

How seniors use information and communication technologies

- 2.1 In the last twenty years, a revolution in information and communication technologies (ICT) has seen the internet and cyber technologies almost completely replace personal, paper-based and phone-based means of commercial and personal transactions in Australia and in most other countries. The consequence for seniors is that for those who are equipped to take part in this revolution, it will 'give rise to new, more accessible products and services satisfying the needs of older people.'¹ However, not all senior Australians are participating in the ICT revolution.
- 2.2 In a community where views and preferences are increasingly being expressed online, seniors who fear the internet will miss out on the social interaction which it provides. Likewise, as governments move towards electronic means of communication with online publications, forms and eHealth initiatives, seniors who are not online might find it increasingly difficult to access these items.²
- 2.3 The Committee found that while many seniors are enthusiastically embracing ICT, others lack confidence and have little, if any, ability to use the internet or other ICT. The speed of the information technology revolution has meant that many older Australians have found themselves 'on the wrong side of the digital divide'³ and seniors without access to email, which is increasingly becoming a necessary tool for participation in

1 The European Commission, *Ageing well in the Information Society: Action Plan on Information and Communication Technologies and Ageing* (2007) <www.europa.eu/legislation_summaries/information_society/strategies/124292_en.htm> viewed 29 November 2012.

2 Government of Western Australia, *Submission 19*, p. 4.

3 Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), *Submission 2*, p. 4.

society, are at risk of reduced participation in critical aspects of modern living.

2.4 Where seniors have embraced ICT, most say that access to the internet is important to them⁴ and research has found that the more time people spend online, the more comfortable they are likely to be when engaging in online activities.⁵

2.5 For housebound seniors the internet has the potential to improve the quality of their life considerably. The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) said that:

With internet access to medical services, online grocery shopping, online payment of bills and social networking possibilities, older Australians can potentially live autonomously in their homes for longer.⁶

2.6 However, housebound seniors who are without internet access at home are at risk of becoming isolated and those who are not computer literate will be severely affected as business and community sectors rely more heavily than ever on ICT for disseminating and seeking information.⁷

2.7 The 2011 Australian Census found that approximately 80 per cent of dwellings have some type of internet connection.⁸ Many seniors who do not have access to the internet at home but who are mobile can access the internet at no cost at their local library's public access computers and at seniors' kiosks at various locations around the country. The Australian Library and Information Association and National & State Libraries Australasia told the Committee that:

On library floors, every day, throughout Australia, library staff are showing library patrons how to use the internet or other communications devices.⁹

4 93.5 per cent of respondents to the Committee's online survey said that 'internet access is important to my quality of life' and 87.3 per cent use the internet daily.

5 Communications Law Centre, UTS, *Submission 31*, p. 3.

6 AHRC, *Submission 2*, p. 4.

7 Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Association (ASCCA), *Submission 7*, p. 4.

8 Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 Census of Population and Housing Australia: 1 525 108 out of 7 760 319 dwellings have no Internet connection and a further 272 257 did not answer the question: <www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/communityprofile/0?opendocument&navpos=230> viewed 9 January 2013.

9 Australian Library and Information Association and National & State Libraries Australasia, *Submission 6*, p. 4.

- 2.8 More than 60 per cent of Australians aged 55 to 64 use the internet, with more than 30 per cent of those over 65 spending time online.¹⁰ However, many seniors 'have high levels of concern about cybersafety, to the extent that they are either limiting the ways in which they use the internet, or not using it at all.'¹¹
- 2.9 This chapter will explore how seniors who are online use ICT and the range of reasons why some seniors are not online. The risks and threats concomitant with using ICT are discussed in Chapter 3 of this report.

How seniors are using ICT

- 2.10 The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) said that statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) show an increase in overall internet participation by senior Australians but there is a marked difference between the '55–64 year olds' and the '65 years and over' group, with those aged 65 years and over having a much lower participation level or access to internet services.¹²
- 2.11 ACMA undertook research in 2010 to find out 'how and why' senior Australians were accessing the internet. The research found that Australians aged '55 and over' were most likely to use the internet for communications activities and for research and information. They were less likely than 'Australians under 55' to participate in blogs and online communities, buying/selling/shopping online, or other interactive purposes.¹³ The research identified the three main reasons for seniors not using the internet for online transactions as:
- they have no need to do so;
 - they prefer to shop in person to see the product; and/or
 - they have security concerns.¹⁴
- 2.12 However, ACMA noted that research done by the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation in

10 Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA), *Submission 16*, p. 1.

