

Joint media release

(Embargoed until 30 September)

1,000,000 older Australians can't be wrong: busting myths by boosting online skills

The popularity of the Australian Government's Be Connected program has proven that using the internet confidently and safely is not beyond older Australians, with the program marking its one millionth learner – and the numbers keep growing. This is especially significant in the lead up to the International Day of Older Persons on 1 October.

Be Connected is a joint initiative between the Department of Social Services, eSafety and Good Things Foundation Australia, designed to help older Australians boost their online game with critical skills through online and face-to-face support.

The achievements of Be Connected are a result of a productive partnership that sees engaging and audience-focused content developed by eSafety and an unparalleled community-based network developed by Good Things Foundation Australia.

\$20 million in small grants has been provided by Good Things Foundation Australia to their network of 3,500 community organisations, alongside critical support and upskilling, to enable them to deliver the program.

The expertise of eSafety has created the high-quality Be Connected website. The site is a one-stop shop with over 500 learning activities - and it's all free.

A recent evaluation of Be Connected has demonstrated its impressive impact in creating a social return on investment of \$4.01 for every \$1 invested.¹

Australia's eSafety Commissioner, Julie Inman Grant, said eSafety research shows that 50% of older Australians are willing to upgrade their online skills with the right resources and Be Connected is certainly delivering that.²

"Confidence is a barrier to older Australians doing more online but Be Connected keeps proving how good it is at breaking down these barriers," she said. "It encourages older Australians to explore even more online and equips them with the skills to do this safely."

Jess Wilson, CEO of Good Things Foundation Australia, said a great strength of the program is that it gives older Australians both the enthusiasm and the capacity to really make the most of technology and at the same time helps build connections with others in their community.

¹ Swinburne University of Technology (2020), Improving the digital inclusion of older Australians: The social impact of Be Connected.

² eSafety Commissioner (2018), Understanding the digital behaviours of older Australians.

“Our national network of 3,500 diverse community organisations are a vital part of the success of this program, providing over-50s with a friendly, supportive learning environment close to them. The \$20m in small grant funding we have distributed helps our community partners to pay staff and volunteer expenses, purchase devices - including loan devices for isolated learners during COVID, and provides hours of dedicated support to older Australians in their own communities.”

Minister for Families and Social Services Anne Ruston congratulated the vast number of older Australians who stepped up to the challenge to Be Connected.

“Be Connected has allowed Australians to accomplish new skills throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and stay connected at a time when older Australians in particular could have felt very isolated and lonely,” Minister Ruston said. “That’s why the Morrison Government is proud to have invested another \$28.3 million in Be Connected through to 2024, so we can continue to empower older Australians to build their confidence online and live independently.”

Despite one million people being reached through this program already, there are many more older Australians who still need support to be connected confidently and safely.

Minister for Communications, Urban Infrastructure, Cities and the Arts, the Honourable Paul Fletcher MP said, “This year International Day of Older Persons has the theme ‘Digital Equity for All Ages’. Older people do need to feel safe and confident online, now more than ever, as the pandemic and resulting lockdowns isolate so many of us. I encourage those looking for a helping hand to be connected online to get involved in this free program.”

Find out more about how to get free digital skills support for older Australians by going to www.beconnected.esafety.gov.au or calling 1300 795 897.

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Information for editors:

- With face-to-face learning a crucial part of the program, Good Things Foundation Australia initially aimed to support 2,000 local organisations that serve their communities to deliver the program. There are now 3,500 community partners nationwide assisting older Australians to learn essential online skills through Be Connected.
- Research indicates that while the usage of the internet by older people increased during COVID, it still fell behind the younger generations. More facts and stats on the digital divide in Australia can be found in Good Things Foundation Australia’s [Digital Nation Australia 2021](#) report.
- eSafety & DSS recently won an award at the Digital Summit Awards for their work on the Be Connected program

eSafety

The Office of the eSafety Commissioner promotes online safety education for Australian young people, educators and parents. It also provides a complaints mechanism for young people who experience serious cyberbullying, and for Australians to report illegal or offensive online content.

Good Things Foundation Australia

Good Things Foundation Australia is a social change charity helping people to improve their lives through digital. Good Things Foundation Australia is the national Be Connected Network & Grants

program manager, building capacity in community organisations to deliver this program to older Australians. www.goodthingsfoundation.org.au

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