



Australian Government

**House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Infrastructure and Communications**

**Inquiry into the role and potential of the National
Broadband Network**

**Australian Government Response
to the Committee's Report**

February 2012

INTRODUCTION

On 16 November 2010, the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, formally asked the House Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications (the Committee) to conduct an inquiry into the role and potential of the National Broadband Network (the Inquiry). The Committee was asked to report by August 2011.

The Committee was asked to examine the capacity of the National Broadband Network (NBN) to contribute to:

- the delivery of government services and programs
- achieving health outcomes
- improving the educational resources and training available for teachers and students
- the management of Australia's built and natural resources and environmental sustainability
- impacting regional economic growth and employment opportunities
- impacting business efficiencies and revenues, particularly for small and medium business, and Australia's export market
- interaction with research and development and related innovation investments;
- facilitating community and social benefits
- the optimal capacity and technological requirements of a network to deliver these outcomes.

The Inquiry received 252 submissions from a wide variety of submitters. On 25 August 2011, the Committee tabled its report, entitled *Broadening the debate*. The report made 16 recommendations, mostly pertaining to initiatives aimed at enhancing Australia's capacity to take full advantage of the NBN.

BACKGROUND

The National Digital Economy Strategy

On 31 May 2011, the Australian government announced the National Digital Economy Strategy (the Digital Economy Strategy). The Digital Economy Strategy is designed to prepare Australia to extract the full benefits of the NBN, and to ensure that by 2020, Australia is one of the world's leading digital economies.

The Digital Economy Strategy identifies eight digital economy goals. By achieving the goals, Australia will increase national productivity, ensure Australia's continued global competitiveness and improve social wellbeing. The eight goals focus on:

- online participation by Australian households
- online engagement by Australian businesses and not-for-profit organisations
- smart management of our environment and infrastructure
- improved health and aged care
- expanded online education
- increased teleworking
- improved online government service delivery and engagement
- greater digital engagement in regional Australia.

The full description of the goals can be found in **Appendix A**. Further information about some of the government's programs and initiatives which will help achieve these goals can be found in **Appendix B**.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

The Australian government has considered the Committee's report and provides the following response to the recommendations.

Recommendation 1

- That the government continue to coordinate the implementation of the National Digital Economy Strategy across government, ensuring appropriate regulatory frameworks are in place and promoting a consistent trans-sector approach to supporting its goals.

Australian Government Response

The government supports this recommendation.

The Digital Economy Strategy presents the government's vision for Australia's digital future.

The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy, in his capacity as Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Digital Productivity, has responsibility for coordinating the government's actions to help achieve the goals in the Digital Economy Strategy.

To advance the digital economy goals, the government is implementing a number of initiatives. Further information about these initiatives can be found in Appendix B. The government will closely monitor progress towards these goals and identify further measures that may be needed over the duration of the Digital Economy Strategy.

Recommendation 2

- That the government require its departments to report against the goals identified in the National Digital Economy Strategy in their annual reports.

Australian Government Response

The government supports this recommendation in principle.

Since 2005, the government has regularly reported on people's increasing uptake of and preference for online government services through the *Australians' Use of and Satisfaction with e-Government Services* studies.

As the lead agency for the National Digital Economy Strategy, the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy will coordinate the process of collecting data and narratives from agencies regarding actions they have taken to progress the goals in the Digital Economy Strategy. It will then provide a consolidated report to the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy on progress towards the digital economy goals on behalf of all government agencies.

Recommendation 3

- That the government continues to implement broadband-enabled technologies into its own services and operations as a means of improving efficiency, as well as to encourage NBN uptake and utilisation.

Australian Government Response

The government supports this recommendation.

Among the relevant initiatives adopted by the government are the Tell Us Once program, Service Delivery Reform in the Department of Human Services, and the open data project data.gov.au.

Further information about these initiatives can be found in **Appendix B**.

