

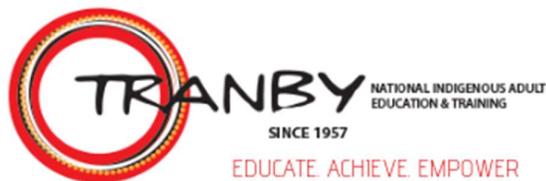
Response to the Digital Inclusion Indigenous Plan

By

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Education and Training

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We would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the Gadigal people who are traditional custodians of the land on which we stand. We would also like to pay respect to the Elders past and present of the Eora nation and extend that respect to the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people present at Tranby.



Background on Tranby

Established in 1957, Tranby is Australia's oldest not-for-profit independent Indigenous education provider. Tranby is a special place. It is a place where people gather not only to learn but to find their power. We are not a standard vocational college. Tranby has a proud 60-year history as a national centre for Indigenous education, community development and social action. Our vocational education and training courses are designed to increase employment and career pathways, as well as provide skills for Aboriginal organisations and communities to be self-managed, self-sufficient and sustainable.

Tranby National Indigenous Adult Education and Training ('Tranby') is located in Glebe, Sydney. The organisation is a function of the Co-operative for Aborigines Limited and has been a pioneer in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adult education, training, and social action for decades.

Tranby, as a nationally registered training organisation (RTO), offers units of competency, full VET qualifications, and non-accredited skill development initiatives to Indigenous adults from across Australia.

Courses at Tranby have changed over time from trade-based skills to governance and legal advocacy. Most importantly, Tranby offers these qualifications in a unique, culturally supportive environment.

Thousands of students have graduated from this iconic Indigenous organisation and returned to their communities empowered with newfound skills and a drive for excellence and self-determination.

In 2020, at the start of the COVID outbreak, Tranby pivoted to providing courses online. Tranby has over the years had to adapt to constantly changing circumstances. Tranby's move to online learning reduced the time lost by students caused by the inability to attend face to face courses. Tranby gained valuable experience about the specialised needs of Indigenous adult learners, the difficulties faced by students learning in a home environment, unreliable internet access and in some cases no access to digital devices suitable for online learning. Tranby also assisted its students to make the most of the opportunities that arose when online courses became available to students who had not been able to attend face to face classes.

During these changing times Tranby continued to be responsive to the needs of community, potential students and industry and also attract funding support from government and philanthropists. Our brand reflects Tranby's fresh, contemporary direction yet still encompasses our rich cultural history and esteemed core values.

Please see Tranby's response to the Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan Discussion Paper below.

1. Questions on access

1.1 What are the major factors that reduce digital access for Indigenous Australians? Are they different in remote, regional and urban areas?

The major factors reducing digital access for Tranby National Indigenous Adult Education & Training (Tranby) online Indigenous adult learners are:

- a. no internet coverage, that is no signal, in some remote and regional areas;
- b. Poor internet coverage with a weak signal that drops in and out causing screens to freeze during lessons, the inability to download course materials and videos and podcasts and buffering this is a problem in all areas, however it is most common in remote and regional areas. It is still a problem in urban areas.

1.2 Whilst coverage of telecommunications services and digital connectivity has improved, the access gap has widened. What are the barriers to accessing existing telecommunications and digital services for Indigenous Australians?

The barriers to accessing existing telecommunications and digital services for Tranby online Indigenous adult learners are:

- a. when students enrol they often do not have access to a laptop or PC or alternatively there is only one device available for the entire family;
- b. there may not be a wifi connection to their home;
- c. if there is a wifi connection to the home their data package may not be sufficient to download and complete the Tranby course requirements;
- d. when students access learning materials on their mobile phones, their data package is often insufficient to maintain connection and download course content.

1.3 Are there issues in connecting to or using available satellite services in regional and remote areas? Are there issues with satellite latency?

Tranby understands this is a problem for some students. Apart from the poor quality of satellite services the cost is prohibitive for Indigenous students unless there is specific support and provision of services Indigenous adult learners. Tranby's focus is on Indigenous adult education. In remote and regional areas where there is no internet coverage the only other method of connecting to the internet is via satellite.

Satellite phones work on a line of sight so they only work outdoors, when the weather is reasonably clear and there are no surrounding obstructions to interrupt the signal.

