# Understanding the digital behaviours of older Australians
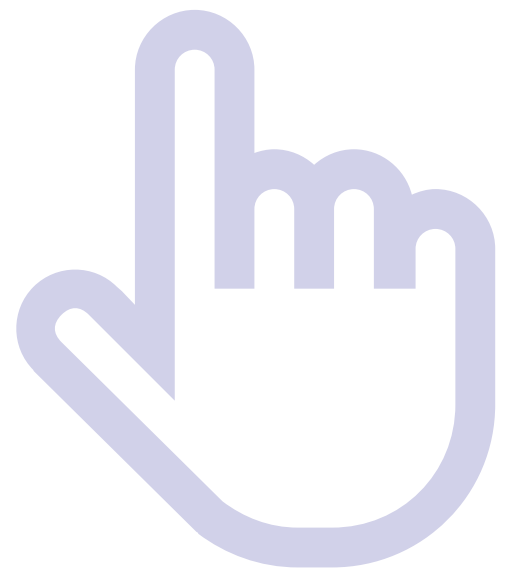
Summary of national survey and qualitative research

## Senator the Hon
# Mitch Fifield

### Minister for Communications

As we immerse ourselves online more than ever, it is critical that all Australians have the skills and confidence to engage online and that we continue to improve our digital participation.

It is fantastic to see that an increasing number of older Australians are embracing digital technologies and improving their confidence online. Building digital literacy skills provides new opportunities to connect, engage and access a wealth of information and ideas.

The Government's Office of the eSafety Commissioner is helping to ensure that women, children and older Australians are well supported and can take advantage of the social, cultural, health and economic benefits that enhanced connectivity can bring.

The Be Connected initiative is a collaborative effort that provides families and communities with practical resources to help build skills. The program allows older Australians to develop their confidence in a supportive environment and learn how to remain safe online while connecting with loved ones.

I encourage families and community groups to take advantage of this national network of more than 1,000 community partners delivering one-on-one support across Australia.

This initiative is just one way the Government is committed to empowering all Australians to embrace 21st century communications in today's digital environment.

# Julie Inman Grant

### eSafety Commissioner

Digital technology is now an essential part of everyday life for many of us, as we enjoy the benefits of being able to instantly obtain information, effortlessly connect with family and friends and easily access a wide range of services.

However, while many of us have successfully adopted a more connected lifestyle, older generations have had lower levels of digital engagement and are finding it increasingly difficult to keep up.

Indeed, our research clearly shows how older Australians often have a real fear of digital technology. This fear is often reinforced by not having the confidence to ask for, or the knowledge of where to seek, help.

Our research also reveals that being safe online is front of mind for older Australians, and having the necessary know-how to engage online safely is critical to building digital confidence.

Be Connected is purpose built to address these needs and improve the digital literacy of older Australians, as well as empowering the broader community to be a part of the solution. As our research indicates, family, friends and peers play a crucial role in supporting and mentoring older Australians to get online.

Clearly we all have a role to play in helping older Australians appreciate the incredible benefits of being confidently and safely connected to our online world.

# Contents

# Introduction

**Internet-enabled digital technologies continue to transform the way we interact socially and economically, changing how information and content are delivered and accessed by Australians. Research shows that the internet is important to most Australians, with three-quarters of adults believing the internet has improved their day-to-day lives[1]. For many people, going online is about getting day-to-day tasks done and accessing information and services that facilitate their daily routines. It is also about social activities, such as staying in touch with family and friends, planning catch-ups and dabbling in hobbies such as researching family histories.**

The sheer scope of our online presence is reflected in the amount of data downloaded by Australians. During the three months to December 31 2017, we downloaded 3.6 million terabytes of data in total compared to 2.6 million terabytes during the December quarter of 2016—a 39% increase[2]. The impact of the internet is also reflected in the value of domestic online retail sales in Australia, estimated to be more than AUD 9 billion for the period January–October 2017, up from an estimated AUD 8 billion during the same period in 2016[3].

In contrast to this, there are significant numbers of older Australians who do not directly engage with the internet and see the idea of a digital society as peripheral to their daily lives. However, this research shows that a significant number of older Australians want to increase their digital skills and, with mentoring and training, are keen to explore the opportunities of digital participation.

## The Digital Literacy for Older Australians initiative 'Be Connected'

In June 2016, the Commonwealth government announced a $50 million commitment to improve the digital literacy and online safety of older Australians aged 50 years and older. The Department of Social Services and the Office of the eSafety Commissioner were given responsibility for jointly developing and implementing the initiative, which includes a family and community-centred approach to supporting, coaching and teaching older Australians how to improve their skills and confidence in using digital technology.

The approach focuses on demonstrating the relevance and value of being connected safely, and to address the needs of two primary cohorts of older Australians:

1. Those who are not yet connected (to demonstrate personal relevance and value of being connected).

2. Those who are already connected—and want to learn more.

As part of this initiative, the Office developed a learning website (beconnected.esafety.gov.au/) with information, tools and training materials. This site (referred to as a portal in research findings) will support a national network of up to 2,000 community partners to deliver free, one-on-one coaching to up to 100,000 older Australians a year who want to develop and to enhance their digital literacy skills. The website also provides a broad range of resources to support families, friends and peers, so they can play an active role in supporting older family members as they get online.



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[1] Communications report 2011–12 series, Report 2—Australia's progress in the digital economy: Participation, trust and confidence, ACMA, November 2012.

