

# Research Brief

## Implementing digital technologies in prison: Inmates' ongoing experiences of tablet access and connections with family and friends

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**AIM** To explore use and experiences of digital tablets among people in prison following an ongoing and progressive rollout across NSW correctional centres, with a focus on contact with family and friends and the perceived value of tablets on experiences of prison.

**FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS** A self-report online survey was administered via digital tablets to all people with tablet access at 19 NSW correctional centres. A total of 2,119 responses were received. The survey asked people about their use of digital tablets, the features they considered most important, any technological issues they experienced, and how they felt tablet access impacted various relationships and experiences of prison.

The results identified wide and consistent use of tablets among the majority of respondents, with tablets used daily, for periods of at least 2 hours, and during the evening when they were able to utilise the phone feature. Most respondents identified the phone feature as most important, although also reported a range of common technological issues relating to usage of the phone and other features.

A sub-sample of respondents who reported their frequency of contact with family and friends both before and after the introduction of tablets (N = 745) indicated a significant increase in contact through use of the tablet phone feature. A series of hierarchical regression analyses identified that increased contact was associated with more favourable perceptions that tablet access had positive impacts on relationships with family and friends, interactions with other people in prison and centre staff, and overall experience of life in gaol. There was also a negative association between increased frequency of contact and a measure of rehabilitative staff relationships.

We concluded that people have continued to have a high level of uptake of the tablets following their broader progressive rollout across NSW correctional centres. While many respondents reported being satisfied with the tablet features, several technological issues identified during the pilot phase persist. Findings also indicated that increased contact with family and friends is important for maintaining and building positive relationships that provide people with a sense of connection and may aid in rehabilitation and successful reintegration. Access to tablets and an increased sense of connectedness may also ultimately contribute to a more positive overall prison social climate through better interactions with other inmates and experiences of prison more generally, although there were mixed indications about effects on quality contact and rehabilitative interactions with staff. While tablets provide people in prison with a range of benefits, including the ability to maintain positive contact with family and friends, it is important to balance these with other CSNSW initiatives that foster conditions conducive to rehabilitative prison environments.

## INTRODUCTION

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Digital technologies have developed considerably over time and have been adapted to various contexts, leading to an increased reliance on technology to access information and services, and to communicate and connect with people (Harrison, 2014; Ross et al., 2023). One context that has seen significant growth with the adaptation and use of digital technology is the field of corrections. There is increasing recognition that providing people in prison with opportunities to develop and maintain the skills and confidence to use digital technologies could have important implications for their successful reintegration to society (Palmer et al., 2020). The use of technology in this space is also becoming increasingly utilised for maintaining communication between people in prison and their family, friends, and other external support people throughout the community (Hart, 2023; Mufarreh et al., 2022).

Research suggests that when people are able to cultivate positive prosocial relationships with people in the outside world, there is a greater likelihood of successful rehabilitation (Hart, 2023). Providing people in prison with access to digital technologies, such as the use of tablets, allows for greater opportunities for individuals to maintain contact with family and friends, increasing their connection to the outside world. It has previously been established that frequent family contact is a central part of people in prison feeling a sense of family connectedness and can help decrease feelings of loss and separation (Folk et al., 2019). This sense of connectedness can help alleviate feelings of isolation and serve as a reminder about life outside prison, which may aid in motivating people to engage in prosocial and rehabilitative activities that will help them successfully reintegrate and reduce the likelihood of reoffending (Moran, 2013).

From October 2020, Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) has been engaged in a staged rollout of digital tablets across NSW correctional centres, with the aim to transform rehabilitation and reduce reoffending. Tablet features have been progressively added, and include paid phone calls, access to read-only white-listed websites (e.g., news, education resources, health and wellbeing, and welfare services), self-service administrative information (e.g., trust account balances, court dates, and sentence information), digital buy-ups, eForms, and paid entertainment packages (e.g., movies, music, games, and eBooks). The phone call feature is automatically disabled at 10pm each night, however the remainder of the services are available throughout the night, with tablets collected each morning to be charged (for more detailed information about the tablets, see Barkworth et al., 2022; Thaler et al., 2022a).

Corrections Research Evaluation and Statistics (CRES) has completed five studies, to date, in line with a broader agenda of evaluation on digital technology. Two related studies utilised data from a self-report survey administered via the digital tablets and face-to-face interviews conducted with people who had experience using the tablets in an initial two pilot centres (Barkworth et al., 2022; Thaler et al., 2022b). Those studies identified a large uptake in the use of digital tablets since their implementation, with people reporting the phone feature as the most utilised of all the tablet features. Access to tablets was also associated with improved communication with family and friends, more positive interactions with staff, and a better overall atmosphere within the centre. Thaler et al. (2022a) found that the improved communication associated with access to tablets meant people were able to actively engage in supervising children, oversee their homework, and be present during evening bedtime and other family routines that they previously were not able to take part in. Such interactions helped re-establish a sense of family connectedness.

