Telecommunities Canada
Submission to People's Consultation on AI
March 16, 2026

Introduction

1. *Who are you / what is your organization?*

Telecommunities Canada (TC) is a national not-for-profit organization established in 1993 to:

- ensure that all Canadians are able to participate in community-based communications and electronic information services by promoting and supporting local community network initiatives.
- represent and promote the Canadian community networking movement at the national and international level.

This document is a summary of on-line responses submitted by TC members and a zoom discussion to further explore the questions asked. We appreciate the opportunity to explore the questions offered in the template and submit them to the process offered. We will also be uploading this document to our website.

2. *Why do you or why does your organization care about this issue—e.g., mandate, work experience, first-hand impacts?*

- Advocating for digital autonomy for the individual in the rapidly emerging field of AI is a largely unaddressed governance policy issue that fits with TC's mandate.. Our concern with AI flows directly from our long-standing work in:
  - Digital equity
  - Community-based communications
  - Public-interest infrastructure
  - Democratic participation in digital systems

We frame these concerns through the lense of **digital autonomy**, which includes digital equity but extends further. Digital autonomy means individuals and communities retain meaningful control over their digital tools, data, representations, and interactions.

•For TC, AI is not merely a technological tool or commercial product. It is emerging as civic infrastructure — embedded in search engines, healthcare systems, education, governance, communications platforms, and personal devices. As there are few spaces for discussions on long term effects of this new technology, we feel it is important to engage in this process.

Experiences With and Impacts of AI Technologies

1.*How have AI technologies impacted your life? Feel free to share specific stories, anecdotes, or experiences (while being mindful of not divulging personally identifying details about others without their consent). Refer to the list of example AI technologies provided.*

Discussion participants offered a variety of experiences:

•Ongoing dialogue with associates, friends and family related to our personal experiences and attitudes. ... i.e. it's everywhere a current topic of concern.

•I now tend to accept the AI responses to online subject searches

•I do more testing of applications than applying them.

•AI is already part of my daily life -- but it is so seamless that it slips by unawares in forms like a Google summary response to my search term, an algorithm delivering an ad to my screen, a chatbot advising me on a tech question. This means that impacts are often unconscious.

•I run AI models on a home computer acquired especially for this purpose. My approach to the current state of chatbots is "trust but verify" when it comes to issues of fact, news, and any task requiring research. I discovered very easily how even the most sophisticated AI can provide answers that are authoritative, well-written, but completely factually incorrect. One need only to ask the question "who am I?" (meaning the person typing the query) to often see how wrong a chatbot can be.

•On creative tasks such as computer code, summaries, scripts and art, AI can accomplish impressive results though output still requires adult supervision and a resistance to overly-derivative "slop".

•To me, AI is an enhancement that makes me more productive but one must be aware of its limits, imperfections and biases to get the most benefit.

2.*How have AI technologies impacted a community you're part of or a cause you care about?*

- All communities are being affected by the high (and increasing) use of AI to create misinformation and disinformation. It is a demonstrated threat to nearly all political, social and environmental causes. Whether discrediting expert and scientific research, inflaming emotions or spreading conspiracy theories, AI has dramatically facilitated efforts to drive public opinion and destabilize societies.

3. How do you, your organization or your community use AI, and how frequently?

- I use it multiple times a day as a supercharged combination of search engine, Wikipedia and troubleshooting tool. For creative tasks the frequency is less often.
- I am increasingly using localized AI (running on my own computing equipment) in preference to foreign-based cloud AI systems.
- Locally we are seeking to reduce barriers to entry for knowledge. We are using AI to enable students and others to ramp up knowlege in a certain topic or task, which then gives them the confidence to engage in projects, reach out to mentors, experts to validate their learning. Our experience has been that using AI as a resource, individuals can step into roles they would not otherwise have sought out.
- AI has helped me acquire the skills and knowledge I need to be the director of an organization. However, to use it effectively, one needs to know how to use the prompts effectively and then check responses for accuracy and revelance.
- I am using AI voice to text summaries of most Zoom meetings
- In my choral community, AI is now used in creating practice resources -- e.g. adding voice or backing tracks to practice resources for members. In such communities, human and financial resources are often tight and using AI tools has been saving time and energy.

4. How has AI been used on you, your colleagues, or your community? What have been the impacts of that?

•My doctor, with my permission, is using AI voice to text summary softward as a time saving way to summarize consultations

• I have found a marked increase in the personalization of ads targeting me. While this is as much a privacy concern as anything else, it appears that AI is being used to more accurately target me with advertising based on recent internet activity.

• If you are doing research on anything, you have to proof all citations included in the appendix because AI is fabricating references and resources that don't exist. Or, in other cases, references are provided that do exist, but have minimal relevance to the subject at hand.

