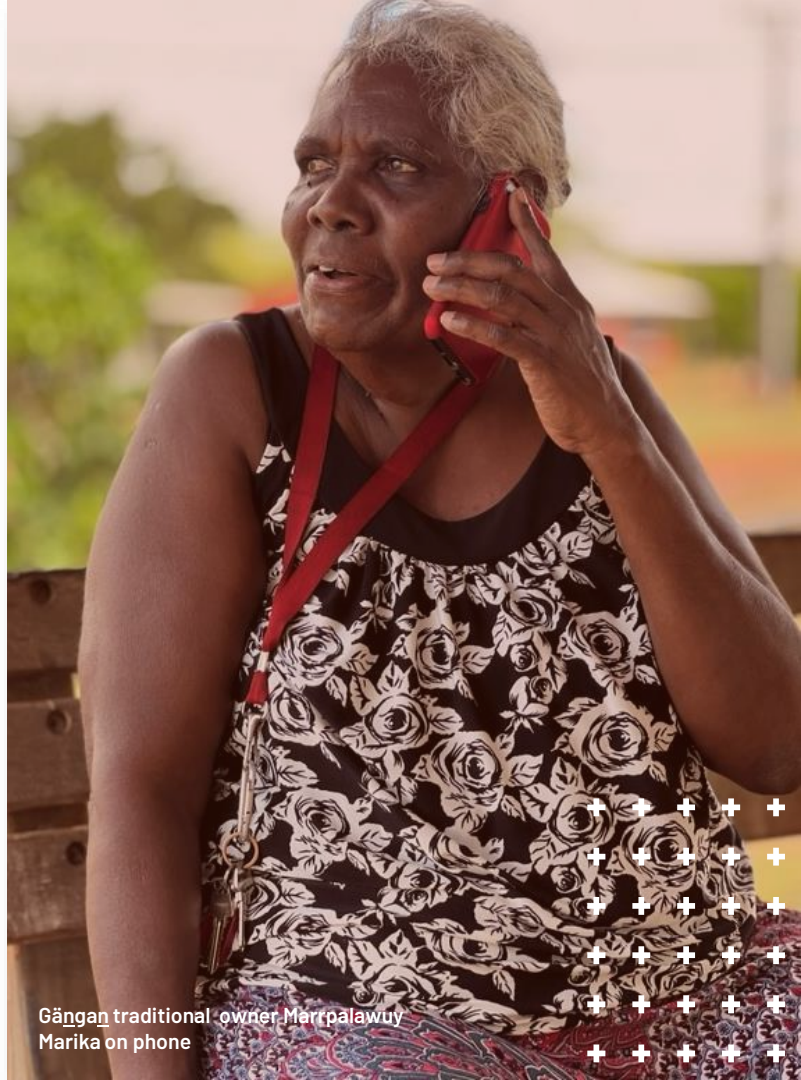# REGULATING TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR REMOTE FIRST NATIONS CONSUMERS

## Learnings from the Mapping the Digital Gap research

**Presenter:**
Dr Daniel Featherstone, RMIT University

*ACCC/ AER Regulatory Conference 3 August 2023*

Gäṉgaṉ traditional owner Marrpalawuy Marika on phone

# CLOSING THE GAP TARGET 17

**By 2026, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equal levels of digital inclusion**

Data collection needed to track key measures:

○ Relative levels of digital inclusion

○ % households with phone and internet access

○ % First Nations people using internet

○ Frequency of online service use

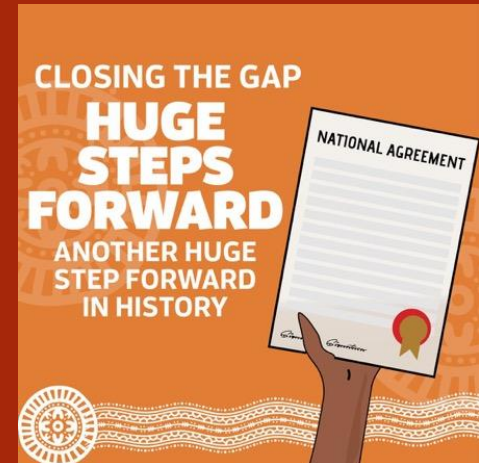○ Access to First Nations media and news services