Two additional studies utilised administrative data to examine behavioural indicators of safety and order, and participation in behaviour change programs (Mahajan et al., 2023, under review). The studies identified significant trends towards reduced assaults and violent offences in custody, and increased program participation following the implementation of tablets. The fifth study examined staff perspectives of the

introduction of digital tablets (Thaler et al., under review). While staff reported mixed views regarding the impact of tablets on their workload, they highlighted the importance of the phone call feature for eliminating some of the friction and tension previously felt within the centre, and for improving interactions with and between people in prison, as well as the overall atmosphere of the centre.

## AIMS

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The current study aims to expand our understanding of how people in prison are using digital tablets, and the benefits they associate with access to those tablets. The initial survey study was completed at a time when tablets had only been available for 12 months in two pilot centres, and during a time when centres were largely impacted by Covid-19 lockdowns and restrictions (see Barkworth et al., 2022). The tablets have since undergone a broader rollout across NSW with people in 19 centres having regular access to tablets at the time of this study. During that time, the tablets have also been integrated into business-as-usual (BAU) activities, with additional features also made available to support that BAU work, including the introduction of digital buy-ups, eForms, and access to additional self-service administrative information.

The first aim of the current study is to understand people's perceptions and use of the tablets in the context of the broader rollout of this initiative across NSW correctional centres and the inclusion of additional tablet features. A second aim of the current study is to understand how tablets have changed both the quantity and quality of contact people have with their family and friends outside prison, as well as their interactions and experiences within prison. In doing so, the second component of this study focuses on people who reported on their experiences of contacting family and friends via unit phones prior to the introduction of tablets, as well as their experiences of using tablets to maintain that contact.

The current study aims to address three key research questions:

1. How are people in prison utilising digital tablets following a broader rollout across NSW correctional centres?
2. How has the introduction of digital tablets changed the frequency of contact people in prison have with their family and friends outside prison?
3. Is there a relationship between a change in contact with people outside prison and how people feel having access to tablets has impacted (a) relationships with family and friends, (b) interactions with other people in prison, (c) interactions and relationships with staff, and (d) their overall experience of life in gaol?

## METHODS

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This study utilised data from a sample of 2,119 inmates across 19 correctional centres who completed a self-report survey administered via the digital tablets in June 2023. The online survey platform was included among the white-listed websites, and Facility Messages sent directly to the tablets throughout the 3-week survey period provided information about the survey and instructions on how to access it. Respondents were able to access the survey by entering their Master Index Number (MIN), which was required to avoid duplicate responses and allow participants to pause and return to the survey at another time without loss of any data. MINs were also utilised to extract inmate demographics from the CSNSW Offender Integrated Management System (OIMS).

All inmates who were present at each of the 19 correctional centres at the beginning of the survey period, and had access to a digital tablet, were invited to participate (approx. 6,150 inmates). The total number of completed surveys represented a response rate of 34.5%. The centres involved represent a mix of minimum, medium and maximum security; male and female inmates; and metropolitan and regional locations. Table 1 provides details of the full sample and the sub-sample who had spent time in prison before and after the introduction of tablets.

**Table 1.** Sample characteristics

	Full sample (N = 2,119)		Sub-sample (N = 745)	
	M(SD)	%	M(SD)	%
Age	37.4(11.7)	-	38.3(11.9)	-
Gender				
Male	-	91.1	-	93.8
Female	-	8.9	-	6.2
Aboriginal				
Yes	-	27.8	-	26.7
No	-	72.0	-	73.3
Unknown	-	0.2	-	0.0
Relationship status				
Non-partnered	-	64.5	-	64.9
Partnered	-	33.7	-	35.1
Unknown	-	1.9	-	1.2
Dependent children				
Yes	-	18.8	-	18.3
No	-	79.1	-	81.7
Unknown	-	2.1	-	1.6
Total time in custody (years)	4.7(5.0)	-	5.2(5.3)	-

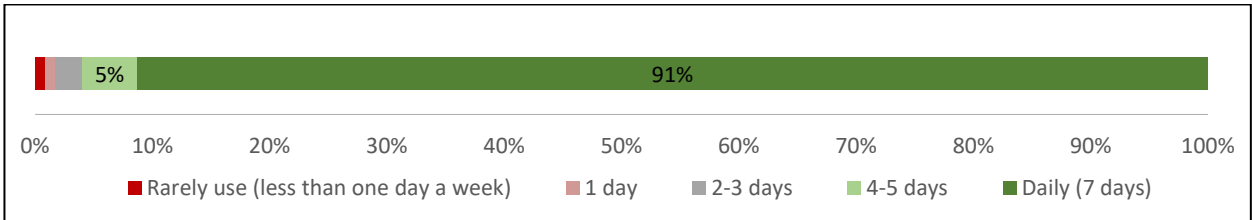
To address the research questions, a series of descriptive statistics are first presented to represent the extent of people’s tablet use, and understand their experience of using the tablets, including identifying those features they use most often and consider most important, as well as what technological issues they have encountered. Drawing on a sub-sample of people who reported on their frequency of contact with family and friends both before and after the introduction of tablets, five hierarchical regression analyses were then conducted to examine how a change in contact may have impacted their perceptions of relationships with people they interact with both in and out of prison, as well as their experience of life in gaol.

