



Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety

Submission to the inquiry into the
cybersafety needs of senior Australians

MARCH 2012

Overview

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety (the Committee) inquiry into the cybersafety needs of senior Australians.

Increasing numbers of senior Australians are becoming active participants in the digital economy and the speed, mobility and ubiquity of internet access are growing. Complementing this growth and engagement in the digital economy is a recognition that participants need to have the right mix of skills and digital literacy to be active, responsible and fully engaged digital citizens. However, the specific cybersafety needs of senior Australians are only partially understood and there is a limited range of measures which target these. The Committee's inquiry will therefore make an important contribution to meeting the cybersafety needs of senior Australians and equipping them to be digital citizens.

The ACMA has been researching cyber issues and delivering cyber-related education programs for more than ten years. Its remit stems from the Online Content Scheme in the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*. Under the scheme, the ACMA investigates complaints about prohibited online content and, with the internet industry, facilitates a co-regulatory approach to internet regulation through the development, registration and enforcement of industry codes of practice. The scheme also assigns the ACMA the important functions of:

- conducting and/or coordinating community education programs about the internet, under which the ACMA has delivered a broad range of cyber education and awareness programs directed at children, parents, carers, teachers and librarians; and
- commissioning and conducting research into the way the Australian community uses online services, in response to which the ACMA has developed a Digital Media Literacy Research program and undertaken other research on Australian families' use of the internet.

Details of the ACMA's current cyber-education programs and resources are set out in Attachment A.

Many of these programs were in place when the ACMA provided its July 2010 submission to the Committee's inquiry into the safety of children and young people on the internet. A number of further initiatives have been launched since that time. The ACMA has also formally responded to the Government's Cyber White Paper public discussion process, *Connecting with Confidence: Australia's Digital Future* and led recent debate about the impact of convergence on communications and media regulation through its *Broken Concepts*¹ and *Enduring Concepts*² papers.

This submission focuses on the ACMA's considerable experience in the research, development, delivery and evaluation of effective cyber-education programs. The ACMA's approach to program development presents a credible and proven blueprint, readily adaptable to meet the particular

¹ ACMA, *Broken Concepts: The Australian Communications legislative landscape*, <http://engage.acma.gov.au/broken-concepts/>, October 2011.

² ACMA, *Enduring Concepts: Communications and Media in Australia*, <http://engage.acma.gov.au/enduring-concepts/>, October 2011.

cyber-education needs of senior Australians. Each of the following four sections addresses the inquiry's terms of reference.

The ACMA considers this inquiry an important initiative in ensuring all Australians can realise the benefits of the digital economy. It is well placed to assist the Committee in its deliberations on this important subject and would welcome opportunities to provide further information on its thinking, research and programs.

a) The nature, prevalence and level of cybersafety risks and threats experienced by senior Australians

The benefits of the internet to economies and societies are widely acknowledged. However, there has long been an awareness that with these benefits come risks which need to be managed.

As greater numbers of older Australians go online, they face the same challenges, gain similar benefits and encounter the same risks as other participants in the digital economy. The risks this group faces are spread across the cyber spectrum and may include online fraud and deception (such as 'romance' scams and phishing emails), theft of personal information and exposure to offensive and illegal material.

Senior Australians are a diffuse group with differing skills, education and life experiences and some may have not had exposure to digital technologies through education or the workplace. This may in turn limit their capacities to manage certain online risks.

The ACMA recognises the limited availability of specific, credible and detailed research into online risks and threats unique to older Australians. An important element in developing successful cyber-education campaigns aimed at senior Australians will be detailed exploration and identification of these risks and any specific groups of senior Australians who may be particularly vulnerable. This would inform consideration of the best methods to manage these risks and the most appropriate channels to inform, educate and empower senior Australians.

The ACMA has, however, conducted extensive research into cybersafety risks and threats faced by young people in the digital economy. A detailed discussion of online threats and risks facing the community generally is provided in the ACMA's three-year program of research into cybersafety initiatives around the world aimed at protecting both young people and adults who access content on the internet. The three reports, [Online risk and safety in the digital economy](#)³, published in February 2008, April 2009 and February 2010, explore a wide range of Australian and international measures that can be used to mitigate online risk and promote online safety. This research explores not only the nature and prevalence of the risks facing young people, but also international best practice across government, industry and the community sector, and a range of analytical tools which can be used to consider and address online risks. These tools have been used by the ACMA in the development and delivery of its Cybersmart programs. This approach would provide a sound methodology for the development of a similar research program for the specific cyber safeguard needs of senior Australians.