•As a researcher, I am very conscious that any articles submitted to ChatGPT or similiar models for a summary are automatically subsumed into the model. These models currently rest on web accessible content scraped without permission. Any pdf, from a peer reviewed journal or not, dropped it into a tool like ChatGPT to produce a summary, becomes free content to the model for training. Ideas under development become content as they are being scraped even as they are being developed by the author/researcher. This content is the lifeblood of many academics. We need to rethink intellectual property.

5. Do you go out of your way to avoid using AI, or certain types of AI (e.g., generative AI, or paying with cash to avoid your purchase decisions being analyzed)? Why or why not?

• I go out of my way to avoid it to the extent that I shun the increasing amount of involuntary insertions of AI into web browsing and other online services. Increasingly companies are “AI enhancing” services in ways I find unhelpful. I demand the ability to control the time and place(s) of my use of AI and I prefer to choose my own tools, rather than the ones that are increasingly recommended to me as I do routine computing tasks.

•No. What would be the point since analysis and profiling of my purchase decisions and social media interactions have been ongoing since the beginning of the Internet?

AI's analytical capacity is a question of degree not of change.

6. If you use AI technologies in your personal life around others—such as using AI tools as in your work output or in interpersonal communications, or using AI-enabled devices in your home or office, do you make a point to disclose that usage to others who may be impacted (e.g., friends, family, intimate partners, colleagues, visitors)? Why or why not?

- I always disclose when using AI in interactions with others, including in media content that I produce.
- I have yet to trust AI sufficiently to have it write textual content to which I would attach my name. I use AI for research and fact-checking but the results of such research I write myself.
- Yes, particularly as a means of providing others with examples of how AI can be used effectively and with diminished personal risk.

Problems and Concerns with AI

1.*What are your key concerns with AI, in general, or with specific AI-based technologies?*

• **Governance lag:** Slow but steady incursion into every aspect of life with not much consideration about negative/unintended consequences. Robots, personal assistants, large language models all become unconscious extensions of human existence as Marshall McLuhan suggested. AI will further the extension of our brain that computing power has already enabled. The speed of deployment leaves little time for thoughtful rule-making when compared to earlier regulatory frameworks developed for automobiles, broadcasting or telecommunications.

• **Corporate concentration:** AI technology development is dominated by a small number of internationally based megacorporations who function mostly without transparency or accountability. They are not in business to serve the public interest

but to serve their private interests.

•**Lack of transparency:** The need for openness and transparency in the ways that AI inputs are collected, managed, and transformed into query responses has to be addressed at all levels.

•**Intellectual property: I**ntellectual property is used in ways that are opaque and hidden, retarding real efforts at regulation and education. We can't properly understand AI enough to regulate it without knowing more about what we're supposed to regulate. The context in which the current processes emerged have completely changed. New assumptions and a new language will be required to move forward.

•**Environmental impacts:** AI systems require significant computing infrastructure, cooling systems, and energy inputs which jeopardize living conditions in surrounding areas. The environmental footprint of large-scale AI projects must be addressed explicitly within national strategy frameworks.

•**Mass surveillance and privacy erosion:** Behavioural data is continuously harvested, modeled and predicted. Mass surveillance is possible and probable. Privacy of any kind is increasingly becoming an illusion.

•**Extended cognition and ownership frameworks:** Through AI, people are now gaining access to personal assistants that are simulations of themselves. To the degree that those simulations become autonomous agents they will become a new and different way of extending individual consciousness. Maintaining humanity while extending consciousness requires ownership of that which simulates the individual's being in the world.

• **Regulatory vacuum:** As with much technology but most acutely felt with AI's rapid pace of development, governments and other guardians of social stability are far, FAR behind in their ability to ensure that AI maximizes benefit to society while minimizing (and drawing attention to) harms. The pre-AI internet exposed the

inadequacy of current approaches to core social concepts including:

Intellectual property and the very concept of "what is original";

Concentration of wealth and power;

Privacy versus surveillance;

The distinct rights and responsibilities of people, corporate entities and automation.

The growth of AI has exacerbated this inadequacy, further widening this gap between those championing unregulated development and the needs of society to understand what is on offer -- let alone the most beneficial, least harmful ways to make use of it.

- **Discourse disconnect:** When technological advances cause major societal changes, the language used to anticipate the consequences is the one describing the existing technologies. We referred to automobiles as horseless carriages, understanding them in terms of the existing transportation system, not the one about to extend the possibilities of transportation into entirely different phase of land use and social organization. It is only now that we are leaving it that we have a vocabulary to describe the societal and environmental consequences of living in a car culture. In the current context, the technical vocabulary of AI does not align well with broader socio-political discourse, making democratic oversight difficult. The complexities and levels of abstraction of rapidly changing AI development and use are outpacing any capacity for public dialogue on how society is adapting to change. To reframe our understanding of what is happening to us, we have to evolve a new vocabulary.