## FINDINGS

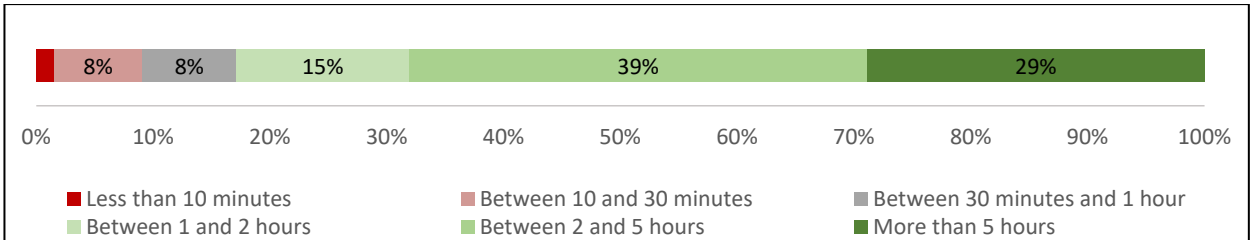
### Experiences with the tablets

#### Tablet use

Figure 1 and Figure 2 identify the extent of tablet use among survey participants. The tablets are widely used with 91% indicating daily use. More than two thirds of respondents also indicated using the tablets for at least 2 hours on those days they use them. Only 1% of respondents reported using the tablets less than once a week and for less than 10 minutes at a time.

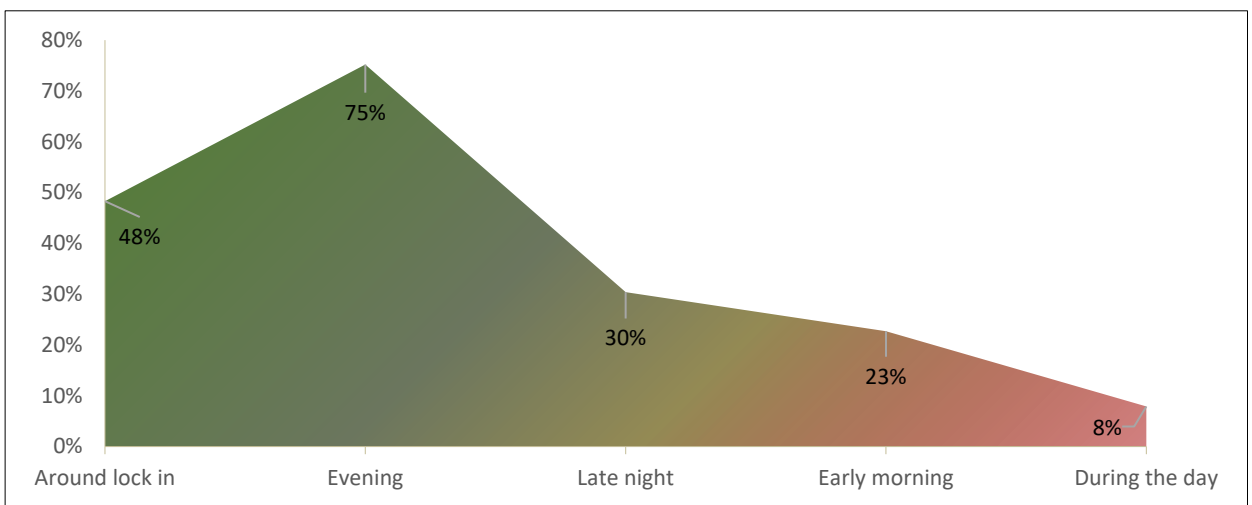


**Figure 1.** How many days would you use the tablet (for any purpose) in a regular week? (N = 2,118)



**Figure 2.** On a day when you use the tablet, how long would you usually use it for (for any purpose)? (N = 2,115)

Figure 3 shows almost half of all survey respondents used the tablets within the first two hours following 'lock-in', after they had been handed back the tablets for the night. Three quarters reported using the tablets during the evening (from around 2 hours after lock-in until 10pm), after which the phone feature is disabled. A third of respondents continued using the tablets late at night (between 10pm and 4am), and almost a quarter reported using the tablets in the early morning prior to 'let-go', when the phone feature was again available. Less than 10% reported using the tablets throughout the day when they are often placed in charging bays.<sup>1</sup>

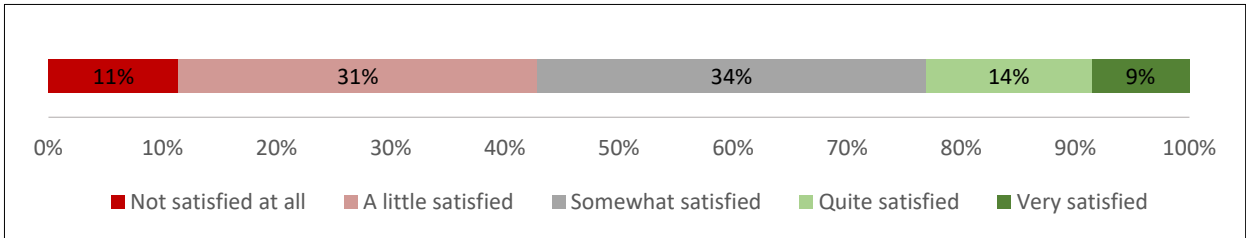


**Figure 3.** At what time(s) during the day do you usually use the tablets? (N = 2,119)

### Tablet features

More than half of all respondents were at least somewhat satisfied with the current tablet features, while another third reported being a little satisfied. Only just over 10% of respondents indicated they were not at all satisfied with current tablet features.

