

# COTA Victoria Policy Position



## Issue: Digital inclusion and access to information

Adopted:

Review date:

### Policy principles:

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- Older Victorians must not be required to engage with digital technology in order to access the information and services they need. There must continue to be a range of low-tech solutions available to ensure all older Victorians have simplified, independent and timely access to the information and services they need.
- Older Victorians must be provided with opportunities to gain the maximum benefit from digital technology if they wish to do so. This means ensuring older people:
  - Have affordable access to high-quality internet
  - Own a device that will enable them to use the internet
  - Are able to use the internet in an accessible way, whether they have a disability, are from a culturally or linguistically diverse background or have other needs
  - Have the skills to engage with digital platforms such as online banking, MyGov, telehealth and social media
  - Have the confidence to use the internet safely

### Rationale for COTA Victoria's position:

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- Older Victorians are at greatest risk of being marginalised and disempowered by the ever-increasing provision of digital information and services. Research indicates that:
  - More than half of people over the age of 70 are not online;
  - 23 per cent of people aged 50-69 have limited or no digital literacy;
  - 43% of people aged 70-79 and 66% of people over the age of 80 do not own a smart phone.
- There are often no low-tech solutions available to support people who are unable to access information online. This:
  - Prevents older people from accessing timely information and services;
  - Limits older peoples' ability to make informed decisions and exercise choice and control over their lives;
  - Heightens older peoples' risk of experiencing elder abuse by forcing them to rely on others to access the information and services they need.
- The impact of this digital divide became increasingly apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, as many older people:
  - Became isolated due to having limited opportunities to connect with friends and family;
  - Found it difficult to access timely and relevant health information and advice;

- Could not access vital relief packages which could only be obtained by completing an online form;
  - Experienced difficulty checking into public venues because there were not always low-tech solutions to QR codes available;
  - Experienced increased rates of elder abuse as a result of being forced to rely on other people to access vital information and services.
- While many older Victorians do want to learn how to engage with digital technology, there are a range of barriers that may limit their capacity to do so. These include:
  - Cost of internet access and technology-based devices;
  - Functional limitations such as vision impairment, hearing impairment or arthritis;
  - Lack of confidence in avoiding online scams.
  - Lack of familiarity with technological language.
  - Challenges associated with memory retention.
  - Fear of doing something wrong.
- While more can and must be done to increase the digital inclusion of older Victorians, there are many older people who will never be in a position to engage with digital technology. Even in instances where an older person does have the capacity to access information online, this may not be the most preferable or user-friendly option. low-tech solutions must continue to be made available to ensure all Victorians have straightforward access to the information and services they need.

## Recommendations:

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1. All public and private entities commit to:
  - Providing information and payment options through a variety of digital and non-digital channels
  - Ensuring all digital systems comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1.
2. The Victorian Government continue to invest in services to support older people who cannot access information online, including a telephone line that provides phone-based information and referral services to older Victorians.
3. The Victorian Government provide financial assistance to support older Victorians on low incomes to:
  - Purchase an appropriate device and any necessary assistive technology
  - Set up and maintain an internet connection
  - Access ongoing training and support