



## Election 2023: Digital Equity priorities for Aotearoa New Zealand

Sharing the experience and insights of the 20/20 Trust

*Ensuring everyone can participate in an increasingly digital world is critical to wellbeing, realising potential, growing the economy and addressing the cost of living crisis Aotearoa New Zealand is currently experiencing. It requires affordable access to the internet and devices, the skills and confidence to get online and stay safe, and wrap around support in the community.*

The 20/20 Trust has a successful 25-year track record partnering with local communities to design and provide digital inclusion programmes for Aotearoa New Zealand. We work with Māori, Pasifika, seniors, refugee learners, people out of work and without qualifications, and partner with churches, marae, libraries and a range of community organisations. We are a member of Digital Equity Coalition Aotearoa (DECA). We honour Te Tiriti ō Waitangi.

You can read more about us and the mahi we do, as well as more about digital equity issues [here](#).

### 20%

of NZ adults lack the essential digital skills needed to use the internet safely and effectively



Source: Bank of New Zealand

### 130,000

Households do not have internet at home

Source: Spark Foundation

### 64%

of Households do not have a fibre connection

Source: Internet New Zealand

### 216,000

Households can't afford internet that meets their needs

Source: Ministry of Education

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# Our digital equity priorities at a glance

While recent governments have acknowledged the value and importance of digital equity, they have struggled to land an action plan for achieving it. 20/20 recommends Government do four things:



1

## Empower communities and the organisations they trust to do the mahi

Our experience shows that digital upskilling is most effective when delivered by communities and organisations who have authentic partnerships with those communities. Government can help by funding these organisations to design and deliver programmes that meet the needs of communities.

2

## Co-design a digital equity funding framework with a community mindset

Using an intermediary (perhaps similar to the Whānau Ora commissioning agencies) will solve the problem of how to get funding to community organisations across the motu, and remove the burden of government procurement processes that don't work for community.

3

## Make digital equity part of government digital transformation

Government agencies embarking on digital transformation programmes that move services online need to ensure the burden of supporting those without the necessary digital skills and access does not fall to unfunded community groups. Funding and other support for community digital inclusion initiatives needs to be built into digital transformation programmes.

4

## Subsidise internet access for low income households

The cost of living crisis is making it even harder for whānau on low incomes to afford the internet access they need. Government can assist through an MSD payment or working with Telcos and community to develop and subsidise an easy-to-access, low cost internet package.

# A closer look at our suggested actions

## 1

### Empowering communities to deliver digital equity programmes

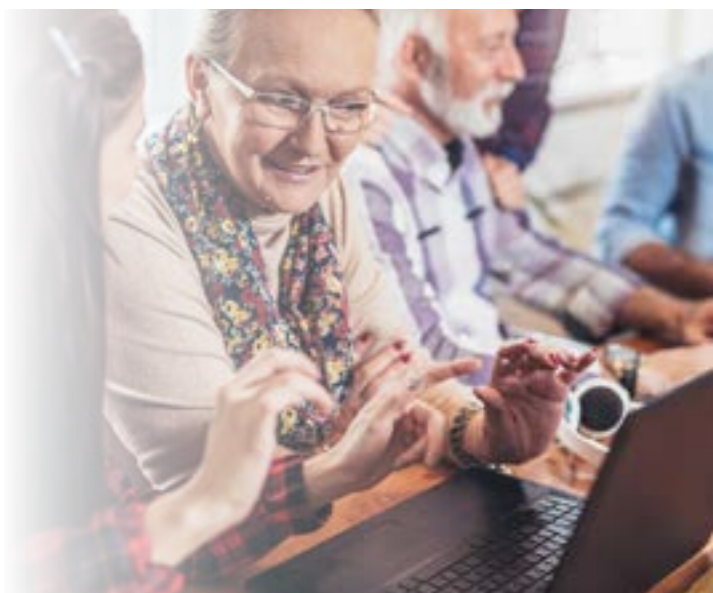
More and more of our daily lives are going online and the digital world is becoming increasingly complex. Shopping for essentials, accessing health information and services, banking, applying for a job, studying, topping up a travel card, using digital tools at work, and accessing government services. Just communicating with other people has become complicated with a multiplicity of platforms and apps. There are also issues of digital identity, data sovereignty, cyber security and online safety to consider.

We are seeing the essentialness of digital access for community resilience increasing. Banks closing, more government services going online, the ongoing impacts of COVID-19, extreme weather events, and the cost of living crisis is increasing demand for digital access and support.