<sup>1</sup> Respondents were able to select multiple time periods.



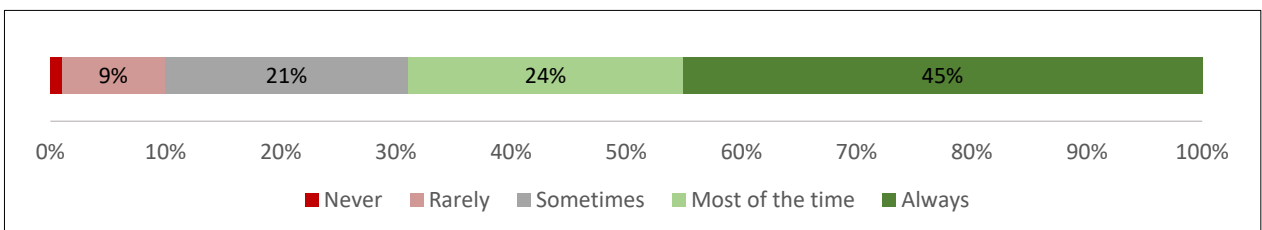
**Figure 4.** How satisfied are you with the current tablet features? (N = 2,063)

When asked about the features people considered were (or would be) most important to them, the majority noted the phone call feature, with over half also indicating video calls would be an important feature.<sup>2</sup> Features that were considered least important included mental health information/support and behaviour change programs, noting that much of this content was still in development or not available on the tablets at the time of the survey. Table 2 presents the most to least important features as identified by survey respondents.

**Table 2.** In using the digital tablets in gaol, which features are (or would be) most important to you? (N = 2,119)

Feature	%
Phone calls	83.2
Video calls	56.2
On-demand entertainment (Movies, Music)	51.3
Self-administration information	47.2
Games	43.7
Digital Buy-Ups	38.5
News websites	33.1
Administration/application (eForms)	20.8
Free-to-air TV	18.6
Education	15.5
Legal information	6.8
eBooks	5.2
Mental health information/support	4.4
Behaviour change programs	3.6

One feature of the tablets in place since the initial pilot rollout is Facility Messages, which allow staff to send messages (and an attached document) directly to the tablets. Messages can be sent to all tablets across the state, to tablets in a specific centre or unit, or to individuals. More than two thirds of respondents indicated they opened the messages either most of the time or always, while only 1% of respondents said they never opened the messages (see Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** How often do you open Facility Messages you receive on the tablet? (N = 1,977)

<sup>2</sup> Some of the features listed (e.g., digital buy-ups, eForms) were available on tablets in some centres at the time the survey was administered, but several of these features were still being rolled out in other centres. Other features (e.g., video calls, behaviour change programs) were not available on tablets in any of the centres but were potential future additions. Respondents were therefore asked to not only consider what was available on the tablet they had access to, but what they would also consider as important features for later inclusion.