All major Commonwealth agencies will be developing plans for how they will take advantage of the NBN in the delivery of their own services and programs. The NBN will, for example, enable further opportunities for Commonwealth agencies to use cloud computing services, as foreshadowed in the government's *Cloud Computing Strategic Direction Paper*.¹

Recommendation 4

- That the government continue to support strategically targeted pilot projects in cooperation with relevant industries and communities that model innovative applications of the NBN.

Australian Government Response

The government supports this recommendation.

The Australian government is supporting innovative education and telehealth trials which seek to highlight the NBN's capacity to deliver services in a manner that improves both the efficiency and effectiveness over current modes of delivery. There are trials of telehealth currently proceeding in Townsville, Armidale and Kiama and an NBN-enabled tele-education project in Armidale.

On 31 May 2011, the government announced the NBN-enabled Education and Skills Services program. This is a four-year initiative commencing from 2011-12 that invites proposals for innovative online and interactive education and skill trials using the NBN. The **\$27.2 million** program aims to demonstrate the benefits of high-speed broadband connectivity and will make **funding** available to develop and implement projects in NBN early release sites.

On 22 January 2012, the government announced the NBN-enabled Telehealth Pilots Program. This initiative will provide up to \$20.6 million for new and innovative in-home telehealth services using the NBN for older Australians, people living with cancer and those requiring palliative care.

On 29 November 2011, \$8 million was announced to trial telemonitoring for veterans, taking advantage of reliable, high-speed and high-capacity broadband through the NBN. Under the trial, veterans and war widows with specific chronic conditions can have their health monitored, using telemonitoring equipment, by health professionals, without leaving their home.

Further information on the program and the trials is available in **Appendix B**.

Recommendation 5

- That the government consider allocating resources to each Regional Development Australia committee to allow these bodies to provide enhanced local digital economy leadership. This leadership role should include identifying regional goals and implementing related strategies and programs.

Australian Government Response

The government notes this recommendation.

The government is providing support to Regional Development Australia (RDA) committees to respond to emerging themes in their regions, including the digital economy. The Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport keeps the RDA committees informed of new initiatives under the government's National Digital Economy Strategy as they are being rolled out and is encouraging the RDA committees to work with their communities on project proposals.

¹ *Australian Government Cloud Computing Strategic Direction Paper*. Department of Finance and Deregulation, April 2011. Available online at www.finance.gov.au/e-government/strategy-and-governance/docs/final_cloud_computing_strategy_version_1.pdf

The Australian government is also providing funding of \$200 000, available in the 2011-12 financial year, for 17 RDA committees in the first and second release NBN sites. The funding will allow eligible RDA committees to undertake development and implementation strategy studies to explore how their regions can maximise economic and social benefits of the NBN and how they can best prepare their region for the NBN rollout.

Recommendation 6

- That the Federal Government develop a comprehensive engagement strategy incorporating a range of approaches to promote the uptake of broadband and digital technologies during the NBN rollout.

Australian Government Response

The government supports this recommendation.

The Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy is putting in place a comprehensive engagement strategy—developed in consultation with other government agencies and NBN Co. The overarching approach is to use advocates, case studies, targeted forums/events, use of nbn.gov.au, social media, and the NBN usage trials to help demonstrate the benefits of the NBN and maximise the benefits of the digital economy.

Recommendation 7

- That, recognising the important roles of public libraries and community centres, the Federal Government works in an appropriate capacity to implement a network of public access points connected to high speed NBN services in as many communities as possible.

Australian Government Response

The government supports this recommendation.

The Australian government will provide grant funding of \$13.6 million over three years from 2011-12 to establish a 'Digital Hub' in each of the 40 communities that will first benefit from the NBN.

Successful applicants for the program may include public libraries and community centre-based hubs.

The digital hubs will enable local residents to experience NBN-enabled services and also to access education and training to learn the skills required to participate in the NBN-enabled digital economy. A key target of the hubs are those people who do not currently use the internet.

Training will be delivered through a mix of group sessions and one-on-one tutorials to enable participants to engage in basic online activities such as: setting up an email account; conducting effective internet searches, participating in e-commerce and online shopping; accessing government services; and connecting with family and friends online. The digital hubs will also demonstrate the benefits provided by the NBN-enabled digital economy including e-health, virtual classrooms and tools for person-to-person and multi-point video communication.

