop a deep understanding of the users of the service, their circumstances and needs, and to use this learning to ensure that they are building the right solutions in the right way.

How the DTA can support the e-petitions system

Reducing fraudulent activity

Identity theft is fuelling a global increase in cybercrime, fraud, serious and organised crime. Identity verification and digital access are common attack points for fraudulent actors, identity thieves and hackers, with identity crime now impacting 1-in-4 Australians[1].

Enhanced security provided by Digital Identity can help minimise the risk of fraud and identity crime in the e-petitions system, in the same way it currently supports the 75 services connected to Digital Identity.

Increasing security

Digital Identity improves the security of government transactions for both users and for the government. Digital Identity makes it much harder for criminals to conduct identity theft. Digital Identity also empowers the user, giving them visibility of their data to ensure it is accurate and provides them with a history of transactions, including where and when information has been shared, allowing people to check for suspicious activity.

Participants within the Digital Identity system undergo comprehensive cyber security assessments. Participants include Identity Service Providers like the Australian Government's provider myGovID as well as any party relying on the verified identities which are provided by the identity service providers. The system undertakes risk management activities (for example, implementing cyber security in alignment with the Australian Signal Directorate's Information Security Manual and Essential Eight). All participants within the Digital Identity system are subject to the rules and accreditation criteria within the Trusted Digital Identity Framework.

Digital Identity as part of e-petitions would extend the associated security processes and procedures of Digital Identity and provide confidence that a user is who they say they are.

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[1] Identity Crime and Misuse in Australia 2019 Report, Australian Institute of Criminology, August 2020 (https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/sr/sr29)

Improving accessibility

Digital Identity is both an accessible and secure identification verification process that can support the e-petitions system. By no longer needing to present in person, Digital Identity removes one of the biggest accessibility barriers to participation in online services. In addition, Digital Identity is WCAG 2.0 compliant (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines). WCAG 2.0 sets out how to make Web content more accessible to people with disabilities.

The Digital Service Standard and SDDP guides teams to research and test with real people who live with disability, older people, and culturally and linguistically diverse users throughout the process. They also help to ensure that services are accessible to users regardless of their digital confidence and access to digital platforms, including users living in remote areas and those using different devices. By applying this approach, teams develop a deep understanding of the users of their service, and the diverse needs they need to support.

The use of official records for verification purposes

Digital Identity can further support e-petitions by verifying the identity of people with a high level of assurance through the reuse and reconfirmation of government held documentation and information. The Digital Identity system works through identity matching services to verify identity information against authoritative sources, including the Document Verification Service (DVS) and Face Verification System (FVS).

The DVS is a national online system that allows organisations to compare an individual's identity information with a government record, such as a birth certificate or passport. In a digital process, the user enters information from the documents and this information is verified with the issue of the identity document. By verifying the attributes on an identity document, the DVS helps confirm that a claimed identity is genuine, and not fictitious. It provides some degree of confidence that the person presenting this information is the 'owner' of that identity.

The introduction of an age limit

Digital Identity could be used to verify identity attributes, including age, as part of the e-petitions system. Should it be necessary for an e-petition to verify the age of a participant, then the e-petition would only receive the information required to confirm the user meets the age requirements. Other information could be provided, but this would be consent based to ensure user privacy is protected.

Other issues relating to the accessibility of e-petitions

By applying the Digital Service Standard and the SDDP, an update of the e-petitions system could be designed for accessibility and inclusivity right from the outset.

The Digital Service Standard and SDDP guides teams to research and test with real people who live with disability, older people, and culturally and linguistically diverse users throughout the process. They also help to ensure that services are accessible to users regardless of their digital confidence and access to digital platforms. This includes users living in remote areas and those using different devices.

Concluding comments

The Digital Identity program, the Digital Service Standard and SDDP present significant opportunities to support aspects of security and accessibility for petitioning systems. Digital Identity provides a simple, safe, and secure way for Australians to verify their identity online, which saves people time, effort and money. The Digital Service Standard and SDDP help ensure Government products and services are accessible, inclusive, and easy to use.

The e-petitions system could leverage these programs and deliver higher security and fraud control outcomes; offer common infrastructure; and make it easier for people to verify who they are in an accessible, convenient and secure way.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission. Should the Committee have further questions, please contact digitalidentity@dta.gov.au or standard@digital.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Randall Brugeaud

Chief Executive Officer

Digital Transformation Agency

18 February 2021