

# BRIDGING GAPS, BUILDING TRUST: CAN WA REDEFINE DIGITAL SERVICES FOR REMOTE AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES?

RESEARCH INNOVATION COUNCIL ANZ BRIEF | VOL.8 | CURTIN UNIVERSITY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



On 19 November, 2024, **Curtin University** hosted a landmark forum in Perth, bringing together senior government officials, industry leaders, and academic representatives to explore productivity challenges and opportunities within Western Australia's public sector. The discussion centred on leveraging the GX5 framework—Digital Identity, Skills Wallet, Digital Front Door, Digital Health Records, and Permits and Licences—as a strategic lens for addressing WA's unique regional and economic context.

Attending the Chatham House discussion were 14 senior public sector leaders from Western Australia, representing a diverse range of government agencies and organisations. Of the attendees, **79% held Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and C-level roles**, including Chief Information Officers (CIOs), Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), and Executive Directors, while the remaining 21% comprised Directors leading critical transformation portfolios. Five AWS industry partners (**AWS, Mechanical Rock, OneBlink, Okta, and Blue Crystal**) joined forces with four senior academics, curated by **Curtin University**, to infuse the forum with diverse insights on building skills and fostering sector-wide innovation.

These leaders are responsible for driving strategic priorities across digital transformation, finance and procurement, regulatory support, corporate innovation, digital health, and environmental management. Collectively, they oversee initiatives focused on modernising public services, enhancing digital capabilities, streamlining operations, and fostering collaboration across sectors to deliver impactful, citizen-centric outcomes.

Keynote speaker, the Honourable Victor Dominello, highlighted the strategic importance of digital maturity for addressing Western Australia's demographic challenges and regional complexities. The discussion spotlighted actionable strategies tailored to WA, including enhancing cross-agency interoperability, embedding resilience into disaster response systems, and leveraging the state's existing digital infrastructure to drive long-term productivity and trust.

By **Patrick Joy** | Head of Research & Analysis | [Public Sector Network](#)

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FIVE DIGITAL INITIATIVES  
TO BOOST PRODUCTIVITY

THE GX5 | RESEARCH BRIEF



# KEY THEMES AND INSIGHTS

## ADDRESSING HEALTH SYSTEM SUSTAINABILITY

Health emerged as the most pressing challenge, accounting for 25-30% of the state budget and facing rising costs due to an ageing population. Participants underscored the need for:

- **Proactive digital investments:** Virtual health, remote monitoring (e.g., smart rings), and AI to optimise patient care.
- **Flattening the cost curve:** Investing in enabling technologies to shift the focus from reactive care to early intervention and efficiencies.
- **Adoption of digital health records:** Leveraging My Health Record as a platform for aged care and patient transfers.

## OVERCOMING BUDGETARY AND PROCUREMENT INHIBITORS

Participants noted bureaucratic hurdles and monolithic budget cycles as barriers to agile, iterative transformation. Key points included:

- **Digital Capability Fund:** While a step forward, it lacks targeted funding for early-stage innovations or iterative projects.
- **Procurement bottlenecks:** Business cases often fail to capture accurate costs until after market engagement.
- **Proposed solution:** Introduce seed funding pathways similar to NSW's Restart Fund to enable proof-of-concept projects, adjusting procurement to allow phased funding, reducing risk and improving vendor engagement.

## BUILDING TRUST IN DIGITAL IDENTITY AND CREDENTIALS

The discussion highlighted challenges in advancing digital identity adoption, where trust is built through choice, clear communication, and tangible benefits (e.g., faster payments, reduced paperwork).

- **Public trust:** Misconceptions and scepticism about government-led digital identity initiatives persist, with comparisons to “big brother” narratives.
- **Utility and uptake:** WA participants cited a need for connected, citizen-centric services that build trust through convenience.
- Participants suggested a political education agenda to equip leaders to advocate for digital identity's benefits and address public misconceptions.

## WORKFORCE CAPABILITY GAPS

- WA faces an ageing public sector workforce, particularly in frontline services like transport and health with noted resistance to change among long-tenured staff.
- Participants cited the need for digital skills training and embedded maturity assessments.

## LEGACY SYSTEMS AND SILOS

- Many frontline agencies (e.g. child protection, housing) operate on outdated systems, hindering service innovation.
- Systems often prioritise short-term outcomes over scalable, enabling technologies.

## INNOVATIVE IDEAS AND CASE STUDIES

### 1. WA SUCCESS: DIGITAL CAPABILITY FUND

- The \$1.4 billion fund demonstrates the benefits of a dedicated digital budget pathway. Lessons include:
  - Enhanced project assurance to ensure delivery.
  - The need for flexibility to support agile, multi-year initiatives.

### 2. LEARNING FROM OTHER JURISDICTIONS

- NSW's Restart Fund: An agile, iterative funding model that allows for phased projects with rapid reassessment.
- Denmark's e-Boks System: A trusted, centralised government mailbox that reduced costs and improved citizen engagement.
- Takeaway: WA can adapt proven strategies to overcome systemic challenges and improve service delivery.

## STRATEGIC OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

- Seed Funding Programs: Establish a targeted Digital Restart Fund for agile, proof-of-concept initiatives.
- Political Education Campaign: Develop a research-driven education agenda to demystify digital identity for public leaders.