Where there are adults and children learning online without internet coverage, they need to access satellite dishes on their homes or local community facilities. We have discussed the issue with Tauondi Aboriginal College and we agreed it is

very difficult to deliver live online classes using satellite links because of buffering and the signal dropping out. There has been more success with pre-recorded material because students can access the recording when the link is more reliable.

We are concerned about the reliance on pre-recorded material because the students cannot interact with the teacher and other students. Students cannot ask questions or ask for clarification or learn from other students.

Online learning has moved to the student being provided with information to teach themselves using available resources and then being assessed on what they have taught themselves.

Online and interactive yarning circles with guest speakers and Community Elders are essential to the online learning experience and to support Indigenous students. Accessing this is difficult for many Indigenous students in rural and remote areas.

1.4 Is there a preference for how telecommunications services are accessed, for example at the community level or at the individual premise level? If so, why?

Tranby online Indigenous adult learners predominantly have their lessons delivered online and most access their lessons from home if they have internet access. They should also have an option to access their online lessons at a community facility if the facility has a quiet space where they can work. Some Tranby online Indigenous adult learners have homes that are noisy or crowded, so, subject to their caring responsibilities, a quiet space to work online as an alternative would be welcome.

If the only service available is a satellite service, at present, this would normally need to be accessed at a community hub due to the cost of satellite to the home.

1.5 Are there initiatives that have successfully addressed access issues? Why were they successful?

Tranby provides our online Indigenous adult learners undertaking Certificate IV or Diploma level courses with:

- an Ipad or other suitable digital device;
- a wifi dongle;
- a prepaid data package sufficient to complete their course requirements.

Overall, we believe this approach has been reasonably successful. Tranby has not held face to face classes since the start of the pandemic. The provision of devices, wifi access dongles and data package has allowed many students to undertake courses where this would otherwise not be possible. Online learning is difficult and adult students have to cope with many household distractions,

Zoom meeting fatigue and the limited ability to connect on a personal level with other students and staff. It is not an ideal learning experience but at the present time it is the only option.

Tranby cannot fix problems of the internet availability or quality, however, we have done our best to address digital access issues on short notice and with limited funding.

1.6 Are there other initiatives that could address barriers to access?

Tranby believes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students should, in the short term, be provided with:

Infants and Primary School Students

- an Ipad for all infants and primary school students that could be kept for them at the school – we assume the school has wifi or satellite connections.

High School Students and Adult Learners undertaking Certificate or Diploma Courses

- 2 in 1 laptop for use at home and school;
- a wifi dongle;
- a prepaid data package sufficient to complete their course requirements.

The provision of devices, dongles and data packages should be provided for students enrolled in micro-credentials subjects based on the nature of the course.

Tranby acknowledges that they may need to continue to provide some courses online post-COVID. Online learning is not suitable for students undertaking Foundation Skill Certificate I and II as they lack the literacy skills to use a keyboard. Foundation skills for Indigenous adult learners (and non-Indigenous adult learners) need to be taught in a face-to-face small group environment. Tranby is researching the possibility of free access to the Tranby classes online so students would only need to log in to the relevant Tranby class using a Tranby portal. This would allow Tranby's Indigenous adult learners to complete their learning without the need to use their own data package. It would also mean the Tranby provided data package would no longer be needed. The Tranby provided data package is not limited to accessing Tranby courses and whilst it has not been an issue to date we are well aware it may become a problem in the future. The most significant issue relating to free data access for Tranby students is the cost to Tranby of providing this free teaching service. We believe the cost is manageable in areas where there is an existing internet service. The cost of free access for students becomes more problematic if students need to access Tranby classes and teaching resources using satellite services.

Additional Recommendations: Tranby recommends:

Recommendation 1.

That NIAA work with the Department of Communications and NBN Co to develop a map of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities outside capital cities and large towns overlaid that has an overlay of a map of internet coverage (that is, which areas are satellite only or poor quality NBN) and internet quality of NBN and Sky Muster services in those areas.

We understand NBN Co's Sky Muster satellite services will cover most if not all remote and regional areas using satellite phones and line of sight. Tranby notes that satellite data packages are metered and the cost is over \$1 per minute.

Recommendation 2.