For people without necessary digital skills and confidence, and access to the internet and a suitable device at home, they are either left behind, or face an experience that can be stressful or harmful (e.g. cyber security and misinformation). There is also a missed opportunity, because without foundational digital skills people can't move on to obtain the more advanced digital skills needed to get better paid jobs, boost small business productivity and grow the tech sector and sectors of our economy that rely on digital technology.

The key to ensuring everyone has what they need to participate and thrive in this digital world is through empowering community organisations to work with their people to provide the support they need with digital skills, obtaining an appropriate device, getting online, and having someone to go to when things go wrong. We have learnt that one size will not fit all—initiatives need to be tailored to community needs and context, and delivered by known and trusted partners.

Government can help by directing funding for digital skills, devices and wrap around support to community efforts. Leaving those organisations to make decisions about who needs what, and what will work best for their community.



## 2

### A digital equity funding framework with a community mindset

One of the barriers to achieving digital equity in Aotearoa New Zealand is sustainable funding for community initiatives. Governments have also struggled to make decisions on what to invest in. The investments that have been made have been adhoc and short term—a combination of contestable funds and complicated government procurement processes that favour organisations good at government procurement and make it impossible for smaller organisations to participate. This makes it difficult to get funding to a range of initiatives that suit the needs of different communities.

These issues can be solved by government partnering with an NGO intermediary with strong networks in the digital equity community. Inspiration could be taken from the model used for the Whānau Ora commissioning agencies. Funding for digital skills, devices and wrap around support would be transferred to the intermediary. The intermediary would then be responsible for getting funding and other support to community organisations. A co-design process should be used to design the model to ensure that it meets needs. Something that is for community should be by community. 20/20 and others in Digital Equity Coalition Aotearoa can help with the design.



## 3

Digital equity and government digital transformation go hand-in-hand



### 3

## Digital equity and government digital transformation go hand-in-hand

Community organisations providing digital inclusion support, and community hubs such as libraries, are facing unprecedented demand for their services. A large part of this is helping people to access government services online.

As government agencies go through digital transformation processes that move services online, closing offices and making it harder to get help on the phone, this excludes vulnerable New Zealanders without the necessary digital skills, internet access and devices to get online and confidently navigate what is on offer and understand what they need to do.

This can be addressed by building digital equity into digital transformation projects. For example by better understanding who will be affected by the move to online, and budgeting to support community digital inclusion programmes.



# 4

## Affordable connectivity

The income poverty and cost of living crisis facing Aotearoa New Zealand means that even more people are struggling to afford the essentials, including internet access. This means internet at home and on-the-go, with enough data for the whole household. Whānau are either going without, sitting outside to access public Wi-Fi, or sacrificing other essentials so their children don't miss out.

Government support is needed for those on the lowest incomes. One option is a payment from MSD that could be used toward internet services, using a similar concept to the Winter Energy Payment. Another is for government to work with the Telco industry and the digital equity community to design a low cost government subsidised internet product or products. Co-design is the key here to ensure the solution will meet needs. The cost of this sort of intervention will more than pay for itself in terms of savings in government services, and wellbeing and productivity gains for households.



Digital equity helps you  
achieve other outcomes



# Digital equity helps you achieve other outcomes

Digital equity isn't just an end in itself. It is an enabler of a range of policy outcomes and priorities for the government of the day.

## The cost of living crisis

Being online allows people to save money and reduces the cost of delivering government services.

## Health

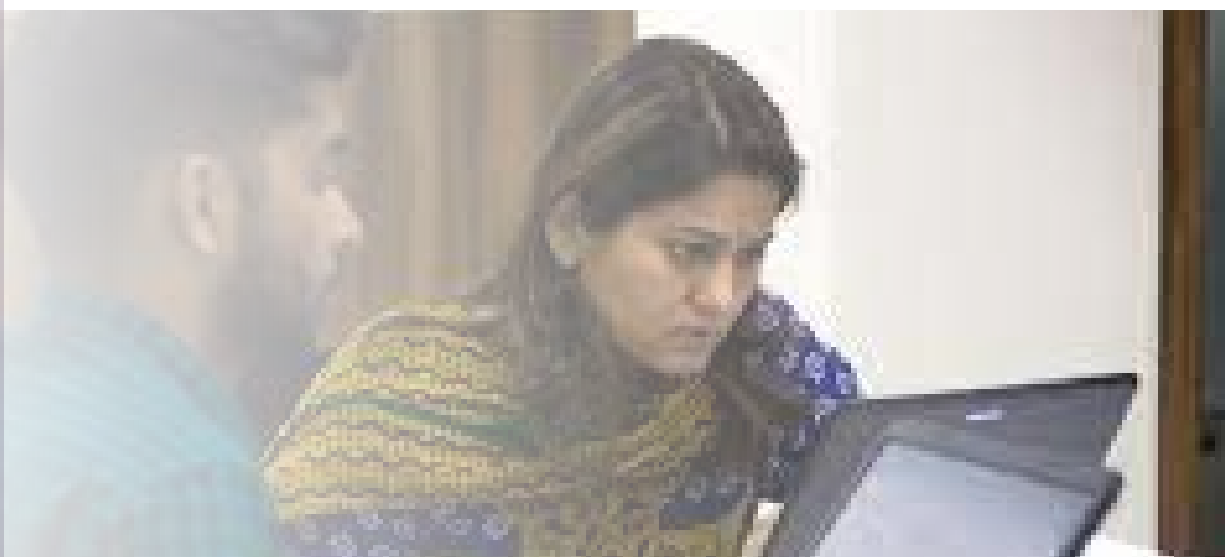
The health sector increasingly relies on people having digital access for appointments, information and communication. Online options can reduce the cost of building new facilities, and enable access to more services in more places.