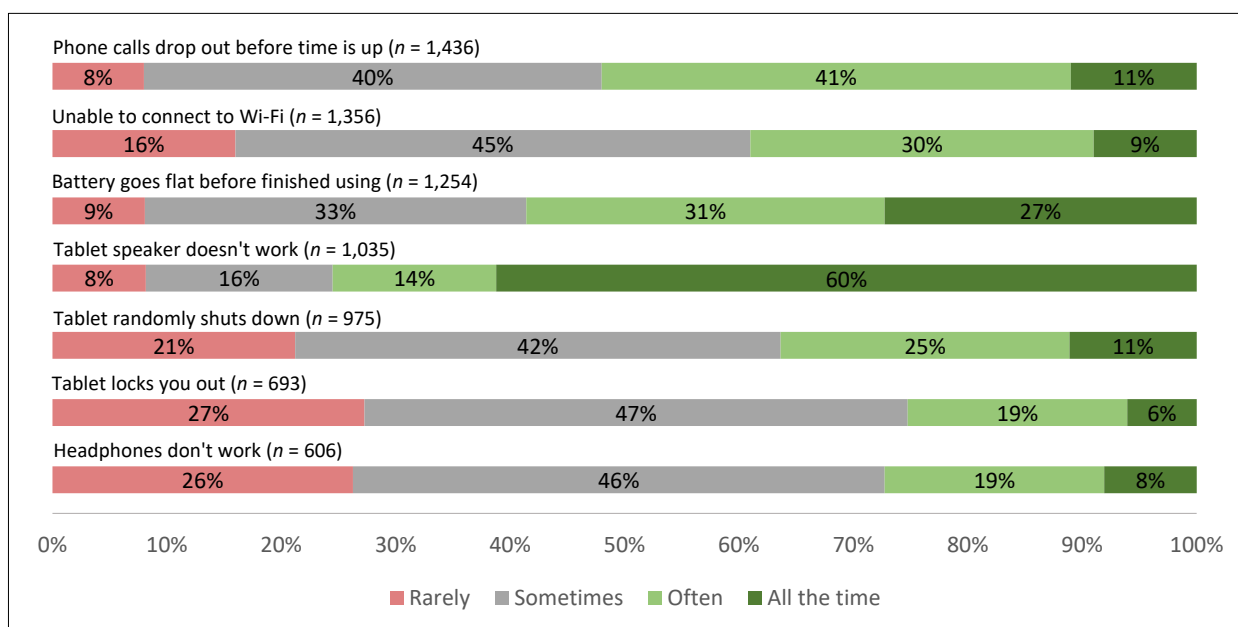
## Technological issues

Several technological issues were identified by participants in Thaler et al.'s (2022a) qualitative evaluation of the implementation of tablets in the initial pilot centres. Respondents in the current study were asked about their experiences with these issues to determine whether they are ongoing and to what extent. Table 3 presents the proportion of people who have experienced each of the issues and Figure 6 indicates the frequency that each issue occurs.

Over two thirds of respondents had experienced phone calls dropping out before the time was up, with just over half of those respondents experiencing the issue often or all the time. Almost two thirds also experienced issues connecting to Wi-Fi, with over a third reporting that occurred often or all the time. The tablet battery going flat was experienced by more than half of all respondents, and over half of those respondents reported this occurring often or all the time. Around half of all respondents also reported not being able to use the tablet speaker function, with almost three quarters of those respondents experiencing that issue often or all the time.<sup>3</sup> Other issues were experienced by fewer than half of all respondents and occurred less frequently.

**Table 3.** Have you experienced any of the following issues? (N = 2,119)

Issue	%
Phone calls drop out before time is up	67.9%
Unable to connect to Wi-Fi	64.2%
Battery goes flat before finished using	59.3%
Tablet speaker doesn't work	49.0%
Tablet randomly shuts down	46.2%
Tablet locks you out	32.8%
Headphones don't work	28.6%



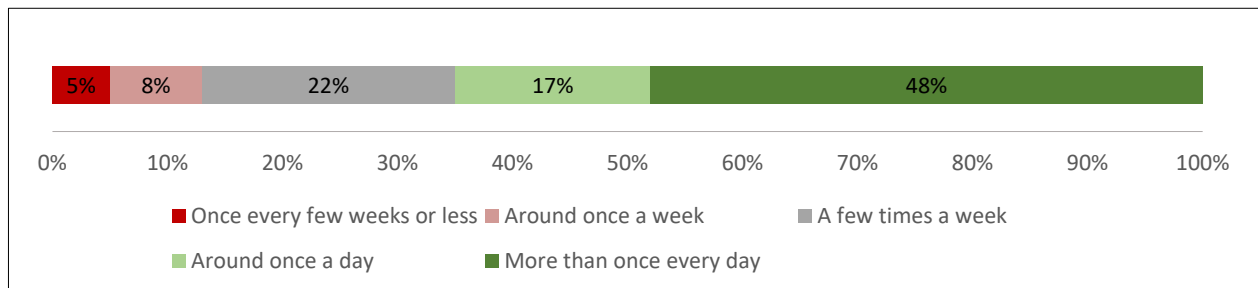
**Figure 6.** How often do each of these technological issues happen?

<sup>3</sup> At the time of the survey, an operational decision had been made to deactivate all tablet speakers to reduce noise disturbances throughout the centres when tablet-users were in close proximity to other people, and headsets were provided instead. The findings related to this issue are therefore likely to reflect inmates' interest in using the speaker function during the time they were deactivated.