Broadband for Seniors is an example of an established network, with 2000 internet kiosks serving as public internet access points for older Australians. The government will connect these access points to the NBN where possible in line with the NBN rollout. The government has committed funding of \$10.4 million over four years from 2011-12 to continue the Broadband for Seniors initiative. Further information about the Digital Hubs and Broadband for Seniors programs is available in **Appendix B**.

Recommendations 8 and 13

- That the Federal Government, with other organisations as appropriate, develop targeted programs for those currently disadvantaged by the digital divide to improve awareness of publicly available high-speed internet facilities, to improve access, and to promote the development of relevant skills.

- That the government provide further support for digital literacy programs, based on the Broadband for Seniors kiosk model, making use of existing resources such as libraries and not-for-profit groups where possible.

Australian Government Response

The government supports these recommendations.

Ensuring that disadvantaged groups have access to the benefits of the digital economy is an important part of the Digital Economy Strategy, and the government will implement a number of programs in line with this recommendation.

For example, a key target group for the Digital Hubs program will be the 25 per cent of households that are not online as well as those households that make only limited use of the internet. This latter group includes approximately 500 000 households that still use dial-up for their internet connection.

In the 2011–12 Budget, the government also provided a further \$10.4 million over four years from July 2011 to continue the Broadband for Seniors initiative.² For more information about Broadband for Seniors, see **Appendix B**.

As the Committee noted in their report, the Broadband for Seniors public access kiosk model is an effective strategy for engaging individuals with an interest in improving their digital literacy but who lack the financial or other resources necessary to achieve this.

The increasing use of computers and the internet in the workplace and society at large suggests that, to reflect the real contexts in which modern communication and work occur, skills such as reading, writing and problem solving should be learned in an information technology-rich environment.

In November 2011, the Australian government and state and territory governments endorsed an over-arching National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults (the Skills Strategy). The Skills Strategy was developed as a response to ABS findings that approximately 40 per cent of employed and 60 per cent of unemployed Australians had poor or very poor literacy and numeracy skills. These results highlighted the need for a national focus on improving the foundation skills of working-age Australians so that all adults have the skills they need to meet the demands of everyday life, work and participation in the community, including digital literacy. The Skills Strategy provides a framework for national, collaborative and jurisdictional action to improve the foundation skills of Australian adults and establish priority areas for action over the next 10 years.

The Skills Strategy is expected to be released in the first half of 2012.

The Australian government is currently supporting the development of e-learning strategies targeted at the needs of disadvantaged youth through the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (AFLF). The AFLF released a report in May 2011 entitled *The Role of Technology in Engaging Disengaged Youth* which indicated a one-size-fits-all approach will not be successful in engaging young learners, nor will the simple transfer of written content online. The multimedia and interactive functions of web 2.0 must be fully used, along with the emerging practices made possible by smart phones and mobile technology. Relevance and convenience of content is crucial for engagement. Blended delivery (for example via face-to-face and online media) is ideal. In light of these findings, the AFLF is investing in projects that will use e-learning to develop digital literacy, foundation and prevocational skills for disadvantaged people.

Recommendations 9 and 10

- That the government provide continued support for organisations involved in the development of high speed broadband applications.

²National Digital Economy Strategy, page 3. Available online at www.nbn.gov.au/the-vision/digitaleconomystrategy

- That the government maintains regulatory support to encourage increased levels of research and innovation in the private sector and recognises the NBN's importance to the realisation of its innovation agenda.

Australian Government Response

The government supports these recommendations.

The government has committed funding of \$564.5 million for the period 2002-2015 to the ICT Centre of Excellence Program, which funds National ICT Australia (NICTA). NICTA is a partnership arrangement between the Australian, state and territory governments and NICTA Member and Partner universities. It is jointly administered by the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and the Australian Research Council. NICTA is a major ICT research, training and commercialisation institute that makes a significant contribution to Australia's digital economy.

The government has also provided support to the CSIRO, the Australian Research Council and the Cooperative Research Centres Program for broadband related projects and applications.

