connecting aotearoa summit 2025

Towards 100% Connection

A summary of key insights, learnings and opportunities

tuanz
TECH USERS ASSOCIATION

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Introduction

After nearly a decade known as the **Rural Connectivity Symposium**, the Tech Users Association of New Zealand (TUANZ) was delighted to host the **Connecting Aotearoa Summit 2025** - a reimagined event broadening the conversation for all New Zealanders.

In its tenth year, our summit tackled the ambitious question, "why can't we have 100% of New Zealanders connected?"

Despite significant progress, many people, businesses and communities across Aotearoa still face barriers to reliable and affordable internet access. This year's expanded summit brought together industry leaders, policymakers and advocates to explore solutions and ensure no one is left behind in our digital future.

In today's world, digital access is essential for education, employment, healthcare and social inclusion. Without reliable internet, people risk being excluded from many opportunities in education, employment, healthcare and more. Being online is no longer optional, it is a fundamental requirement for full participation in our society.

Connecting Aotearoa Summit 2025

Ensuring universal connectivity is about more than convenience; it's about equity. We know those without digital access face greater challenges in finding jobs, accessing services and staying connected with family and friends. As technology continues to advance, the gap between the connected and unconnected will only widen unless we take action now.

No one should miss out on the opportunities technology provides, and digital engagement must be safe, inclusive and available to all. This is a vital conversation to help enable a future where digital access is a basic right, not a privilege.

The overall sentiment of the summit was one of optimism, collaboration and shared determination. We all recognised the scale of the challenge but were united in the belief that universal connectivity for all New Zealanders is achievable. There was strong consensus that addressing affordability, digital equity, and resilience, alongside continued investment and cross-sector partnerships, is essential. The summit's discussions reflected a clear commitment to ensuring that every individual, regardless of location or income, can access and benefit from fast, reliable internet.

Thank you for joining the conversation at the **Connecting Aotearoa Summit 2025**. Together, we can shape a future where digital access is a right, not a privilege.

We look forward to meeting again next year, continuing to share ideas and find creative solutions to expanding connectivity for all.

Craig Young
CEO, TUANZ

Key highlights

"Why can't 100% of New Zealanders be connected?"

Despite significant progress, thousands of New Zealanders remain digitally excluded, unable to access affordable, meaningful internet services.

Connectivity is now recognised as essential for full participation in today's society.

Connectivity is no longer a luxury, but a basic necessity for all New Zealanders. Across every discussion, digital connectivity was highlighted as essential for education, employment, healthcare and social participation.

Our vision is a 100% connected Aotearoa, where location or income is never a barrier to fast, reliable and affordable connectivity.

KEY THEMES FOR OUR CONNECTING AOTEAROA SUMMIT 2025 INCLUDED:

Strengthening rural connectivity

Bridging the digital divide and ensuring access for all, regardless of location, is crucial for the vitality, growth, and resilience of rural Aotearoa.

- Despite significant investment, many rural areas still experience unreliable or inadequate internet access due to geographic limitations, infrastructure gaps, and higher costs.
- Connectivity is critical to rural communities, not just for business, but for health, safety and social connection. Poor rural health outcomes are exacerbated by connectivity issues, as the success of telehealth relies on access to connectivity, access and affordability of both devices and data plans.
- Potential solutions include the continued expansion of fibre and wireless networks, leveraging LEO satellite technologies and the use of high frequency (HF) radio systems like Winlink for emergency communications.

Make internet affordable for everyone

Addressing the cost barriers to internet access is a primary focus, as affordability remains a significant obstacle to digital inclusion. Exploring solutions for greater affordability is essential to ensure everyone can participate fully in our digital world.

- Even with discounted offers, many low-income households struggle with payments.
- Rural households pay on average 29% more than urban households for their broadband connection.
- Potential solutions include flexible, low-cost service plans, social ISPs, digital equity services at discounted prices for eligible households and proposals for a Basic Connectivity Service.

Advancing digital equity

Promoting inclusivity and ensuring everyone has the opportunity to participate in the digital world is essential. Ensuring universal connectivity is about equity and opportunity, as those without digital access face greater challenges in finding jobs, accessing services, and staying connected.

- Digital access is a fundamental requirement for full participation in society, and digital equity isn't optional – it's essential for full participation in today's economy.
- Approximately 170,000 households (9.9%) in New Zealand do not have a fixed broadband connection and 1 in 5 households remain digitally excluded.
- Key reasons for exclusion include access, affordability, and digital literacy. Collaboration, security, digital literacy, and access to basic services are key for meaningful inclusion.
- Social impact ISPs are challenging the status quo by providing low-cost, community-powered internet services specifically for low-income households.

Shaping the future of connectivity

Discovering emerging technologies and innovative solutions for a connected Aotearoa is vital. Digital connectivity must be a right, not a luxury. It's the backbone of our future competitiveness, productivity, and prosperity.

- New Zealand is moving away from legacy technologies including the 3G network, scheduled for shutdown from the end of 2025, and the copper network, which is proposed to be retired by 2030.
- The sector is exploring next-generation networks, satellite connectivity and rural innovation.
- Building resilient infrastructure is a central theme, noting the importance of networks that can withstand natural disasters and other disruptions.

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Why can't 100% of New Zealanders be connected?

In today's digital world, access to fast, reliable, and affordable internet is the foundation for participation in education, employment, healthcare, and modern life. However, despite New Zealand's significant progress in expanding broadband coverage, many people, particularly in rural and lower-income communities, continue to face substantial barriers to getting online. These challenges are varied and include:

- Geographic limitations
- Affordability
- Infrastructure gaps
- Digital literacy

At our Connecting Aotearoa Summit 2025, we set out to chart a path toward a fully connected nation, one where every New Zealander, regardless of where they live or what they earn, can participate fully in our digital society.

This year's event brought together diverse voices from industry, government and community to focus not just on infrastructure, but also on affordability, digital inclusion, and innovative solutions for the future.

As Mark Aue, CEO of Chorus, reminded us, "We all have a role to play in delivering digital equity and ensuring every New Zealander has the opportunity to connect and thrive."

"Digital connectivity must be a right, not a luxury. It's the backbone of our future competitiveness, productivity, and prosperity"

- Mark Aue, CEO, Chorus.

Achieving 100% connectivity demands long-term vision, bold investment and genuine collaboration. Despite the challenges, the summit affirmed a shared belief that universal, affordable and reliable internet access for all New Zealanders is achievable.

"Approximately 170,000 households in New Zealand don't have a fixed broadband connection, which is nearly 10% of the country"

- Ben Oakley, Commerce Commission.

Aotearoa's connectivity snapshot

Significant progress has been made in improving connectivity through initiatives like the Ultra-Fast Broadband (UFB) programme, the Rural Broadband Initiative (RBI), the Mobile Black Spot Fund (MBSF), and the Marae Connectivity Programme. The UFB network has brought fibre to a large part of the population and the RBI improved broadband for 85,026 rural homes and businesses. Over 670 Marae have been connected under the Marae Connectivity Programme.

Despite this progress, not all New Zealanders have access to reliable, affordable connectivity. According to the Commerce Commission's reporting, approximately 170,000 households (9.9%) in New Zealand do not have a fixed broadband connection. Approximately 400,000 households, representing one in five people across Aotearoa, are also considered digitally excluded. This means they cannot afford a digital connection for full participation in today's economy.

New Zealanders are connected through various technologies including:

- **Fibre:** The UFB network provides fibre-to-the-premises, covering 87% of premises and 88% of the population, with an average uptake of 76-79%.
- **Copper:** Around 94,000 households across the country were still using the copper network for internet or landlines as of June 2023. However, copper use is significantly declining, with approximately 75,000 rural copper connections remaining as of March 2025. Copper is scheduled to be retired by 2030.
- **Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) and WISPs:** These technologies provide improved broadband, particularly in rural areas. In June 2023, 68% of rural households were within the coverage area of at least one WISP network, and 93% of rural copper premises had FWA available. 1,648 WISP towers have been used to extend connectivity.
- **Satellite:** Satellite internet is rising in popularity, especially Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellites like Starlink. Nearly 100% of rural copper premises have LEO/GEO satellite as a broadband alternative. One NZ recently launched a text-to-satellite service, enabling coverage across the 40% of the landmass where there is no mobile network.
- **Mobile:** Mobile networks (4G, 5G) are being upgraded, with mobile tower numbers increasing. Mobile provides voice coverage to 99% of rural copper premises. From the end of 2025, 3G mobile networks are being shutdown. This will impact some older devices and their ability to make calls, including a 111 emergency call. Some rural areas still have limited or no mobile coverage, and there is a perception that rural cell phone connectivity is getting worse in some areas.

