# Counterpoint: Australia's Digital Divide Is Narrowing

**Thesis:** Evidence shows that Australia has made considerable progress in its efforts to improve digital inclusion, and upgrades of the country's broadband networks will assist that process.

## Talking Points

- Experts agree that Australia's digital divide is narrowing, with a larger proportion of the population accessing the internet than previously.
- In response to increased demand for digital services due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the federal government embarked on a major upgrade of Australia's broadband infrastructure.
- Part of the remaining infrastructural gap will be filled by complementary technologies, such as 5G mobile networks.

## Summary

Information technology experts—including those with concerns about stubborn digital inequalities—acknowledge that Australia is closing the digital divide. The authors of the nation's most authoritative survey of digital equality, the annual *Australian Digital Inclusion Index*, wrote in their 2020 report that digital inclusion has increased, even though the rate of increase was slow. They noted that the access score, a national rating which measures internet accessibility, had risen from 63.9 in 2014 to 76.3 in 2020, 'reflecting the fact that Australian internet users are accessing the internet more often, using an increasingly diverse range of communication technologies, purchasing larger data allowances and taking up high-speed NBN services'.

In September 2020, the federal government announced a program of major upgrades to the National Broadband Network (NBN). The minister for communications, Paul Fletcher, said the government was keeping pace with the challenges posed by COVID-19—and, indeed, would use the crisis to increase access to high-speed internet. In a joint media release with the finance minister, he remarked that the pandemic was an excellent time for infrastructural enhancements that would include significant improvements for neighbourhoods which had been dependent on slow fibre-to-the-node (FTTN) technology. Noting long-term growth in broadband demand, he claimed when the upgrade was complete, the government would be providing at least 8 million Australian homes with access to 'ultra-fast broadband speeds of up to 1 Gigabit per second (Gbps)'.

Telecommunications providers also argue that other technological advancements, such as the introduction of 5G mobile networks, will work in tandem with the growth of the NBN to deliver better digital services to consumers. For instance, Optus vice-president Andrew Sheridan told *News.com.au* that his company's '5G home service will be a complement to the NBN, so if you're on some of those technologies which are capped out in terms of capability, you may look at 5G as delivering greater capability, particularly those areas where there's more limited technology'.

## Ponder This

- The author has presented the fundamental positions for this perspective in the debate. Outline the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective.
- If asked to begin forming an argument for this position, what sources would you need to build your case? What fundamental information do you need? What opinion leaders in this debate would you look to in solidifying your argument?
- What are the weakest aspects of the position outlined by the author? How might those weaker arguments help you prepare a counter argument?
- What additional Talking Points could you add to support this position?

## Bibliography

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