[2] 8153.0 - Internet Activity in Australia, December 2017, ABS, March 2018 http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/8153.0

[3] APPENDIX 1 EXPERIMENTAL ESTIMATES OF ONLINE RETAIL TURNOVER, ABS, December 2017
http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/8501.0Appendix1Oct%202017?opendocument&tabname=Notes&prodno=8501.0&issue=Oct%202017&num=&view=

# Research@eSafety

Under Section 15 of the Enhancing Online Safety for Australians Act 2015, the Office of the eSafety Commissioner (The Office) has the following research functions:

- support, encourage, conduct and evaluate research about online safety for Australians

- collect, analyse, interpret and disseminate information relating to online safety

- publish reports and papers relating to online safety for Australians.

This research report relates to theme 2.

**The Office's research program is underpinned by four key themes, including:**

**1** Tracking trends

**2** Supporting the development of Office resources and programs

**3** Inter-agency and international co-operation

**4** Program and resource evaluation

## Research into digital participation by older Australians

To support the development of the learning website and its content, the Office has undertaken a range of research examining the level of interest in acquiring and improving digital skills and the drivers and barriers to digital participation.

This research report presents a summary of research commissioned by the Office into digital participation by older Australians which comprised:

1. A national survey of more than 3,600 adults aged 50 years and over which examined their level of digital participation and attitudes to improving their digital literacy skills.  This survey was undertaken during the period May–June 2017.

2. Face-to-face focus groups and in-depth telephone interviews conducted during August 2017 focusing on people who identified in the national survey as either 'digitally disengaged' or having 'low digital literacy'.

The full report, and other Office research, is available from esafety.gov.au/about-the-office/research-library

For any enquiries relating to this report and other Office research, please contact research@esafety.gov.au

# Key findings

This summary report highlights that many older Australians are interested in developing and acquiring new digital skills. However, understanding and learning the 'in and outs' of digital devices and the internet can be intimidating, and asking for assistance or guidance can be daunting. Many older Australians have real concerns about the safety of the internet and want to understand how digital participation can improve their lives. These factors, in combination, pose a real barrier to building digital confidence. Older Australians, particularly those aged 70 years and over, with limited or no experience in using digital devices, have identified that face-to-face learning is the preferred option for building digital skills and confidence.

## Digital literacy levels

There are approximately 8 million people in Australia aged 50 years and over and amongst this group the national survey identified differing levels of digital participation and literacy:

1. Higher levels (relative to others in their age range): Representing 36% of the target—'Higher levels' is defined as those who perform online transactions at least once a week.

2. Moderate: 31% of the target population—those who perform online transactions less frequently than once a week.

3. Low: 26% of the target population—those who perform online activities no more than once a month.

4. Digitally disengaged: nearly 8% of the target population—non-internet users who never perform online activities.

## Factors influencing digital participation—work, age and income

- The need to use the internet at work has an influence on digital literacy levels. Around 40% of the low literacy group, and 90% of the high literacy group, were required to use the internet at work.

- There is a strong relationship between age and digital literacy levels: three-quarters of the digitally disengaged group were aged 70 years and over.

- Higher incomes tend to dominate higher digital literacy groupings. In addition, there was a higher proportion of females, and participants living in regional areas, in the digitally disengaged and low literacy groups.

## Digital device use

- Smartphones are the most common device that participants aged 50 years and over have access to, with 71% having access to one. This dropped to 57% for those aged 70–79 and 34% for those aged 80 years and older.

- Younger participants and males, in general, used digital devices more frequently than other groups. Ownership of, and access to, digital devices also increased with digital literacy.

- Approximately 9% of the population aged 50 years and over did not have access to any digital device.

## Connecting to the internet

- The most common way older Australians connected to the internet was through a home internet connection, with four-in-five doing so.

- Approximately 70% of older Australians used the internet multiple times a day. The highly literate group were almost three times more likely to access the internet multiple times a day compared to the low literacy group. This is also a result of the fact that this group is dominated by younger 'digitally confident' age groups such as those aged 50–65.

- 11% of the population aged 50 years and over did not have any form of internet access. They were likely to be older—aged 70 years and above.

- Regardless of current digital literacy levels, 50% of all respondents mentioned they wanted to use the internet more and said they would be more likely to use the internet if certain barriers around access, knowledge about devices and learning how to do things online were addressed.

## Improving digital literacy

Those with higher digital literacy levels were more likely to be interested in improving their skills than those not using digital devices or not connected to the internet. In terms of preferred methods of training, face-to-face options were identified as the method of choice.

- 72% of respondents preferred offline training methods in the use of digital devices and the internet.

- Preference for offline training was high across all demographics, especially females and among those aged 60 years and over.

- 20% of respondents preferred online training methods.

- 6% were not interested in any training.

## Areas for learning new skills

Many older Australians expressed interest in acquiring new digital skills, with online safety an underlying theme for building greater trust and confidence. Specific areas of learning identified included:

- safety (e.g. privacy settings, paying safely online)
- managing data/files (e.g. data usage at home and on the move, backing up and retrieving files)
- location/data sharing (e.g. using Wi-Fi safely, GPS and Bluetooth)
- services and online interests.

# Australia's population profile

Data from the 2016 Census of Population and Housing shows that the potential reach for digital literacy and online safety programs targeting older Australians is in the millions.

**On Census night 2016, nearly 34% of the Australian population were aged 50 years and over, equating to an estimated 8 million people—3.7 million of which were aged 65 years and over.[4]**

The issues and challenges of an ageing population are endemic. Over the coming decades, those aged 65 years and over will account for an increasing share of the total population, reaching 22% by 2056.[5]  While many older Australians carry the digital skills acquired through their work into retirement, these skills will likely need updating to keep pace with technological change and other challenges relating to online safety and security.