Those who remain without reliable connectivity or are digitally excluded are predominantly in remote rural areas, isolated communities, and among some low-income households. Connectivity rates vary widely across the country. People living in remote rural areas, especially Māori, often face the greatest challenges. The biggest gaps in connectivity are found where rural location, low income and ethnicity overlap.

Several persistent barriers contribute to the lack of reliable connectivity including:

GEOGRAPHIC LIMITATIONS

Remote and rugged landscapes make it challenging and expensive to build traditional internet infrastructure. Laying cables or installing towers in these areas often requires more time, specialised equipment, and higher costs than in cities or flat regions. As a result, people living in these locations are more likely to miss out on reliable connectivity.

INFRASTRUCTURE GAPS

Some communities have access only to slow, unreliable connections, or lack necessary infrastructure like fibre boxes or lead-ins even where services are technically available. Older legacy networks like copper and 3G lack the speed and resilience demanded by today's digital economy.

ACCESS

For some households, there is no suitable broadband access technology available. Access issues are more complex in rural areas compared to urban areas where fibre and FWA are widely available. Approximately 130,000 rural premises never had access to the copper network, says Ben Oakley, Commerce Commission.

AFFORDABILITY

Cost is a major barrier to digital inclusion. This includes the monthly cost of service and upfront costs for equipment like routers, laptops, and smartphones. Commerce Commission data shows that rural consumers pay on average 29% more than urban consumers for their broadband connection ($113.52 vs $87.86). Affordability is especially challenging in rural areas with fewer lower cost options where fibre is not available.

DIGITAL LITERACY

Even when internet connections are available, some people struggle to make the most of them due to limited digital skills or a lack of confidence online. This gap in digital literacy can prevent people from accessing important services, learning opportunities or connecting with others. This highlights that reliable connectivity by itself is not enough to ensure everyone can fully participate in the digital world.

ABSTAINERS

A portion of households choose not to have a fixed connection for reasons beyond access or affordability. Some people prefer to rely on mobile data and hotspotting for their online needs. While others simply choose to remain disconnected from the internet altogether. These choices reflect different preferences and lifestyles, highlighting that digital exclusion is not always due to barriers, but sometimes personal decisions.

A vision for a fully connected Aotearoa

What does 100% digital inclusion look like? In a truly connected Aotearoa, every New Zealander would have access to fast, reliable and affordable internet, ensuring no one is left behind in our digital future.

This means full participation in society for everyone, regardless of location or income. For example, every student could access online learning and educational resources; families and friends could stay connected across distances; and all businesses - large and small, urban and rural - could leverage digital tools to innovate and grow.

Seamless access to essential services including healthcare, government support and education would be a reality for everyone. Rural and urban communities would both benefit equally, helping to bridge longstanding divides and promote safe, inclusive digital engagement.

Universal connectivity would unlock greater opportunities, wellbeing and social connection for every New Zealander.

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Icons from Flaticon

Why do we want resilient networks and what's the human impact?

This issue was discussed by Mike Smith (The Connectivity Group), Skip Parker (Rhema Media), Ellen Strickland (Brainbox Institute), and Steve Main (Amateur Radio Emergency Communications, AREC). The panel explored the multifaceted concept of resilience in connectivity, extending beyond network infrastructure to include human impact and end-user preparedness.

Mike Smith facilitated the session and presented a perspective on end-user resilience. He highlighted that while there is significant investment in making telecommunications networks more resilient (for example power backups, diverse links and more fibre), the focus often misses the end-user's situation. He stressed that for a home or business, having only one connection (fibre, satellite, or wireless) represents a single point of failure. Using the example of a rural community losing their landline service, he demonstrated the critical need for alternative, resilient voice options when their primary service is removed. Mike Smith argued for the importance of homes and businesses having multiple, diverse connections to ensure continuity, acknowledging that affordability can be a barrier. He suggested promoting this concept, particularly to businesses, to ensure they can continue operating during outages.

Skip Parker shared the perspective of a nationwide broadcaster with 65 transmission sites. Rhema Media faces the challenge of connecting sites over vast distances and through difficult terrain, historically using point-to-point links and satellite distribution. Skip highlighted the vulnerabilities of satellite connectivity, mentioning issues like weather impacts and even "cow fade" (when cattle obstruct the signal path between the satellite dish and the satellite). To build resilient networks for their transmission sites, Rhema is moving towards internet-connected sites using diverse networks, partnering with multiple providers to ensure resilience during disasters. He emphasised the need for multiple partners at each site as not every technology or provider will stay operational during an event. Skip also noted traditional radio can be quite resilient in disasters.

Ellen Strickland emphasised internet resilience is fundamental to community resilience. She described the internet not as a tool we occasionally use, but as the "nervous system" of our lives, communities and businesses. This analogy underlines the internet's ubiquity and its crucial role in transmitting vital information, especially during crises. Ellen shared her personal experiences during severe weather events in Aotearoa describing the profound human impact when both power and internet were lost, leaving people unable to access critical information or communicate with loved ones, which leads to significant psychological strain. She introduced her research on strengthening internet infrastructure against extreme weather and climate change, advocating for a holistic approach that integrates energy, transport, and social infrastructure with telecommunications to build true resilience.

Steve Main, presented AREC's role in providing emergency communications support. Formed after the 1931 Napier earthquake, AREC is a volunteer organisation assisting emergency services and communities when traditional networks fail. Steve shared the example of Gisborne during Cyclone Gabrielle losing all fibre and telephone connectivity for about 12 days. He highlighted the resilience of High Frequency (HF) radio for its ability to transmit over the horizon without intermediate infrastructure. He demonstrated Winlink (a message handling system) and showed how it was used during Cyclone Gabrielle for welfare checks and social connection in affected areas.

1. Strengthening rural connectivity

Bridging the digital divide and ensuring access for all, regardless of location.

Strengthening connectivity is essential for supporting the vitality, growth and resilience of rural Aotearoa. Many rural households continue to experience unreliable or inadequate internet access, creating significant barriers to education, employment, healthcare and essential services. This persistent digital divide limits opportunities for both individuals and communities, and can lead to further social and economic exclusion.

Bridging this gap is crucial to ensuring our rural communities can thrive in an increasingly connected society. Ensuring all New Zealanders, regardless of where they live, have the opportunity to fully participate in and benefit from the digital world is essential for our future.

"Connectivity is absolutely critical to rural communities, not just for business, but for health, safety and social connection"

- Hon Mark Patterson, Minister for Rural Communities.

For rural New Zealand, the importance of connectivity is magnified by unique geographical and socio-economic factors. Around 20 percent of New Zealand's population is based in rural communities but they are distributed across varying levels of rurality, a significant proportion live in remote areas. These areas often face challenges related to remoteness, lower incomes, higher social deprivation, and a higher proportion of Māori and older populations compared to urban centres.

"Telehealth [is seen] by the Government as the answer. For it to be part of the solution, we've got to have connectivity and deviced and people who can use it all"

- Dr Grant Davidson, Chief Executive, Hauora Taiwhenua Rural Health Network.

As Dr. Grant Davidson of Rural Health New Zealand highlighted, rurality has a negative impact on health outcomes, with those living in remote communities experiencing significantly higher mortality rates from preventable causes, particularly among Māori and older age groups.

Accessing rural health services can be difficult, with rural people less likely to be admitted to hospital and rural general practices facing unacceptably high patient-to-GP ratios. Telehealth is seen as a potential solution, but its effectiveness relies entirely on access to connectivity, devices, affordable data plans and digital literacy. Without reliable internet, these vital health services remain inaccessible to those who need them most.

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Beyond healthcare, connectivity is vital for economic participation and social connection. Rural New Zealand is the backbone of the country's economy, generating the majority of exports. However, businesses in these areas, from small enterprises to large farms, require reliable internet for operations, market access, and adopting modern technologies like precision agriculture. For those managing farms, homes and caregiving responsibilities, reliable internet is crucial for running businesses, accessing education, managing healthcare needs, and staying connected with social networks.

Safety and emergency communication are also profoundly impacted by connectivity. In times of natural disasters, reliable communication becomes a matter of survival. The ability to contact emergency services, access real-time information during a crisis, and let loved ones know you are safe is paramount, and this relies heavily on resilient communication networks.

Rural connectivity snapshot

The country has made impressive strides, with a world-leading fibre-to-the-premises network reaching 87% of the population and high uptake rates. Despite this considerable investment and progress in building broadband infrastructure in New Zealand over the past decade, many individuals, businesses, and communities in rural areas still face significant barriers to accessing reliable and affordable internet.

"Government investment in rural connectivity programmes totals more than $770 million over the last 10 years, resulting in improved broadband for 85,000 households and mobile coverage along thousands of kilometres of state highway and at Marae"

- Hon Paul Goldsmith.