³ See http://www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=PC_311304 to access the reports.

b) *The impact and implications of those risks and threats on access to and use of information and communication technologies by senior Australians*

Recent research by the ACMA and others provides high level information on and analysis of the impact and implications of cybersafety risks and threats relevant to senior Australians. Relevant research findings which provide a context for understanding cybersafety risks and threats for senior Australians include:

- an increase in overall internet participation by senior Australians: recent Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data⁴ showed the largest increase in the proportion of people accessing the internet, was in the 55-64 years old age group - up from 63 per cent in 2008-09 to 71 per cent in 2010-11
- a marked difference in online participation between two age groups: the 55-64 years old and the 65 years and over, with those aged 65 years and over having a much lower participation level or access to internet services
- a varied range of reasons for use of the internet, with a lesser likelihood to use transactional or interactive services when compare to younger users of the internet
- the main barriers to senior Australians' use of the internet are lack of skills and confidence, motivation, and a different tempo and method of learning new skills and picking up new services.

These findings are covered in more detail below.

Differing levels of online participation

The ACMA refers the Committee to recent ABS research⁵ pointing to differing levels of online participation in the senior Australians demographic. While the overall number of senior Australians accessing the internet is high, the level of access is not homogenous, or spread evenly across this group. Results from the ABS Multipurpose Household survey (MPHS) for the period July 2010 to June 2011, showed:

- 71 per cent of Australians aged 55 to 64 years old reported accessing the internet in the last 12 months
- the number of Australians aged 65 and over accessing the internet is much lower, with 37 per cent going online in the last 12 months.

This compares with a total of 79 per cent of Australians aged 15 years and over accessing the internet.

ABS data also shows internet access among senior Australians varies across gender, employment, location and education level.

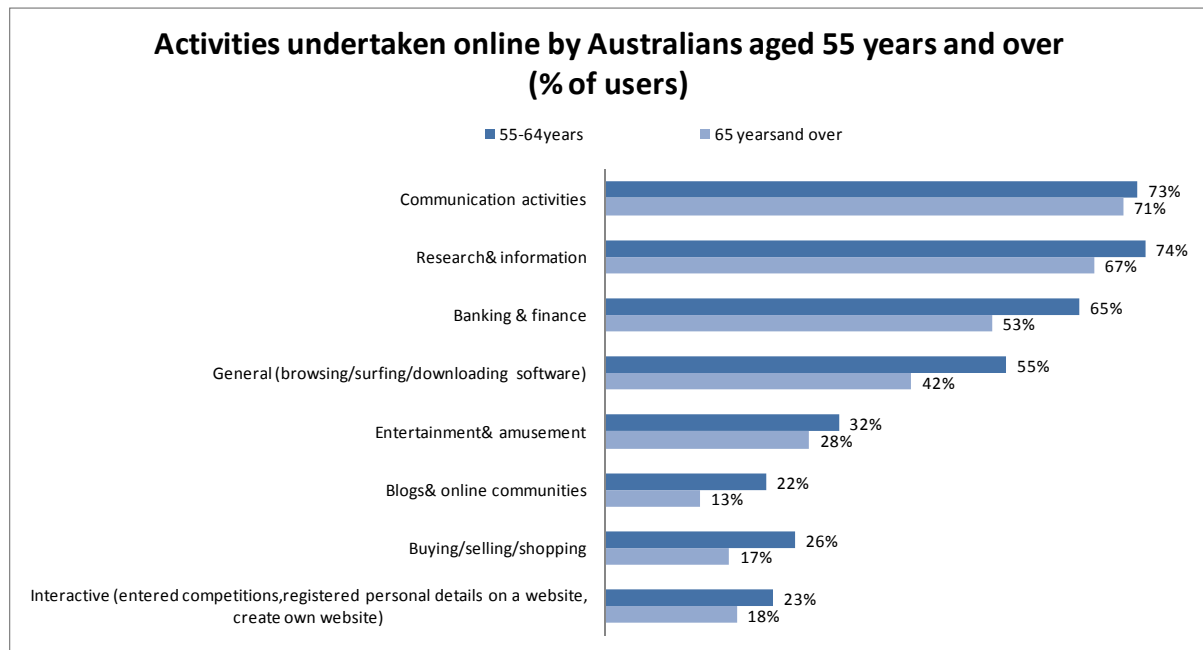
⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Household Use of Information Technology, Australia, 2010-11*, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/8146.0Main%20Features12010-11?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=8146.0&issue=2010-11&num=&view=> December 2011.