11 National Seniors Australia (NSA), *Submission 29*, p. 1.

12 Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), *Submission 24*, p. 5.

13 ACMA, *Submission 24*, p. 6.

14 ACMA, *Submission 24*, p. 6.

2011 found the reasons seniors use online communication technologies varied greatly from person to person.¹⁵

- 2.13 In its submission, the Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Association (ASCCA) advised that its members want to learn how to use the internet for a whole range of reasons: to shop, chat, research, buy and sell shares, and pay bills. One lady wanted to learn how to use a computer because at 93, she wanted to write her memoirs. With the help of her newly-learned computer skills she went on to publish two volumes.¹⁶
- 2.14 Ms Carol Bennet, CEO of Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF), said that those seniors who are active online are particularly likely to be among the 80 per cent of Australians who use the internet to seek health care information.¹⁷
- 2.15 The Hobart Older Persons Reference Group told the Committee that, among other uses, its members appreciate being able to download music from the internet and also to communicate with people interstate and overseas.¹⁸
- 2.16 On the other hand, Mr Malcolm Grant, Hobart Older Persons Reference Group, said that some seniors just do not want to spend their time using the internet, even though they may be highly educated and are quite capable of being savvy internet users:
- ...there are a lot of people of my generation who are not all that interested, quite frankly, and who are quite happy to use their [computer] for emailing their friends and for accessing some information, but beyond that have got other things in life, or what is left of life ... it does not necessarily have to do with one's educational background, one's ethnic background...there are people, plenty of whom are tertiary educated, who really have other things in their life as well as their daily dose of internet technology.¹⁹
- 2.17 Many seniors use the internet to research their options then revert to other forms of contact, such as the telephone or possibly posting a cheque, to

15 ACMA, *Submission 24*, p. 6.

16 ASCCA, *Submission 7*, p. 12.

17 Ms Carol Bennet, CEO, Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF), *Committee Hansard*, 19 September 2012, p. 1.

18 Hobart Older Persons Reference Group, Hobart City Council, *Submission 8*, p. 1.

19 Mr Malcolm Grant, Member, Hobart Older Persons Reference Group, *Committee Hansard*, 7 August 2012, p. 8.

complete the transaction. Mr Michael O'Neill, CEO of National Seniors Australia (NSA), said:

...we have noticed that people get on the internet and get quotes ...but they stop at that point and then ring...and say 'I've been on the internet. I've found your price is X. I would like to proceed with that purchase'. [When we ask why they did not complete the transaction they say] 'Oh, no I don't want to put my details on the internet. I am just not confident about that'.²⁰

- 2.18 Seniors are using Skype in large numbers, as it gives them the ability to keep in touch with their children and grandchildren if they live interstate or overseas.
- 2.19 Among seniors who do enjoy using the internet it is clear that they use it frequently. Mrs Kay Fallick reported that a survey of YOURLifeChoices' members found that 94 per cent of 2,500 responses are online daily.²¹

Using ICT in remote, regional and rural areas

- 2.20 Access to the internet can be particularly beneficial for older people living in rural, regional and remote communities who have limited alternative means of remaining engaged with the wider community. Unfortunately, access issues, cost and fear of technology means that many seniors in these areas are not benefitting as they might from ICT.
- 2.21 Numerous reports have outlined the difficulties of providing ICT to remote areas, particularly getting communication technologies into remote Indigenous communities and 'small communities experience significant limitations when it comes to communication'.²²
- 2.22 As well as experiencing a lack of reliability of internet connection in regional and rural areas, there is limited competition which means prices are relatively high and 'alternate services are not always easy to arrange'.²³

20 *Committee Hansard*, 31 October 2012, p. 2.

21 Mrs Kay Fallick, Publisher, Owner, Director, YOURLifeChoices website, newsletters and magazine, *Committee Hansard*, 18 May 2012, p. 1.

22 ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, the Centre for Appropriate Technology and the Central Land Council, *Home Internet for Remote Indigenous Communities*, 2011, p. 20.