# MAPPING THE DIGITAL GAP

4-year study of remote First Nations digital inclusion

Partnership between ADM+S and Telstra

Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) supplementary project

2022 (Year 1) visit research trips to 10 remote communities

Partnerships with local organisations, co-researchers



Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island), East Arnhemland NT



Yuelamu, Central Desert, NT

# 2022 RESEARCH FINDINGS

**10**
communities
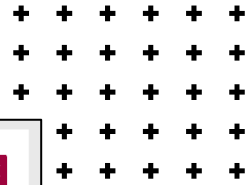visited

**21**
Community
co-researchers

**530**
surveys conducted
(495 First Nations)

**140**
interviews
conducted

Yuelamu community, Northern Territory

# 2023 ADII DASHBOARD – FIRST NATIONS PAGE

**AUSTRALIAN DIGITAL INCLUSION INDEX**

**Toggle menu**

Year: 2022
Data labels — On

Tips    Notes
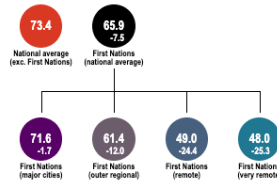
## First Nations

Filter    Export    Menu

### Insights

This First Nations page provides a snapshot of the scale of the Digital Gap for First Nations people compared with other Australians by remoteness categories. It includes results from 10 remote and very remote communities surveyed under the Mapping the Digital Gap project (2022-2024).

In 2022, the Digital Gap between First Nations people and other Australians is 7.5. This gap is particularly pronounced in remote (24.4 points) and very remote (25.3) parts of Australia.

Access is a considerable issue in remote First Nations communities, with an Access gap of over 37 points between First Nations people and other Australians in remote and very remote areas.

### First Nations digital gap snapshot

ADII Score

**73.4** National average (exc. First Nations)
**65.9** -7.5 First Nations (national average)

**71.6** -1.7 First Nations (major cities)
**61.4** -12.0 First Nations (outer regional)
**49.0** -24.4 First Nations (remote)
**48.0** -25.3 First Nations (very remote)

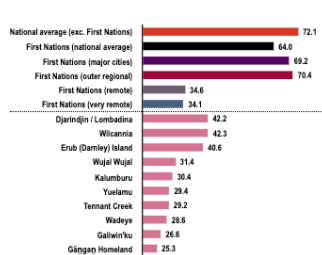### First Nations remote communities

**How to use the map**

To view the results for each remote First Nations community, hover over the community name or marker, and click or tap to display more information. Each time you click a community, its results for ADII Score, Access, Affordability, and Digital Ability will be shown in a panel on the left side of this tile.
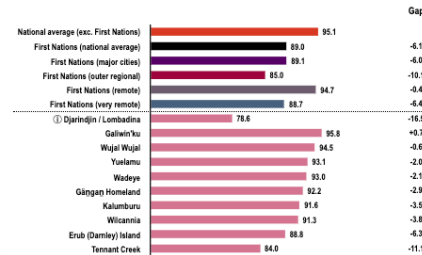
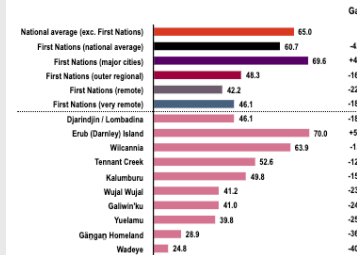Map markers: Galiwin'ku, Jagi, Gängan Homeland, Erub (Darnley) Island, Kalumburu, Wadeye, Wujal Wujal, Djarindjin/Lombadina, Tennant Creek, Yuelamu, Wilcannia

### Access comparison — Access

| | | Gap |
|---|---|---|
| National average (exc. First Nations) | 72.1 | |
| First Nations (national average) | 64.0 | -8.2 |
| First Nations (major cities) | 69.2 | -3.0 |
| First Nations (outer regional) | 70.4 | -1.7 |
| First Nations (remote) | 34.6 | -37.6 |
| First Nations (very remote) | 34.1 | -38.1 |
| Djarindjin / Lombadina | 42.2 | -29.9 |
| Wilcannia | 42.3 | -29.9 |
| Erub (Darnley) Island | 40.6 | -31.6 |
| Wujal Wujal | 31.4 | -40.8 |
| Kalumburu | 30.4 | -41.8 |
| Yuelamu | 29.4 | -42.7 |
| Tennant Creek | 29.2 | -42.9 |
| Wadeye | 28.6 | -43.5 |
| Galiwin'ku | 26.6 | -45.5 |
| Gängan Homeland | 25.3 | -46.8 |

### Affordability comparison — Affordability

| | | Gap |
|---|---|---|
| National average (exc. First Nations) | 95.1 | |
| First Nations (national average) | 89.0 | -6.1 |
| First Nations (major cities) | 89.1 | -6.0 |
| First Nations (outer regional) | 85.0 | -10.1 |
| First Nations (remote) | 94.7 | -0.4 |
| First Nations (very remote) | 88.7 | -6.3 |
| Djarindjin / Lombadina | 78.6 | -16.5 |
| Galiwin'ku | 95.8 | +0.7 |
| Wujal Wujal | 94.5 | -0.6 |
| Yuelamu | 93.1 | -2.0 |
| Wadeye | 93.0 | -2.1 |
| Gängan Homeland | 92.2 | -2.9 |
| Kalumburu | 91.6 | -3.5 |
| Wilcannia | 91.3 | -3.8 |
| Erub (Darnley) Island | 88.8 | -6.3 |
| Tennant Creek | 84.0 | -11.1 |