**Figure 1** Age profile of the Australian resident population, 2016
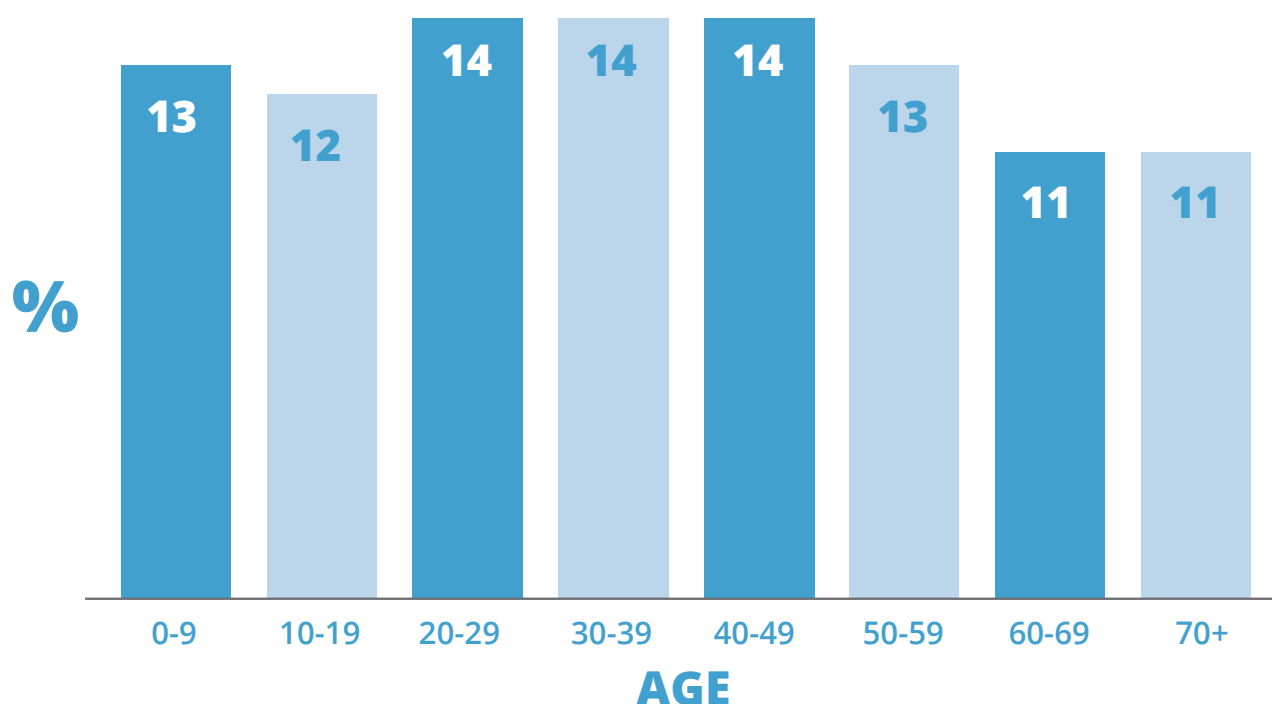


**Source:** https://profile.id.com.au/australia/five-year-age-groups Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Census of Population and Housing

[4] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/older-people/older-australia-at-a-glance/contents/demographics-of-older-australians/australia-s-changing-age-and-gender-profile

[5] Ibid

# Digital participation and literacy

At its simplest level, digital participation relates to the use of digital devices, including the internet, and the type and nature of digital activities performed. Digital literacy refers to people's capabilities and understanding of how to use technology and perform different activities online.

## Current digital participation and literacy levels

Approximately 34% of Australians aged 50 years and over (about 2.7 million people) had either low digital literacy levels or did not use digital devices or the internet.

In terms of digital literacy levels of the population aged 50 years and over:

- 36% have comparatively higher levels of digital literacy relative to others in their age range, transacting online at least once a week.

- 31% have moderate digital literacy, including people who performed online transactions less frequent than once a week.

- 26% have low digital literacy, with this group including people who perform online activities no more than once a month.

- nearly 8% are considered 'digitally disengaged,' including current non-internet users who never perform online activities.

## Primary factors influencing greater digital participation and literacy

### Needing to use technology at work, age and income levels

Previous experience with using the internet or digital devices at work was a key factor in digital confidence later in life. Other factors, such as age and income, were also important in influencing digital literacy levels and attitudes to learning.

- 40% of the low literacy group and nine-in-ten of the high literacy group were required to use the internet at work. Only 6% of the digitally disengaged group claimed they were required to do so. Similarly, very few participants in the qualitative research had ever used the internet as part of their work, with many having retired before the internet became commonplace in workplaces.

- There is a strong relationship between age and digital literacy levels. Three-quarters of the digitally disengaged group were aged 70 years and over, and as digital literacy level increased, this proportion of older participants decreased (four-in-ten of those with low literacy were 70 plus, one-in-five for those with moderate literacy and less than one-in-five of those who were highly digitally literate)—see also Figure 2. Coinciding with their younger average age, half of the highly digitally literate group were either still working or semi-retired.

- Higher incomes tend to dominate higher digital literacy groupings. Over half of those in the high literacy group earned more than $52,000 per year. In contrast, almost two-thirds of the digitally disengaged group had a personal income of less than $21,000 per year.

- There was a higher proportion of females and participants living in regional areas in the digitally disengaged and low literacy groups.