## Education

Being online enables more people to learn in a way and at a time that works for them. Schools can keep operating during ongoing disruption from the Covid-19 pandemic, measles outbreaks and extreme weather events. Rangatahi can play a digital caretaker role for kaumatua and others in the whānau.

## Employment

Digital skills enable people to move into higher paying jobs, fill the skill shortage needed to grow the tech sector and other sectors that rely on workers with digital skills, and move out of industries being disrupted by climate change. Many occupations now require a base level of digital skills.





## Economic growth

Employment and productivity improvements for businesses through digital skills benefit the whole economy through GDP growth.

## Social inclusion and wellbeing

By providing online access to information, government services, and connection with family, friends and community.

## Disability services

Digital skills, devices and internet access can help people with disabilities overcome physical and sensory barriers to full participation in society.

## Climate change

Digital access enables communities to connect, get vital information and continue to work and learn remotely when extreme weather events and natural disasters make travel difficult. More people working from home means less traffic congestion and pollution from cars.

## Housing availability and affordability

Having digital skills and being online enables people to work from home, providing the opportunity to relocate for more affordable housing and areas where there is not a housing shortage.



# Digital equity facts and figures



## HOUSEHOLDS

**130,000**

Households do not have internet at home

*Most at risk of exclusion are families with children in low income households, people living in social housing, disabled individuals, seniors, Māori and Pasifika youth, migrants and refugees with English as a second language, offenders and ex-offenders, and unemployed people.*

*Source: Spark Foundation<sup>1</sup>*

**64%**

of Households do not have a fibre connection

*Those less likely to have a fibre connection at home are households with lower incomes, those living in the North Island outside the two main cities, and those with long-term disabilities or impairment.*

*Source: Intenet New Zealand<sup>2</sup>*

**216,000**

Households can't afford internet that meets their needs

*Source: Ministry of Education<sup>3</sup>*

**20%**

of NZ adults lack the essential digital skills needed to use the internet safely and effectively

*Source: Bank of New Zealand<sup>4</sup>*





# ETHNICITY

Proportion of ethnic groups with “Below essential” digital skills



\*NZ Europeans are the only ethnic group with a greater proportion of people than the population in general. NZ Europeans are a relatively older demographic and age is a key driver of digital skills.

Source: Bank of New Zealand <sup>4</sup>



# BENEFITS

**\$3.10 –  
\$3.60**

the ROI on every dollar invested in digital equity by government

Source: Ministry of Education <sup>3</sup>

**\$464m  
–\$737m**

the annual economic benefit of connecting the 130,000 households that don't have internet access

Source: Spark Foundation <sup>1</sup>

1. [www.sparknz.co.nz/content/dam/SparkNZ/pdf-documents/reports/The%20Economic%20Benefits%20of%20Digital%20Inclusion%20and%20Connectivity.pdf](http://www.sparknz.co.nz/content/dam/SparkNZ/pdf-documents/reports/The%20Economic%20Benefits%20of%20Digital%20Inclusion%20and%20Connectivity.pdf)
2. [internetnz.nz/new-zealands-internet-insights/new-zealands-internet-insights-2022/](http://internetnz.nz/new-zealands-internet-insights/new-zealands-internet-insights-2022/)
3. Research commissioned by the Ministry of Education and carried out by the Gravel Road economics and telecommunications consultancy in 2022. Research by NZIER also found an ROI of 3 to 1.
4. <https://blog.bnz.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/BNS0692-Digital-Skills-Report-20224.pdf>



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The 20/20 Trust is a registered charity CC24748

**20/20  
TRUST**

**Ka taea e tātou katoa o Aotearoa ngā kaha matihiko ki te whai wāhi i te Ao  
Everyone in Aotearoa has the digital capabilities to fully participate in the world**