



14th June 2022

To whom it may concern

Re: Wangaratta Digital Hub, continued funding

I'm writing on behalf of Women's Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE), in support of continued Victorian Government funding for the Wangaratta Digital Hub, whose state funding is due to expire at the end of June 2022.

WHGNE is a proudly feminist organisation supporting the creation of equal, just, healthy and safe communities in rural and regional Victoria. We view the world through a prevention lens, addressing the root causes of discrimination, exclusion, and oppression to realise communities in which equality, care and wellbeing are centred.

The pandemic highlighted just how critical digital access is to the ability to remain socially connected, economically active and well, and physically and mentally healthy. We saw an amazing, near-society-wide shift towards the digital realm - businesses and services moved online, workplaces required staff to work from home where possible, schools transitioned to home-based digital learning, community members checked in and provided digital confirmation of their vaccination status in order to access goods and services, patients used telehealth services to keep their wellbeing in check, and families and friends who were physically isolated from each other turned to digital platforms to stay socially connected.

However, this transition was not possible or smooth for everyone in our communities. In fact, those who experience other forms of social and economic disadvantage often found themselves faced with barriers to accessing, affording or being able to utilise the digital technology required to participate in community throughout the pandemic.

It is well demonstrated that digital disadvantage, or "digital poverty" [exacerbates other forms of disadvantage](#), and that women, people with disability, regional/rural people, older people, First Nations people and people from culturally diverse backgrounds experience the greatest barriers to easy, affordable digital access. As a result, they find themselves disproportionately missing out on the benefits of digital access. With many of the aforementioned shifts of daily needs and interactions to the digital realm persisting to this day, it is more important than ever that government and communities partner to challenge digital poverty and the way it intersects with other forms of disadvantage and exclusion.

We are pleased the Victorian Government continues to invest in digital inclusion across the state, through its ongoing Connecting Victoria projects, and would urge the government to include ongoing funding for the Wangaratta Digital Hub in this investment.


The Wangaratta Digital Hub has been a critical community resource throughout the pandemic, supporting community members to access a range of digital technologies, develop their skills under the guidance of community volunteers in a safe, welcoming, and inclusive setting, and build support networks, all towards increasing the level of digital inclusion in the Wangaratta community.

However, the good work of the Wangaratta Digital Hub is not finished. Indeed, the [Australian Digital Inclusion Index's most recent data \(2021\)](#) demonstrates that while Wangaratta's digital inclusion score has increased between 2020 and 2021, the community is lagging behind both state and national digital inclusion averages.

There is some way to go to ensure Wangaratta community members all enjoy equal access to, and benefit from, digital technologies. We cannot imagine a better way for this to occur than under the care and guidance of volunteers whose work is genuinely focused on achieving what can only be described as a public good. As such, we wholeheartedly support the work of the Wangaratta Digital Hub in challenging digital poverty in our community and hope the Victorian Government will do the same.

We look forward to supporting the Wangaratta Digital Hub into the future, to realise an equal, just, healthy and safe Wangaratta community for all.

Yours sincerely

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Amanda Kelly
CEO