In addition, the government's Innovation Agenda, entitled *Powering Ideas: An Innovation Agenda for the 21st Century*, sets out a framework of National Innovation Priorities and details concrete actions to help it achieve its policy ambitions. Some of the government initiatives to support Australia's research and innovation capacity include:

- reforming university research funding arrangements and boosting investment, with a focus on excellence and transparency, and increased support for postgraduate research students;
- investing in infrastructure and fellowships to ensure Australia stays ahead of the game in the three priority science fields of marine and climate, space and astronomy, and future industries, each reflecting Australia's research strengths and helping to address challenges like climate change, rising health costs, and increasing global economic competition; and
- boosting business research and delivering better outcomes for the nation by: replacing the R&D Tax Concession with a new, simpler R&D Tax Incentive; and taking an innovative approach to the commercialisation of research through Commercialisation Australia.

Recommendation 11

- That the government develop a strategy for the digitisation of Australia's culturally and historically significant content.

Australian Government Response

The government notes this recommendation and will consider this matter in the context of the National Cultural Policy.

On 15 December 2011, the government announced funding of \$19.94 million over three years for an Australian Broadcasting Corporation/Education Services Australia education portal.

The project will deliver a free, public, online education portal offering an extensive library of educational media resources mapped and aligned to the Australian curriculum as it rolls out.

The portal will comprise two streams. The first stream will feature contemporary and archival ABC content identified and enhanced for maximum educational value and directly aligned to the new Australian curriculum. A significant share of this content will be rich video and audio which will be readily and reliably available to homes as the NBN rolls out across the country. The second stream will feature interactive educational resources that will demonstrate and use the capacity of the NBN.

Recommendation 12

- That the government facilitate discussions between representatives of key content industries and internet service providers (ISP) to work towards an agreed framework for minimising online copyright theft.

Australian Government Response

The government supports this recommendation.

Discussions between relevant sectors and the Attorney-General's Department about an industry-led response to the issue of online copyright infringement are underway.

Recommendation 14

- That the government continue to support programs that equip small and medium enterprises with the knowledge and support they need to compete in the digital economy.

Australian Government Response

The government supports this recommendation.

As part of the Digital Economy Strategy, the government will provide \$10 million in grant funding over three years from 2011-12 for the Digital Enterprise program. The program will be available in the first 40 communities to benefit from the NBN. It will provide group training seminars as well as one-on-one advice on how small to medium businesses and not-for-profit organisations can use the NBN to make greater use of online opportunities to conduct their existing processes more efficiently and better achieve their organisational goals.

There are also a number of existing initiatives run by the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science, Research and Tertiary Education which provide assistance to small to medium businesses, including Enterprise Connect; the Small Business Advisory Services; and the Small Business Support Line.

The digitalbusiness.gov.au and business.gov.au websites provide Australian small to medium enterprises with online resources for advice and information about doing business both online and off. digitalbusiness.gov.au focuses on the use of online tools for promotion, sales and business improvement while business.gov.au – the flagship government website for business information of all kinds in Australia – provides information about a wide variety of topics, including digital economy information.

Further information about all of these programs and initiatives is available in **Appendix B**.

Recommendation 15

- That the government develop strategies for the collection and provision of data on workforce needs in the ICT sector into the future.

Australian Government Response

The government supports this recommendation in principle.

The government supports workforce development planning and evidence collection in a number of ways. Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) play a critical role in collecting evidence about Australia's workforce development needs.

These Councils are funded by the government, through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), and they are governed by independent, industry led boards. The Council responsible for the ICT sector is Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA). The formal roles of IBSA include:

- providing integrated industry intelligence and advice to Skills Australia, government and enterprises on workforce development and skills needs
- actively supporting the development, implementation and continuous improvement of high quality training and workforce development products and services including training packages
- providing independent skills and training advice to enterprises, including matching identified training needs with appropriate training solutions; working with enterprises, employment service providers, Registered Training Organisations and government to allocate training places under the National Workforce Development Fund.