**Figure 2** Representation of people aged 70 years and over by level of digital literacy



% of population in each digital literacy category
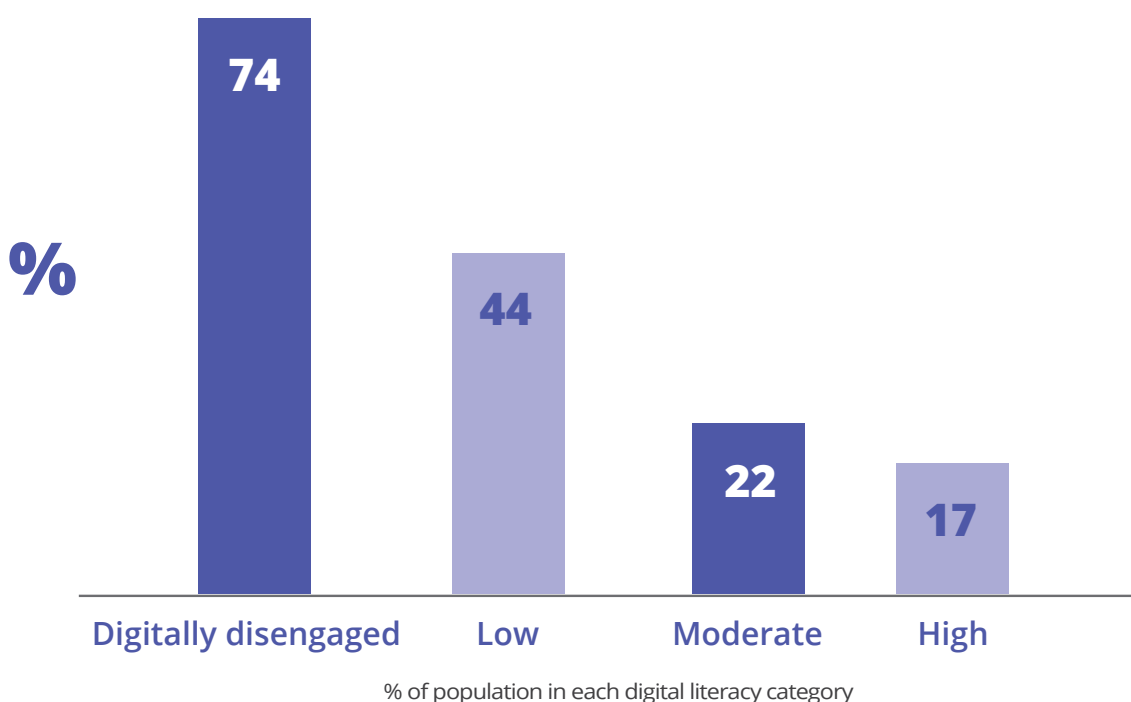
# Digital devices and the internet

**While many older Australians have and use digital devices such as smartphones, their use is at a very rudimentary level, with many respondents seeing digital devices as a 'stopgap,' or a backup to communicate with family and friends just in case.**

Our research shows that digital devices are, by and large, underutilised by many older Australians who see them more in the context of traditional communications and less in terms of providing access to services, information and content. Taking the next step and becoming familiar with the 'ins and outs' of digital technologies is a real challenge for many.

## Usage and attitudes towards digital devices

A smartphone was the most common device that surveyed participants had access to, with close to seven-in-ten using one. This was followed by laptops, desktops and tablets—each of which were owned by over half of the participants. Approximately 9% did not have access to any of these digital devices. Digital devices were more likely to be accessed by younger age groups and males. In detail:

• The younger age group (specifically 50–69 years old) were more likely to have access to smartphones, laptops and tablets compared to the older age group. The older age group were more likely to have no access to any devices, especially those aged 80 years and over.

• Males were more likely than females to have access to digital devices such as laptops, desktop computers, smart TVs or standalone GPS devices.

Reflecting the general popularity of smartphones, more than six-in-ten people aged 50 years and over were using a smartphone daily. This was followed by desktop computers, which were used at least once a week or daily by more than half of the participants.

Younger participants and males, in general, used digital devices more frequently than other groups. Those aged 50-59 years and males were more likely to use their digital devices at least once a week compared with older Australians or females. However, there was no difference between the proportion of males and females who used their smartphone or tablet once a week. Participants in metro areas were likely to use their digital devices more frequently than those in regional areas. However, the qualitative research showed that there were smartphone users who had very limited or no knowledge about the potential functionality of their phones beyond making calls.

> **I have a smartphone but it's not connected up to the internet or anything. It's used as a phone really.** – In-depth interview, low digital literacy, Melbourne, male
>
> **It's this [phone brand] … thing. I don't know if it connects to the internet. Wi-Fi. What's Wi-Fi? I've been told that now I've got Wi-Fi. Oh great, I don't know what that is.** – In-depth interview, digitally disengaged, regional Queensland, male

## Number of digital devices

Ownership of and access to digital devices increased with digital literacy (Figure 3), with smartphones being the most commonly used device by all literacy groups. The majority of the moderate and high literacy groups had access to three or more digital devices, whereas four-in-ten of the low literacy group had none, or only one, device at home.

Three-quarters of the moderately digitally literate group and almost all of the highly literate group owned a smartphone. On the other hand, around half of the low literacy group had never used a smartphone, compared to the moderate and highly literate groups (20% and 9% respectively). A similar pattern was seen across other digital devices among the low literacy group.

The qualitative research showed that low digital literacy users did not recognise the benefits of owning multiple devices, given how infrequently they were using them. The highly digitally literate group were more likely to interact with their devices daily, with smartphones being used most, by four-in-five participants.

