

Brooke

Broken Systems, Broken Lives

HOW GOVERNMENT RED TAPE IS FAILING
AUSTRALIA'S MOST VULNERABLE — AND
HOW TO FIX IT



Introduction: The Urgency of Modernising Government Services for Vulnerable Citizens

Government services that support vulnerable people — such as victims of crime, people with disabilities, low-income families — are often hampered by getting access to the right support at the right time, due to outdated processes. These **legacy systems create barriers to critical assistance**, resulting in delays that can further entrench hardship. For example, within Australia, previous victim support tribunals had such severe backlogs that victims waited up to two years for compensation, leaving some unable to afford essential services like counselling or housing¹. Similarly, delays in the Federal government National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) left 1,140 Australians stuck in hospitals, unable to return home due to administrative hold-ups^{2,15}.



VICTIMS PREVIOUSLY WAITED
up to two years
FOR COMPENSATION

Beyond the human toll, inefficient government systems impose a significant cost on the public sector and the broader community. Manual, paper-based processes consume excessive public sector staff time and force citizens to navigate complex bureaucratic requirements.

Studies show that moving services online can reduce administrative costs substantially. According to the UK Government's Digital Efficiency Report, digital transactions are on average 50 times cheaper than face-to-face transactions, 30 times cheaper than postal transactions, and 20 times cheaper than telephone transactions, demonstrating the enormous cost-saving potential for governments through digital service delivery^{3,13}. These findings mirror the outcomes seen in many Australian digital government initiatives, where local reforms have similarly driven efficiency gains, cost savings, and improved access to essential services.

ON AVERAGE, DIGITAL TRANSACTIONS ARE



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However, modernisation of outdated processes should not be viewed solely as a way to clear backlogs — it must be a **proactive strategy to deliver better, more equitable support** for vulnerable communities, ensuring they receive timely assistance when they need it most. For many people in crisis, navigating complex government systems often means retelling traumatic experiences and facing inconsistent or impersonal responses. Also, requiring vulnerable individuals to physically meet with case workers can add further stress and delays, especially when decisions are bound by complex policy rules.

In contrast, a human service-centred approach to modernisation remains the most effective way for governments to deliver faster, fairer, and more consistent services — accessible anytime, through any channel²².

As new technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) are rapidly adopted, it's essential they are implemented with clear guardrails in place. With the right foundations, governments can design tailored, secure, and timely responses that reduce stigma, lower barriers to access, and ensure citizens receive the right support, at the right time, in the way that suits them best²¹.

A Local Example: Transforming Victim Support Through Digital Service Reform

A landmark example of human-centred, digital transformation improving government service delivery can be seen in the recent overhaul of a state-based victims of crime financial assistance system in Australia. Under the previous model, victims were required to apply through a court-based process, which could take more than a year, with some cases stretching up to 24 months⁴. The process was not only slow, but often retraumatising, as applicants were required to appear in court and undergo adversarial hearings to access the support they were entitled to.

In 2024, this court-based process was replaced with a trauma-informed, omni-channel model that eliminated the need for in-person appearances in court and significantly streamlined the experience for victims. Individuals can now apply for assistance entirely online, reducing both processing times and emotional distress.



THE PREVIOUS COURT-BASED PROCESS COULD TAKE BETWEEN

12-24 months



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The new system has expanded eligibility, increased financial support options, and extended the timeframe for applications, ensuring that victims can seek help when they are ready⁵.

While the new approach is still in its early stages, comparable reforms in other Australian states have already demonstrated powerful results. For example, similar digital upgrades to justice-related services in Queensland led to a 60% reduction in decision wait times⁶.

This transformation highlights the power of digitalisation in shifting government services from reactive to proactive. Instead of forcing victims to navigate burdensome legal and administrative hurdles, the modernised model prioritises accessibility, dignity, and timeliness. The benefits of this approach extend well beyond victim support — other areas such as disability services, welfare programs, and housing assistance could also adopt similar frameworks to ensure vulnerable citizens receive the help they need, when they need it most.



DIGITAL UPGRADES TO JUSTICE-RELATED SERVICES

reduced wait times by 60%



Digitising the Care Economy: How Government Can Act Now to Support Vulnerable Citizens

Around the world, governments continue to embrace digital transformation to improve public services. Denmark, the United Kingdom, and Norway now provide nearly all government services online, enabling citizens to access welfare benefits, healthcare, and emergency assistance seamlessly⁷. **Australia ranks fifth** in the Digital Government Index published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) — an international body focused on shaping better policies for better lives. Despite this strong ranking, there is still significant room for improvement in how social services are delivered, particularly for those who need them most⁸.

To ensure vulnerable citizens fully benefit from modernisation, governments must move beyond simply digitising existing services — a focus of the past decade. The next phase requires reimagining service delivery through secure, omni-channel access and continuous process improvement. This means ensuring services are not only digital, but also accessible, trusted, and consistent — delivered efficiently across any channel, regardless of how people choose to engage.

