

# The five point plan for digital inclusion: COVID-19 and beyond.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the reliance of New Zealanders on the Internet for work and study, information, and social interaction. It has also brought the need for digital inclusion into sharper focus and increased the urgency for action in this area. Too many New Zealanders are excluded from the digital world.

The Government has laid out its vision for digital inclusion in New Zealand and taken some steps towards realising that vision. Now is the time to step up our efforts, not just as part of our national response to COVID-19, but also as a foundation for future success all round. In this changing world, digital inclusion will be a key foundation for economic productivity and growth, wellbeing and sustainability.

We believe the actions taken by the Government, industry, and NGOs during the pandemic to get more New Zealanders online can be catalysed into ongoing action. As a country, we especially need to focus on groups in society that need different kinds of support, including Māori, Pasifika, older people, people with disabilities, those on lower incomes, rural users, and the homeless.

**We, the undersigned, call on Government to implement this five point plan for digital inclusion, and pledge our support in achieving these goals.**

## 1. Affordable connectivity

**What: government support to make connectivity affordable and accessible for New Zealanders on low incomes and who have recently become unemployed.**

We need to think beyond the shorter term fixes generously offered by providers. Solutions might include subsidies, options that work for renters, and providing connectivity as standard in public housing.

**Who:** MBIE and MSD, with involvement from Kāinga Ora, should lead this work across government, and coordinate funding for organisations doing the work in the community.

## 2. Getting devices to people who can't afford them

**What: making devices available to low income New Zealanders at low (or no) cost.** Efforts are underway to get devices (and connectivity) to school age children, but there are many New Zealanders in other age groups who can't afford devices appropriate to their needs. Solutions might include bulk purchasing, grant funding (without unnecessary contestability), or support for existing refurbishment programmes. Accessibility barriers need to be addressed.

**Who:** MSD and the Government Chief Digital Office at the DIA should lead this work across government, and coordinate funding for organisations doing the work in the community.

## 3. Wrap around support for the newly connected

**What: government funding for organisations providing support to get online and help with digital skills, motivation and trust.** Many New Zealanders receiving connectivity and devices for the first time will need help getting connected and using these new digital tools. Options might include increased funding for organisations already active in the community to meet immediate demand, and a networked model to reach more people in the longer term.

**Who:** DIA should lead this work across government, and coordinate funding for organisations doing the work in the community.

## 4. Digital skills for displaced workers and our small businesses

**What: government funded digital skills training and other support to help people find new jobs and make our businesses (including NGOs) more sustainable and resilient.** The economic impacts of COVID-19 will require a number of New Zealanders to look for new employment. Our businesses will be thinking more about opportunities in the online world. Options might include support packages to help businesses get online, and government funded skills training to support job seekers and provide new career options.

**Who:** MOE, TEC and MBIE should lead this work across government, and coordinate funding for organisations doing the work in the community. Economic development agencies should be involved on the business uptake side.