Further information about the findings of the 2011 environmental scan of the ICT sector is available from the IBSA website. Consultations with industry were undertaken by IBSA in 2011 in preparation for the release of the 2012 environmental scan in March 2012.

The forward looking work of the ISCs is complemented by a range of freely available labour market statistics, produced by DEEWR:

- The Job Outlook website provides information about employment characteristics, trends and prospects for a range of leading ICT occupations.
- A package of ICT labour market indicators, spanning both demand and supply, is provided on the SkillsInfo website.

Skills Australia also conducts economic research into a range of occupations, including ICT. Skills Australia is currently preparing a set of scenarios for Australia's future to 2025 as part of the next iteration of the national workforce development strategy. Science, technology and innovation form one of the six drivers for these scenarios. Modelling based on the scenarios will be conducted in 2012, and this will provide demand and supply projections for ICT occupations under each of the scenarios.

Recommendation 16

- That the government develop a long term strategy to up-skill and/or retrain the existing workforce and develop new training programs to address emerging skills gaps.

Australian Government Response

The government supports this recommendation.

Under the Building Australia's Future Workforce package, the government is delivering a \$3 billion investment over six years to ensure Australia has the people and skills it needs to respond to the demands of the future.

This package places industry at the heart of the training efforts by establishing a new \$25 million National Workforce and Productivity Agency that will build on the work of Skills Australia. Through the agency, industry will have the opportunity to set the direction for future training in Australia.

The agency will manage a \$558 million National Workforce Development Fund (the Fund). The Fund is the vehicle through which government and industry will work together, sharing responsibility to deliver an estimated 130 000 high quality training places. Co-contribution is a requirement, recognising the shared responsibility between government and industry.

DEEWR has been working with the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, NBN Co, principal contractors and state governments to identify training and employment opportunities associated with the NBN rollout. The discussions have centred on the importance of a coordinated, national, state and regional approach. A regionally focused stakeholder engagement model will be developed and used to facilitate this approach.

The Definitive Agreements between Telstra and NBN Co announced on 23 June 2011, set out Telstra's participation in the NBN rollout and are supported by agreements between Telstra and the Commonwealth which include funding of up to \$100 million for retraining employees. This funding will

assist Telstra in the retraining and redeployment of Telstra staff affected by reforms to the structure of the telecommunications industry, including to enable their transition to employment in deploying and supporting a fibre network.

The Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education also operates in this space.

The IT Industry Innovation Council (ITIIC) within the Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education portfolio has an interest in the future skills needs of the ICT sector. The Council recognises that an ICT ready workforce and a digitally literate community will be vital if the NBN is to achieve its potential. The Council has established a working group which will consider a range of skills related issues including the teaching of ICT within a national schools curriculum, ICT careers awareness, attracting and retaining ICT skills and alternative pathways into ICT.

Another Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education initiative, Enterprise Connect, also provides services to lift the management skills of Australian small and medium enterprise owners and senior managers.

National Digital Economy Goals

- ***Online participation by Australian households***

By 2020, Australia will rank in the top five OECD countries in the percentage of households that connect to broadband at home.

- ***Online engagement by Australian businesses and not-for-profit organisations***

By 2020, Australia will rank in the top five OECD countries in the percentage of businesses and not-for-profit organisations using online opportunities to drive productivity improvements, expand their customer base and enable jobs growth.

- ***Smart management of our environment and infrastructure***

By 2020, the majority of Australian households, businesses and other organisations will have access to smart technology to better manage their energy use.

- ***Improved health and aged care***

By 2020, as identified in the National E-Health Strategy endorsed by the federal, state and territory governments, 90 per cent of high priority consumers—such as older Australians, mothers and babies and those with a chronic disease, or their carers—can access individual electronic health records.

Through the government's investments in telehealth, by July 2015, 495,000 telehealth consultations will have been delivered, providing remote access to specialists for patients in rural, remote and outer metropolitan areas.

By 2020, 25 per cent of all specialists will be participating in delivering telehealth consultations to remote patients.