National Infrastructure's (NIFF) Graham Mitchell also reported over 1600 WISP towers have been deployed, connecting many rural homes and businesses. Mobile network operators (MNOs) have also significantly expanded their tower numbers.

Rural consumers pay on average 29% more than urban consumers for a broadband connection, says Ben Oakley and Rachael Coyle (Commerce Commission). This higher cost, combined with lower average incomes and higher social deprivation in many rural areas, makes connectivity unaffordable for many households. Dr Grant Davidson shared that satellite, for example, Starlink's standard residential plan, while offering a solution in remote areas, still has a monthly cost of $159 plus set-up costs of up to $1,040 for equipment. However a recent promotion offering free equipment with a 12-month plan with a lower monthly cost of $79 for a degraded service was noted by Nicole Oliver (Rural Women NZ).

Many households, businesses, and facilities in rural areas still rely on legacy technologies like the copper network and 3G mobile networks. However, these transitions potentially pose challenges for users, particularly for voice calls and emergency services. While MNOs are upgrading 3G sites to 4G or 5G, ensuring equivalent coverage in all areas, it is a complex task and there will be a number of devices that no longer work following the 3G shutdown.

The current landscape is characterised by a complex interplay of existing infrastructure, technological change, and socio-economic barriers that leave a significant portion of rural New Zealand underserved. Rachael Coyle (Commerce Commission) highlighted that while their copper services investigation focuses on competition where copper is available, they are very aware of the human impact.

Photo by Te Pania on Unsplash

"Connectivity is not a luxury. It is a basic enabler for health, safety, economic growth, and social participation. Connectivity issues compound isolation and inequality"

- Nicole Oliver, Board member, Rural Women NZ.

The experience of rural women

The gendered impact of connectivity in rural areas was a key theme in the discussion *Improving outcomes in Rural NZ – where are we missing the mark?* featuring Rural Women NZ's Board Member, Nicole Oliver. While digital connectivity is essential for everyone, the lack of reliable and affordable internet has particularly acute consequences for rural women.

Nicole highlighted that rural women are often at the centre of rural life, managing households, businesses, farms and caregiving responsibilities. With much of this work increasingly dependent on stable internet access, connectivity becomes a basic enabler for health, safety, economic growth, and social participation.

Sharing her own experience of needing reliable connectivity for her business and board work while living in a rural area, she explained that having internet access is now almost as important as having electricity.

However, rural women face unique barriers: fewer digital upskilling opportunities, lower access to devices, and greater caregiving loads, all of which compound their risk of isolation and exclusion. For example, when connectivity is poor, women may miss out on telehealth services, struggle with children's schooling needs, or be unable to run businesses effectively from home.

Connectivity is not a luxury but a "basic enabler for health, safety, economic growth and social participation," enabling rural women to "thrive, not just survive".

She called for targeted investment in digital infrastructure, the inclusion of rural women's voices in policy design, and robust public education to help communities navigate new technologies. Real consultation is essential, as "one size doesn't fit all," she says. Addressing the gendered impact of connectivity means ensuring rural women have the same opportunities to participate and lead as their urban counterparts, making digital equity a cornerstone of rural wellbeing and prosperity.

Photo by Eugene Quek on Unsplash

Envisioning rural connectivity

The ultimate vision for rural connectivity in New Zealand is where everyone, regardless of location, has access to fast, reliable, and affordable internet - where all people have connectivity to meet their life, work, and study needs. In this ideal scenario, digital access is not a luxury but a basic right, essential for full participation in society.

Success would mean bridging the digital divide and ensuring equitable access to opportunities regardless of where someone lives. Rural communities would have the same level of digital access and capability as urban centres. The key benefits of achieving this goal are wide-ranging and include:

- **Enhanced economic prosperity**
  Reliable connectivity supports rural businesses, enables remote work opportunities, facilitates access to global markets, and boosts productivity in primary industries. Mark Aue (Chorus), noted that achieving 95% fibre coverage could add another $17 billion of economic benefits to New Zealand.
- **Improved health outcomes**
  Connectivity enables equitable access to telehealth services, remote patient monitoring, and online health resources, helping to address the current disparities in rural health outcomes.
- **Equitable education**
  Students in rural areas gain access to the same online educational resources and remote learning opportunities as their urban peers.
- **Increased safety and resilience**
  Robust infrastructure to ensure rural communities can access emergency services and critical information during natural disasters and other crises.

"Rural households pay on average 29% more than urban households for their broadband connection"

- Rachael Coyle, Commerce Commission.

- **Strengthened social connection**
  Access to reliable internet can help combat isolation, allowing them to stay connected with family, friends, and community networks.
- **Greater digital inclusion**
  Everyone, regardless of location, income, age, or ethnicity, has the means, affordability, skills, and confidence to participate safely and effectively in the digital world. This includes addressing barriers like digital literacy and access to devices.

Achieving 100% rural connectivity

Achieving 100% connectivity for our rural communities would help close the digital divide and ensure no one is left behind in our increasingly digital world.

It's about building a future where digital access is a cornerstone of rural resilience and enables equitable access to education, remote work, digital services, and social connection.

It requires a multifaceted approach that leverages various technologies, innovative funding models, and collaborative partnerships. Several options were discussed at the summit:

Expanding fibre and wireless networks:

- Continuing to expand fibre infrastructure where economically viable. Chorus launched a community co-funded fibre build programme, contributing up to $3,500 per premise towards build costs outside existing fibre areas. This aims to make fibre expansion more achievable for communities willing to contribute.
- Encouraging the regional providers to expand their role by developing their own fibre infrastructure in areas where the incumbent has not yet delivered.
- Further deployment of Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) and Wireless Internet Service Provider (WISP) networks. WISPs have been key partners in the Rural Broadband Initiative (RBI), connecting areas where fibre and mobile were not feasible. Continued support and investment in these networks is important.
- With the forthcoming nationwide 3G shutdown, mobile network upgrades are accelerating, with 3G sites being replaced by faster and more reliable 4G and 5G technology.

"Satellite-to-mobile adds an additional layer of coverage and resilience across New Zealand and its territorial waters"

- Simone Cuthbert-Scott, One NZ.

Leveraging satellite and emerging Technologies:

- Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite services are increasingly important for providing connectivity in remote and indigenous communities and farming areas where terrestrial infrastructure is limited. While raising issues around cost and consumer protection, they offer faster and more flexible options. One NZ has launched a text-to-satellite service using SpaceX, enabling coverage in areas without a traditional mobile network and adding resilience. Voice and data services via satellite are expected to follow.
- High Frequency (HF) radio systems, like Winlink, offer a resilient message handling system that operates without intermediate infrastructure and is especially valuable for emergency communications where other networks fail. Winlink provides services including email with attachments, position reporting, weather bulletins, emergency communications and message relay.
- Exploring other emerging technologies including 5G NTN (Non-Terrestrial Networks), can help address rural needs. 5G NTN extends mobile coverage beyond traditional cell towers by using satellites and other platforms.

Addressing affordability:

- Implementing targeted affordability initiatives for example, a broadband product for low-income households, as proposed by ACCAN in Australia (NALO), or social impact ISPs offering low-cost services. For example, Broadband and Internet New Zealand (BAINZ) is trialling digital equity services at discounted prices for eligible households.
- Exploring models for a Basic Connectivity Service providing free internet access for those in need, funded potentially through mechanisms like the Telecommunications Development Levy (TDL).

Building resilience:

- Investing in backup power solutions (batteries, generators) for critical infrastructure to maintain connectivity during power outages.
- Exploring mobile roaming capacity during outages and greater infrastructure sharing.
- Encouraging end-user resilience by promoting the benefits and options for having more than one diverse connection at home or for businesses.