23 Tandara Lodge Community Care Inc., *Submission 1*, p. 1.

2.23 The Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (DBCDE) has stated that a key objective for the National Broadband Network (NBN) is that:

...a person's ability to receive affordable high-speed broadband services should not be affected by where they live or work. The NBN will ensure that every community in regional Australia gets fair access to affordable high-speed broadband.²⁴

2.24 Public libraries are providing free internet access and tuition to rural and remote areas for those who are able to get to a library. Ms Vanessa Little from the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) said that:

There are libraries from Millicent in the south-east of South Australia, right through the country into the very heart of the Northern Territory offering these services to communities, particularly to seniors.²⁵

2.25 ASCCA helps rural, regional and remote Australians who would like to set up a computer club for seniors with a development kit which is available to anyone. Mrs Nancy Bosler, President of ASCCA, said that people in rural, regional and remote areas can also phone or email the Association for help.²⁶

2.26 Keeping up-to-date with changes in ICT in rural and remote areas and remaining cybersafe is an issue particularly for vulnerable groups, including Aboriginal people and older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The South Australian Government told the Committee that:

This inability to keep up to date with technology can in turn widen the 'digital divide' and result in social isolation from friends and family.²⁷

2.27 Commander Glen McEwen, Manager of Cyber Crime Operations with the Australian Federal Police (AFP), told the Committee that the AFP's cybercrime prevention team has worked in partnership with the Northern Territory Department of Justice to deliver the 'Strong Choices' program in remote locations. The AFP ran a number of sessions with Indigenous

24 The Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (DBCDE), *#au20 National Digital Economy Strategy. Leveraging the National Broadband Network to drive Australia's Digital Productivity*, Canberra, 2011.

25 Ms Vanessa Little, President, ALIA, *Committee Hansard*, 9 May 2012, p. 6.

26 *Committee Hansard*, 23 March 2012, p. 16.

27 South Australian Government, *Submission 37*, p. 3.

elders, both men's and women's groups, regarding how they could assist in protecting young people online.²⁸

Computer clubs for seniors

- 2.28 The Committee heard from various seniors' groups which come together to share their knowledge of computing and to enjoy it as a pastime. Some groups offer their members a range of services and activities including computer training, which will usually include some cybersafety training and information. The African Seniors Club, for example, serves the welfare needs of the aged and ageing African population in Queensland and conducts 'small group workshops in which the members are constantly educated and trained on how best to use computers including the online and internet services'.²⁹
- 2.29 LACVI comprises 22 clubs with over 4 000 members. It told the Committee it has a focus on keeping older people active and participating in the community and many of its clubs offer computer-related activities.³⁰
- 2.30 The peak body for seniors' computer clubs, ASCCA has more than 156 member clubs and is run by seniors for seniors. It assists older and disabled Australians to access computer technology. ASCCA told the Committee that it helps start new clubs and it advises and assists existing clubs. Also, it provides:
- ...a channel for communication between likeminded people, who want to share in the potential of the computer age to serve their individual and community goals.³¹
- 2.31 ASCCA has created a development kit to help seniors set up a computer club. The kit is free and available on ASCCA's website. It takes people through the process of forming a club from the start and also offers email or telephone help. Mrs Bosler said that 'every aspect they need for setting up that club is available'.³²
- 2.32 There are numerous computer clubs in retirement complexes. Mrs Bosler told the Committee that:
- ...larger groups such as the Anglican retirement villages have been very supportive in helping to get internet access and

28 *Committee Hansard*, 13 March 2013, p. 2.

29 African Seniors Club – Australia Inc., *Submission 18*, p. 3.

30 Life Activities Clubs Victoria Inc. (LACVI), *Submission 5*, p. 1.

31 ASCCA, *Submission 7*, p. 10.

32 *Committee Hansard*, 23 March 2012, p. 16.

computer training into their facilities... We must make sure that we do not eliminate any section of the aged community – and that means those in aged care facilities and even those in nursing homes.³³

- 2.33 The Committee heard from various witnesses that ‘seniors helping seniors is a most effective medium’³⁴ when it come to passing on cybersafety tips and advice. The Brotherhood of St Laurence noted that socially isolated seniors would be helped by:

Government support and funding to recruit technically savvy older people to run internet workshops in places such as libraries, neighbourhood houses and men’s sheds [and it] would improve people’s ability to use the internet safely.³⁵

- 2.34 When socially isolated seniors overcome their fears or other obstacles and become active online the evidence is that their social isolation is lessened. As WorkVentures told the Committee:

When we talk to seniors who have purchased a computer they rave about the benefits of being able to access online services, of the reduced social isolation that comes from contacting family, friends or people they’ve never met but have similar interests, and of the joy they get from using computers for entertainment.³⁶

Seniors and online social networking

- 2.35 The internet offers unprecedented opportunities for social networking and many seniors are active on social networking sites. For housebound seniors online social networking allows them to stay connected and engaged with family and friends.³⁷

- 2.36 Telstra told the Committee that:

... instant messaging, Facebook and Twitter has given Australians from all walks of life a feeling of being more connected to loved ones, family and friends regardless of the tyranny of distance,

33 Mrs Bosler, President, ASCCA, *Committee Hansard*, 23 March 2012, p. 18.

34 Brisbane Seniors Online Association Inc. (BSOL), *Submission 34*, p. 2.

35 Brotherhood of St Laurence, *Submission 13*, p. 8.

36 WorkVentures Ltd, *Submission 33*, p. 6.

37 LACVI, *Submission 5*, p. 2.

density of population and the remote and less densely populated areas of Australia.³⁸

- 2.37 More than 500 000 Australians aged 60 years and over have a Facebook page.³⁹ Facebook told the Committee that:

Every day, countless seniors in Australia connect via Facebook with the friends, family, places, events and things that they care about. Social platforms such as Facebook can assist senior Australians to ‘bring the outside world in’ at a time when they may face greater challenges getting out and about in the physical world.⁴⁰

- 2.38 However, although social networking sites offer a significant opportunity for seniors to remain engaged with their community, these sites also present challenges for those who do not know how to safely use social media.⁴¹ Dr Cassandra Cross said:

Many seniors do not have an adequate knowledge of security settings on accounts, either about their existence in the first place, or the importance of changing the default setting. They believe that only their contacts can access the information that is being posted. In reality, this is not the case.⁴²

- 2.39 As with the wider community, many seniors use online dating and romance websites and some have had bad experiences, including in some cases losing significant sums of money as well as their self-confidence and self-esteem.

- 2.40 Abacus – Australian Mutuals, the Association of Building Societies and Credit Unions, told the Committee that many senior Australians are establishing friendships and relationships through online social networking and dating websites. Social networking is a very positive development for seniors, especially those who are housebound, but there are risks involved. Abacus told the Committee that romance scams are a significant and growing concern for seniors because many profiles are bogus, with criminals befriending victims in order to get them to send money in the promise of love or a relationship.⁴³

38 Telstra Corporation Ltd, *Submission 22*, p. 4.

39 South Australian Government, *Submission 37*, p. 6.

40 Facebook, *Submission 36*, p. 2.

41 South Australian Government, *Submission 37*, p. 6.

42 Dr Cassandra Cross, *Submission 49*, p. 3.

43 Abacus – Australian Mutuals, *Submission 44*, p. 2.

Seniors' use of internet for banking and e-commerce

- 2.41 ABS research from 2010 reported that among seniors who used the internet at home, using it for financial transactions was significantly less popular than using it for email and general browsing.⁴⁴
- 2.42 In 2012, the Committee's online survey found that 'banking and paying bills' was the most popular use of the internet by seniors who are online at home (see Appendix D).⁴⁵ This might indicate that seniors who are active online have become more confident about using the internet for banking in the two years since the 2010 research.
- 2.43 Again it is the housebound and isolated seniors who could benefit greatly from the ability to do banking and other financial transactions from home:
- In some cases, it may also be their only means of conducting their necessary day-to-day business [such as] banking, paying bills, online purchasing and so on.⁴⁶
- 2.44 A submission from eBay and PayPal told the Committee that both companies 'enjoy considerable patronage from the 55 year old plus age group'. Over 400 000 senior Australians use PayPal.⁴⁷

Shopping online

- 2.45 The ability to shop online offers housebound seniors and those in rural or remote places shopping opportunities which they could not have dreamed of only a few years ago.⁴⁸
- 2.46 In 2011, an NSA Productive Ageing Centre report noted that older people are increasingly shopping online with at least 10 per cent of internet users

44 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 8146.0 *Household Use of Information Technology, Australia, 2010-11*, Personal Internet Use, Table 8.

45 76.5 per cent of respondents to the Committee's online survey found that 'banking and paying bills' is the predominant reason for seniors using the internet.