- ***Expanded online education***

By 2020, Australian schools, TAFEs, universities and higher education institutions will have the connectivity to develop and collaborate on innovative and flexible educational services and resources to extend online learning resources to the home and workplace; and the facilities to offer students and learners, who cannot access courses via traditional means, the opportunity for online virtual learning.

- ***Increased teleworking***

By 2020, Australia will have at least doubled its level of teleworking so that at least 12 per cent of Australian employees report having a teleworking arrangement with their employer.

- ***Improved online government service delivery and engagement***

By 2020, four out of five Australians will choose to engage with the government through the internet or other type of online service.

- ***Greater digital engagement in regional Australia***

By 2020, the gap between households and businesses in capital cities and those in regional areas will have narrowed significantly.

Digital economy programs

Broadband for Seniors

Since 2008, the government has invested \$15 million to establish 2,000 internet kiosks across Australia to provide older Australians with free access to computers and the internet, as well as training in information technology skills.

On 10 May 2011, the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, announced that the government would invest a further \$10.4 million over four years to continue to support kiosks and senior users.

For more information, visit www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/seniors/progserv/broadbandseniors.

Business.gov.au

The Australian government's principal business resource remains the award winning www.business.gov.au website. The site has been in operation for 13 years.

Business.gov.au is a whole-of-government service which assists Australians to plan, start and grow their business by providing a wide range of services and essential information from Australian, state, territory and local governments.

By using business.gov.au, businesses can comply with government requirements more simply and conveniently, saving time and money.

For more information, visit www.business.gov.au.

Data.gov.au

The Department of Finance and Deregulation has developed data.gov.au as a data catalogue of government information. The site provides an easy way to find, access and reuse public datasets from the Australian, state and territory governments.

For more information, visit <http://data.gov.au>.

Digital Hubs

The Australian government will provide \$13.6 million in grant funding over three years from 2011–12 to establish a Digital Hubs program that will help communities to gain the skills needed to maximise the benefits provided by the NBN.

The program will establish a Digital Hub in the first 40 communities to benefit from the NBN. Digital Hubs will provide local residents with online training and the opportunity to experience NBN-enabled services and technology.

For more information, visit www.dbcde.gov.au/digital_economy/programs_and_initiatives/digital_communities_initiative.

Digital Enterprise

The Australian government has provided \$10 million in grant funding over three years from 2011-12 to establish a Digital Enterprise program that will help small-to-medium enterprises and not-for-profit organisations (including local cultural organisations) in those communities to first benefit from the NBN.

It will help them to better understand how they can maximise the opportunities from greater digital engagement, enabled by the NBN.

The program will provide group training seminars as well as one-on-one advice on how participants can use the NBN to make greater use of online opportunities to conduct their existing processes more efficiently and better achieve their organisational goals.

For more information, visit

www.dbcde.gov.au/digital_economy/programs_and_initiatives/digital_enterprise_program.

Digital Local Government

The Australian government's \$17.1 million Digital Local Government program will provide funding to local governments in communities that first benefit from NBN.

It will assist local governments to deliver innovative online services—in particular, to homes and businesses.

The program encourages the development of online services that are replicable and scalable, and which other local governments across Australia can adapt for their purposes. It has the potential to encourage a step change in the quality, availability and speed of local government services.

The Digital Local Government program will contribute to the Australian government's vision that Australia will become a leading global digital economy by 2020.

For more information, visit

www.dbcde.gov.au/digital_economy/programs_and_initiatives/digital_local_government_program.

Enterprise Connect

Enterprise Connect offers comprehensive advice and support to eligible Australian small and medium businesses to help them transform and reach their full potential. Among its core services is the holistic business review offered to client firms by experienced Business Advisers.

As part of the business review, a Business Adviser can identify areas where a business requires improvement in its practices to help it compete in the digital economy. Business Advisers can access the Enterprise Connect Technology and Knowledge Connect (TKC) service which offers an independent broker service to diagnose technology and technical knowledge related issues and opportunities, provides linkages to domestic and international sources of expertise, suppliers of technology and technical knowledge advice, and assists businesses to access leading edge technology.

For more information, visit www.enterpriseconnect.gov.au/Pages/Home.aspx.

