**o**

Vision Australia Submission

Aged Care Data and digital strategy

Submitted to: Department of Health and Aged Care

Date: 20 November 2023

Submission approved by:

Chris Edwards

Director Government Relations, Advocacy, NDIS & Aged Care

# Aged Care Data and digital strategy

# Vision Australia Submission

Prepared by: Caitlin McMorrow, NDIS and Aged Care funding Specialist Lead

## Introduction

Vision Australia appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback to the department of Health and Aged Care on the draft Aged Care Data and Digital strategy. We welcome the strategy’s focus on effective and inclusive digital solutions that prioritise consumer directed care, and minimise administrative and compliance burden for service providers. We also applaud the proposed commitment to ensuring accessibility of digital solutions that cater to consumers with diverse needs and unique barriers to engagement with technology. As per our recommendations below, we would propose strengthening the outcomes and action areas to include a specific commitment to the engagement of people with disability, as well as service providers with relevant expertise, in the co-design and user testing of digital solutions.

## Recommendations

* Outcome 1: We suggest that the priority area around creating simplified user friendly experiences should be amended to include a specific commitment that people with disability will be involved in co-design and user testing of new digital solutions.
* Outcome 2: This outcome should be amended to acknowledge the importance and value of diversity within the workforce, acknowledging that workers from specific needs cohorts such as disability will be consulted in the design and implementation of all digital solutions to optimise service provider and sector capability.

## Involvement of People with disability in Co-Design and User Testing of Digital solutions

There is already a digital literacy gap for older Australians, and this is further compounded for people who are blind or have low vision, who must often learn new and vastly different ways of accessing technology following diagnosis in later life. For example, a person with vision loss will not simply need support to learn the use of a computer or tablet, but will also require specific training to effectively use screen reading or magnification software that works in conjunction with that device. This adds an additional layer of complexity that must be taken into account when assessing whether digital solutions are straight-forward and simple to use. Both accessibility and usability must be factored into the design of any proposed digital solutions that are introduced. Due to the unique barriers, they face, people with disability must be included in both co-design and user testing of these platforms to ensure they are fit for purpose. If feedback from this cohort is not considered in the early design stages of new digital offerings, there is a risk that significant modifications or amendments will be needed later, and the time and cost investment involved in achieving this will undermine the efficiencies that these new technologies are intended to create. For this reason, we suggest that Outcome 1 be amended to include a commitment that people with disability will be included in user testing and co-design of new solutions. This could be added under Priority 2: Creating simplified, User Friendly experiences. While there is no question that it is important to ensure the needs of all diversity groups are represented, we consider that it is particularly important to ensure that specialised knowledge and lived experience of disability is specifically mentioned, because this group often have needs related to assistive technology that are not well understood across the aged care sector more broadly.

## Diversity of Workforce

In general, the draft strategy demonstrates a strong understanding of the need for aged care consumers to access usable digital solutions that are fit for purpose. It is important to recognise, however, that people with disability are not only aged care consumers. They also adopt caring and support roles, give their time as volunteers and are employed as workers and professionals by service providers across the aged care sector. People with disability who are part of the aged care workforce also need to be assured that they will have accessible and usable digital solutions that enable them to carry out their roles efficiently and effectively. While the strategy appears to contemplate the importance of this concept for consumers, it is not been contemplated in the planning for workforce enhancement. Accordingly, we suggest that Outcome 2 should be amended to acknowledge the importance of engaging diversity groups, such as people with disability when designing and evaluating digital solutions that impact service providers and the interface between business and Government.

## Conclusion

Vision Australia thanks the department of health and Aged care for its consideration of this submission. We would be happy to provide further information around any of the issues outlined in this paper.

## About Vision Australia

Vision Australia is the largest national provider of services to people who are blind, deafblind, or have low vision. We are formed through the merger of several of Australia’s most respected and experienced blindness and low vision agencies, celebrating our 150th year of operation in 2017.

Our vision is that people who are blind, deafblind, or have low vision will increasingly be able to choose to participate fully in every facet of community life. To help realise this goal, we provide high-quality services to the community of people who are blind, have low vision, are deafblind or have a print disability, and their families.

Vision Australia service delivery areas include:

* Allied Health and Therapy services, and registered provider of specialist supports for the NDIS and My Aged Care
* Aids and Equipment, and Assistive/Adaptive Technology training and support
* Seeing Eye Dogs
* National Library Services
* Early childhood and education services, and Felix Library for 0-7-year olds
* Employment services, including National Disability Employment Services
* Accessible information, and Alternate Format Production
* Vision Australia Radio network, and national partnership with Radio for the Print Handicapped
* Spectacles Program for the NSW Government
* Advocacy and Engagement, working collaboratively with Government, business and the community to eliminate the barriers our clients face in making life choices and fully exercising rights as Australian citizens.

Vision Australia has gained unrivalled knowledge and experience through constant interaction with clients and their families. We provide services to more than 26,000 people each year, and also through the direct involvement of people who are blind or have low vision at all levels of the Organisation. Vision Australia is therefore well placed to provide advice to governments, business and the community on the challenges faced by people who are blind or have low vision fully participating in community life.

We have a vibrant Client Reference Group, with people who are blind or have low vision representing the voice and needs of clients of the Organisation to the Board and Management. Vision Australia is also a significant employer of people who are blind or have low vision, with 15% of total staff having vision impairment.

We also operate Memorandums of Understanding with Australian Hearing, and the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service.