Enhancing digital literacy:

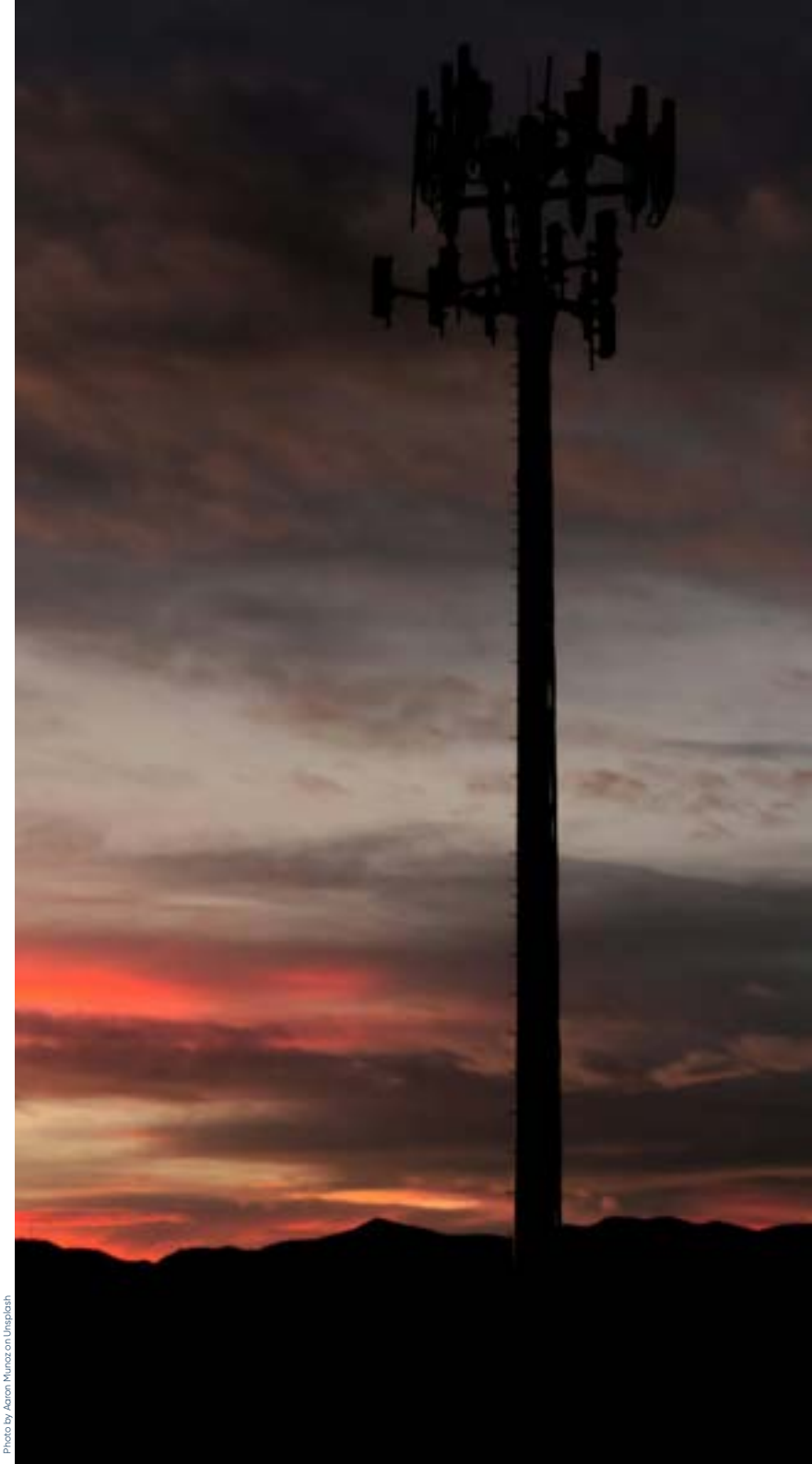
- Developing community-based support models and funding to deliver digital literacy training and connection support on the ground, including culturally appropriate resources.
- Supporting initiatives that provide affordable devices to those in need.

Fostering collaborative policies:

- Promoting public-private partnerships and encouraging collaboration across government, industry and community sectors.
- Ensuring rural voices and communities are consulted and included in the co-design of digital policy and connectivity solutions.
- Addressing systemic and structural challenges through sustained funding and supportive policy frameworks for digital equity initiatives.

"Internet resilience means staying connected, but also being able to reconnect quickly and easily. It's about having a network that's robust... and one that comes back quickly when it goes out"

- Ellen Strickland, Brainbox Institute.



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2. Make internet affordable for everyone

Examining the cost barriers to internet access and exploring solutions for greater affordability.

Affordability is a key challenge in achieving full connectivity across Aotearoa. While progress has been made in building digital infrastructure, the cost of internet services and devices remains a significant barrier for many New Zealanders, particularly low-income households. Addressing affordability is crucial for ensuring equitable access and enabling full participation in the digital economy.

"The cost of living crisis affects all, limiting their ability to prioritise digital access. There is a strong need for community-based support models that provide hands-on help, training, and ongoing guidance"

- Pete Bains, Broadband & Internet New Zealand (BAINZ).

Access to phone and internet is considered a fundamental enabler of contemporary life, necessary for employment, education, healthcare, banking, and government services, all of which are increasingly digital. The cost of connectivity is a critical barrier to digital inclusion. This barrier extends beyond the monthly cost of services to include the cost of devices and data plans, as well as a lack of understanding of plans and potential penalties. The cost of essential equipment like routers, laptops, and smartphones also presents a significant hurdle.

Unaffordable connectivity exposes individuals and households, especially those in rural and regional areas, to digital exclusion. This limits their economic and social opportunities and impacts national productivity, wealth, and wellbeing. Digital access is essential for full participation in today's economy and society, and those without it face greater challenges in various aspects of life, including finding jobs, accessing services, and staying connected. Ensuring affordability makes digital access a cornerstone of rural resilience.

Affordability snapshot

Affordability is identified as one of the primary reasons why approximately 170,000 households (9.9%) in New Zealand do not have a fixed broadband connection. This rate varies significantly across the country, from 1% to around 30% in different districts. Rural areas, in particular, often exhibit lower levels of connectivity, partly due to a lack of affordable options where fibre may not be available. Commerce Commission data indicates that "Rural households pay on average 29% more than urban households for their broadband connection," with an average cost of $113.52 compared to $87.86 for urban customers.

The cost of essential equipment such as routers, laptops and smartphones is a significant barrier for many. Even when discounted offers are available, households with low disposable incomes find it difficult to afford internet services. Pete Bains (BAINZ) noted during the digital equity panel discussion that even on low-cost pilot offers, some low-income households struggle with making weekly payments. The price of connectivity can require a higher percentage of average household income in certain areas, such as Gisborne and the West Coast, compared to major cities like Auckland and Wellington. Households with larger numbers of dependents may also face challenges as this can reduce disposable income available for broadband. Consumers being signed up to contracts they don't understand or cannot

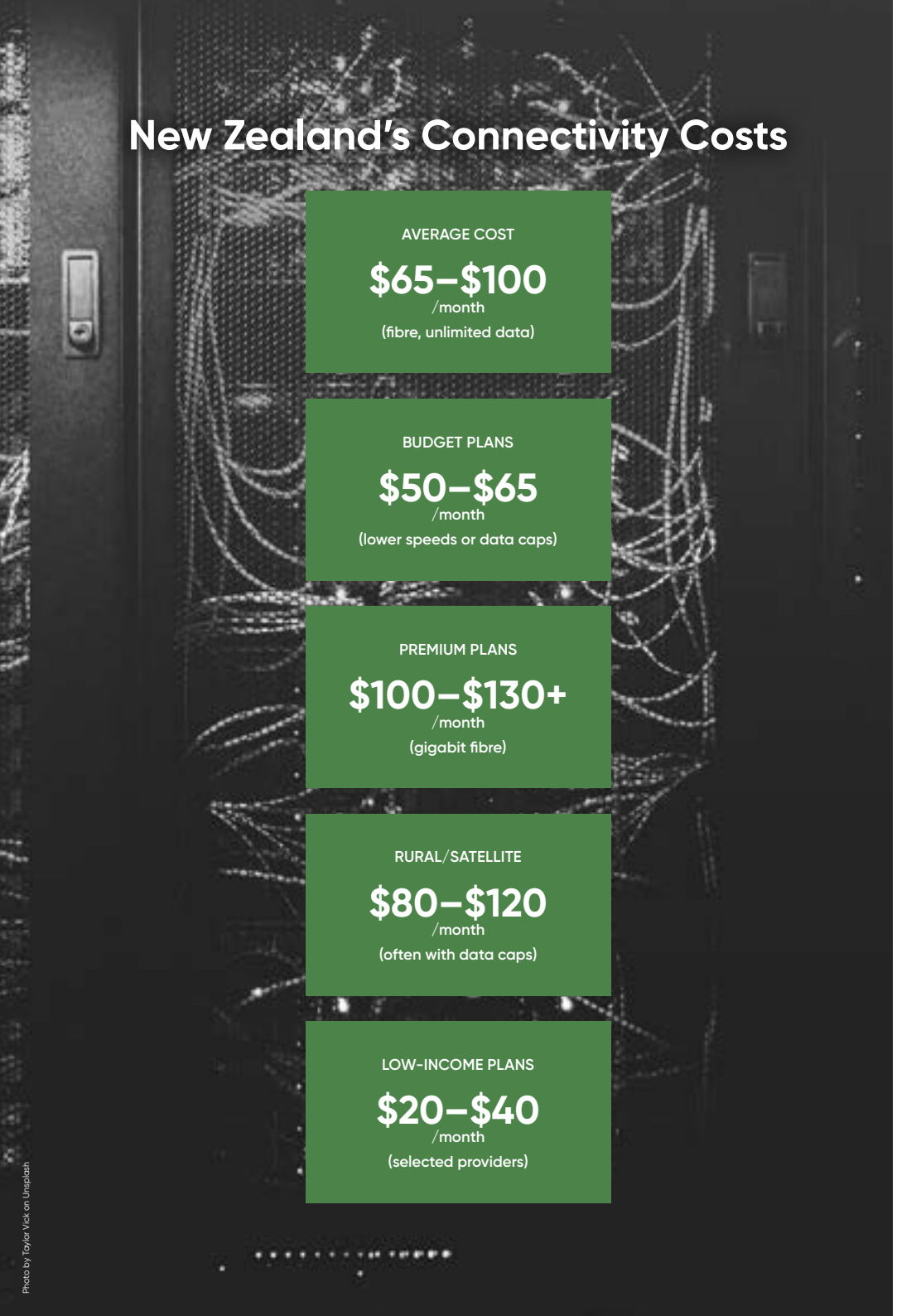


Photo by Taylor Vick on Unsplash

afford also exacerbates the issue. Initiatives aimed at addressing this are often resource-intensive and rely heavily on underfunded community organisations or volunteers.

