

Digital Inclusion and Service Access

Summary report for Western Sydney Community Forum's Digital Inclusion and Service Access Leadership Forum.



2026

Event details

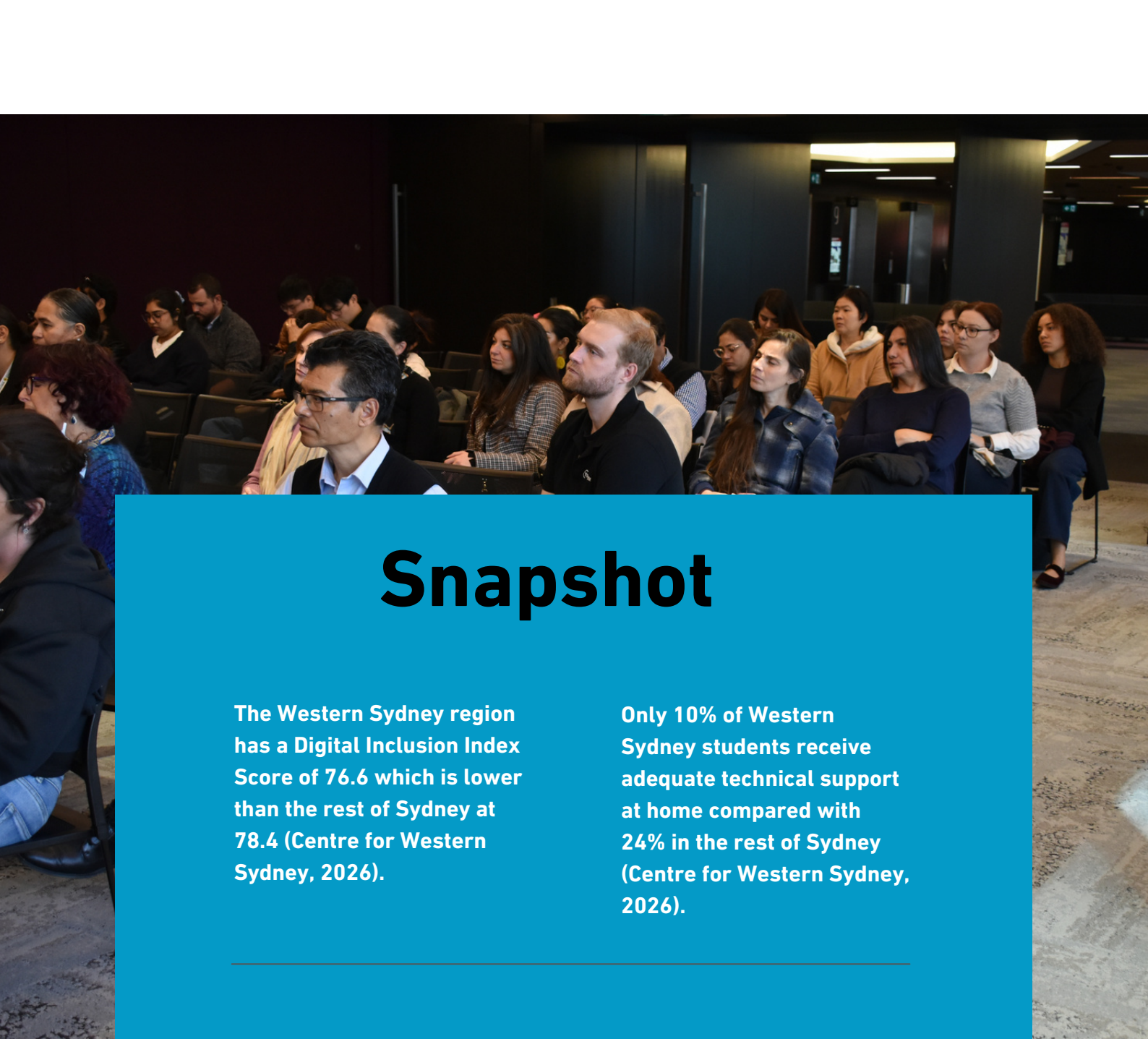
Western Sydney Community Forum held its Digital Inclusion and Service Access Leadership Forum on 8 July 2026, in partnership with the Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association of NSW Inc. and the Centre for Western Sydney at Western Sydney University.

