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GOVERNMENT OUTREACH AND THE POWER OF THE LETTERBOX

Physical mail remains a strategic channel for governments aiming to reach all citizens – especially vulnerable or digitally disconnected citizens. In Australia, public agencies at federal, state, and local levels continue to send letters, forms, and information kits via the post to ensure no one is left behind by the digital divide. This approach was underscored during the 2021 Census, when 85% of Australian households received a mailed Census letter with a unique online code and instructions – providing paper alternatives for anyone without internet access (abs.gov.au).

Inclusive mail-outs acknowledge that not everyone is online, and they offer a reliable way to communicate critical information widely. Importantly, older Australians broadly prefer receiving official communications by postal mail, and advocates warn that reducing mail services could exclude seniors from vital interactions like postal voting, pension notices and tax information (infrastructure.gov.au). In short, the letterbox continues to be a vital public communication tool alongside email and apps.

“If it comes in the mail at least you get 5-10 secs of facetime. If it’s in your junk you delete it without even looking at it.”

Male, 20’s, NSW



A citizen retrieves official mail from a letterbox, highlighting the enduring role of postal communication.

Government agencies across the globe recognise that physical mail helps bridge gaps in digital access. Even in highly connected countries, millions lack internet or basic digital skills. For example, in the UK about 10 million people remained digitally excluded in 2020 and projections show nearly 6 million Britons could still be offline by 2032 (galloways.co.uk). These individuals – often seniors, low-income households, or those in rural areas – rely on traditional mail for information and services.

Likewise in Canada, roughly 30% of Canadian seniors do not use the internet at all (grey-box.ca), meaning paper letters may be the only sure way to reach them.

Physical mail also proves essential for Indigenous and remote communities with limited broadband, digital literacy equity across vulnerable citizens and improves comprehension for all Australians following neuroscience research (ADII, 2025). By sending letters, governments can convey messages to every household with an address, a level of universal reach unmatched by digital channels.

Governments are discovering that a “digital-first” strategy must still include analogue channels to truly serve all citizens.



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Beyond reach, physical mail conveys a sense of authenticity and trust that can be crucial for official communications. Surveys in Australia show that over half of people find physical mail more secure and trustworthy for sensitive personal and financial information, whereas only about 15% feel email is more secure. **In fact, when it comes to certain documents – like identity cards, licences, or local council notices – many Australians feel it “more trustworthy and official to receive these in the physical mail”.**

While digital emails are becoming the primary channel for bills and statements, there are reports that indicate improve comprehension and deeper understanding when reading on paper versus on screens, particularly when under time pressure. Meta-cognitive regulation is also greater when reading on paper versus digital (sciencedirect.com, 2024). These are important findings when considering informed and accurate knowledge across financial management.

“I work from home so it’s literally nice to go out, stretch my legs, get some sunshine and walk to the letterbox.”

Female, 60’s, Townsville



Australians clearly value the tangible credibility of a stamped envelope for important government matters with mail/post to a home address the second-most preferred and with more than half of Australians saying they would like regular or very frequent government communications via post. In other words, Australians don’t want governments to abandon the mailbox. In fact, 94% state they believe the Postie and the letterbox is part of Australian society.

International examples reinforce trends across larger populations. In the United States, the Postal Service is considered a critical infrastructure for reaching all citizens – so much so that the USPS is consistently ranked as the most trusted federal agency (uspsoig.gov). During emergencies, it has played a lifesaving role.

After Hurricane Katrina, for instance, postal workers helped deliver government relief checks, health information, and even medicines to displaced people when power and phone lines were down (uspsoig.gov). More recently, the U.S. government tapped the postal network to distribute free COVID-19 test kits nationwide, with over 270 million test kits shipped to American households via USPS in 2022 (about.usps.com). These efforts highlight the postal service’s unique ability to physically reach everyone, including those without reliable internet, in times of need.

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Similarly, in Canada, authorities and advocates have pushed back against ending door-to-door delivery, arguing it would hurt seniors and people with disabilities who depend on mail for information and connection (ccdonline.ca). And in the UK, the National Health Service has explicitly defended the importance of letters for patient communications, urging that postal deliveries be prioritised so critical health letters arrive on time (practicebusiness.co.uk).

Australia Post is deemed an 'iconic' Australian brand. In 2024 Roy Morgan ranked Australia Post the 'Most Trusted Brand in Services', noting it is one of the few brands that touches nearly all Australians on a frequent basis. The Roy Morgan report outlined that Australia Post has had an eventful few years as ordering of goods online rocketed to record highs during the pandemic and has not abated. The role of the postal service across Australia underscores that physical mail is more than nostalgia; it remains a practical, accessible and trusted medium for officialdom.

In summary, governments are discovering that a "digital-first" strategy must still include analogue channels to truly serve all citizens. The humble letter in the mailbox can reach the pockets of the population that emails and apps miss. It can engender trust, as an official-looking envelope often carries more weight with the public than a crowded email inbox. From public health notices and election materials to community services information, physical mail ensures equitable access to information, meeting people where they are, whether online or off.

As one Australian study put it, the letterbox serves as a kind of civic "fortress" of secure communication for many households. In the coming years, innovative governments will likely blend digital outreach with strategic mail drops, leveraging the strengths of each. By doing so, they can maintain broad reach and public confidence, ensuring that important messages – be it a local council update or a national emergency alert, reliably land in every citizen's hands.

The letterbox, far from obsolete, continues to prove its worth as a cornerstone of inclusive government communication (infrastructure.gov.au).

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