### MEDIUM-TERM GOALS

- Embed Digital Skills in Workforce Training: Require agencies to allocate a percentage of HR budgets to uplift digital skills.
- Enable Connected Services: Align agency initiatives to focus on citizen-centric, cross-department service delivery.

### LONG-TERM VISION

- Health Innovation Roadmap: Develop a WA-specific roadmap for digital health, including virtual care, AI-driven efficiencies, and remote monitoring.
- Digital Identity Adoption: Implement verifiable credentials systems aligned with national standards to ensure interoperability and build trust.

## CONCLUSION

The Western Australia roundtable illuminated a path forward for addressing systemic barriers and advancing digital transformation. Health system sustainability emerged as a critical “burning platform,” demanding immediate and strategic digital investments. Participants also highlighted the need for agile funding, workforce capability uplift, and trust-building initiatives to overcome cultural and technical resistance.

Key next steps include embedding digital maturity assessments, adopting proven funding models, and focusing on cross-agency collaboration to deliver citizen-centric, connected services. By aligning practical actions with long-term vision, Western Australia can drive productivity, improve service delivery, and position itself as a leader in public sector innovation.

## FUTURE FOCUS AREAS

**Digital identity and verifiable credentials:** The transformative potential of decentralised and interoperable digital identity systems.

**AI and responsible technology use:** Frameworks for ethical AI use in public services and capability-building initiatives to harness its potential for service improvement.

**Digital maturity and workforce capability:** Addressing digital readiness gaps across agencies and professions.

**Citizen-centric service design:** The need to prioritise user experiences and trust in government digital services. Research could follow on needs-based service design and citizen engagement strategies.

**Streamlined funding and agile project management:** Challenges in securing funding for digital projects were noted, alongside the importance of iterative approaches.

**Collaboration for productivity gains:** The need for shared platforms and standards, successful models and incentivised cross-sectoral collaboration.

**Data privacy and governance:** Robust frameworks for privacy-preserving data sharing essential for trust and innovation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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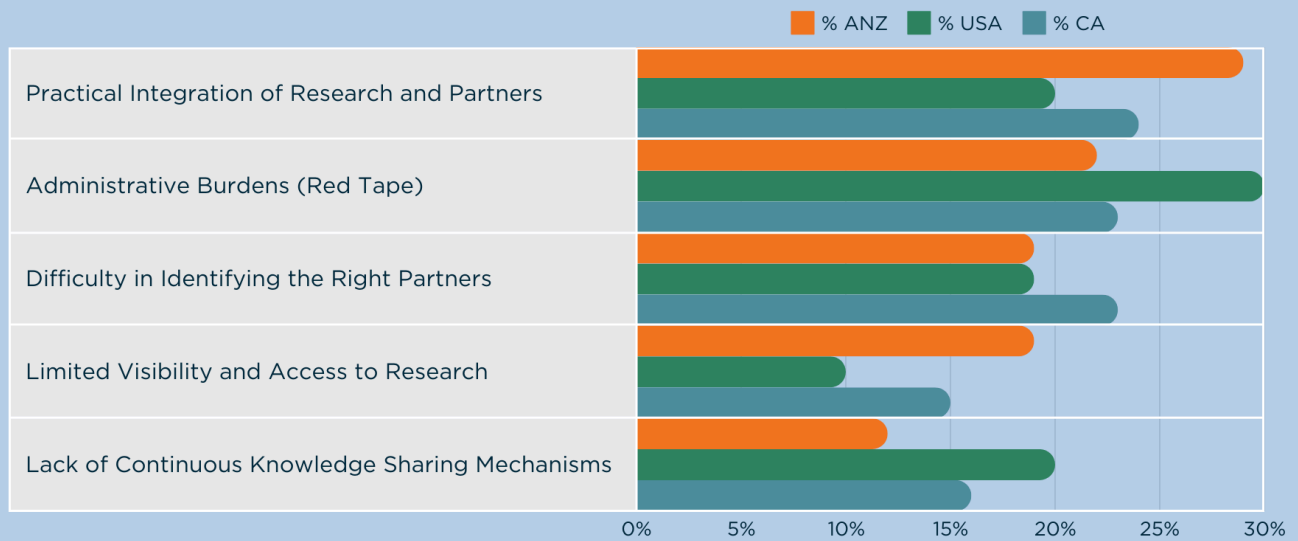
# ABOUT THE RESEARCH INNOVATION COUNCIL

**Connecting government, industry and academia:** we've been able to engineer a new program antithetical to the classical red tape, administration, and risk-aversion that impedes innovation.

Our program offers senior executives a unique opportunity to gather monthly for PSN-facilitated roundtable sessions with colleagues, academics, and technologists. We run the program at no cost to government executives or academics, and provide attendees a private online group on our global insights exchange platform, access to research briefs, and expert engagement with PSN analysts and facilitators.



## Greatest challenge partnering with Academia or Industry



Source: PSN Research Innovation Council Survey 2024. Total Sample Size: 188 ANZ/ 83 USA/ 80 CA Gov Executives

## ABOUT PUBLIC SECTOR NETWORK

Public Sector Network is a research company that represents public sector professionals across Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the USA. It develops roundtables, seminars, and conferences to suit current areas of interest to government agencies and their suppliers.

PSN's growing community spans across federal, state, and local government departments, healthcare, and education, allowing members to share information, access the latest in government innovation, and engage with other like-minded individuals on a secure and closed-door network.

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