Funding should then be provided so that internet service providers construct reliable cost-effective internet infrastructure so that coverage can be made available, as far as possible, to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. NBN Co's Sky Muster should be engaged to install one or more satellite dishes in all remote Indigenous communities, together with regular and emergency maintenance and support services.

Recommendation 3.

The Commonwealth should provide free wifi access, supported by adequate well maintained internet infrastructure to remote and regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Recommendation 4.

The goal over time should be that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, over time, have free reliable well maintained, home internet access to support child and adult learners and for banking, emergency services and telehealth.

Recommendation 5??

That Indigenous Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) members of the Alliance of First Nations Independent Education & Training Providers (the Alliance) are funded to provide appropriate adult educational and training opportunities within the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system. This will promote online access to culturally safe and inclusive learning environments.

These recommendations are only worthwhile if the Commonwealth provides long term funding for asset maintenance and renewals for infrastructure in remote and regional areas. Remote and regional areas are littered with examples of funding being spent on new infrastructure and assets but because there is no guaranteed ongoing budget or workforce to maintain these assets they deteriorate quickly, fall into disrepair and are decommissioned.

2. Questions on affordability

2.1 What are the major factors that affect digital affordability for Indigenous Australians?

Are they different in remote, regional and urban areas?

2.1.1 The major factors affecting digital affordability are:

- a. The cost of post-paid mobile phone services and packages and the uncertainty about monthly charges when they exceed the agreed package;
- b. The higher cost of prepaid mobile phone services and the services being cut off once the package is exhausted;
- c. The propensity of Indigenous Australians to dispose of prepaid phones when the data package is exhausted and purchase a new prepaid phone;
- d. The lack of home internet wifi services that are cheaper than mobile phones and can be used to connect phones to the wifi using the home data packages. Wifi to the home is often more unreliable than mobile phone services.

2.1.2 The differences between remote, regional and urban costs are:

- a. Urban digital costs are in some circumstances lower because it is more likely that the home is connected to cost effective wifi services. This lowers the cost of online education services and is a more effective learning experience than trying to conduct lessons using mobile phones.
- b. regional costs for Indigenous adult learners are often higher due to the reduced likelihood of wifi to the home. Indigenous Adult learners are more likely to have wifi access at local community facilities, however these facilities are often not ideal due to limited hours of access and to PCs and space limitations during COVID restrictions.

Tranby has addressed these costs for Certificate and Diploma students by providing Ipads, dongles and data packages when required. At present Tranby does not provide devices and packages for micro-credential courses, although this is under discussion where the micro-credential courses maybe recognised in the future for certificate courses.

- c. Remote Indigenous adult learners have the highest cost per student. We note again that adult literacy is a prerequisite for digital literacy and keyboard skills. On the latest statistics, 70% of Indigenous adults in remote areas are functionally illiterate. Whilst we do not have access to the breakdown of literacy on a male/female/other basis we believe male Indigenous adults are anecdotally more likely to lack literacy skills than female Indigenous adults. Indigenous adult foundation skills need to be taught face to face in a small group environment to build confidence and self-esteem in a culturally safe learning environment – these people after all are the people that the Western education system failed to educate.

Remote Indigenous communities are more likely to only have access to satellite services. The cost of satellite connections are high on a monthly basis and data packages are over \$1 per minute.

Without free or very low-cost satellite and data packages Indigenous adult learners will not be able to complete online education. We understand that some community facilities and schools provide free access to satellite services but for practical purposes Indigenous adult learners don't have easy reliable access to satellite services.

2.2 How can affordability be improved for Indigenous Australians living in urban, regional and remote areas to ensure equitable outcomes?

Tranby is researching the possibility of free access to the Tranby classes online so students would only need to log in to the relevant Tranby class using a Tranby portal. This would allow Tranby's Indigenous adult learners to complete their learning without the need to use their own data package. It would also mean the Tranby provided data package would no longer be needed. The Tranby provided data package is not limited to accessing Tranby courses and whilst it has not been an issue to date we are well aware it may become a problem in the future.

The most significant issue relating to free data access for Tranby students is the cost to Tranby of providing this free teaching service. We believe the cost is manageable in areas where there is an existing internet service. The cost of free access for students becomes more problematic if students need to access Tranby classes and teaching resources using satellite services.

2.3 Are there initiatives that have successfully addressed issues? Why were they successful?

Tranby Indigenous Adult Learners undertaking Certificate or Diploma Courses during COVID have been provided where necessary with:

- an Ipad;
- a wifi dongle;
- a prepaid data package sufficient to complete their course requirements.