⁵ *ibid*

Varying reasons for engaging with the digital economy

[Research published by the ACMA](#)⁶ in 2010 examined how and why senior Australians were accessing the internet. This research found Australians aged 55 and over were most likely to use the internet for communications activities and for research and information; and less likely than Australians under 55 to participate in blogs and online communities, buying/selling/shopping online, or other interactive purposes. See Figure One below.

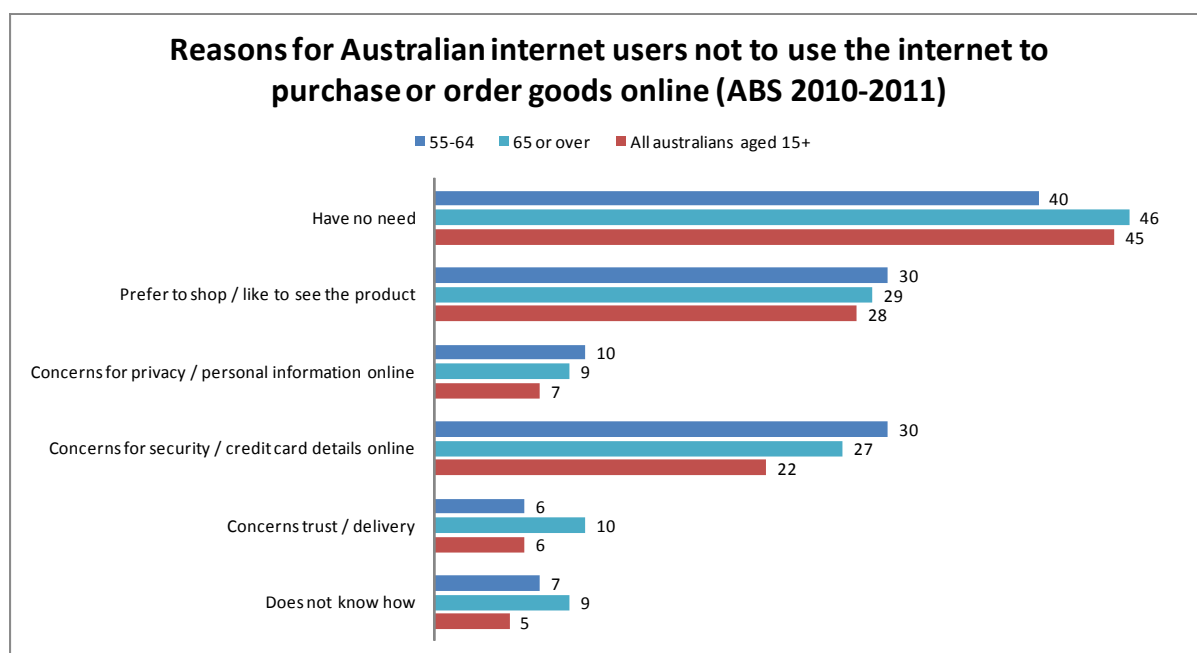
Figure One: Activities undertaken online by Australians aged 55 years and over (ACMA 2010)



Recent ABS data (MPHS survey July 2010 to June 2011) also captured the main reasons for senior Australians not using the internet for online transactions. Represented in Figure Two below, the three main reasons for older users of the internet not making online transactions are: having no need, a preference for shopping and seeing the product, and security concerns. It is apparent from this data that while concerns relating to privacy and lack of skills are important, they do not appear to be main factors for lack of use of the internet for transactions.

⁶ ACMA, *Communications report 2009-10 series. Report 1 –Australia in the digital economy: The shift to the online environment*, http://www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=PC_312356, November 2011.

Figure Two: Reasons for not using the internet to purchase or order goods online



One of the main drivers of being confident, digitally literate citizens is the use of, and familiarity with information and communication technologies in the school or workplace. The Committee is referred to a [2009 audit by the ACMA](#)⁷ of existing Commonwealth, State and territory policies and programs that aim to promote and increase levels of digital media literacy (including those targeting senior Australians). The audit provides useful information on existing programs and initiatives and areas where future effort can be concentrated.

Research published in June 2011 by the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI), [Older Australians and the internet](#)⁸ found the reasons senior Australians are interested in using online communication technologies varied greatly from person to person. These include communicating with friends, making bookings, looking up timetables, making cheap phone calls, researching health topics and general searching.

