



16th January 2006

The Secretary
Department of Communications Information Technology and the Arts
GPO Box 2154
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Sir

Clever Networks Program

The Tasmanian eHealth Association (TeA) has been established to foster the growth of the Tasmanian eHealth sector and these comments on the proposed Clever Networks Program are provided through this lens.

TeA applauds the objective of the Clever Networks initiative of supporting the rollout of new broadband infrastructure networks and innovative applications to improve the delivery of health services in regional, rural and remote areas. Robust communications infrastructure is essential for the implementation and full use of innovations in eHealth and is a critical enabler of eHealth development and the resulting improvement in health care for all Australians.

TeA congratulates the Australian Government for taking the initiative to address the market failures in extending broadband infrastructure into regional, rural and remote Australia. This has been critical for extension of healthcare services to these areas and provides more equitable quality of health care for all Australians.

However, TeA is concerned that the emphasis of investment by the Australian Government within programs such as the Clever Networks initiative remains heavily skewed towards communications infrastructure development. There is every indication that the communications infrastructure market is a rapidly maturing market with multiple providers, multiple technologies and market competition pushing down prices and expanding coverage into regional areas. The role for governments' intervention in this area should be declining as markets become more mature.

TeA believes that intervention should shift towards the development and implementation of high value content to increase demand for existing communications infrastructure. TeA is concerned that without concurrent development and implementation of high value services on this infrastructure the "transformational change" that DCITA desires will be glacial in arriving. Applications in eHealth that create new demands for data transmission rather than re-bundling existing demand through demand aggregation will be critical for this to occur and there is a clear role for governments, both as eHealth customers and as catalysts for economic development in Australia, in stimulating the

implementation of these innovations in eHealth. Many innovations already exist and a focus on taking these beyond local implementations to regional and national implementations will stimulate the rapid transformational change that DCITA seeks.

As a part of a risk minimisation plan, we would respectfully suggest that the Australian Government ensures that organizations and associations that are already actively working towards a better connected health system are informed and involved in any future action. Using Tasmania as an example, the TeA is aware that in the existing eHealth sector there are already numerous small innovative Tasmanian companies, collaborating with State and Australian Government departments and leveraging close ties with multi-national organizations and University researchers to deliver world-class eHealth solutions.

The TeA understands that these interactions must operate within the bounds of appropriate governance and probity, but wishes to highlight that these are issues that associations like ours face and successfully deal with on a daily basis. The TeA therefore would like to emphasize the synergies between our activities and the aims and objectives of the Government's programs. We believe that strong open communication has been facilitated as a critical component of achieving a vibrant Tasmanian (and Australian) eHealth Sector.

Thank you for the opportunity to raise these concerns and we would welcome further opportunities to contribute to the success of your programs.

Yours sincerely

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