### Digital Ability comparison — Digital Ability

| | | Gap |
|---|---|---|
| National average (exc. First Nations) | 65.0 | |
| First Nations (national average) | 60.7 | -4.3 |
| First Nations (major cities) | 69.6 | +4.6 |
| First Nations (outer regional) | 48.3 | -16.7 |
| First Nations (remote) | 42.2 | -22.7 |
| First Nations (very remote) | 46.1 | -18.9 |
| Djarindjin / Lombadina | 46.1 | -18.9 |
| Erub (Darnley) Island | 70.0 | +5.1 |
| Wilcannia | 63.9 | -1.1 |
| Tennant Creek | 52.6 | -12.4 |
| Kalumburu | 49.8 | -15.2 |
| Wujal Wujal | 41.2 | -23.8 |
| Galiwin'ku | 41.0 | -24.0 |
| Yuelamu | 39.8 | -25.2 |
| Gängan Homeland | 28.9 | -36.0 |
| Wadeye | 24.8 | -40.1 |

Filters applied: none

No special First Nation collection was undertaken outside selected remote communities for this year and results obtained based on national sampling methods of First Nations people should be treated with caution due to very small sample sizes.

RMIT UNIVERSITY

# FIRST NATIONS DIGITAL GAP SNAPSHOT
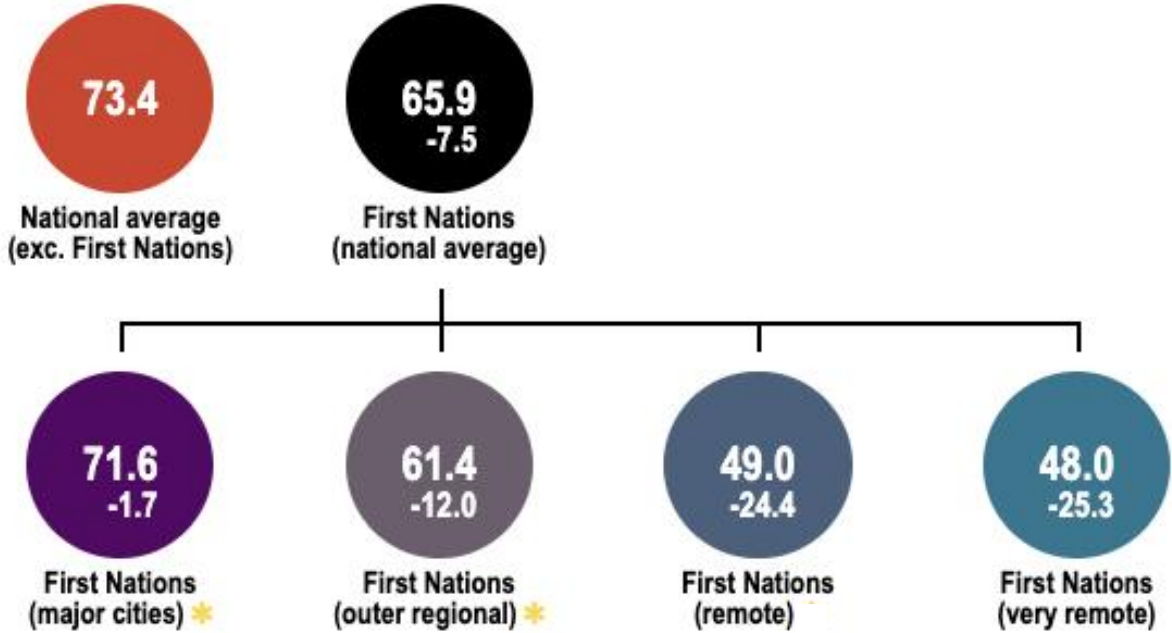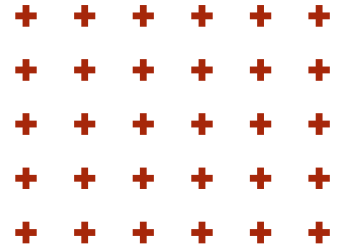
# ACCESS
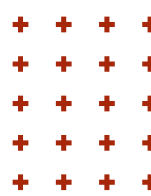
Pre-paid mobile is the primary means of phone and Internet access