## Maintaining contact and building connections

### Contact with family and friends

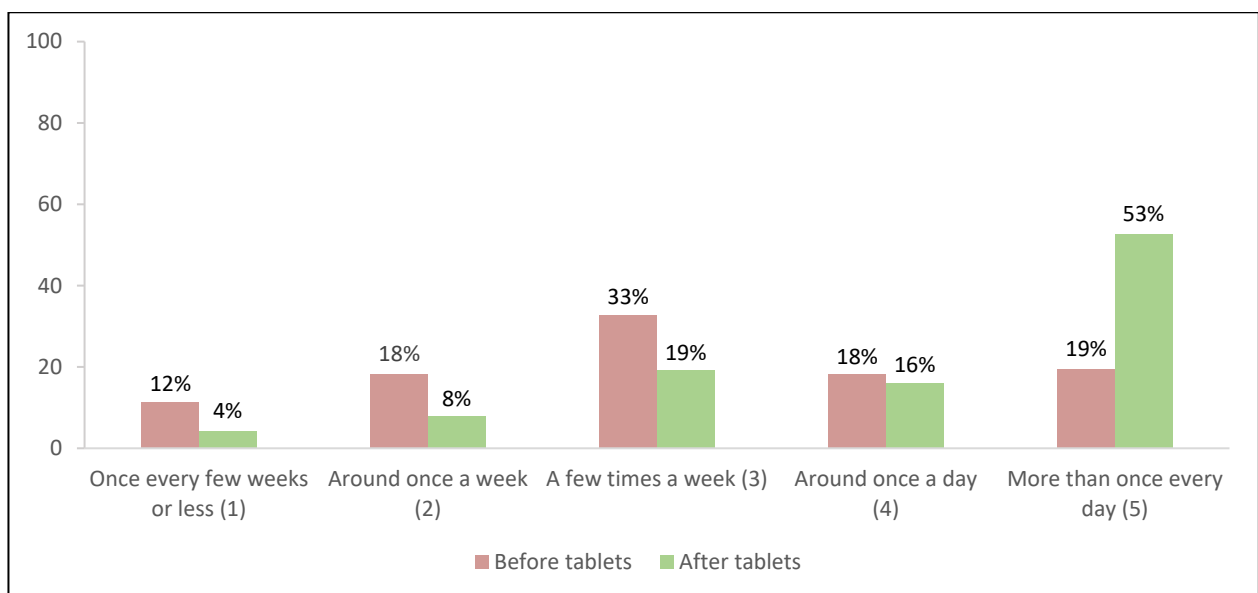
As previously indicated, the option to make phone calls is considered the most important feature of the tablets. Figure 7 indicates 65% of respondents use the tablet to contact their family and friends at least once a day, and a further 30% of respondents maintained contact at least once a week.



**Figure 7.** Using the phone feature on the digital tablet, how often do you speak with your family and friends? (N = 1,886)

We also aimed to explore whether the introduction of tablets had changed how much contact people in prison were having with their family and friends. To do so, we drew on a sub-sample of respondents who indicated they had spent time in prison prior to the introduction of tablets and reported their frequency of contact with family and friends both before and after the introduction of tablets. The sub-sample comprised a little over a third of the total sample (N = 745).

Prior to the introduction of tablets, almost two thirds of the sub-sample only contacted family and friends a few times a week, or less; after the introduction of tablets, more than two thirds of respondents were able to maintain contact at least once a day (see Figure 8). This change in contact from before (M = 3.15, SD = 1.25) to after (M = 4.05, SD = 1.19) the implementation of tablets was found to be statistically significant ( $t = -20.19, p < .001$ ).

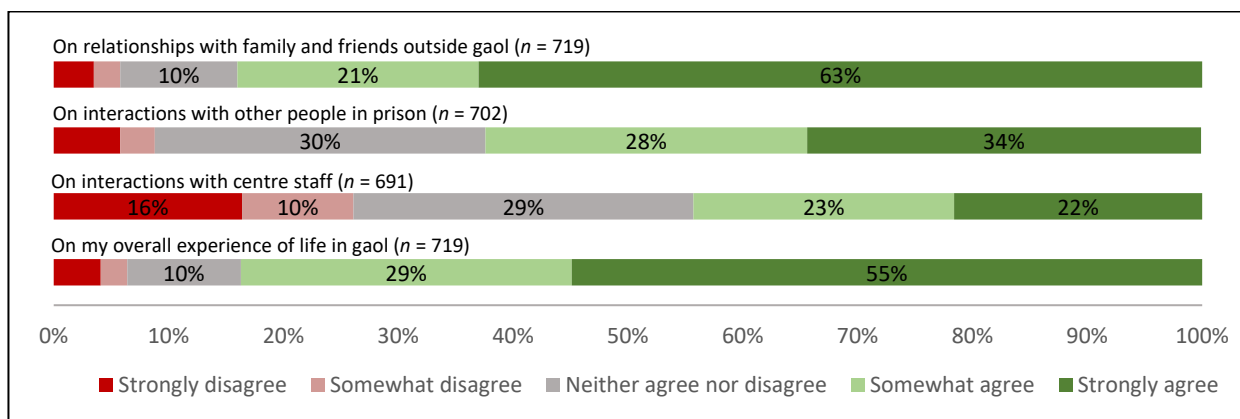


**Figure 8.** Frequency of contact with family and friends before and after introduction of tablets (N = 745)



## Perceived impacts of tablet access

Survey respondents were specifically asked about four potential positive impacts that might be associated with the introduction of tablets (see Figure 9). Over 80% of respondents that had spent time in gaol before and after the introduction of tablets agreed that access to tablets had a positive impact on their relationships with family and friends, and their overall experience of life in gaol. Almost two thirds also agreed that access to tablets had a positive impact on interactions with other people in prison, while less than half felt tablets had a positive impact on interactions with staff.