46 LACVI, *Submission 5*, p. 2.

47 eBay and PayPal, *Submission 11*, p. 1.

48 The Committee's online survey found that 'shopping' was fourth placed among reasons for seniors using the internet with 54.5 per cent of respondents saying they use the internet for shopping.

who are aged 50 years and over purchasing one or more items online on a weekly basis, or more frequently.⁴⁹

- 2.47 Potential risks for seniors shopping online, such as making transactions on unsecure websites or on an unsecured computer, are discussed in the next chapter of this report.

Shift of government services to the internet

- 2.48 Increasingly, essential information about government services is provided online. Seniors (and everyone else) can access government services provided by Medicare Australia, Centrelink and Veterans Services, among others, through the *Australia.gov.au* website. The site also provides a portal for the Government to communicate with consumers, including senior Australians, who are using the internet to access government services.⁵⁰

- 2.49 The DBCDE submitted that:

The rollout of the National Broadband Network (NBN) is expected to bring substantial economic and social benefits to internet users and access to health and aged care will be improved by increased online government service delivery and greater commercial opportunities.⁵¹

- 2.50 Although government is increasingly using websites to convey important services and information, the AHRC says it is not always easy for seniors to navigate those websites and it recommends that all government departments should audit their online information to ensure it is user-friendly and accessible '... with the view to improving accessibility and extending information platforms beyond the online medium if required'.⁵² The accessibility for seniors of information on government and business websites is further discussed later in this report.

- 2.51 Mr Andrew Connor from Digital Tasmania suggested to the Committee that to provide all seniors with equal access to government websites, government could look at the feasibility of providing a low cost internet

49 NSA Productive Ageing Centre, *Older Australians and the Internet: Bridging the Digital Divide*, September 2011, p. 13.

50 DoHA, *Submission 16*, p. 4.

51 DBCDE, *Submission 25*, p. 2.

52 AHRC, *Submission 2*, p. 9.

connection to seniors for the purpose of accessing government online services and legitimate online banking sites.⁵³

Recommendation 1

That the Australian Government investigates innovative ways of providing low cost internet connection to financially disadvantaged housebound and geographically isolated seniors who request it.

Government initiatives to engage seniors with ICT

Internet kiosks for seniors

2.52 Since 2008, around 2,000 Broadband for Seniors kiosks have been established across Australia as part of the Australian Government's National Digital Economy Strategy. At these kiosks, seniors can access free, personalised training on how to use a computer and surf the internet. Kiosks are located in community centres, retirement villages, libraries, some ex-service organisations and senior citizens clubs.⁵⁴ Mrs Bosler from the ASCCA told the Committee:

[The kiosks] are a wonderful stepping stone for seniors to become used to the basic concept of using the internet. It is that fear factor of not quite knowing where to start and whether they can manage that often is the stumbling block for older people. Those kiosks are doing a good job.⁵⁵

2.53 The NSA Productive Ageing Centre noted that the free internet kiosks address the barrier of cost of access to the internet and lack of training only in the areas that benefit from these initiatives. The report states that in 2011 only 17 per cent of 'older Australians who never or rarely use the internet' were aware of the existence of internet kiosks yet they are the kiosks' target group.⁵⁶

53 Mr Andrew Connor, Spokesperson, Digital Tasmania, *Committee Hansard*, 7 August 2012, p. 9.

54 Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), <www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/seniors/programs-services/broadband-for-seniors> viewed 8 January 2013.

55 *Committee Hansard*, 23 March 2012, p. 15.

56 NSA Productive Ageing Centre, *Older Australians and the Internet: Bridging the Digital Divide*, September 2011, pp. 9–10.

- 2.54 The AHRC is also concerned about seniors' lack of awareness of the kiosks and recommended to the Committee that a publicity campaign to alert seniors to the existence of the kiosks would be useful. The campaign should target seniors clubs, magazines, newspapers, radio and television.⁵⁷
- 2.55 The Broadband for Seniors kiosks are playing an important role in education and training of seniors in cybersafety and this is discussed in some detail in Chapter 4.

Recommendation 2

That an advertising campaign targeting seniors be devised to alert seniors around the nation to the existence and location of the Broadband for Seniors kiosks.

