



Ageing,
Disability &
Home Care

AHI09/4400
EA1531990

Mr Paul Gibson MP
Member for Blacktown
Chair
Standing Committee on Broadband in Rural and Regional Communities
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Gibson

I refer to your letter to the Hon. Paul Lynch MP, Minister for Ageing and Minister for Disability Services, inviting submissions to two Parliamentary inquiries of the Standing Committee on Broadband in Rural and Regional Communities. The Minister has asked me to respond on his behalf.

Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC) operates over 700 offices across six regions throughout NSW. ADHC must provide services to small and remote communities around the State, regardless of whether there is supporting infrastructure. Therefore, improved access to cost-effective broadband has the capacity to greatly assist in the delivery of human services such as those provided by ADHC, particularly in rural and remote locations.

I have enclosed a document which outlines just some of the many instances where broadband access would benefit our citizens in these communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on this matter.

Yours sincerely

Jim Moore
Chief Executive

17 MAR 2010

Encl.

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Client Intake and Assessment

Efficient and accessible services are crucial to the operation of the agency and their funded service providers. The use of Internet-based tools for the collection of information and referral has already improved the efficiency of services, but much more could be done.

For instance, a pilot project currently underway in the Hunter region is an excellent demonstration of how access to fast Internet access can enhance the Home and Community Care (HACC) sectors intake and assessment procedures for people seeking entry into HACC services.

The Hunter Access Point project is also a significant platform for business, as it allows more efficient transfer of information between general practitioners and service providers, and reduces the burden on clients who do not have to provide the same personal information at each stage of the intake process.

Service providers and non-government organisations around the State are eager for the kind of service offered in the Hunter to be accessible in their suburb, town or region. However, that service could only be realistically implemented if there was cost-effective broadband access available nationwide.

Our Ageing Population

As you are aware, the demographic challenges facing our State and nation are enormous. By 2030, the proportion of people 65 years and over will have almost doubled (from 14 to 22%), while the number of centenarians will increase eight-fold.

However, our challenge does not just come from the sheer number of older people. It will come from the fact that those people will also be living much longer lives than at any other time in human history. New information and communication technology provides an array of potential new mechanisms to promote social "connectedness" among older people, which in turn will help them to stay healthy and active for longer.

The NSW Positive Ageing Statement that contributes to the NSW Government's plan for population ageing, *Towards 2030*, was launched in October 2009.

One of the initiatives under the plan is a new research grants program which, among other things, seeks to apply new information and communication technology to support social inclusion and participation of older people.

Ideas for research projects that could be funded under this scheme would be greatly enhanced by better communication technology in rural and regional communities.

Child Protection

New child protection legislation, which has now come into effect, requires mandatory reporting of children at risk of significant harm. Incidents will need to be reported to Community Services and an online tool will be available to interactively guide government officers through a Mandatory Reporter Guide.

However, the remoteness of many communities in New South Wales means that officers in these areas may be unable to take advantage of this communications tool. This not only disadvantages them, but potentially the children they are trying to protect.

Better access for disadvantaged groups and individuals

Access to improved broadband services should also ensure better access to people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) or video conferencing applications – only really viable through fast broadband – would enable access to interpreters, regardless of their location. This would not only reduce travel costs, but would also allow access to a wider range of languages than might currently be available.

Sign language is better than text for people with a hearing impairment. Video calls to or from people with a hearing impairment would improve their lives, by providing better and easier communication. This has already been demonstrated in other countries where fast broadband has been introduced.

Agency employees

Government officers who carry out work on behalf of older people and people with a disability would also benefit from an improved communication infrastructure. For instance, many agency staff currently travel vast distances to either provide services or meet with colleagues. Departmental offices in the Western Region of NSW, in particular, would immediately benefit from faster internet access, due to the poor quality of communications currently available in that part of the State.

Fast and efficient access to the internet would also assist ADHC staff and the people they care for, in the ways outlined below.

Video Conferencing

Fast internet access would improve staff communications across the State, and provide staff with the ability to do business from their desks. ADHC could achieve savings through reduced travel and accommodation costs, without sacrificing collaboration, or loss of important visual connection, between the parties. The broad span of control in the agency means that faster and more comprehensive network coverage would enable better professional supervision and development, especially

for staff in regional areas and statewide business units (e.g. Western and Northern Regions, and the Office of the Senior Practitioner respectively).

Communication and Collaboration

A fast and reliable Internet service would provide better online collaboration between professionals and specialists. For example, ADHC employs over 100 psychologists around the State, and online collaboration would aid communication by allowing them to share resources and expertise more easily.

The new service would also enable interactive communication between caseworkers, care workers, occupational therapists etc., who undertake home care services. They could directly access systems information and enter data at the point of service (which would also have the added advantage of minimising data entry errors).

E-Learning

ADHC has a large direct-service workforce that does not have a high level of literacy competence. At the present time, it is difficult to know whether these 9,000 frontline staff are reading and understanding all of the written material that is distributed. However, instructional video is considered a much better tool for communicating than text (e.g. character-based learning; embedded video instructions). ADHC is interested in deploying some of these technologies, not only for staff but also for funded service providers and their clients. Fast broadband access would make these e-learning tools a much more practical and attractive option.

Advanced Technologies

It is likely that many of the innovative new applications and services will only be introduced after the introduction of the Federal Government's National Broadband Network (NBN). In fact, it is considered that the infrastructure will attract a large number of new services. For example, the NBN could:

- encourage the development of a range of new 'health and home care' products and services (e.g. expansion of the VitalCall and like services);
- allow content to be re-used by enabling tools to present information in different ways; and
- encourage the use of non-browser based internet applications.

I would also like to take this opportunity to point out that issues surrounding what is known as the "digital divide" are still relevant when discussing issues of access to the proposed broadband network. While 70% of Australian households have an internet connection, and the majority of those households are on broadband, many older people and people with a disability are still not connected. For instance, it is a sad fact that the likelihood of a person using the internet regularly (if at all) decreases with age. Therefore, it should not be assumed that faster broadband will make a difference to these people's lives, unless it is accessible and affordable.
