

# Submission: Digital Identity and Inclusion

---

## Council of the Ageing (COTA) NSW

COTA NSW is the peak body representing people over 50 in NSW. We're an independent, non-partisan, consumer-based, non-government organisation. We work with politicians, policy makers, service and product providers, as well as the media to ensure the views and voices of older people are heard and acted on.

### **Our work is to:**

- inform
- educate
- engage
- advocate

### **We work with:**

- the community
- service & product providers
- government
- the media

COTA NSW has launched some of the State's most important initiatives for older people, including NSW Meals on Wheels, Carers NSW, and the Retirement Village Residents Association.

Currently COTA NSW delivers a range of services to older people in NSW, including an Aged Care Navigation service, the Legal Pathways program and Strength for Life.

## Acknowledgement of Country

COTA NSW acknowledges the unique status of Australia's First Peoples as the original people of this land. We recognise their cultures, histories and ongoing relationship and obligations to the land, sky and waterways.

In the spirit of reconciliation, COTA NSW acknowledges all traditional custodians of the lands we today know as New South Wales.

COTA NSW  
PO Box Q349  
Queen Victoria Building NSW 1230

**Telephone:** 02 9286 3860  
**Web:** [www.cotansw.com.au](http://www.cotansw.com.au)  
**Email:** [info@cotansw.com.au](mailto:info@cotansw.com.au)

COTA NSW is funded by the NSW Government under the NSW Ageing Strategy.

## Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on Digital Identity and Inclusion in NSW.

As the peak body representing people over 50 in NSW, we know that digital inclusion is consistently raised as an issue of concern for older people. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, digital forms of identity verification, particularly QR code check-ins, have become increasingly ubiquitous. Increasingly, digital systems are required to engage with essential services.

This presents issues for many older people who may not be fully proficient using new technologies. In our recent 50+ Survey of more than 6000 older people across NSW, more than 60% of respondents agreed that they find it difficult to keep up with the changing rate of technology<sup>1</sup>. This lack of confidence in digital technology intersects with other barriers to the use of digital identity among older people, including socioeconomic and cultural barriers.

One challenge commonly raised by older people in relation to digital identity is the difficulty of identity verification without a passport or driver's license – both of which many older people often lack. Digital identity systems present an opportunity to provide more flexibility to older people who may struggle with conventional identity systems.

The increased uptake of digital service delivery with COVID-19 has compounded with previous increases in the usage of digital platforms to deliver essential services. Despite the increase in uptake, only 15% of Australians over 65 years accessed government services, or health and medical information<sup>2</sup>, or health services. 54% of people over 65 years stated they were “somewhat” or “very dissatisfied” with the concept of interacting with government primarily by digital methods according to the Australian Government's digital transformation office.

Despite the challenges that face older people and their digital inclusion, there is a real appetite for greater digital engagement among older people. 71% of respondents to COTA's 50+ Report survey agreed that computers and technology give them more control over their lives, and almost half of respondents expressed interest in the use of technology and a willingness to stay informed<sup>3</sup>. Older people's digital ability is not static; the Australian Digital Inclusion Index has found that older people saw increases in digital inclusion from 2020-2021. Ensuring digital inclusion for older people in digital identity must mean both making digital services more accessible and maintaining non-digital systems.

COTA NSW endorses a wide range of solutions to support the digital inclusion of older people. These are broader principles that could serve to make the transition to digital identity more inclusive of older people's needs.

---

<sup>1</sup> COTA NSW, *50+ Report 2022: What Older People Think*, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Roy Morgan, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> *50+ Report 2022*, p. 9.

## Providing non-digital alternatives

- Providing offline options – at a minimum, all essential government services should be accessible through non-digital means. Where possible, this should be provided in multiple formats; through face-to-face service, telephone hotline, or through hard-copy correspondence where feasible. Crucially, accessibility features that may be present on digital platforms – for instance, translation to languages other than English – should also be available through these non-digital platforms.
- Distributing information through diverse channels - many older people access information through non-digital channels. When information dissemination occurs – for instance, informing residents of changes to identity verification systems – it is important that it takes place along non-digital channels that older people are likely to make use of, such as community radio and community newspapers.
- Non-digital medical identity systems – during the COVID pandemic, digital medical records such as QR code check-ins and vaccine passports became common. At this time, the NSW and Commonwealth Government made a concerted effort to improve non-digital options for these products. The success of initiatives such as printed QR code cards and hard copy vaccine certificates helped integrate those who struggled with technology usage and offered them a way to make use of these essential services. While this option could have been better publicized, continuing this practice with any future services of this nature would support digital inclusion greatly.

## Supporting digital access among older people.

The reality is that without greater confidence to navigate digital systems, uptake of digital identity among older people will lag. The below recommendations provide broad advice for improving digital ability among older people that could be taken up to improve digital inclusion in digital identity.

- Expand the Tech Savvy Seniors program to include a telephone hotline - expanding this program would provide older people a trusted source of information that they can access for information, support, and referrals when dealing with hardware and software issues.
- Include accessibility features on all digital platforms – not only older people, but many people with disability benefit from accessibility features on digital platforms such as text font size changing , high contrast features, and dyslexic-friendly fonts. While some of these features are present on some NSW Government platforms, they are not completely consistent.
- Provide diverse guides to using digital services – engaging with government services through digital platforms can often be an elaborate and at times difficult process.

While how-to guides exist, they can often be limited in detail. A diverse variety of guide formats, including video and images, in multiple languages, would help ensure that older people are able to engage with digital services correctly.

- Maintaining legacy systems – A frequent issue raised by older people with regards to digital inclusion is the rapid rate of change in technology. Often, older people will dedicate time to learning how to navigate a new digital service or system, only for it to undergo changes in design. Maintaining legacy systems would help older people keep up with the pace of digital change.
- Inclusion of older people in service design process – when designing digital services and platforms, the inclusion of older people in the design process would help ensure that older people’s digital inclusion is considered in the delivery of the service.
- Offer concession/rebate for digital access – the reality for many older Australians is that skill is not the only barrier to digital access – cost remains an important factor, too. Where possible, targeted rebates for older people to help cover the cost of technology uptake – for instance, subsidized broadband access – could help mitigate this issue.
- Easing the transition to digital identity documents – As discussed above, COTA has received a large amount of feedback from older people concerned about the growing prevalence of digital identity documents. The process of obtaining digital identity documents can be difficult for older people who may no longer have a driver's license and may struggle with navigating online registration. Many services that require identity verification do not accept state-issued proof of age or photo cards in lieu of a driver’s license.

## Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on digital inclusion and digital identity. Older people are consistently left out of discussions around digital inclusion, but we are optimistic that with ongoing consultation, older people can be included in the transition to digital identity systems.

COTA NSW looks forward to working with the NSW Department of Customer Service to ensure that the needs and desires of older people continue to be planned for and addressed.