Here are essential actions governments must take to build fairer and more effective systems for vulnerable citizens.



1. Proactive vs. Reactive Government Support

A digital services approach allows governments to shift from **reactive service delivery**, responding to issues as they occur, to **proactive support**, anticipating and addressing citizen needs before they become crises. For example, NDIS wait times for some approvals previously averaged 129 days, severely delaying support for those in need¹⁶. **A proactive system, enabled by smart technologies, including AI, could identify at-risk individuals earlier and trigger faster, tailored interventions — preventing people from falling into deeper crisis.** A United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) report underscores the benefits of proactive strategies, particularly in disaster risk reduction, where anticipating risks and engaging communities leads to more effective outcomes⁹.

2. Ensuring Consistency in Government Information

Many citizens experience confusion when seeking support due to **inconsistent information from different representatives**¹⁰. For example, a woman applying for the Disability Support Pension (DSP) was wrongly issued a **\$127,000 debt due to administrative errors** — a mistake only corrected after a lengthy appeals process¹⁴. Another example includes Australians with disabilities being denied or delayed essential payments because of conflicting or incorrect information from Services Australia, with many cases requiring appeals to be resolved¹⁶.

To address these inconsistencies and ensure vulnerable citizens get timely and accurate support, governments can leverage **AI-powered systems to create trusted, up-to-date sources of information for both citizens and staff.**

When implemented with the **right ethical and policy guardrails**, AI tools help ensure that all citizens — no matter who they speak to or how they seek help — receive clear, consistent, and accurate information. AI can also support case workers by guiding them to apply complex policies correctly and consistently, reducing the risk of human error and bias.

With AI-driven case management systems, such as Salesforce's Agentforce, **responses can be personalised yet consistent**, ensuring that every citizen receives accurate, tailored information that reduces confusion and errors²³. For vulnerable citizens, their families, and carers, having clear guidance on available services — and how to access them — can be life-changing.

A PROACTIVE SYSTEM ENABLED BY SMART TECHNOLOGIES COULD:



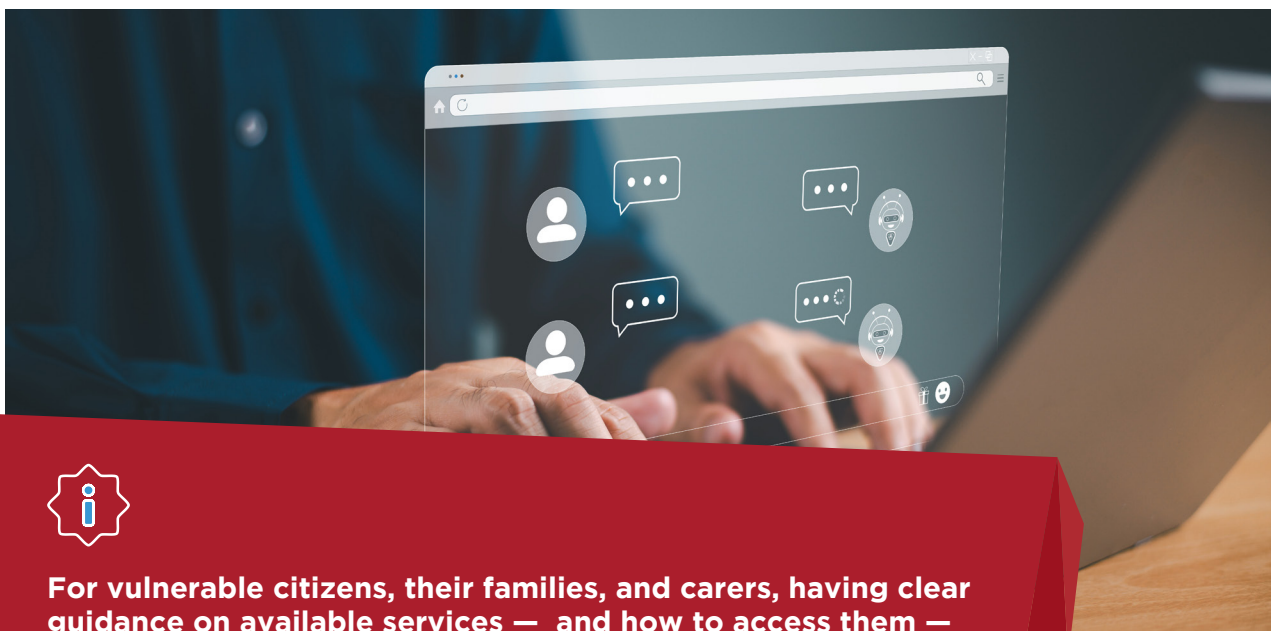
IDENTIFY AT-RISK INDIVIDUALS EARLIER



TRIGGER FASTER INTERVENTIONS



PREVENT PEOPLE FROM FALLING FURTHER INTO CRISIS



For vulnerable citizens, their families, and carers, having clear guidance on available services — and how to access them — can be life-changing.