This has been a short-term success so that students could continue their course. Tranby usually provides hard copy materials for use in the Tranby classrooms. Tranby believes that the online courses have been reasonably successful and will review how to improve student access to online classroom subject to ongoing funding constraints.

3. Questions on digital ability

3.1 What are the major factors that affect digital ability, including attitude and confidence, for Indigenous Australians? Are they different in remote, regional and urban areas?

The major factors affecting digital ability in remote areas from our experience are:

- a. Based on anecdotal evidence digital literacy is poorer for Indigenous adults in remote areas who are 25 years and older. Whilst to our knowledge, there has been no research or studies done on why this appears to be the case, we anticipate it is because older adults are less likely to be literate and mobile phones only became cheap and ubiquitous in the past 10 -15 years;
- b. Adults and children rely on mobile phones. Mobile phones have limited capacity to support online learning.
- c. Older adults with low levels of literacy and digital skills rely on children and younger adults for support using online devices. This creates problems with online banking security.

3.2 What is needed to encourage greater understanding and use of digital technologies?

The greatest barrier to understanding and use of digital technologies is low levels of literacy. Someone who is not functionally literate cannot use a keyboard. Adults over the age of 25 did not have access to computers when they attended school. Indigenous adults in remote areas at the present time and in the past do not have access to a high school education because remote schools only provide education to grade 6. If students in remote area which to go to high school under most circumstances they need to attend a boarding school from Year 7 when they are 12 or 13 years of age.

Indigenous adults are often not confident in their use of digital technologies and often rely on children or other adults to complete online forms, banking or to assist them with telehealth.

Indigenous adults often feel uncomfortable in a learning environment due to poor education experiences that have destroyed their confidence and self-esteem.

3.3 How can digital ability be improved for Indigenous Australians living in urban, regional and remote areas?

If the goal is to develop confident adult learners the best opportunity for success is to allow them to learn in a culturally sensitive and appropriate environment. In many cases where an adult student lacks literacy and numeracy skills the first step is to improve their confidence that they are able

to learn to read and write regardless of their poor school experience or visual reading issues such as dyslexia.

If literacy and numeracy is not a significant problem, it is again important to work to develop confidence with Indigenous adult learners one on one or in small non-judgemental groups. Shame and embarrassment in front others is a serious problem. The most common fallback position is often it is just easier for them to get someone else to do it for them.

3.4 Are there initiatives, including international initiatives, that have successfully addressed digital ability issues or improving digital skills, particularly for older Indigenous Australians, and why were they successful?

Whilst voice recognition may be one way forward the technology at the present time is not sophisticated enough to result in major break throughs. Voice recognition still requires a degree of key board skills.

3.5 What organisations or agencies could support and improve digital ability levels?

Tauondi Aboriginal College in South Australia has foundation skills on scope and only accepts Indigenous students on campus.

3.6 What is needed to help address online safety issues experienced by Indigenous Australians?

Tranby has been discussing an online portal owned by Indigenous Australians to provide safe online content and Indigenous administrators to review online discussion groups. The aim would be to provide free access to the portal and online learning environment.

Sky Muster already limits streaming services such as Netflix. Elders in remote communities are more likely to approve limited internet access with access to specific sites.

4. Questions on data

4.1 Are there any additional existing data sources regarding Indigenous digital inclusion or other data sources that are being used to measure Indigenous digital inclusion?

Not known. We note the last time significant research and a report was undertaken on Indigenous digital inclusion was 5 years ago. We recommend new research be undertaken in 2022-2023.

4.2 What data needs to be captured for the ongoing measurement of Indigenous digital inclusion?

Data needs to be broken down based on geographic area, see our recommendations above. It needs to be further broken down by literacy, numeracy levels and gender.

Crucial data need to be collected on areas where English is a second or third language.

4.3 How can data on Indigenous digital inclusion be better captured and utilised?

We note the last time significant research, and a report was undertaken on Indigenous digital inclusion was 5 years ago. We recommend new research be undertaken in 2022-2023.

There are a number of data capture companies such as Smartr. These companies should be able to capture the data required.

4.4 What could be data proxies in the absence of specific data sources on digital inclusion?

Not known