**Figure 3** Access to devices in the home by level of digital literacy
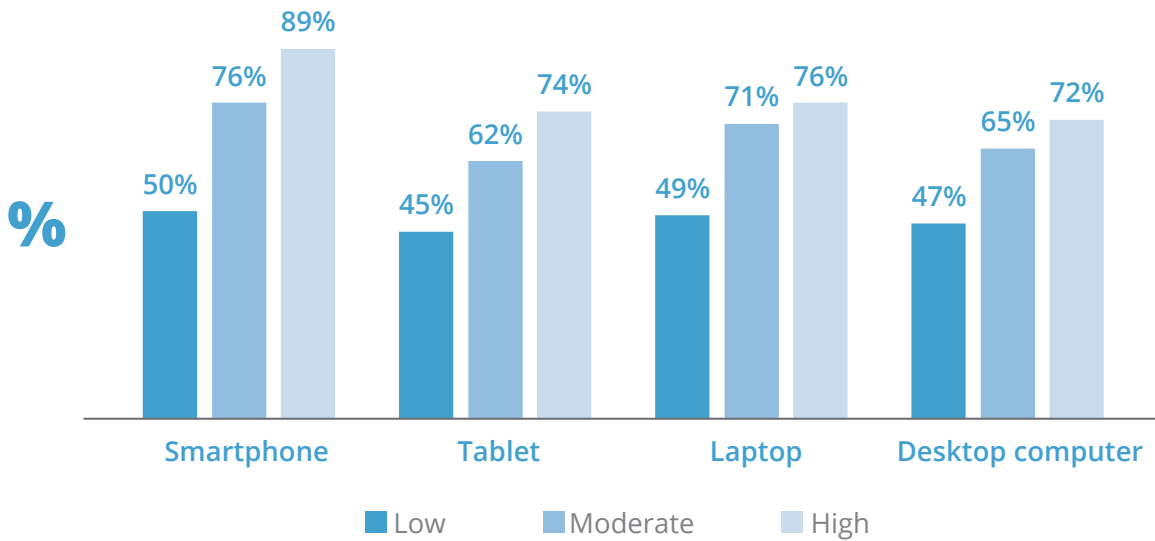


# Internet use

**Nationwide, 11% of people aged 50 years and over (nearly 900,000 people) did not have access to an internet-enabled device either in the home or elsewhere.**

**They were likely to be older (aged 70 years and above), and did not ask others, e.g. family members or friends, to do anything online on their behalf. Access to digital devices and the internet, however, did not necessarily manifest as active internet use, particularly so for those aged 70 years and over.**

The most common way older Australians connected to the internet was through a home internet connection, with four-in-five doing so. Besides a home internet connection, there was also a sizeable portion of respondents who used data on a portable device and connected to public Wi-Fi. A greater proportion of the moderate (42%) and high literacy groups (56%) reported using data on their portable devices and used their devices via public Wi-Fi compared to the low literacy group (18%).

Frequent access to the internet was more common amongst the younger age group than the other age groups combined, with seven-in-ten of the younger age group accessing it multiple times a day. In contrast, the older age group (those aged 80 years and over) were accessing the internet less frequently, with only about half of them being likely to access it multiple times a day.

The highly literate group were almost three times more likely to access the internet multiple times a day compared to the low literacy group. Around nine-in-ten of the moderately literate group accessed the internet at least once a day.

Similar to findings for device usage, participants in metro areas were more likely than those in regional areas to have a home internet connection, to use their own devices to connect to public Wi-Fi and to connect to the internet at work. Three-in-four of those living in metro areas were accessing the internet multiple times a day, which was significantly more than regional residents.

## Drivers of increased internet use

This research highlights that there are significant barriers to increasing current levels of internet use, including lack of interest, lack of access, cost-related and lack of knowledge about how to use devices and how to perform tasks online.

When asked what would encourage higher use of the internet, half of all participants mentioned they did not want to use the internet more. They were likely to be from the older age group (aged 70 years and over). The remaining half mentioned they would be more encouraged to use the internet if certain access-related barriers were addressed, such as faster speed or better connection. They also noted likely increased use if device-related barriers were addressed e.g. more knowledge about devices, as well as task-related barriers, such as learning to find information, learning to use social media etc. The younger age group (50–69 years old) and males were more likely to mention access-related issues whereas the older age group (70–79 years old) and females were more likely to cite device-related issues.

Close to half of the participants across all digital literacy groups indicated they did not want to use the internet more than they currently do. This was even more evident for the digitally disengaged group, among which three-in-four indicated they were unlikely to use the internet more or at all in the future. In the qualitative research, cost of internet use also featured as a barrier to internet use.

Factors preventing higher internet usage included that the highly literate group were more likely to mention access-related issues, whereas the low literacy group were more likely to mention device-related issues.

The qualitative research revealed that spending time online was viewed as a 'guilty pleasure' at best (for those who saw at least some value or enjoyment in it) and a waste of time at worst. It was seen as distracting them from other, more valuable activities such as being outdoors and seeing people face to face, and there was a fear of becoming addicted or being 'sucked in' to spend more time online than intended.

I mean you've only got to look at the kids today. I mean you walk up the street and they are all on their phones. You cannot sit down at a table unless they are all on their phones and it's just out of control. This device is the worst thing that they ever could have come up with. – Focus group, low digital literacy, Sydney, female

If it was a power company or something like that [forcing me to go online] I would go to another company. I won't be made to use something I don't want to. That's it. – In-depth interview, low digital literacy, Melbourne, female

Well I've been around for a while, been to a lot of places, seen a lot of things, done a lot of things and there's not a great deal more that I really want to know about. – In-depth interview, low digital literacy, Melbourne, female

The qualitative research also showed that there was a complete lack of awareness or recognition of the benefits of using the internet.

