

# Insufficient access to reliable and affordable internet amplifies inequalities in Melbourne

August 19 2022

---



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Residents of a public housing estate in Melbourne, Australia are missing out on education and employment opportunities, and health and income support because of barriers to the access and use of reliable and

affordable internet, a new University of Melbourne report has found.

The report, "Understanding Digital Inequality: An analysis of unequal connectivity in Carlton Housing Estate," reveals the considerable digital connectivity challenges for residents from the Carlton Housing Estate.

The research team co-designed a pilot study that examined the lived experience of 141 residents after the first COVID-19 lockdown in Melbourne in 2020.

According to the report, residents incur high [internet](#) costs as they are often required to purchase mobile data or pay for other solutions to plug gaps in connectivity without any guarantee of results.

It was also reported internet companies do not provide sufficient support to set up and troubleshoot solutions and with 60 percent of respondents living below the [poverty line](#), this exacerbates already disadvantaged circumstances.

Lead author of the report Dr. Nicky Dulfer said it has become increasingly important to understand the experiences of communities particularly vulnerable to digital exclusion.

"This report provides an insight into the lived experiences of people in public housing towers, who experience significant digital inequality at a time when internet access is required for most forms of participation in society," Dr. Dulfer said.

"It also provides an example for further research to better understand the factors that lead to digital inequality in intersectional communities. Growing this evidence base will be critical to determining how exactly government and industry can tackle increasing digital inequality in Australia."

As a result of unreliable internet, participants were often unable to engage in common activities like streaming and conference calling, and were required to use mobile data to interact with critical services like Centrelink and digital translators.

The study also revealed participants were not as digitally connected during the pandemic and ensuing [lockdowns](#) as the critical services they depended on assumed.

Online home-schooling and remote working demanded a one-to-one device-to-person ratio, and many low-income families needed to buy or request assistance to meet this demand.

The report recommends further research should focus on how people access the internet, not just if they can access the internet or not and at what cost, and for the development of not-for-profit alternatives that can be rolled out where the need is greatest like [public housing](#) estates.

In addition, the research team calls on telecom companies and governments to work together to set minimum quality standards and create products which offer low-cost options that do not force people to sacrifice quality or [reliability](#).

"ACCAN is really proud to support this groundbreaking report and we congratulate the university for bringing such an important issue to the surface. Digital inequality is an area that we have been concerned about for a long time and it's important that all Australians have equal access to reliable and affordable internet no matter what they can afford," ACCAN CEO Andrew Williams said.

The University of Melbourne's Social Equity Institute Director Professor Jo Barraket said this research has emerged at a particularly important time.

"The [pandemic](#) has led to huge digital uplift across all kinds of services. Through direct engagement with one community's experience, this research shines a light on both the social inequities generated by an increasingly digital world, and possible ways to respond," Professor Barraket said.

**More information:** [Understanding Digital Inequality: An analysis of unequal connectivity in Carlton Housing Estate \(2022\)](#)

Provided by University of Melbourne

Citation: Insufficient access to reliable and affordable internet amplifies inequalities in Melbourne (2022, August 19) retrieved 10 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-08-insufficient-access-reliable-internet-amplifies.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.