In-home Telemonitoring for Veterans

The Australian Government is undertaking an \$8 million three-year trial of in-home telemonitoring services for veterans that takes advantage of the reliable, high speed and high capacity broadband delivered by the National Broadband Network (NBN). The trial aims to improve the quality of life of our veteran community and will allow veterans to access high quality health care from home.

The trial will commence from mid 2012 in a number of NBN early release sites around Australia.

For more information, visit www.dva.gov.au/health_and_wellbeing/health_programs/Pages/telem.aspx

Medicare Benefits Schedule Expansion

From 1 July 2011, the Australian Government has provided Medicare rebates for telehealth services to enable Australian patients to participate in consultations with their specialists using videoconferencing.

This is helping to improve health care service delivery in rural and remote areas for people who need specialist medical care.

For more information, visit www.mbsonline.gov.au/telehealth

NICTA

NICTA is a world-class, world-scale ICT research, training and commercialisation institute that is substantially funded by the Australian Government. NICTA is lifting Australia's ability to generate breakthrough technologies, grow ICT businesses and spur the development of the digital economy and Australian industries creating jobs and wealth.

NICTA collaborates with private sector research organisations, major companies, small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) and public sector agencies.

NICTA is one of Australia's largest ICT research organisations and employs over 250 research staff and research support staff and around 250 post-graduate students. Its headquarters are at the Australian Technology Park at Redfern in Sydney. It has four other laboratories in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.

Additional funding of \$185.5 million was announced in the 2009-10 Budget to extend NICTA's operation for a further four years to 2014-15. The funding deed for this additional funding was executed on 8 December 2010.

For more information about NICTA, visit www.nicta.com.au.

NBN-enabled education and skills services

This four-year program will fund innovative online and interactive education and skills services using the NBN. The program aims to demonstrate the benefits of high-speed broadband connectivity to be provided in and across the NBN first-release site areas, including improving online accessibility to individuals at home and in workplaces.

For more information, visit www.dbcde.gov.au/digital_economy/programs_and_initiatives/nbn-enabled_education_and_skills_services_program

NBN-enabled tele-education project

This NBN-enabled tele-education project in Armidale commenced in late 2011 and will deliver state-of-the-art virtual interactive training rooms, laboratories and community learning capability. The project takes the form of a partnership between the NSW TAFE – New England Institute and University of New England, and will deliver:

- high-definition, internet-protocol-delivered television, video on demand and three-dimensional representation in trade skilling packages
- open access courseware combining University and TAFE content that will be available free to the user from any NBN footprint
- high-quality open learning and support services for teaching professionals
- cloud technology enabling software licensing to the server to ensure individuals do not pay licence fees
- enhanced community access services for 30 regional community technology centres in NSW
- virtual classes allowing students in any home or work location to participate in immersive learning enabled by the NBN

Further information about this project is available at www.nbn.gov.au/education/government-initiatives/nbn-enabled-tele-education-project/

NBN-enabled Telehealth Pilots Program

This program will provide funding to successful proposals for pilot projects to develop and deliver telehealth services to NBN-enabled homes with a focus on aged, palliative or cancer care services. The program aims to harness the NBN infrastructure to deliver better access to high quality health services.

For more information, visit www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ehealth-nbntelehealth-pilots

Service Delivery Reform

The government is also undertaking investigation and testing of some preliminary developments to improve people's ease of use and access across government services. The government will examine service delivery reforms that will enable individuals to manage their government transactions and personal information via a single on-line account and provide the basis for a range of new services.

On 16 December 2009, the Minister for Human Services announced the start of the reform to government service delivery to develop a modern, flexible, whole-of-government service delivery system. This will enable the government to better meet the needs and expectations of the Australian people and deliver services more efficiently.

For more information, visit www.nbn.gov.au/government-services/government-initiatives/service-delivery-reform

Small Business Advisory Services (SBAS – Business Enterprise Centres)

The Small Business Advisory Services program aims to maximise the growth, prosperity and sustainability of small businesses. The government funds selected Business Enterprise Centres and other not-for-profit business advisory organisations to provide assistance and advice on issues such as business planning, cash flow, leasing guidance and legal and accounting services. These services are located in suburban, rural and regional Australia.