Barriers to full participation in the digital economy

The CCI research *Older Australians and internet* also found that over half of the senior Australians surveyed who were interested in using the internet were facing a range of barriers preventing them from doing so⁹. Barriers identified in the study included:

- lack of skills and knowledge about which computer to buy and technology to embrace
- concerns about security and viruses and a lack of support

⁷ ACMA, *Audit of Australian digital media literacy programs*, http://www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=PC_311472#indicators, July 2009.

⁸ Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (2011), *Older Australians and the Internet*, <http://www.cci.edu.au/sites/default/files/shaukka/Older%20Australians%20and%20the%20Internet%20report%20FINAL.pdf>, June 2011.

⁹ The methodology for this study was a quantitative survey of 149 members of National Seniors Australia.

- high costs
- not wanting to burden their friends or family by asking for help and fear of breaking the computer.

Need for targeted research

While some previous research suggests particular factors underpinning senior Australians' use of and attitudes towards digital technologies, further targeted research is required to understand the specific problems faced by older Australians and the impact those have on their participation in the digital economy. It will be important to ensure this research not only examines how senior Australians engage with the online environment, but also identifies the best ways and strategies to help this group mitigate risk and threats, while maximising the benefits of participation in the digital economy. Understanding and increasing senior Australians' levels of participation in the digital economy will require consideration of their perceptions of both the risks and benefits of the digital economy. Research indicates that these benefits are not clear to many older Australians, nor are they fully aware of the internet's potential.

A critical component of this research will be understanding how and where to direct awareness and education initiatives for senior Australians. The ACMA has experience in conducting this type of research and refers the Committee to its research report, [*Cybersmart Parents: Connecting parents to cybersafety resources*](#)¹⁰. This study examined parents' need for cybersafety information, including what topics they would like more information on, and the format they would like to receive it in. This study is an important tool that helps the ACMA plan and deliver cybersafety information resources to parents in their preferred format and delivery channel.

The ACMA would be pleased to provide further information to the Committee on its research program and objectives and how it provides a useful template for the development of a similar program targeted at senior Australians.

¹⁰ ACMA, *Cybersmart Parents: Connecting parents to cybersafety resources*, http://www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=PC_311473#pubs, July 2010.

c) The adequacy and effectiveness of current government and industry initiatives to respond to those threats, including education initiatives aimed at senior Australians

To date, internet safety measures have been targeted at the needs of children and adults generally and the ACMA notes the comparatively limited number of cyber-education initiatives targeted specifically at senior Australians. This situation is not unique to Australia. A [recent study commissioned by the ACMA](#) surveyed international cybersecurity awareness raising and educational initiatives in 11 jurisdictions.¹¹ Out of the 68 international campaigns examined in the study, none focused on seniors solely and only eight campaigns (or 12 per cent) included information tailored for senior consumers.

While this evidence points to a deliberate focus by government and industry on the cybersafety needs of children, their families and schools, it would be desirable to gain a better understanding of the cybersafety needs of senior Australians and deliver targeted education programs to meet these needs.

Recent research from the ACMA points to a general appetite of all internet users, including senior Australians, to learn new digital skills and receive information on how to use the internet safely. The ACMA draws the Committee's attention to its research study, [Digital Australians](#)¹² which found:

- 32 per cent of all online Australians were interested in learning more about asking a website to remove content that breached consumers' privacy;
- 38 per cent were interested in learning more about managing personal information online
- 36 per cent expressed an interest in learning how to use the internet safely.

The ACMA's current Cybersmart programs do contain elements and advice that partially address the needs of senior Australians – both their personal, individual cybersafety needs through general awareness raising and their needs as carers for younger Australians.

Generally, Cybersmart programs promote the importance of whole communities working together to develop respectful digital experiences for the safety of young people through to senior members of the community. A recent example highlights how this general approach can also be used to tailor specific cybersafety advice for senior Australians in their roles as carers of younger people. In 2012 the ACMA co-ordinated Australian participation in the annual international event Safer Internet Day. Held on 7 February, the theme for the 2012 Safer Internet Day was 'Connecting generations and educating each other'. This presented an excellent opportunity for the ACMA to create engaging, tailored and informative actions and advice for grandparents¹³ to encourage them to learn new skills and connect with other generations.

¹¹ ACMA, *An overview of international cyber-security awareness raising and educational initiatives*. Research report commissioned by the Australian Communications and Media Authority, http://www.acma.gov.au/webwr/assets/main/lib310665/galexia_report-overview_intnl_cybersecurity_awareness.pdf, May 2011.