The Forum featured The Hon. Jihad Dib MP, Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government and Member for Bankstown. It brought together government, community organisations, researchers and industry representatives to discuss how Western Sydney communities can participate safely and meaningfully in an increasingly digital world. Discussions also considered the digital infrastructure and support needed to enable participation across the region.

Discussions focused on digital inclusion as a social justice issue and the need to maintain accessible and inclusive service delivery during digital transformation. Participants explored strategies to improve digital affordability, access and capability, and opportunities to strengthen collaboration across sectors to address digital inequity.



2026



Snapshot

The Western Sydney region has a Digital Inclusion Index Score of 76.6 which is lower than the rest of Sydney at 78.4 (Centre for Western Sydney, 2026).

Only 10% of Western Sydney students receive adequate technical support at home compared with 24% in the rest of Sydney (Centre for Western Sydney, 2026).

The digital inclusion rate for Western Sydney schools is 24% which is lower than 41% for schools in the rest of Sydney (Centre for Western Sydney, 2026).

Digital literacy programs are now being delivered in 12 languages across numerous communities in New South Wales.

“Technology should never be an end in itself. Technology is simply a tool. Its purpose should always be to improve people's lives.”
— The Hon. Jihad Dib MP



Proceedings

01

Professor Azadeh Dastyari, Director of the Centre for Western Sydney, set the scene by introducing the current landscape of digital inclusion in Western Sydney and the importance of access, affordability and digital ability.

02

The Hon. Jihad Dib MP delivered a keynote address that explored the NSW Government's commitment to digital inclusion, accessible service delivery and ensuring no one is left behind as services become increasingly digital.

03

During an engaging fireside chat between Minister Jihad Dib and Western Sydney Community Forum CEO Billie Sankovic, the conversation focused on digital transformation, lived experience, community partnerships and maintaining accessible service delivery as government services continue to evolve.

04

The forum culminated with a panel discussion featuring Gina Vizza, Joseph Vijay, Adjunct Professor Pandora Patterson and Professor Corrinne Sullivan that explored practical approaches to improving digital inclusion through collaboration, digital confidence and community led service delivery.

2026

Setting the Scene

with Professor Azadeh Dastyari

Professor Azadeh Dastyari, Director of the Centre for Western Sydney, opened the forum by outlining the state of digital inclusion in Western Sydney and introducing the key themes for discussion.

Professor Dastyari explained that digital inclusion is comprised of three interconnected elements: access, affordability and digital ability, and that being digitally inclusive means more than just people having access to devices and the internet. She noted that people also need the confidence, knowledge and skills to use digital technologies safely and effectively, which is especially important as more essential services continue to move online.

Professor Dastyari concluded her address by highlighting that digital inclusion is a social justice issue that disproportionately affects people already experiencing disadvantage, including older people, First Nations communities, people on low incomes and those living in public housing. One in five Australians experiences some form of digital exclusion, highlighting broader socioeconomic inequality. Professor Dastyari stressed the need for continued investment in digital infrastructure, affordability and skills development across the Western Sydney region.



Keynote Address

with The Hon. Jihad Dib MP



The Hon. Jihad Dib MP discussed digital transformation, emphasising that digital transformation must be accompanied by genuine digital inclusion, and noting that government services should be accessible to everyone regardless of their circumstances. He stressed that digital services should complement rather than replace face-to-face support, recognising that many people continue to rely on personal interaction when accessing essential services.

Drawing on both government policy and personal experience, the Minister highlighted the importance of designing digital services around the diverse and unique needs of communities and ensuring that technology reduces barriers rather than creating new ones for communities. The Minister explained that digital inclusion requires governments to consider the needs of people experiencing disadvantage, which including older people, people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, First Nations communities, and people living in regional and remote areas.

Central to this approach is the NSW Digital Inclusion Strategy, which has been developed to strengthen accessibility and inclusion across digital government, focusing on improving connectivity, affordability and digital literacy. The Minister highlighted some of the initiatives supporting this goal, including the NSW Digital Connectivity Index, Easy Read resources, multilingual community-based digital literacy programs, and the NSW Device Bank.