I just can't be bothered with it and you hear so many things about the internet and the internet saying something about someone else and this and that and someone committing suicide because so and so is nasty over the internet and you get all sorts of [expletive] like that. And I think, 'Good God why even have the [expletive] thing?' So I'm not interested whatsoever. – In-depth interview, digitally disengaged, regional Queensland, male

Participants had no desire to speed up their tasks and did not understand why there was a constant pressure to do everything more quickly these days.

## Technology bites—confidence with digital devices

Technology can be intimidating and this can be further reinforced by not having the confidence to ask for help or knowledge of where to go for help. Even many older respondents with access to digital devices identify that their use is largely communications-related, with a significant lack of awareness of other device functions and capabilities.

Nationwide, more than three-quarters of respondents aged 50 years and over were able to perform basic tasks such as typing on a physical keyboard, using a mouse, using a search engine, sending an email and typing on a touchscreen. About one-fifth to one-third had never tried to undertake more advanced tasks such as taking and sending a picture, messaging, installing and updating an app/program or making video calls. The ability to perform advanced tasks appeared to be a key difference between the older age group (aged 70 years and over) relative to the younger age group (50-69 years old). In addition, the research found that males were generally more likely to report that they were able to undertake basic and advanced digital tasks than females.

When it comes to the list of online activities provided, at least two-thirds of participants said they performed the online activities at least monthly. Doing research online before buying things in a physical store and searching for information about government services were the most common activities undertaken. Other activities, such as paying bills online, buying goods online, internet banking and online bookings, have never been done by around one-third of participants. Most of the online activities were likely to be conducted by males and the younger age group (50–59 years old) more frequently than other cohorts. In some cases the qualitative research also highlighted a fear of technology.

Oh the internet, I think scary is right…I don't understand it. I still don't feel like I understand it…I don't feel like I know what I'm doing. I'm always afraid I'll press the wrong button or something. – In-depth interview, low digital literacy, Melbourne, male

When I can't get what I want, give up. I sort of go, 'Oh, I've had this.'  And that's it I exit. I go out of it. – In-depth interview, low digital literacy, Melbourne, female

I've sometimes got a fear of electronic things. When I was growing up I was always able to fix lamps and do electrical wiring and stuff like that, I just loved all that. When it came to something like this [a computer] I almost mentally froze. – Focus group, low digital literacy, Sydney, female

When it comes to task confidence, the digitally disengaged group were less likely to be able to perform a set of digital tasks. While a large majority of the low literacy group could do basic tasks such as use a mouse, type on a keyboard and use a search engine, only a minority were able to do slightly more advanced tasks such as take and send a picture using a smartphone or install and update an application. The ability to perform advanced tasks was a key difference between the low and moderate literacy groups, while the highly literate group could perform both the basic and the advanced tasks. In addition, the qualitative research showed that low literacy participants might have been able to perform certain tasks on one type of device, but not on another.

# Interest in skill improvement

There is a significant level of interest among older Australians in terms of acquiring new digital skills, but this is in the context of building trust and confidence in the internet and addressing real online safety and security concerns. Those respondents who identified an interest in learning identified a range of activities for future skill development (Figure 4). These generally fell into four key areas with safety (including security) foundational to participation in all other areas:

• safety (e.g. privacy settings, paying safely online)

•managing data/files (e.g. data usage at home and on the move, backing up and retrieving files)

• location/data sharing (e.g. using Wi-Fi safely, GPS and Bluetooth)

• services and interests (e.g. undertaking a range of activities and interests such as researching family history online).

## Areas of interest

Security-related activities such as privacy settings, backing up files, safely downloading files, securing online transactions, using Wi-Fi safely and the like were identified as key areas for improving skills. Other areas of interest included researching family history, using digital device features (privacy settings, Bluetooth, GPS) and managing data usage at home and on the move.