**Figure 9.** Positive impacts of tablet access

To understand whether the extent of people’s contact with family and friends was related to their perceptions of tablets having a positive impact on various relationships and their overall experience of life in gaol, a series of bivariate correlations and hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. In addition to examining the impacts of tablets identified in Figure 9, a second measure of staff relationships was also considered. ‘Staff relationships’ is a bespoke 12-item measure developed for the CSNSW context covering key elements related to staff motivating people towards change, inspiring hope by influencing prosocial goals, collaborating with people to achieve goals, and exhibiting and enacting an orientation towards rehabilitation (see Islam et al., under review for further information and validation of the staff relationships measure).

**Table 5.** Bivariate correlations between frequency of contact and perceptions of relationships (N = 745)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Contact with family/friends before tablets	–					
2. Contact with family/friends after tablets	.51***	–				
3. Positive relationship with family/friends	.05	.38***	–			
4. Positive interactions with other people in prison	-.05	.31***	.57***	–		
5. Positive interactions with centre staff	.04	.13***	.23***	.31***	–	
6. Staff relationships	.04	–	-.04	.13***	.42***	–
7. Positive overall experience of life in gaol	-.06	.22***	.63***	.64***	.31***	.02

\*\*\* $p < .001$

Significant positive correlations were identified between the frequency of contact with family and friends via tablets and people’s perceptions that access to the tablets had a positive impact on relationships with family and friends, interactions with other people in prison and centre staff, and their overall experience of life in

gaol. There was, however, a significant negative correlation between contact with family and friends following the introduction of tablets and people's perceptions of rehabilitative staff relationships.

Five hierarchical regression analyses also examined whether the magnitude of change in contact people had with family and friends following the introduction of tablets was associated with perceptions about relationships with family and friends, interactions with other people in prison and with staff, rehabilitative staff relationships, and their overall experience of life in gaol (see Table 6). Step 1 controlled for individual characteristics and the frequency of contact people had with family and friends prior to the introduction of tablets. Step 2 introduced the frequency of contact people had with family and friends after the introduction of tablets; in the context of these models, this variable represents the extent to which contact with family and friends had changed before and after introduction of the tablets.

The overall model at Step 1 was not significant for perceptions about whether tablets had a positive impact on relationships with family and friends ( $F = 0.93, p = .481$ ), interactions with staff ( $F = 1.84, p = .077$ ), or people's overall experience of life in gaol ( $F = 1.23, p = .285$ ). When considering interactions with staff, however, those who identified as Aboriginal were significantly less likely to indicate tablets had a positive impact. The overall model at Step 1 was significant for people's perceptions that tablet access had a positive impact on interactions with other people in prison ( $F = 2.59, p = .012$ ), with males more likely to report tablets having a positive impact. The initial model was also significant when considering perceptions of rehabilitative staff relationships ( $F = 4.38, p < .001$ ). Those who identified as male, Aboriginal and who had spent more time in custody were less likely to report feeling supported and motivated by staff.

At Step 2, all models were significant [relationships with family and friends ( $F = 140.33, p < .001$ ); interactions with other people in prison ( $F = 120.04, p < .001$ ); interactions with staff ( $F = 11.53, p < .001$ ); staff relationships ( $F = 19.21, p < .001$ ); overall experience of life in gaol ( $F = 65.67, p < .001$ )]. The results indicate that an increase in frequency of contact with family and friends following the introduction of tablets was positively related to people's perceptions that tablets had a positive impact on their relationships with family and friends, interactions with other people in prison and centre staff, and their overall experience of life in gaol, while being negatively related to perceptions of rehabilitative staff relationships.

**Table 6.** Regression analyses examining association between change in frequency of contact with family and friends, and perceptions of whether tablets have had a positive impact on relationships, interactions and experiences (N = 745)

	Relationships with family and friends		Interactions with other people in		Interactions with staff		Staff relationships		Overall gaol experience	
	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1		.009		.026		.019		.045		.012
Age	-.064		-.071		-.031		.071		-.052	
Gender (0=Female; 1=Male)	.034		.098*		-.004		-.081*		.048	
Aboriginal (0=No; 1=Yes)	-.035		-.067		-.107**		-.137***		-.041	
Relationship status (0=Non-Partnered; 1=Married/De Facto)	.040		-.017		.028		-.004		.015	
Dependants (0=No; 1=Yes)	.002		-.021		-.006		.023		.005	
Time in custody (years)	.017		-.049		-.065		-.090*		-.040	
Contact before tablets	.047		-.058		.034		.035		-.070	
Step 2		.166		.146		.017		.027		.085
Contact after tablets	.478***		.448***		.151***		-.194***		.342***	

$\beta$  = Standardised beta coefficients; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$

## CONCLUSIONS

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The current study further contributes to a broader agenda of evaluation on digital technology implemented across NSW correctional centres. It is the second study utilising self-report surveys administered via tablets to understand people's use and experiences of digital tablets. The first of these studies was completed at two initial pilot centres at a time when the technology was still new and tablet features were limited (see Barkworth et al., 2022). The current study explores a wider use of tablets following a progressive rollout across 19 NSW correctional centres where additional tablet features were also available.