Digital Hubs

- 2.56 The Digital Hubs program, administered by the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (DBCDE) encourages Australians to realise the benefits of greater digital engagement in a safe and secure way. Forty communities were selected to be the first digital hubs connected to the NBN. The program provides local residents with online training and the opportunity to experience NBN-enabled services and technology.⁵⁸ Training opportunities being offered at digital hubs are discussed in Chapter 4.
- 2.57 DBCDE told the Committee that 'digital exclusion' exacerbates 'social exclusion' and the Digital Hubs program recognises that older Australians often have concerns about online safety and security and these are addressed by the program.⁵⁹
- 2.58 ALIA's Ms Little said that public libraries are using the digital hubs to provide library users with access to services which require high bandwidth and which were not previously available. Digital hubs are becoming:

... an access point for a whole range of other services, like eHealth, access to lawyers and access to educational programs overseas.⁶⁰

57 AHRC, *Submission 2*, p. 8.

58 DBCDE, *Submission 25*, p. 11.

59 DBCDE, *Submission 25*, p. 11.

60 *Committee Hansard*, 9 May 2012, p. 8.

- 2.59 In Tasmania the Committee visited a digital hub in the Pittwater Community Centre at Midway Point and observed firsthand a computer class for seniors. Committee members talked to the participants and heard how they were using their new knowledge of the internet for various projects.

ICT and healthcare

- 2.60 In May 2011 the Government released its *National Digital Strategy* which has eight 'Digital Economy Goals', one of which is *Improved Health and Aged Care*. The goal is that by 2020, 90 per cent of high priority consumers, including older Australians, can access individual health records electronically. This will include investment in telehealth consultations to provide improved remote access to specialist services for patients in rural, remote and outer metropolitan areas.⁶¹
- 2.61 The development of the Personally Controlled Electronic Health Record (PCEHR) by the National E-Health Transition Authority (NEHTA) supports the *National Digital Strategy's* goals for eHealth in Australia. Since its launch in July 2012, PCEHR allows the 'secure sharing of health information between an individual's healthcare providers, while enabling the individual to control who can access their PCEHR'.⁶²
- 2.62 CHF's Ms Bennet said that while PCEHR creates particularly exciting opportunities, consumers of all ages need to have access to the right information and know what their rights and responsibilities are if they are going to reap the full benefits.⁶³
- 2.63 Ms Susan Ryan, Age Discrimination Commissioner from the AHRC told the Committee that the Human Rights Commission is very enthusiastic about the opportunities that eHealth services will present, but it is absolutely crucial that older people 'be given tools whereby they can take advantage of this great new investment that is being made on behalf of all Australians'.⁶⁴
- 2.64 Several groups made representations to the Committee with concerns about how PCEHR would operate, particularly in relation to online safety for seniors and about the possibility of misuse of PCEHR information by third parties, such as employers or insurers. These concerns are discussed in Chapter 3.
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61 DoHA, *Submission 16*, p. 1.

62 National E-Health Transition Authority (NeHTA), *Submission 4*, p. 2.

63 *Committee Hansard*, 19 September 2012, p. 2.

64 *Committee Hansard*, 23 March 2012, p. 2.

Barriers to internet access for seniors

2.65 Research in 2011 by the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI) looked at all aspects of 'Older Australians and the Internet' including barriers to access. It found the key barriers preventing seniors from using the internet were:

- they don't know how to use the internet/lack of skills (76.5 per cent)
- they are confused by the technology (73.8 per cent), and
- they have concerns about security and viruses (63.8 per cent)⁶⁵

2.66 Respondents to CCI's research placed 'cost of access to the internet' ninth in the list of reasons why they were not using it. Of those who did identify cost as the reason for non-use, one respondent said:

To the government I would just like to tell them that I am quite sure many single pensioners out there on their own haven't got a computer or the internet for the same reason as me. It is the cost factor. If the cost factor was eliminated I would get a computer and then go back to U3A.⁶⁶

2.67 COTA NSW told the Committee that it has identified 'cost' and 'lack of knowledge' as the two main barriers which prevent some people over the age of 55 years from engaging in the digital world.⁶⁷ COTA NSW said:

Knowledge includes education and application. Before this barrier can be addressed the fear factor needs to be addressed. If the fear factor is not acknowledged and the benefits outlined, older Australians will avoid the technology and justify why they should not engage in the digital world.⁶⁸

2.68 The NSA Productive Ageing Centre also identified cost as high on the list of barriers which some older people face in relation to using the internet. The barriers the NSA identified were:

- cost of access to computers and internet connection;
- geographical and/or physical constraints, illness and/or lack of transport preventing access to internet resources;

65 Creative Workforce Program, Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI), *Older Australians and the Internet*, June 2011, p. 31.