**Figure 4** Improving digital skills—areas of interest



% of people aged 50 years and over
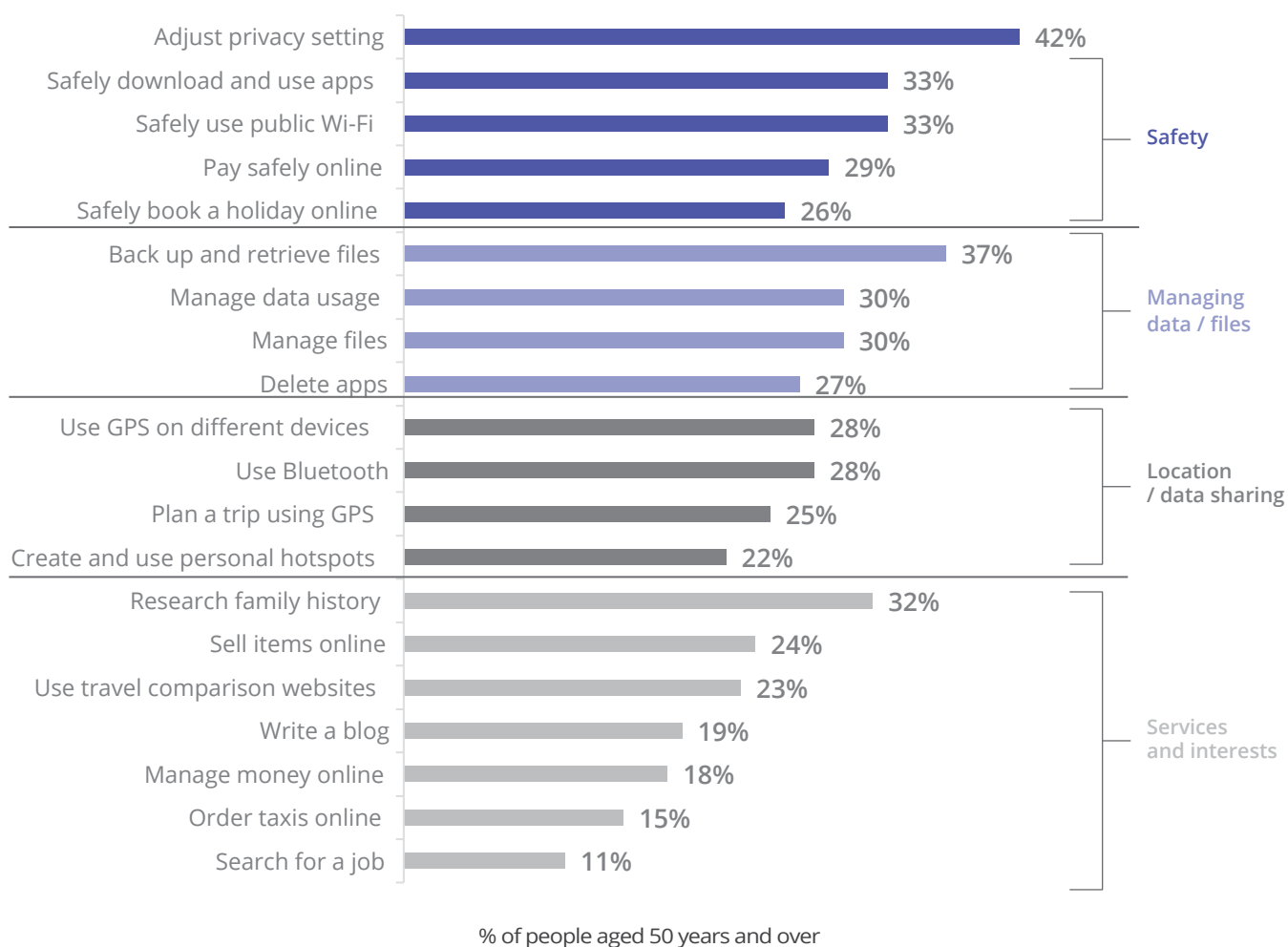
## Areas of interest by level of digital literacy

One of the key differences between the digitally disengaged and the low digital literacy groups was their willingness to learn and improve their digital skills. The digitally disengaged group were significantly less likely than other literacy groups to want to improve their skills. On the other hand, the moderate group were more likely than other groups to want to improve across most skills. Security was a key skill of interest across all groups, wanting to improve their ability to adjust privacy settings on devices. Low literacy and digitally disengaged participants in the qualitative research were universally concerned about security when online, and generally refused to make transactions online for this reason. Similarly, they rarely took part in social media, believing their privacy would be compromised if they created profiles online.

## Key concerns and barriers for using devices

Close to two-thirds of participants agreed that they only learned how to do tasks that they really had to, followed by close to half who agreed they tended to forget how to do things on devices as they didn't do them often enough. About one-in-three did not like experimenting with devices as they would then have to ask for help or might find themselves accidentally changing things and needing help to set them right. These concerns were more significant among females who were less likely to perform online activities compared to males. These concerns were also more dominant among the older age group (aged 70 years and over).

In terms of physical difficulties when interacting with their devices, half of the participants agreed that the small screens on mobiles and tablets were hard to read and difficult to use with their fingers. About two-in-five found it hard to keep track of PINs and passwords. These difficulties did not differ based on gender, age or location.

Security-related concerns when using digital devices and the internet were high. Three-quarters of respondents felt uncomfortable giving out contact details online and worried that digital devices were vulnerable to hacking. In addition, half were concerned that banking details may get stolen when paying for online purchases, online shops might not be legitimate, emails received may not be genuine, and they also found it quicker or easier to buy in-store. Most of these concerns were more likely to be expressed by the older age group—those aged 70 years and over—and females compared to other age groups and males respectively. The group surveyed had high levels of concern about the security of digital devices. About seven-in-ten expressed concern and almost all participants had anti-virus software installed and some form of passwords set for their devices. In line with the usage of devices and the internet, the younger age group were more likely to implement more security measures than other age groups combined.

Four-in-ten participants had either had contact details stolen, experienced a virus attack or had been a victim of a scam. Those experiencing any form of security breach were likely to be male and above 70 years old. Security and privacy concerns were also highlighted in the qualitative research.

> I don't belong to Facebook I don't believe in it. I did join at one stage but then I unsubscribed pretty quickly... I could see people were telling other people out there what they had for breakfast and I thought, 'What!' And I've known my nephews and niece, their children had trouble on Facebook because they disclosed too much and they've been bullied and I don't agree with it. Because once it's out there you can't take it away. – In-depth interview, low digital literacy, Melbourne, female

> I wouldn't do internet banking because there are too many smart hackers out there ... – In-depth interview, low digital literacy, Melbourne, female

Compared to other literacy groups, the low literacy group were significantly more likely to express concerns related to using digital devices, for example, they did not like experimenting on devices as they may have to ask for help. Among both low literacy and digitally disengaged participants in the qualitative research, there was widespread low confidence in attempting to perform new tasks without the assistance of someone who was familiar with the technology.

On the physical difficulties faced when using digital devices, the majority of the low and moderate literacy groups held similar concerns about small screens being difficult to use and read. These physical difficulties did not seem to be a major barrier among the moderately and highly literate groups.

