Connectivity in the Bush
2016-17

Centacare Cairns
FNQ Partners in
Recovery

introduction

During many discussions and community forums conducted in 2015 & 2016 with people whom reside in rural and remote areas of the Tablelands and Gulf Region, it was evident there were significant issue related to connectivity of technology and the internet.

With changes to the way the region will deliver and provide access to mental health and wellbeing resources towards an online and technology platform, Centacare Cairns - Partners in Recovery with the support of Dr Ernest Hunter and AbT Consultancy Group on behalf of NQ PHN, developed a survey of questions to capture the impacts of connectivity in the bush. The data has captured significant issues related to connectivity and the impact this has on people's health, business's and their ability to connect with each other in rural and remote areas in North Queensland.

Areas/Towns captured within the survey....

Mareeba

Georgetown

Atherton

Tolga

Herberton

Milla Milla

Kuranda

Koah

Dimbulah

Mutchilba

Chillagoe

Croydon

Walkamin

Speewah

Myola

Einasleigh

Normanton

Forsayth

18 Towns / Suburbs in total, covering the southern and northern Gulf Catchment and Tablelands Shires.

Devices used in household across these areas are:

76% have a landline

60% a mobile phone

66% of those with a mobile phone have a smart phone

69% have a Tablet/iPad

91% have a Laptop/PC and less than 1% identified that they do not use any internet based technology

Participants were asked what they use their internet for?

82% of respondents stated that they use their internet for **Business/Work**

93% use it for **Personal** and **79%** for **Social**

56% of people utilise their internet for **Health Information** and **59% Education** (inc children)

84% of Participants reported that they have experienced internet connectivity problems in the 6 months leading up to Dec 2016.

The average impact rating of these problems on day to day life for people were

6.5 / 10

a score of 10 indicates a significant impact that affects business, social connection, finances & wellbeing.

Participants were asked what were the specific issues with connectivity........

- Ability to **connect** or stay connected to internet **85%**
- The **speed** of connection **76%**
- **Cost** of accessing the internet (eg: cost of downloaded data) **25%**
- **Restriction** of data available for a set time period eg: month **26%**

84%
of Participants stated that they would utilise the internet
to access information or support for health concerns,
both mental and physical.

Participants were asked if they would use the following types of internet options based on health and wellbeing.

Information about symptoms / conditions 96%

Information about treatments 85%

Self Assessments 56%

Internet based treatments 40%

Online Counselling 45%

Participants were asked which of these sites they have heard of?

Health Direct	22%
Beyond Blue	95%
Black Dog Institute	77%
Mustering Wellness	28%
Mens Health	42%
Relationships Australia	52%
Poisons Information	60%
Mood Gym	3%
Lifeline	82%
National Domestic Violence	40%

So if connectivity was/is NOT a barrier how confident and willing are people in using internet and access to health info?

81%

and, is there people living in your household that would access health info/services via the internet if they felt more confident in their ability to connect?

65% of people said YES

Have you or someone in your household ever used a phone based service (for an emergency/crisis or for ongoing health support)

69% said YES

COMMENTS

"Mobile services are patchy at best and city based operators always call these numbers even when you ask them not to!!!! Internet gets knocked out during bad weather and we can't get anything with 'unlimited data' even if you are willing to pay for it".

"....slow/expensive internet limits my capacity to engage with essential services such as ehealth and self education"

"It is extremely frustrating living remote and not have coverage for simple things like mobile phones and internet being restricted and slow and limited compared to everyone that lives in town...."

"I have internet issues everyday"

...."some shocking and dropping in and out, every so often it goes out for half a day or so"

...."we can barely load a website site these days"

"Instead of bridging the gap between remote and urban Australians, the ever widening gap in services, connectivity and access to technology is WIDENING this divide and rural Australian's are being left behind and forgotten"

"Physical isolation is compounded by digital isolation, which feeds into depression and anxiety"

"we have great online services, however, if we don't have good connectivity or enough internet we can't access it!!"

This report was compiled and collated by Peta O'Neill,
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If you have any questions please contact us on the below
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