66 Creative Workforce Program, CCI, *Older Australians and the Internet*, June 2011, p. 32.

67 COTA NSW, *Submission 39*, p. 2.

68 COTA NSW, *Submission 39*, p. 2.

- limited public access to computer facilities;
- knowledge-based barriers and lack of online skills;
- concerns regarding privacy and security of internet transactions; and
- lack of ability or confusion about the internet can 'lead to a feigned lack of interest' – seniors find it less stigmatising to have 'no interest' than to be unable to use online resources.⁶⁹

2.69 The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) told the Committee that while seniors do not have the highest prevalence of online victimisation, many have a real fear of victimisation which prevents them from accessing government or business services or hampers online social interaction with friends and family. Dr Rick Brown, Deputy Director (Research), with the AIC said:

Fear of potential victimisation may also make it difficult for senior Australians to identify and use legitimate online resources.⁷⁰

2.70 Seniors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can face the additional barrier to internet access of language. The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) told the Committee that language barriers can 'certainly act to prevent engagement with information provided online, and can reduce confidence in engaging with new technology.'⁷¹

2.71 Dr Jenny Cartwright, AFP Co-ordinator, Strategic Initiatives, told the Committee that on the ThinkUKnow website there are fact sheets on cybersafety in several different languages including Greek, Korean, Persian, Serbian, Spanish, Turkish and Vietnamese.⁷²

2.72 Many older immigrants with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are unlikely to have had significant training in the use of new technologies. Financial constraints may mean that they have limited opportunity to engage with new and emerging technologies.⁷³

2.73 However, when people with limited English are comfortable using ICT, it gives them the ability to stay in touch with friends, family and news in other places. Digital Tasmania's Mr Connor said:

69 NSA Productive Ageing Centre, *Older Australians and the Internet: Bridging the Digital Divide*, September 2011, p. 15.

70 *Committee Hansard*, 10 October 2012, p. 1.

71 Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA), *Submission 40*, p. 2.

72 *Committee Hansard*, 13 March 2013, p. 7.

73 FECCA, *Submission 40*, p. 3.

.... The internet provides marvellous opportunities for people for whom English is not their first language to connect with their communities ... my mother-in-law is from Poland and does not speak a lot of English. She can keep totally up to date through the computer and the news sites, even watching TV shows and news bulletins.⁷⁴

- 2.74 Asked whether any cybersafety information on the DBCDE website is available in languages other than English, Mr Abul Rizvi said that currently it is not but 'that is probably something we should look into'.⁷⁵

Recommendation 3

That the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy prioritise including some cybersafety information on their website in languages other than English.

- 2.75 Unfortunately, it is the people who are socially isolated, whether it is because of language or for other reasons, who would probably benefit most from having the internet in their homes. Ms Danielle Walker, Community Development Officer at Hobart City Council, said:

... often social isolation is not just about health and wellbeing; there are poverty related issues that restrict access to resources such as laptops or computers or transport to get out to centres where they are available. When the costs start to add up, coming out of your home can be more difficult, and then that starts to impinge on your health and wellbeing and mental health.⁷⁶

The cost of ICT as a barrier for seniors

- 2.76 Despite the decreasing cost of purchasing a computer and internet connection, many seniors remain unable to afford the necessary hardware and software to enable connection to the internet in their home:

.... [computer] costs are compounded by the cost of software and ongoing support required to download and regularly update

74 *Committee Hansard*, 7 August 2012, p. 5.

75 *Committee Hansard*, 12 September 2012, p. 3.