In line with findings from Barkworth et al.'s (2022) study, the tablets remain widely and consistently used by the majority of people who have access to them, with the phone feature exceedingly considered the most important of all current or possible future features. Notably, the current study considered how the use of that phone feature had changed the frequency of contact people have with family and friends and how that contributed to whether they felt tablets had a positive impact on various relationships and experiences of life in gaol.

Of note was the significant increase in frequency of contact following the introduction of tablets, with more people reporting regular daily contact with family and friends compared to before the introduction of tablets. That increased frequency of contact was also associated with people's perceptions that access to tablets had a positive impact on their relationships with family and friends. Research has identified the importance of providing people with the freedom to maintain contact and build positive relationships with family and friends for feeling a sense of connection, aiding rehabilitation, successful reintegration into society, and reducing reoffending (Farmer, 2017; Hanley & Flynn, 2023; Jewkes & Reisdorf, 2016; Palmer et al., 2020).

Results also identified a connection between increased contact with family and friends and people's perceptions that tablet access had a positive impact on interactions with other people in prison and their overall experience of life in gaol. These outcomes are often identified as being interconnected and linked back to the availability of the tablet phone feature. Qualitative studies drawing on experiences of tablet users and staff reported that much of the friction and conflict previously associated with managing unit phone access has been eliminated with the introduction of the tablet phone feature, resulting in improved interactions between people in prison, and subsequently improving the overall atmosphere of the centre (Thaler et al., 2022a, under review). Thaler et al. (2022a) also reported that when people felt a greater sense of connection to their family and friends, facilitated by their ability to maintain more contact via the tablets and engage more frequently and consistently with family issues, they experienced more autonomy and less stress, which further limited the potential for tension and violence between people in prison. The findings provide an objective indication of the potential importance of contact with crucial support networks in the community for contributing to a positive prison social climate. Barkworth et al. (2022) also identified that tablet access more broadly was positively associated with people's views of the centre's social climate. These associations between connectedness and more positive prison climates may further reflect a causal mechanism for other observations of the effects of tablets on correctional centre outcomes such as violence and program participation (see Mahajan et al., 2023, under review).

Increased contact with family and friends was also associated with perceptions of positive interactions with centre staff but was negatively associated with perceptions of rehabilitative staff relationships. The difference in findings across these two measures could be attributed to subjective reflections of the type of contact or interactions people in prison are having with staff. For example, findings from the qualitative studies identified that access to tablets meant people in prison were less reliant on staff for accessing administrative information and managing the use of unit phones, which in turn reduced the type and frequency of their interactions with staff (Thaler et al., 2022a, under review). The outcome of that reduced

contact could therefore be twofold; on the one hand, staff–inmate interactions are considered more positive because people are more relaxed knowing they can contact family and friends via tablets and are therefore also more compliant at lock-in, while on the other hand the reduced contact means staff have fewer opportunities to build rapport and have rehabilitative conversations with the people under their care. Previous research has also identified that digital technologies can have a calming quality and may even be a resourceful management tool (Stiernstedt & Kaun, 2022), but that does not necessarily translate to more quality contact or rehabilitative interactions.

It is also important to note that several technological issues identified in Thaler et al.'s (2022a) study continue to persist, with phone calls dropping out, Wi-Fi disconnecting, and tablet batteries going flat identified as the most commonly occurring issues. Staff from Thaler et al.'s (under review) study identified such issues as having the biggest impact on interactions between tablet users and staff, with people becoming frustrated and aggressive when issues cannot be immediately resolved, which ultimately has negative impacts on staff, how they respond to the situation, and the overall atmosphere of the centre. These sources of frustration may subsequently present an ongoing barrier for staff to engage people in constructive or rehabilitative conversations.

Limitations of the current study should be noted. The administration of the survey via tablets restricts the sample towards those who use the tablets or may be most comfortable using them, although previous research reported there were very few people who did not use the tablets (see Thaler et al., 2022a). People were asked to consider the importance of tablet features regardless of whether they had access to that feature, which may affect their ability to truly reflect on the importance or usefulness of that feature. Finally, while we considered people's frequency of contact with family and friends before and after the introduction of tablets, this was done in a way where they were required to reflect back to the time prior to the availability of tablets, which may have affected the accuracy of responding.

Overall, the current study has provided further understanding of how people use and perceive the importance of tablets since becoming more widely available across NSW correctional centres. The phone feature remains the most important tablet feature, with consistent evidence of its value for supporting ongoing contact and positive relationships with family and friends, as well as other interactions and experiences in prison. While there are identified benefits of the tablets, including opportunities for people to maintain contact with family and friends, it is important to balance these with other CSNSW initiatives that promote rehabilitative staff relationships and other conditions that are conducive to rehabilitative prison environments. Addressing current sources of tablet-related frustrations for tablet users and staff, and the potential for further benefits of the tablets to be realised through additional features in the future may aid in fostering those positive relationships and climates.

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