¹² ACMA, *Digital Australians – Expectations about media content in a converging media environment*, http://www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=PC_410199, October 2011.

¹³ For more information see:

<http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/Safer%20Internet%20Day%202012/Safer%20Internet%20Day%202012%20-%20Actions%20for%20Grandparents.aspx>

Cybersmart Outreach

As seniors in the online environment interact with rapidly evolving technology, especially social networking sites, the Cybersmart Outreach presentations provide access to critical information via parent and carer presentations on risks including online scams, malware, hacking and identity theft. This information is supported by practical steps to take with privacy and parental controls, reporting mechanisms, passwords and security software, to assist in recognising and minimising these risks.

In acknowledging that young people are often the expert users of technology, presentations encourage young Australians to pass on their user knowledge and practices to older members of their family to ensure safety of their parents and grandparents in online environments. This not only affirms positive online practices and experiences of senior community members, but strengthens a young person's own knowledge (through the necessity for clear communication skills and reinforcement of their digital citizenship skills) and incidentally promotes close and respectful inter-generational family relationships.

d) Best practice safeguards, and any possible changes to Australian law, policy or practice that will strengthen the cybersafety of senior Australians

The nature of the online environment is such that some risks may not be able to be addressed through regulation. Successful mitigation of many online risks requires equipping online users with the knowledge, skills and behaviours which enable them navigate the online environment with safety. Development of these attributes requires robust, tailored and effective education programs.

The ACMA's approach to cyber-related education programs is supported by research, evaluation and global sharing of information and resources. A more detailed discussion of the ACMA approach to program development is outlined at Attachment B.

The [ACMA considers](#)¹⁴ it is important that cyber-education programs, including those targeting senior Australians:

- be built on a firm evidence base in order to properly identify and scope the issues that need to be addressed, and to ensure that resources target the right audiences in the most effective manner possible. Research on the specific cybersafety needs of senior Australians is therefore required, to inform development of appropriate education strategies;
- provide resources that adhere to strong education and learning principles, and that meet the specific needs of senior Australians allowing a mix of theoretical and practical activities to introduce and explore concepts, and to 'rehearse' skills and behaviours in a safe environment;
- ensure that resource development includes consultation and testing with the relevant audience group as well as with subject matter experts;
- be flexible, to allow adaptation in a rapidly changing technological environment and to quickly address emerging issues, particularly those technologies that are preferred by senior Australians;
- be evaluated at all stages of development and implementation to ensure initiatives are driving behavioural change in senior Australians and increasing their participation in the digital economy;
- provide multiple approaches, including:
 - information to raise awareness about particular issues and risks, as well as the benefits of the digital economy
 - tools and other mechanisms of support to assist in dealing with online risks,
 - comprehensive and well-structured education programs to build skills and resilience.

¹⁴ ACMA, *Developments in internet filtering technologies and other measures for promoting online safety. Second Annual Report to the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy*, http://www.acma.gov.au/webwr/_assets/main/lib310554/developments_in_internet_filters_2ndreport.pdf, April 2009.

- effectively reach as wide an audience as possible using a diverse range of delivery channels, including new stakeholders and 'non-traditional' cyber-education delivery channels;
- utilise a mix of delivery styles suited to the particular needs of the audience being targeted; including face-to-face delivery, utilising topics that are of interest to seniors and provide opportunities for skills rehearsal;
- provide concrete actions and steps that users can take to improve their online safety and security, as opposed to high level 'dos' and 'don'ts' which can be difficult for users to implement.

The ACMA's proven and practical program development approach is a tested strategy that could be utilised in the evolution of education initiatives that strengthen the cybersafety of senior Australians and promote responsible and resilient digital citizens in this demographic.

The ACMA's Outreach format – involving face-to-face presentations in a group environment – is ideally suited to informing senior Australians about the risks and benefits of the digital economy. While senior Australians' use of digital technologies is growing at a rapid rate, a significant proportion of this group are not yet using digital technologies regularly, or are using them to only a limited extent. An important function of these activities would be explanation of the benefits of participating in the digital economy, as well as providing relevant skills and knowledge. While the content and style of these presentations would be tailored to a senior audience, the principles underlying their development could be applied to ensuring that they are effective for this audience.

A significant element of the ACMA's Cybersmart program is collaboration with industry, other levels of government and the non-government sector in Australia and internationally on the development and delivery of the program. The ACMA would recommend a similar collaborative approach in the development of cyber-education indicatives for senior Australians, noting there would be a need to engage with existing and new stakeholders and partners to reach this audience effectively.