An affordable connected future

The vision is for everyone in Aotearoa New Zealand to have connectivity networks available to them to meet their life, work, and study needs. This requires that internet access is not only available and ubiquitous but also affordable to low-income individuals and households. Digital access must be equitable and accessible to all, making it a right rather than a luxury or privilege.

By achieving this goal, every household then has the opportunity to participate fully in our digital world. This could involve developing a basic connectivity service that provides free internet access for those in need. Solutions must be sustainable and genuinely enable people to connect and participate in the digital economy. Ultimately, the goal is to improve the lives of all New Zealanders affected by digital poverty.

Bridging the digital divide

Several pathways and strategies are being explored to tackle affordability barriers:

- **Regulatory measures**
  Discussion focussed on the need for more effective regulation for consumer protection, particularly concerning sales practices and credit assessment. Strengthening regulation for industry practices with built-in consumer safeguards and reforming outdated codes, such as the telecommunications consumer protection code, were suggested.
- **Targeted pricing and services**
  The development of flexible, low-cost service plans that adapt to the financial realities of vulnerable communities is seen as crucial. Digital equity services have been piloted for specific low-income groups,

demonstrating the potential for targeted offers. Chorus is also running a proof-of-concept trial with low-income households to explore effective ways to remove affordability barriers.

- **Basic connectivity service**
  A proposed Basic Connectivity Service providing free internet access for those in need. Pete Bains (BAINZ) suggested retail service providers may not offer this due to lack of commercial value and suggested that local fibre companies or Chorus could be better positioned to deliver it.
- **Funding mechanisms**
  Sustained funding is necessary to scale digital equity initiatives. Using the Telecommunications Development Levy (TDL) to sponsor digital equity initiatives and fund a Basic Connectivity Service has been suggested as a potential funding mechanism.
- **Support for equipment costs**
  Addressing the significant barrier posed by the cost of essential equipment (devices) is important.
- **Collaboration and partnerships**
  Partnering with ISPs, local councils, tech providers, and philanthropic organisations can also help reduce costs and expand reach. Collaboration across sectors is highlighted as key to improving efficiency and impact.
- **Industry-led initiatives**
  Social impact ISPs like Our Net are challenging the status quo by providing low-cost, community-powered internet services specifically designed for low-income households. These initiatives often include features like affordable pricing, community employment pathways, and pay-it-forward mechanisms. Local fibre companies could also offer low-bandwidth service tiers tailored for equity-focused initiatives.
- **Raising awareness**
  Campaigns like 'No Tech Day' aim to raise public awareness about digital exclusion and encourage action.

Photo by S.O.C.I.A.L. C.U.T on Unsplash

3. Advancing digital equity

Promoting inclusivity and empowering everyone to participate in the digital world.

Digital equity is about ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate in the digital world. It is essential for full participation in today's economy and society, going beyond mere access to encompass affordability and accessibility for all. Addressing digital equity is crucial for bridging the digital divide and unlocking the full potential of Aotearoa.

Digital equity is critical because access to phone and internet has become a fundamental enabler of contemporary life, increasingly necessary for employment, education, healthcare, banking, and government services. Being digitally excluded limits individuals' economic and social opportunities and impacts national productivity, wealth, and well-being.

"Digital infrastructure is not a luxury; it's an essential public utility that demands political attention and investment," says Petra Claessen, President, BTG. Those without reliable internet face greater challenges in various aspects of life, highlighting that digital access must be seen as a right, not a luxury or privilege.

The impact of digital exclusion is particularly severe for certain groups, including those in rural, regional, and remote areas, Māori and Pacific Peoples communities, people with disabilities, older adults, and low-income households. For rural communities, ensuring affordability makes digital access a cornerstone of rural resilience. Dr Grant Davidson (Hauora Taiwhenua Rural Health Network) highlighted how poor health outcomes in rural communities are exacerbated by high Māori populations, high social deprivation, and an aging demographic, all of which are intertwined with barriers like access to connectivity, affordability of devices and data, and IT literacy.

Digital access as a right

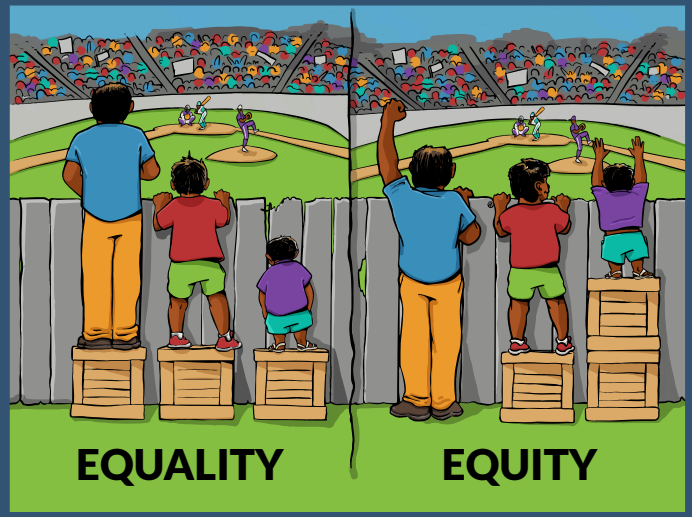
In his keynote address, Mark Aue, CEO of Chorus, delivered a powerful message:

- NZ's fibre network is world-class, but *1 in 5 households remain digitally excluded*, that's 400,000 homes.
- To close the gap, we need long-term vision, bold investment and genuine collaboration.
- "It's not about making money or losing it, we all have a role to play in delivering digital equity and ensuring every New Zealander has the opportunity to connect and thrive."
- New initiatives like the community co-funded fibre build and proof-of-concept trials for low-income households are steps forward, but scaling impact requires all of us.

Digital equity snapshot

What is digital equity?

Digital equity means that everyone has fair and equal access to the internet, digital devices, and the skills needed to use them. It ensures that no one is left behind because of where they live, how much money they have, or their background. With digital equity, everyone has the same opportunities to learn, work, connect, and take part in today's digital world.



Despite significant progress in building digital infrastructure, a substantial number of households in New Zealand remain digitally excluded. Approximately 170,000 households (9.9%) in New Zealand do not have a fixed broadband connection. This rate varies widely across districts, from 1% to around 30%. Mark Aue (Chorus) reported a higher figure, stating that "1 in 5 households remain digitally excluded – cannot afford the package of meaningful digital access", estimating this at roughly 400,000 homes. He described this as a "pretty staggering and embarrassing statistic", especially given the increasing digitisation of essential services.

The reasons for not having a fixed broadband connection include access issues, affordability, and choosing not to connect. Affordability is identified as a major barrier to digital inclusion. This includes the monthly cost of a suitable connection and/or upfront costs for equipment. Areas with lower than average median incomes often have lower rates of connectivity, as affordability can be challenging, particularly in rural areas with fewer cheap options. Households with larger numbers of dependents may also have less disposable income for fixed broadband. Rachael Coyle (NZ Commerce Commission) previously noted that "Rural households pay on average 29% more than urban households for their broadband connection," costing $113.52 compared to $87.86 on average. The cost of essential equipment, such as routers, laptops, and smartphones, also acts as a significant barrier.

Pete Bains (BAINZ) shared learnings from their digital equity trial, explaining that the cost of living crisis affects individuals' ability to prioritise digital access and even on discounted pilot offers, low-income households find it difficult to afford internet services. Current digital equity initiatives are often resource-intensive and heavily rely on underfunded community organisations or volunteers.

"Understanding the scale of the economic and social benefits is critical for those making decisions about policy and investments - at a national, regional and local level"

- Rose Jamieson, Internet NZ.