3. Omni-channel Service Delivery

To deliver equitable and accessible services, governments must further embrace **omni-channel service delivery** by offering citizens the choice to engage online, by phone, or in-person, and receive the same consistent and high-quality service regardless of the channel. While strong progress has been made, the next step is clear – elevate the channel experience to deliver services that are tailored, responsive, and intuitive to each individual's needs.

For many vulnerable citizens, **the way they engage with government can be as important as the service itself**. Research from the Australian Digital Inclusion Index highlights that while digital access is growing, one in four Australians remains digitally excluded, particularly among low-income, elderly, and regional populations¹⁷. Some may prefer personal interaction, but for others, feelings of shame or fear of judgement when seeking help for sensitive issues like housing or financial support present a significant barrier to accessing assistance¹⁹.

A recent article from The Guardian underscored how individuals in financial distress often **avoid seeking support due to stigma and embarrassment**, with some delaying or refusing help until they are in crisis¹⁹. In these cases, AI-powered virtual assistants and online portals can provide a privacy-protecting, judgement-free environment, enabling people to access help discreetly and without fear of being judged. Research has shown that AI tools used for sensitive service interactions, such as therapy and support access, can improve user comfort and reduce stigma because of the anonymity they offer²⁰.

Omni-channel delivery also **benefits case workers and frontline staff** by streamlining workflows across systems, reducing manual duplication, and ensuring accurate, up-to-date case information is accessible regardless of the point of contact. The OECD recommends omni-channel strategies as essential to improving public trust and reducing service gaps, noting that citizens increasingly expect “seamless, consistent and convenient” service experiences across channels¹⁸.

4. Overcoming Access Barriers for Remote Communities

Another major challenge in delivering government support is **ensuring equitable access to services for remote and regional Australians**. The Lutheran Care and Batchelor Institute report highlighted that government staff often assume essential services like banks or Services Australia offices are accessible, when in fact many remote communities lack any physical access to these services¹¹.

AI-powered case management could help bridge this gap by integrating localised data, ensuring that government representatives provide region-specific, accurate information rather than generic, city-centric responses.



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Determining How to Best Leverage AI for Government

A key emerging technology in government digital transformation is AI. **AI-powered tools** — including platforms like Salesforce's Agentforce — can enhance service delivery by automating routine administrative tasks, providing real-time case insights, and improving decision-making processes.

For instance, an **AI-powered virtual assistant** could guide a citizen through an application process using interactions in natural language, check their eligibility for benefits, and provide real-time updates on their case status, reducing the need for manual intervention¹². AI can also flag cases requiring urgent attention, ensuring vulnerable citizens do not fall through the cracks of complex systems.

However, **implementing AI successfully requires more than technology alone — it needs the right strategy and expertise**. Many government agencies face challenges in adopting AI, including concerns around workforce readiness, ethical use, and data security. Agencies need trusted partners to guide them through these complexities and ensure AI solutions are human-centred, compliant, and effective.





“Too often, vulnerable Australians are left waiting for critical support because government systems were designed for another era. Modernising these services is not just a matter of efficiency — it’s about restoring dignity and trust in public systems. When done right, AI and digital tools can help governments provide fair, consistent, and timely support to people who need it most. But these technologies need to be implemented carefully, with real understanding of the human experience behind each case.”

BRUCE MCGREGOR, MANAGING PARTNER, BROOKE INSTITUTE

By working with **Brooke**, as an experienced and trusted Salesforce implementation partner, governments can identify the right AI capabilities, ensure alignment with policy and regulatory frameworks, and seamlessly integrate AI into existing case management systems and legacy enterprise architectures.

A well-planned AI strategy, supported by a knowledgeable and trusted partner, ensures that technology adoption delivers tangible, measurable benefits — both for government staff and the citizens they serve. AI can help create a unified view of citizen needs, provide consistent information across channels, and accelerate service delivery, ultimately enabling governments to move from reactive to proactive support models.

Conclusion: The Time to Act is Now

Governments are at a critical inflection point.

The question is no longer whether to modernise public services — it’s whether we can afford not to.

Broken systems mean broken lives. Every day that outdated systems remain in place, vulnerable people are left waiting, falling through the cracks, or giving up altogether.



This white paper highlights that human-centred digital transformation, when combined with omni-channel delivery, AI, and thoughtful service design, is not just a pathway to efficiency. It is a lever for equity, dignity, and timely access to essential support. From victims of crime to people with disabilities and those facing financial hardship, citizens deserve systems that respond to their needs without unnecessary friction or delay.

The opportunity is clear: reimagine government services to be faster, fairer, and fundamentally more human. Now is the time to modernise — not tomorrow, not next quarter. Because the **people who need help the most can't wait**.

To explore how your government organisation can take the next step in modernising your service delivery, contact the Brooke team. As a trusted partner in public sector digital service transformation, we're here to share insights, answer questions, and help you design a path forward.



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