76 *Committee Hansard*, 7 August 2012, p. 4.

software (such as anti-virus and security software), and to troubleshoot technical problems.⁷⁷

2.77 According to the NSA Productive Ageing Centre, those seniors who were most likely to identify 'cost' as a barrier preventing them from using the internet or improving their internet skills are:

- females
- those receiving an income of \$30 000 or less a year
- those receiving an age pension, or
- those receiving other government support.⁷⁸

2.78 LACVI suggested to the Committee that the government could subsidise the cost of security software and devices and perhaps even access to broadband services for pensioners as a way of preventing victimisation through cybercrime because:

Many seniors are likely to try to do it 'on the cheap' to avoid spending any more than necessary on their often meagre income ...we suggest that government has a role to ensure seniors are not excluded from their use simply because they cannot afford high-cost and poorly targeted services...⁷⁹

2.79 There are programs which help seniors to acquire ICT equipment at low cost. WorkVentures told the Committee about its *Connect IT program* which supplies 'refurbished computers' to low income households. Over the last three years senior Australians have become the largest customer segment of the program. People receiving the aged pension have grown from receiving 29 per cent of the program's deliveries in 2009 to 53 per cent in 2011. 'This equates to thousands of computers being supplied to senior Australians each year.'⁸⁰

2.80 When seniors receive a computer from WorkVentures, they also receive a mousepad that is attached to an information booklet which describes what the main cyber safety risks are and how seniors can protect themselves. This package is provided by the AFP as part of the ThinkUKnow program. Dr Cartwright told the Committee that the AFP has distributed approximately 500 of these mousepad/information packages each month

77 Government of Western Australia, *Submission 19*, p. 4.

78 NSA Productive Ageing Centre, *Older Australians and the Internet: Bridging the Digital Divide*, September 2011, p. 10.

79 LACVI., *Submission 5*, p. 4.

80 WorkVentures Ltd, *Submission 33*, pp. 2-3.

since July 2011. Additionally, each new computer has a ThinkUKnow sticker on it so seniors can immediately see the ThinkUKnow website address for cybersafety information.⁸¹

2.81 WorkVentures also provides free technical support throughout the life of the refurbished computer. WorkVentures receives considerable support from Centrelink in promoting this program.⁸²

2.82 On top of the cost of the hardware, internet access adds another cost which some seniors cannot meet. The Brotherhood of St Laurence believes government policy should take account of the cost of internet access at home among senior Australians:

This is especially important as increasing numbers of services become available only on line and new essential services like e-health become the norm. As this trend gathers momentum, internet connection will become an essential service equivalent to other utilities and government policy needs to embrace its affordability by all senior Australians.⁸³

2.83 The AHRC told the Committee that in 2010 and 2011, a number of European countries codified internet rights into law. For example, Finland became the first country in the world to make broadband a legal right for every citizen in 2010.⁸⁴

Concluding comments

2.84 The Committee found that the way seniors use ICT reflects their wide diversity of skills, attitudes to and uses for the technology. Some seniors are as cyber savvy as anyone, while others are non-users or very cautious users. Seniors who do go online have quite a high level of awareness of cybersafety issues. Mr Rizvi said:

They seem to be more conscious of it and they are more aware of the things they need to do to keep themselves safe online. So we have this dual situation where on the one hand a high percentage

81 *Committee Hansard*, 13 March 2013, p. 3.

82 WorkVentures Ltd, *Submission 33*, pp. 2-3.

83 Brotherhood of St Laurence, *Submission 13*, p. 8.

84 AHRC, *Submission 2*, p. 8.

of seniors are fearful about going online but, on the other hand, those who do go online appear to be more careful about it.⁸⁵

- 2.85 Younger seniors may have used ICT in their workplace before retirement so they have ICT skills and are confident of keeping themselves cybersafe. Other seniors did not use ICT in the workplace but they have embraced the new technology and are also skilled and confident. However, many seniors left the workforce before the ICT revolution and they are either non-users or tentative users because they lack knowledge and skills and/or because they are fearful of going online, knowing there are risks but not feeling confident to manage those risks.
- 2.86 The fears that many seniors have about cybersafety are reasonable. The evidence shows that seniors are being specifically targeted by scams and 'phishing' because they have access to life savings and superannuation investment funds making them primary targets for cybercrime.⁸⁶
- 2.87 Overwhelmingly, the Committee heard that the only way that seniors who are afraid to go online will overcome their fears is by providing appropriate and accessible education and training. Cybersafety education and training for seniors is discussed in Chapter 4 of this report.

85 Mr Rizvi, DBCDE, *Committee Hansard*, 12 September 2012, p. 2.

86 Mrs Karen Harfield, Executive Director, Fusion, Target Development and Performance, Australian Crime Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 15 August 2012, p. 1.