When reflecting on the pact of technological advancement, "the faster the technology evolves, the faster this gap widens. And so the question is how fast can we solve digital exclusion in Aotearoa?" says Rose Jamieson (Internet NZ)

She emphasised the urgency of collective action, but also acknowledged that solving digital equity for different contexts and lived experiences is difficult and "it remains a struggle".

Towards digital equity

Achieving digital equity means ensuring every person and household has the opportunity to participate in the digital world. The ideal is for digital access to be not only available and ubiquitous, but also equitable, accessible to all, and affordable to lower-income communities.

This could involve developing a basic connectivity service that provides free internet access for those in need, classifying communications as an essential service. Ultimately, the goal is to improve the lives of all New Zealanders affected by digital poverty, leveraging both established and emerging technologies to achieve the goal of 100% connectivity across Aotearoa.

Lee Timutimu (Our Net) reminded attendees that support is needed beyond just financial contributions; "in-kind support is important". As discussed in the *What are we doing to help close digital inequity?* session, collaboration is key to amplify our impact.

Achieving digital equity: pathways and strategies

Several pathways and strategies were discussed at the summit to address the challenges of digital equity and affordability:

- **Regulatory measures**
  Discussion included more effective regulation for consumer protection concerning sales practices and credit assessment. Reforming outdated telecommunication consumer protection codes and strengthening regulation for industry practices with built-in consumer safeguards were suggested. Formally classifying communications services as essential, similar to water and electricity, would help ensure affordable, reliable access for all. Investigating the reasons behind a possible Universal Service Obligation (USO) which is outcomes-focused and ensures universal voice, SMS, and internet connectivity that is affordable and accessible could be a useful step.
- **Targeted pricing and basic connectivity services**
  Developing flexible, low-cost service plans that adapt to the financial realities of vulnerable communities is seen as crucial., Chorus is running a proof-of-concept trial with a number of providers to explore effective ways to remove affordability barriers for low-income households. These initiatives reflect Australia's proposed concessional broadband product for low-income households at around $30 a month.
- **Funding mechanisms**
  Sustained funding is necessary to scale digital equity initiatives. Using the Telecommunications Development Levy (TDL) to sponsor digital equity initiatives and fund a Basic Connectivity Service was suggested as a potential funding mechanism. Addressing the barrier posed by the cost of equipment and devices is also important.

- **Collaboration and partnerships**
  Partnering with ISPs, local councils, tech providers, and philanthropic organisations can help reduce costs and expand reach. Collaboration across sectors was highlighted as key to improving efficiency and impact. There is a lot of good work fragmented across community groups and not-for-profits. There is a clear need to reduce silos and aggregating initiatives to improve efficiency. Rose Jamieson (Internet NZ) highlighted the value of partnering with trusted community organisations like Rural Women and iwi.
- **Industry-led initiatives**
  Social impact ISPs like Our Net are challenging the status quo by providing low-cost, community-powered internet services specifically designed for low-income households. Lee Timutimu (Our Net) shared their vision to improve the lives of New Zealanders affected by data poverty. Their pilot programmes are set to launch in Northland and Rotorua, including affordable pricing, community employment pathways, and pay-it-forward mechanisms. Local fibre companies could also offer low-bandwidth service tiers tailored for equity-focused initiatives.
- **Raising awareness**
  Campaigns like 'No Tech Day' aim to raise public awareness about digital exclusion and encourage action.

INNOVATION SPOTLIGHT: OUR NET

Our Net, founded by Lee Timutimu is a pioneering example of a social ISP dedicated to closing the digital divide for Māori and underserved communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Launched with a strong advocacy for digital equity, Our Net goes beyond typical internet service provision by prioritising social impact, community engagement, and culturally relevant support.

Lee shared the story and mission of Our Net: recognising that many Māori whānau remain digitally excluded due to affordability, infrastructure gaps, and a lack of digital literacy support. He explained how Our Net has set out to address these barriers directly. The organisation partners with local marae, hapū, and community groups (pilot programmes are underway in Northland and Rotorua), to provide affordable connectivity solutions, digital skills workshops and tailored support for families.

By embedding itself within the communities it serves, Our Net is able to foster trust and deliver services that are responsive to real needs. The model focuses not only on providing internet access but also on ensuring that people have the skills and support to use digital tools confidently and safely. As a social ISP, it reinvests profits into furthering digital inclusion and supporting local initiatives, setting a new standard for how connectivity can empower rather than exclude.

www.our.net.nz

"Our mission is to improve the lives of all New Zealanders affected by digital poverty"

- Lee Timutimu, CEO & Founder, Our Net.

What is a Social ISP?

A social internet service provider (ISP) is an organisation that prioritises social impact over profit. Unlike traditional ISPs, a social ISP's primary mission is to bridge the digital divide for underserved communities by offering affordable, accessible, and tailored internet services. Profits are typically reinvested into community programmes, digital literacy training, and initiatives that promote digital equity, ensuring that connectivity supports broader social and economic wellbeing.

Photo by Umberto on Unsplash

SPOTLIGHT: NO TECH DAY

Could you run your life without tech? No Tech Day, is a new national campaign to raise awareness and action on digital exclusion.

Experience first hand the barriers faced by the estimated 20% of New Zealanders who lack adequate access to the internet, devices or digital skills. No Tech Day is a new national campaign dedicated to raising awareness and driving action on digital exclusion in Aotearoa New Zealand.

DECA Co-Chair Victoria MacLennan launched No Tech Day at the 2025 Connecting Aotearoa Summit, encouraging all New Zealanders to spend Friday 22 August without using technology. The campaign highlights how digital exclusion affects everyday life - limiting access to government services, education, healthcare, job opportunities, and social connection. By stepping into the shoes of the digitally excluded, participants can better understand the urgent need for digital equity.

Join the movement for digital equity in Aotearoa! By taking part, you'll help raise awareness of digital exclusion and support real change. Donations will go directly toward providing devices and internet connections for those in need.

No Tech Day also presents an opportunity for the tech industry and businesses to lead conversations about the impact of digital exclusion and champion solutions. Register and gain early access to campaign updates, resources and practical tools to help you get involved.

www.notechday.nz

4. Shaping the future of connectivity

Discovering emerging technologies and innovative solutions for a connected Aotearoa.

Leveraging both established and emerging technologies is essential to achieving the goal of 100% connectivity across Aotearoa, ensuring all New Zealanders can participate fully in the digital future.

Future connectivity snapshot

New Zealand's connectivity landscape is evolving rapidly, driven by the retirement of legacy technologies like the 3G network and copper lines, which are now outdated, expensive to maintain, and unable to deliver the speed and resilience required for modern digital life. The Hon Paul Goldsmith also reinforced the government's focus on restoring economic growth and productivity, highlighting the critical role that digital infrastructure plays in achieving these goals.

During our summit our presenters and panellists explored:

- accelerating 5G rollout in both urban and rural areas
- fibre expansion
- satellite-to-mobile services
- next-gen IoT and smart infrastructure
- resilience solutions
- retirement of legacy technologies

How does this reflect what Aotearoa needs?

- Expanding coverage and reliability, especially in rural and remote regions.
- Building networks that are robust and resilient in the face of disasters and outages.
- Enabling new digital services and economic opportunities through high-speed, low-latency connectivity.
- Managing the transition for vulnerable users, with consumer protections and support for device upgrades.
- Addressing digital equity and ensuring all New Zealanders, regardless of geography or income, have affordable, reliable access to digital infrastructure.

Emerging Technologies

Facilitated by Adam Beck (HUB), with Simone Cuthbert-Scott (One NZ), Sebastian Faxér (Ericsson NZ), and Chris Roberts (Amuri Net), this panel discussion explored how next-gen networks, satellite connectivity, and innovative rural solutions can help achieve 100% connectivity.

Adam Beck
General Manager, Business & Market Development
HUB

Simone Cuthbert-Scott
GM Enterprise Service & Cust Delivery
One NZ

Sebastian Faxér
CTO
Ericsson NZ

Chris Roberts
Amuri Net

Next-generation networks

The panel explored how upgrading to next-gen networks is critical to reaching underserved areas and ensuring high-speed, reliable connectivity for all New Zealanders.

Satellite connectivity

Discussion highlighted the increasing role of satellite technologies, including Low Earth Orbit (LEO) in bridging gaps where terrestrial infrastructure is not viable.

Rural innovation

Innovative rural solutions were showcased, including locally-driven initiatives and partnerships that tailor connectivity to the unique needs of different regions.

Building resilient infrastructure

Ensuring that networks are robust, flexible and disaster-ready was a central theme. The panel stressed the importance of designing infrastructure that can withstand natural disasters and other disruptions, providing continuity of service.

Advancing digital equity

The discussion emphasised that access to technology should not depend on geography, everyone should benefit from digital advances.