Both the digitally disengaged and the low literacy groups shared similar concerns about security when using the internet. Though a slightly more prominent concern in the low literacy group, the majority did not feel comfortable giving their contact details online and were worried about their devices being hacked. Three-quarters of the low literacy group were concerned about online banking, which was significantly more compared to other literacy groups. In the qualitative research, participants did not distinguish between websites in terms of which might be riskier than others: online banking was treated with the same caution as providing card details to an unknown online retailer in a foreign country.

Among the digitally literate groups, many took precautionary steps to protect their devices and data when connecting to the internet, such as using anti-virus software and setting passwords. The biggest precaution low literacy participants took, though, was to avoid online transactions involving payments of any kind.

# Interest in training and using the online portal

While significant numbers of Australians are interested in receiving training to improve their digital skills there is a need to match training options to levels of need and confidence. Many respondents preferred offline training methods, more so for those with no or low levels of digital literacy. Face-to-face learning is the preferred method of acquiring new skills due to the opportunities for hands-on mentoring and guidance. However, it is likely that as these people acquire new skills and their confidence and awareness increases, online resources will also play a part in their ongoing learning experience. Furthermore, the use of online resources to support and mentor older Australians will also likely be a referral resource for those providing support and guidance, such as family, peers and friends.

Nationwide, the majority (72%) of participants preferred offline training methods. Approximately 20% preferred online training methods and six percent were not interested in any training. Preference of offline training methods were high across all demographics, especially females and among those aged 60 years and over. Males and the younger age group (50–59 years old) were more likely to prefer online training methods. These were also the demographic groups who were more likely to feel comfortable with the different online activities.

About half of all participants said they were likely to use an online portal to improve their digital skills. Over half of those aged 80 years and above claimed they were unlikely to use the portal. Overall, key reasons for not wanting to use the portal were: feeling that their current skills were sufficient, distrust towards the internet or government sites, preference for other learning methods and not feeling the need to use it. The preference for offline training was also highlighted in the qualitative research.

> I probably need a teacher or a go-to person who would just help me go through everything. I've never done anything in an order. I've got bits and pieces. – In-depth interview, low digital literacy, Melbourne, male
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> Someone who knows what they are talking about, no matter where from, it wouldn't matter where they are from as long as they are not leading me up the garden path…You've got someone to look over your shoulder and you say, 'No don't press that button, you need to press that one.' – In-depth interview, digitally disengaged, regional NSW, female
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> Older people they need classes, they need an instructor who will explain things to them like face to face. They need instructions type written or whatever, book form to read to remember later. Learning how to use the net via computer for older people I think is not good. Younger people yes, not older people because they have been brought up a different way. They've had to learn a different way to the young people these days. – In-depth interview, low digital literacy, Melbourne, female

Those who stated 'their skills were sufficient' as a reason for not using the portal were more likely to be male (36% vs 21% of females), aged 50–59 (41% vs 30% for those aged 60–69 and 19% for those 70 years+) and from metropolitan areas (31% vs 24% for non-metropolitan areas). One-third of 70–79 year olds expressed distrust towards the internet or government sites, significantly more compared to other age groups combined. On the other hand, the idea of autonomous learning was the main factor that appealed to those who were likely to use the portal.

In line with the high level of concern around digital privacy, about four-in-ten wanted to improve their skills when it came to adjusting privacy settings as well as backing-up and retrieving files. One-third also mentioned they wanted to improve their skills on safely downloading and using apps, safely using public Wi-Fi and researching family history.

Most skill topics mentioned did not interest the older age group aged 80 years over, with the exception of researching family history. People aged 60–69 were more likely to be interested in most topics compared to other age groups. There were a higher proportion of females who were more interested in a number of topics compared to males.
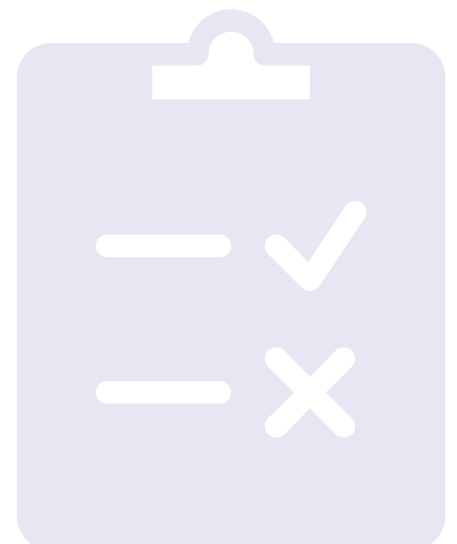
In line with their resistance to improving their digital skills, one-in-three of the digitally disengaged group were not interested in receiving any form of training on the use of digital devices or the internet, compared to 6% or less among all literate groups. This also led to the low likelihood of using the portal by the digitally disengaged group, whereby only 13% of them indicated they would use it. Key reasons in both the quantitative and qualitative research for their unlikely use of the portal were distrust of technology, internet or government sites; not feeling the need or desire to use it; and their age.

Among the digitally literate groups, most preferred to learn via offline training methods. Although, close to half or more from the literate groups claimed they were likely to use the portal. Key reasons for the probable portal use were similar across all literate groups, with the highest proportion citing the desire to improve/ learn new skills. On the other hand, the key reason for being less likely to use the portal among both moderate and highly literate groups was mainly the perceived sufficiency of their skills.

# Conclusion and future research

While this research has highlighted a number of areas for facilitating the development of learning resources for older Australians, their available support networks are likely to also be critical to the success of any initiative to build digital skills and confidence. The potential for intergenerational learning and mentoring will be explored in research to be released by the Office in the second half of 2018.

This research examines the role family and friends play in helping older people to build their digital skills. It also examines the support these people need to deal with the challenges of teaching older people and to build their confidence to take on coaching roles.

# Notes