For more information, visit [www.ausindustry.gov.au/SmallBusiness/SmallBusinessAdvisoryServices/Pages/SmallBusinessAdvisoryServices\(SBAS\).aspx](http://www.ausindustry.gov.au/SmallBusiness/SmallBusinessAdvisoryServices/Pages/SmallBusinessAdvisoryServices(SBAS).aspx).

Small Business Support Line (SBSL)

The support line assists small business owners manage their business by providing initial advice and referral services on matters such as obtaining finance, cash flow management, and personal and hardship counselling. The support line is available through instant messaging, email and phone.

For more information, visit www.ausindustry.gov.au/SmallBusiness/SBSL/Pages/SmallBusinessSupportLine.aspx.

Smart Grid, Smart City

The Australian government has committed up to \$100 million to develop the Smart Grid, Smart City demonstration project in partnership with the energy sector. This initiative will gather robust information about the costs and benefits of smart grids to inform future decisions by government, electricity providers, technology suppliers and consumers across Australia.

For more information, visit www.ret.gov.au/energy/energy_programs/smartgrid/Pages/default.aspx.

Telehealth trials

Telehealth trials in Armidale, Kiama and Townsville will assist to inform the development of future programs and initiatives to address the health goals under the Digital Economy Strategy.

The Townsville diabetes trial will enable in-home monitoring of type 2 diabetes patients and provide updates on a patient's health status to health professionals, including alerts where a clinical change may require further intervention. Patient care will be further augmented through high-quality in-home consultations with general practitioners and various health professionals using high-definition video as well as access to support, education and coaching services to promote healthier lifestyles. These services will be delivered in cooperation with the relevant state and local authorities, namely Queensland Health and the Townsville-Mackay Medicare Local.

In the NBN early release sites of Armidale and Kiama, the government is working with NSW Health and relevant local health districts, to trial the delivery of in-home telehealth services, enabled by the NBN's high-speed broadband connections. The trial will target services toward older Australians with moderate or severe chronic diseases, and will augment existing aged care programs and health service delivery to enhance chronic disease management.

The Kiama trial will also improve access to mental health services for young people (aged 12 to 25) by extending tele-consultation into participants' homes, participating schools and community centres.

For more information, visit www.nbn.gov.au/health-and-aged-care/government-initiatives/nsw-telehealth-trials-in-kiama-and-armidale.

Telework activities

The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy recently declared 12-16 November 2012 as National Telework Week, an initiative to encourage as many employers and employees as possible to trial teleworking. A range of organisations have been established as Partner organisations to assist the department to promote National Telework Week.

To further support the government's telework strategy, the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (the department) will work with AIIA to promote telework with case studies and videos. The first of these video case studies is available on www.nbn.gov.au/telework/resources. The department will also work with AIIA to discuss how to address interoperability in the Australian context and develop relevant fact sheets on matters such as IT security for telework. The department will develop best-practice guidance for work health and safety management related to telework.

The department will trial and develop a Telework Business Case Builder to help businesses and not-for-profit organisations develop a business case for telework in their organisations. It will also ensure telework is on the agenda of all NBN business forums and is a focus for the Digital Hubs program and Digital Enterprise program, which will include seminars on telework to assist local SMEs with guidance on adoption of teleworking using the NBN. An additional seminar program will promote the benefits of telework in the state capital cities and major regional areas.

The department will promote telework across the Australian Public Service in conjunction with the Australian Public Service Commission.

The take-up of telework is promoted through the Telework Australia website.

For more information, visit www.nbn.gov.au/telework and www.teleworkaustralia.net.au.

Tell Us Once

The government has committed \$2.3 million in the 2011-12 Budget to an Improved Access to Australian Government Services measure which will investigate and test some preliminary developments to improve people's ease of use and access to government services.

Further information is available at www.nbn.gov.au/government-services/government-initiatives/tell-us-once-initiative.