Fostering strong partnerships

The panel agreed that collaboration between telecommunications companies, technology innovators, and local communities is essential for sustainable and scalable progress toward universal connectivity.

Community engagement

Panellists acknowledged the value of working closely with communities to co-design solutions that address real-world barriers and ensure lasting impact.

Vision for 100% connectivity

Ultimately, the panel called for bold, collective action to close the digital divide,

The emerging technologies and initiatives being explored directly address the key challenges and needs identified at the summit:

- **Addressing geographic limitations**
  The expansion of fibre, satellite and innovative rural solutions are crucial for connecting communities that don't currently have fibre access and face challenging terrain.
- **Enhancing resilience**
  Building robust networks and promoting user-level resilience is vital in a country prone to natural disasters, ensuring continuity of essential services and emergency communications.
- **Enabling new use cases**
  The move to next-gen networks and differentiated services supports the increasing digitisation of services across healthcare, education, banking, and government, as well as new industry applications in areas like precision agriculture.
- **Managing transitions**
  The planned retirement of 3G and copper highlights the need for managed withdrawal processes and consumer protections to ensure users can transition to alternative services without being left behind.

Our connected future

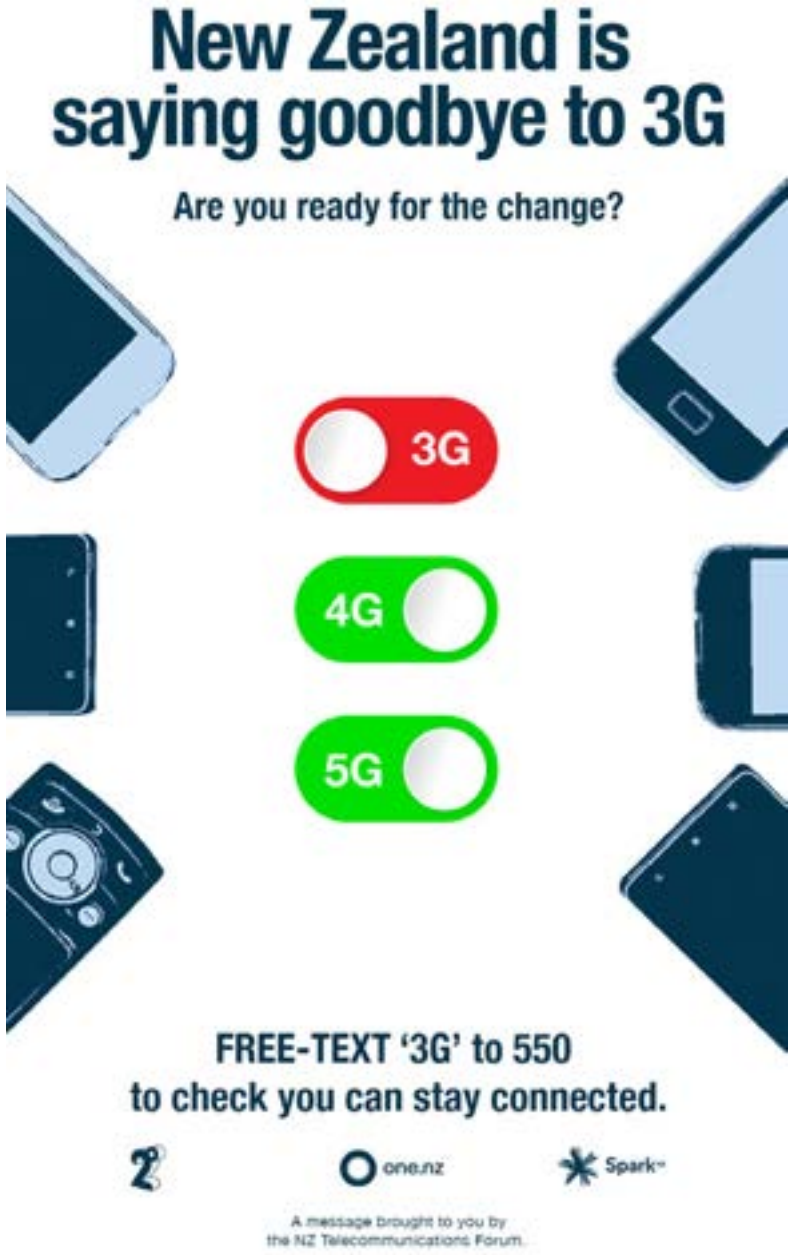
The vision is a fully connected Aotearoa where 100% of New Zealanders, regardless of location or income, have access to fast, reliable, and affordable internet. This will help close the digital divide and enable equitable access to education, remote work, digital services, and social connection.

Imagine our digital economy enabled for all New Zealanders: allowing farmers to use precision technology, healthcare providers to use telemedicine, students to access virtual classrooms, and small businesses to reach global customers. Universal connectivity would also support and strengthen social and economic resilience.

In our near-future connectivity should be considered an essential service, like water and electricity, ensuring a systematic guarantee of affordable and reliable access for all New Zealanders. Networks should also be resilient, robust, flexible, and disaster-ready, capable of withstanding natural disasters and disruptions to provide continuity of service.

From a connectivity perspective, our future in New Zealand is envisioned as:

- A diverse, layered network landscape where fibre provides the backbone, complemented by high-quality fixed wireless, WISP networks, and satellite services in harder-to-reach locations.
- Networks capable of providing differentiated performance levels tailored to specific applications and user needs, moving away from a one-size-fits-all model.
- Significantly expanded mobile coverage, potentially leveraging satellite-to-mobile technologies to reach areas currently without signal.
- A focus on resilience and reliability, with infrastructure designed to withstand disruptions and mechanisms in place for rapid recovery.
- The retirement of older technologies like 3G and copper, shifting users onto more modern digital platforms.
- Digital connectivity is increasingly treated as an essential utility or a basic right.



SPOTLIGHT: UNDERSTANDING THE 3G SHUTDOWN

We're saying goodbye to 3G, stay connected - check your phone now!

Paul Brislen, CEO of the New Zealand Telecommunications Forum (TCF), provided a key update on the nationwide shutdown of 3G mobile networks, scheduled from the end of 2025. This reflects a global shift away from legacy technologies towards advanced 4G and 5G networks, enabling faster, more reliable digital services across the country.

The upcoming 3G shutdown, which follows similar transitions in Australia and other countries, is a crucial step in freeing up spectrum and resources to support future-ready connectivity. However, it also presents challenges, particularly for those still relying on 3G-only devices, including some medical alarms and security systems. After the shutdown, these devices will no longer be able to connect to the network.

While most New Zealanders already use 4G or 5G devices, it is important for everyone to check if their device is affected. To prepare, everyone should use the free Checker Tool - text '3G' to 550 to find out if their device is compatible. To support a smooth transition, the TCF is working closely with mobile network operators (MNOs) on a nationwide awareness campaign, aiming to ensure that no one is left behind as New Zealand moves towards a more connected future.

The TCF is working closely with mobile network operators (MNOs) on a nationwide awareness campaign to ensure no one is left behind during the transition.

The path to universal connectivity

Achieving 100% connectivity in New Zealand is not just a technical challenge, it is fundamentally a matter of equity and inclusion. It demands a bold, multi-faceted approach, blending emerging technologies, innovative policy, targeted investment, and deep cross-sector collaboration.

Achieving universal connectivity in New Zealand means ensuring every individual and community can access reliable, affordable, and high-quality internet, regardless of location or circumstances. This requires expanding fibre networks, leveraging a mix of technologies like fixed wireless and satellite, and supporting community-driven solutions to reach underserved rural and remote areas. Managing the transition away from legacy copper and 3G networks must be done carefully, with a focus on protecting vulnerable users and providing clear information and support.

True digital inclusion goes beyond just access, it also means making connectivity affordable, building digital skills, and ensuring everyone can safely and confidently participate online. Continued collaboration between government, industry, and communities is essential, as is sustained investment in resilient, future-proof infrastructure. By treating digital access as a basic right and public utility, New Zealand can close the digital divide and unlock greater social and economic wellbeing for all.

In summary, New Zealand's path to universal connectivity can be built on world-class infrastructure and a commitment to closing persistent gaps in access, affordability, and digital capability. By leveraging emerging technologies, modernising policy, ensuring digital equity, and fostering robust partnerships, Aotearoa can realise a future where 100% of New Zealanders are connected!

INNOVATION SPOTLIGHT:

Chorus community co-funded fibre build programme

Chorus is breaking new ground with its Community Co-Funded Fibre Build Programme, designed to extend world-class fibre broadband into previously underserved communities across New Zealand.