Low household use of fixed line phone, Internet or satellite services

Quality of service and coverage critical issues in most communities

No mobile access in about 700 small communities & homelands

Increased use of public Wi-Fi for accessing services, Wi-Fi Calling

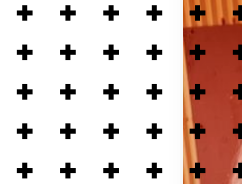VAST TV not working in most homes - increased cost, congestion

"*The internet ... past 10am is hopeless. ... You cannot access internet banking [or ] open emails or send them. Often there are unexplained internet outages.*"

Survey comment, Galiwin'ku 2022

Gäŋgan co-researcher
Djamika Ganambarr

# AFFORDABILITY

Data affordability a growing issue as demand increases

Limited shift from pre-paid to post-paid services

Cost of devices an issue with high turnover

Shift to online government services leading to user-pays model

"*Clients [are often] not able to ring us [or other services] if they need assistance, because they can't afford the credit, or they have no phones.*"

Service provider, Wadeye 2022



Djarindjin resident & broadcaster Bernadette Angus

# DIGITAL ABILITY

Digital ability varies with access and support

Gaps– elderly, people with low literacy, disabilities, disconnected

Social media a primary means of communications

Cyber-safety and scams are a significant concern

Demand for appropriate training, support, local digital mentors

*"I would like to learn more about computer. But ... we don't have an office to sit down and work. Without having a computer in this community [we can't learn]."*

Billy Gumana, traditional owner, Gängan 2022
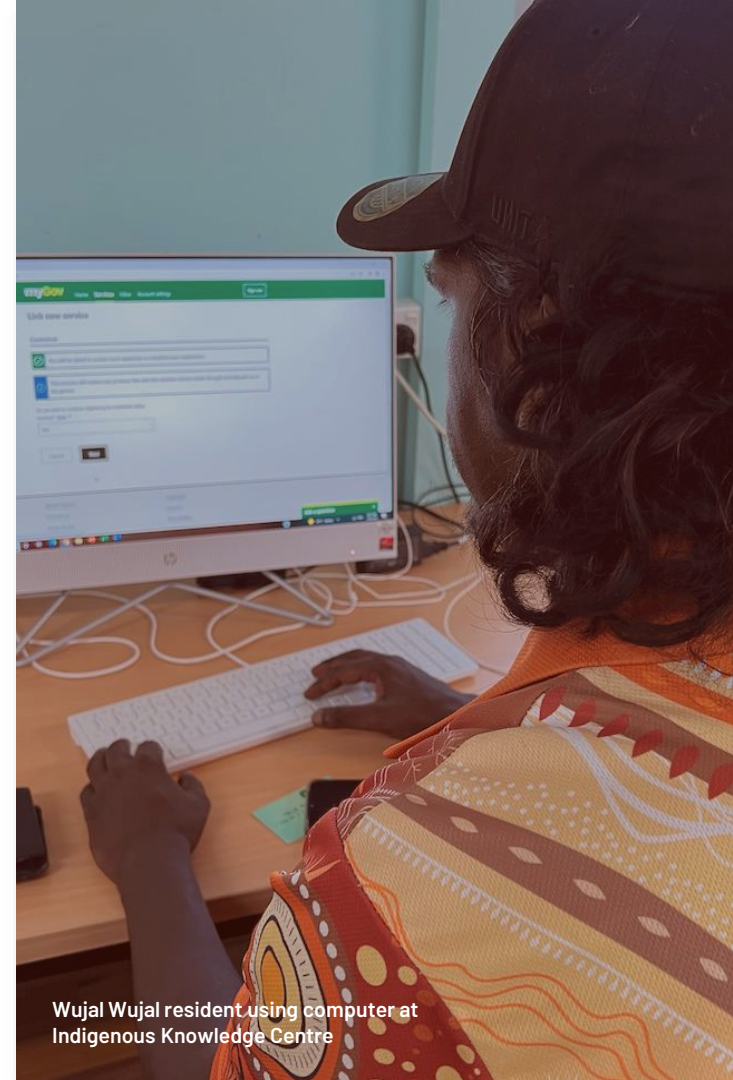
Wujal Wujal resident using computer at Indigenous Knowledge Centre

# KEY MESSAGES

Connectivity for remote First Nations people is a public policy issue

Digital inclusion requires more than infrastructure

A coordinated approach needed to achieve CTG target 17

Regulation needed for:

- Affordable Internet access under Universal Services Guarantee

- Reliability and quality of service of mobile and internet services

- Access to TV and radio services for trusted news & information

*"Connectivity is increasingly crucial for access to education [and other] services. … It's become an essential service, particularly for remote mob. [It] should be a service model, not a business model."*

(Jennifer McFarland, CAYLUS, Alice Springs 2022)

Tennant Creek NT

**For more information**

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Mappingthedigitalgap.com.au

facebook.com/MappingtheDigitalGap