

Hon Jo Palmer MLC
Minister for Education
Minister for Children and Youth
Minister for Disability Services

Via email: jo.palmer@parliament.tas.gov.au

Dear Minister Palmer

Thank you for your letter of 4 January 2026 updating COTA Tasmania on the Online Access Centres (OAC) changes planned for the end of June 2026.

COTA welcomes this as a sensible and constructive outcome. We have consistently argued that Tasmania could not responsibly “finish up” with OACs without a clear, accessible alternative in place — particularly for older Tasmanians who rely on local, trusted help to navigate essential online services.

This is especially important given the scale of digital exclusion: the Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2025 reports that around one in five Australians (20.6%) are digitally excluded, and exclusion is much higher for people aged 75+ (66.5%). Tasmania also records the lowest digital inclusion score nationally (69.4).

Your advice that the Government will transition services to local library sites where there is duplication, while maintaining other OACs with increased funding, provides continuity and reduces the risk of service gaps. We particularly welcome the explicit commitment that Libraries Tasmania will work closely with OAC teams on transition to ensure there is no gap in service.

We also strongly support the recognition of Libraries Tasmania’s growing role in the digital inclusion space - including access to free wi-fi and public computers, drop-in help, and one-to-one digital skills support, as well as alignment with the Good Things Foundation’s *Be Connected* program. COTA’s national Digital Engagement Policy also highlights that an inclusive society must support those who can participate digitally while maintaining services and supports for those who cannot. It is important also to understand that a “digital-only” policy can be seen as a form of ageism.

This reflects what we hear from older people: they are more likely to seek help in community hubs they already know and trust. That preference is echoed in the Review of Digital Inclusion in Tasmania, which found people value local, trusted support in accessible community hubs they already frequent (including Libraries Tasmania and Neighbourhood Houses), and that effective support is personalised, on-demand and patient.

COTA notes the location-specific decisions outlined in the attached outcomes table, including the planned mergers of OAC services into library services at New Norfolk, Devonport and Lilydale from 30 June 2026, and ongoing funding for other centres through 2026–2029 with increased annual support in several locations (including through Digital Connections Grants).

These decisions appear to reflect a practical balance between avoiding duplication where strong alternatives exist, while maintaining a presence where there is limited other social infrastructure.

They also support the recommendations of the Review of Digital Inclusion in Tasmania (December 2024), which emphasised the vital role played by trusted local hubs and the importance of effective volunteer models with training, and the need to avoid leaving communities behind through transitions.

To help ensure these changes deliver improved access in practice (not just in structure), COTA encourages a strong transition focus on:

- Clear communication and outreach, especially to older residents, about where to go, what help is available, and what hours apply in each community.
- Supported handover arrangements, so people are not left without assistance during the changeover period.
- Volunteer and staff capability, including consistent training and scope — particularly around scams, privacy, and cybersecurity, which are major barriers to confidence for older users. (The Tasmanian Digital Inclusion Review specifically notes that volunteer models can be effective provided volunteers receive consistent, high-quality training and work within a clearly defined scope, including cybersecurity/scams.)
- Ongoing non-digital options, recognising that digital-only service models can amount to exclusion and structural ageism, and that older people strongly want non-internet options to remain available.

Finally, COTA would encourage a shared approach to measuring success. The Review highlights the value of an integrated support “eco-system” through well-trained staff and volunteers embedded across trusted entry points.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you (or relevant officials) to discuss implementation considerations from the perspective of older Tasmanians, including communications, transition supports, and how outcomes will be measured in terms of access, confidence, and safety for users.

Thank you again for keeping COTA informed, and for the Government’s continued commitment to strengthening digital inclusion supports in communities across Tasmania.

Yours sincerely

Brigid Wilkinson

Chief Executive Officer

23 January 2026