How it works:

- Co-investment: Chorus will contribute up to $3,500 per premise towards the cost of fibre deployment in eligible communities outside the current fibre footprint.
- Collective action: The more homes and businesses that join, the lower the average cost per premise, making high-speed connectivity more accessible through shared investment.
- Community partnership: Chorus works directly with local stakeholders to assess costs and coordinate the build, empowering communities to take an active role in their digital future.

Why it matters:

Fibre broadband is considered the gold standard for speed, reliability, and future-proof performance. With most New Zealand households already connected, this programme helps bridge the gap for rural and remote areas. As a global leader in fibre connectivity, New Zealand's network has delivered significant economic benefits: $31 billion over the past decade, including $8.8 billion in productivity gains just last year.

Who is it for?

While not every community may be ready to co-invest, this model offers a scalable, practical solution for those able to mobilise local support and funding. It's a powerful step forward in closing the digital divide and ensuring all New Zealanders have the opportunity to thrive in a connected world.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Conclusion

Achieving 100% connectivity and digital equity across Aotearoa is a critical challenge that demands collective commitment and action from all stakeholders.

Our discussions at *Connecting Aotearoa 2025* highlight that while progress has been made, significant barriers remain, particularly regarding affordability, infrastructure gaps, digital literacy, and managing transitions from legacy networks. To ensure no one is left behind in our digital future, we are encouraged to:

- **Advocate for the recognition of connectivity as an essential utility** in New Zealand. This includes supporting the modernisation of regulatory frameworks to keep pace with technological change and ensure consumer protection, such as exploring outcomes-focused Universal Service Obligations (USO) and mobile-specific obligations like a Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation (UOMO).
- **Champion and scale digital equity initiatives** that directly address barriers of affordability and digital literacy. This involves supporting and expanding programmes offering affordable connectivity plans, providing access to devices, and delivering practical digital literacy training, particularly for vulnerable communities in rural areas. Consider supporting proposals for a Basic Connectivity Service for those most in need.
- **Increase investment in infrastructure expansion**, especially in rural, regional, and remote areas where market failure persists. This requires a long-term vision and national commitment. Industry should continue to explore new models like community co-funded builds to reach currently uneconomic areas.
- **Ensure a smooth and consumer-focused transition** away from legacy networks, particularly the 3G shutdown from the end of 2025 and the planned copper retirement by 2030. This requires clear communication, public education and proactive support for consumers to check device compatibility, understand alternative services, and navigate the transition.
- **Prioritise building network and end-user resilience** to withstand natural disasters and disruptions. This includes investing in resilient network architecture (backup power, infrastructure sharing, diverse links) and promoting end-user resilience by encouraging homes and businesses to adopt multiple, diverse connections for critical needs.
- **Foster genuine collaboration across government, industry, technology innovators, and local** communities. Actively engage with and co-design solutions alongside rural and diverse communities to ensure initiatives are relevant, effective and appropriate.

In conclusion, while New Zealand has built a strong foundation and is actively exploring cutting-edge technologies to enhance connectivity, achieving a future where all New Zealanders are connected requires continued bold investment, focused policy, strong collaboration across government, industry, and communities, and a commitment to tackling the persistent issues of affordability and digital exclusion.

Thank you to everyone who joined us at the Connecting Aotearoa Summit 2025 including our speakers, panellists and all attendees for your energy insight and commitment to advancing digital connectivity across Aotearoa. Your willingness to share experiences, ask challenging questions and collaborate on solutions made this year's event a powerful step forward in addressing the barriers to 100% connectivity.

We look forward to continuing the conversation together at *Connecting Aotearoa Summit 2026* on Wednesday 13 May in Wellington. Let's keep working towards a fully connected future for all New Zealanders.

About TUANZ

The Technology Users Association of New Zealand (TUANZ) is the voice of technology users in Aotearoa New Zealand. Established as a not-for-profit organisation, TUANZ acts as the independent group representing the interests and needs of individuals, businesses and organisations as they navigate the evolving technology landscape.

Our membership encompasses a diverse range of technology users, from small businesses and innovative startups to large enterprises and public sector entities. This broad network connects those who utilise technology to achieve their goals, fostering a community dedicated to understanding, adopting and maximising the benefits of digital tools and services.

TUANZ plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between technology providers and end-users. We work collaboratively across sectors, engaging with government, industry and the wider community to ensure that technology deployment and policy decisions are user-centric and contributing to a thriving digital ecosystem for all New Zealanders.

Our focus is on empowering technology users through education, advocacy and the facilitation of meaningful connections. We strive to ensure New Zealanders can confidently and effectively leverage technology to enhance productivity, innovation and overall quality of life. We provide a platform for an informed and influential user voice, advocating for policies and practices that support positive technology outcomes for our members and the nation.

Learn more about TUANZ and join us: **www.tuanz.org.nz**

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TECH USERS ASSOCIATION

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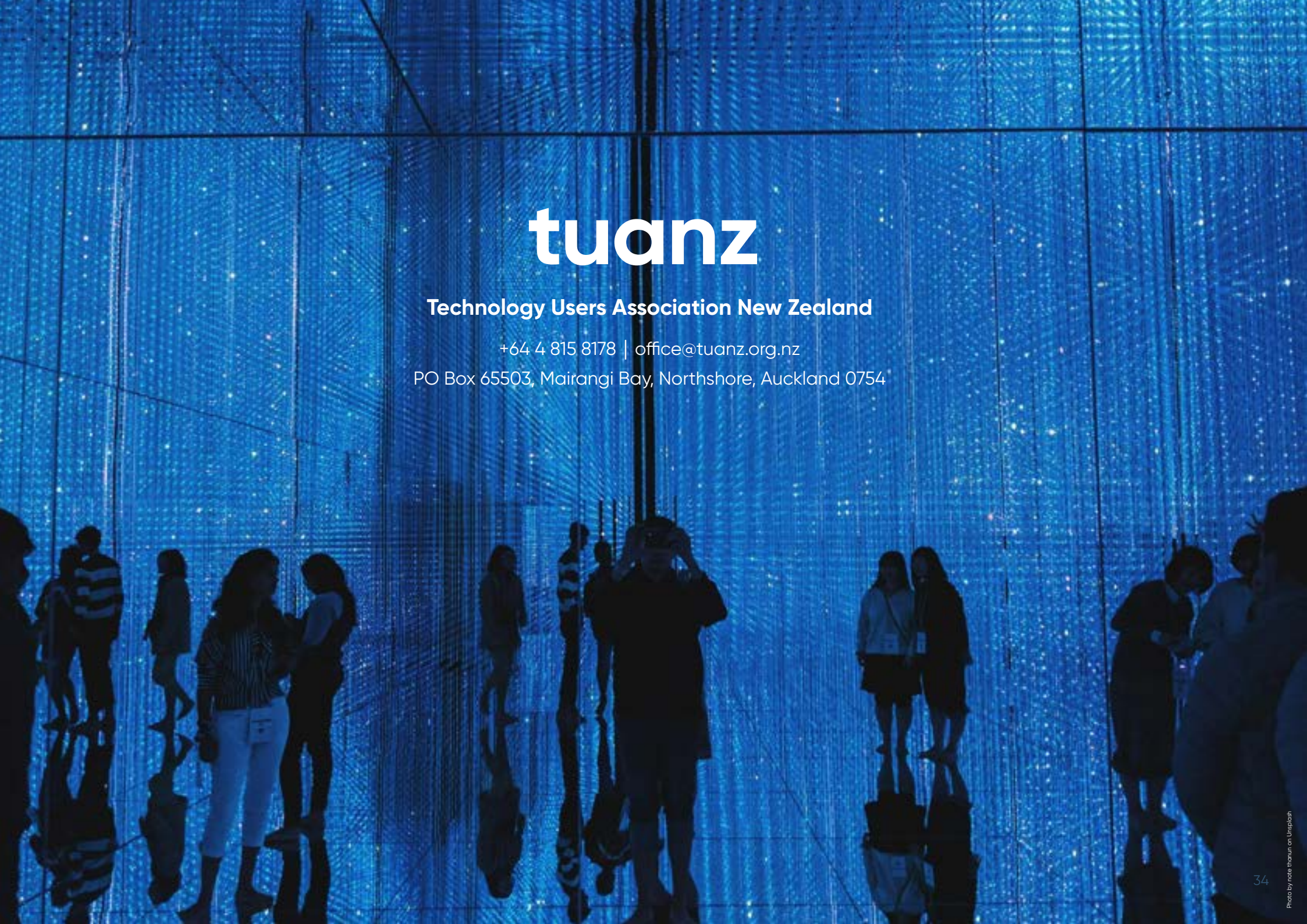
References

Connecting Aotearoa Summit 2025: Audio recordings & presentations

These recordings were analysed using Google's NotebookLM AI tool to identify key themes, actions, recommendations and identify quotations for the initial draft report.



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