Fireside Chat

During a fireside chat between Billie Sankovic, CEO, Western Sydney Community Forum, and The Hon. Jihad Dib MP, the discussion highlighted the importance of a human-centred approach to digital inclusion, ensuring digital transformation remains responsive to the needs and lived experiences of the communities it is intended to serve.

A key point was that digital inclusion efforts must ensure that digital services complement face-to-face and telephone support, recognising that many people continue to rely on personal interaction when accessing essential services. The conversation also focused on the importance of incorporating lived experience into policy and service design so that digital solutions are responsive to the real needs and circumstances of the communities they are intended to serve.

Also highlighted during the conversation was the vital role community organisations and local leaders play in improving digital inclusion. It was noted that local organisations and leaders help build trust with local communities, identify local needs and support individuals to develop digital confidence and skills. It was also stressed that achieving any meaningful digital inclusion outcomes requires collaboration across government, industry and the community sector.



Panel Discussion

Facilitated by Western Sydney Community Forum's Vikram Murthy, the panel featured Gina Vizza, CEO of Combined Pensioners & Superannuants Association of NSW (CPSA), Joseph Vijay, Interim President and Board Chair of Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Association, Adjunct Professor Pandora Patterson and Professor Corrinne Sullivan. The panel discussion explored the practical impacts of digital inclusion across Western Sydney, drawing on perspectives from community organisations, advocacy, research and academia.

Drawing on their experiences working with older Australians, Aboriginal communities and culturally diverse communities, panellists underscored that digital inclusion involves far more than access to technology. Key messages from the dialogue included the growing digital exclusion experienced by many older Australians as essential services such as banking, government services and customer support increasingly move online. Panellists also highlighted that digital confidence is built through trusted relationships rather than technology alone.

Digital inclusion is a broader issue of social justice, where access to education, employment, healthcare and community participation increasingly depends on digital inclusion. Digital inclusion requires trust, cultural safety and genuine co-design with communities from the outset, and services must be developed alongside communities rather than for them, recognising that local knowledge is essential to creating equitable and effective systems.



Key Themes

The Forum provided an opportunity for attendees to engage with and consider a range of challenges and opportunities relating to digital inclusion and service access across Western Sydney.

Each section explored digital inclusion from a different perspective with a number of consistent themes emerging throughout the Forum, highlighting both the complexity of digital inequity and the importance of collaborative solutions.

Long-term investment supports lasting change

Reducing digital inequity requires sustained investment in infrastructure, affordability, digital literacy and community-based support. Ongoing collaboration across government, community organisations and industry is essential to achieving long-term outcomes.

Digital inclusion is a social justice issue

Digital inclusion reflects broader social and economic disadvantage, disproportionately affecting people already experiencing barriers to participation. Addressing digital inclusion is therefore essential to creating more equitable communities.

Digital transformation should not replace human connection

Digital services should complement and not replace face-to-face and telephone support. Maintaining accessible service options ensures people can engage in ways that best meet their needs.

Local organisations strengthen digital inclusion

Community organisations play a critical role in building digital confidence through trusted relationships and local knowledge. Their ongoing support helps people safely access services and participate in an increasingly digital society.

Speakers



Adj A/ Professor Billie Sankovic
Chief Executive Officer
Western Sydney Community Forum



The Hon. Jihad Dib MP
Minister for Customer Service
and Digital Government, and
local member for Bankstown



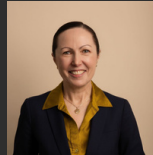
Vikram Murthy
Manager Policy and Programs
Western Sydney Community Forum



Professor Azadeh Dastyari
Director
Centre for Western Sydney



Gina Vizza
Chief Executive Officer
Combined Pensioners &
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NSW (CPSA)



Adj Professor Pandora Patterson
Chief Executive Officer
Fair Foundations



Professor Corrinne Sullivan
Director of Indigenous Research
Western Sydney University



Joseph Vijay
Interim President and Board
Chair
Australian Seniors Computer
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Partners



Thank You

Western Sydney Community Forum is the regional peak not for profit social development council.

We work with the community, business and government sectors towards inclusive and sustainable communities, now and for future generations.



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