- **Embedded biases:** Possibly the most critical limitation of AI is the fact that we can't remove the built in bias to deliver answers regardless of veracity. Humans must learn to ensure they are not being lied to by explicitly clarifying that expectation. This needs to be at the surface of discourse around AI.

- **Undermining trust:** Even unmanipulated LLMs can be notorious for authoritatively and confidently producing results that are comprehensive yet completely wrong. With minimal sophistication, this technology can be misused

to present any random opinion as established fact. Combined with a general lack of awareness, even by experts, of how the technology works -- exactly what happens to turn a query into an answer -- makes monitoring, let alone regulation, extremely difficult. The resulting effect in society is an increasing confusion, literally, of "what is real". This undermines trust in institutions, science, and even core assumptions about societal norms and shared values.

2. What do you see as the most <u>important</u> or <u>urgent</u> problems with AI, in general? What about specific AI-based technologies? (Important problems may be those that you think are the most important, but can be addressed over a longer period of time. Urgent problems are those you may not think are the most important overall, but must be addressed right now, or as soon as possible.)

- **Managing national interests in an international context:** The concentration of AI technologies in the hands of a VERY small number of powerful and interconnected groups of corporations, government actors and institutions that function internationally can credibly be seen as existential threats to societies with different values and norms to those of these monolithic AI suppliers. Using the internet to service Canadians from foreign sources, would-be regulators have little power short of affecting internet communications in ways in which the cure could be worse than the disease.

- **Corporate capture of digital agency:** The world's largest tech companies are fixated on AI with autonomous agency as a commercial product. In focusing their attention on AI's essence as a consumer artifact, their development of agency in AI risks making agency serve corporate ends and therefore become parasitic and dehumanizing. Having the individual, not corporations, in control of their actions and relationships in the world is the key to remaining human as extended consciousness reframes our realities.

- **Opacity:** Because of their novelty and increasing ubiquity, AI applications lure us into a zone of trust, while at the same time they are developed behind a

curtain of secrecy by major tech companies. AI embedded in social media is particularly problematic as so many people are impacted without transparency or acccountability.

- **Foreign ownership and control of AI industries:** Centralization sucks all the capital out of the room when everything is flowing through major foreign companies. Establishing smaller ventures in Canada would provide a test zone while keeping capital in the country. Decentralization would also mitigate the impact of the industry on local workforces.

- **AI enabling online harms:** Level of frauds, scams and other online harms targeting vulnerable populations is rapidly increasing. AI generated content is so realistic it is practically impossible to distinguish it from real content. Addressing this should be a national priority

- **Environmental stewardship:** Large-scale AI data centers are resource intensive and can have an outsized environmental impact on the communities where they are located.

- **Intellectual property:** Copyright needs to be totally reworked from the bottom up. The ethics behind the data collection, for Large Language Models, from the beginning to the present, is highly problematic. There is no system, nor any thought in place, for how contributors are getting reimbursed for that content. AI has broken, maybe for good, the previous way of managing intellectual property, reimbursement of creators, or control. No one is even suggesting an alternative model.

Use Cases: Worthwhile or Worth Banning?

1. What do you consider to be worthwhile use cases for AI technologies, if any? Tell us about how you weigh up the benefits versus the costs. If you believe there are simply no worthwhile use cases for AI technologies, or for specific types, why is that

the case?

- AI has already proven invaluable in science, engineering and software development. It is keeping Ukraine alive as a sovereign country in the face of staggering military challenges. It has made creative tools accessible and affordable. And it offers yet-unimagined advances in knowledge and understanding as profound as the changes enabled by the printing press, the telephone and the Internet. Further, this technology exists all around us; even if we were to foolishly assert no benefit, those around us who do see it will simply move along without us. Of course such advantages come with risk and opportunities for abuse almost as profound. The role of society is to mitigate the risks and maximize the advantages.

2. Do you think AI as a class of technologies should be banned entirely? If so, why?

- The history of technology has shown that "banning" has never been an option.

3. Do you think specific kinds of AI technologies or use cases should be banned? If so, which specific ones, and why?

- Banning connotes stopping AI at its source(s), which is impossible without totalitarian efforts to close our society off from the world. Having said that, use of regulation and the Criminal Code is useful, indeed necessary, to indicate to both abusers and the public at large what are the limits of AI given our values and aspirations as a society.

4. What are some <u>ways</u> you would recommend, to support worthwhile use cases and/or ban specific AI technologies or use cases, or otherwise retain worthwhile benefits from AI technologies while minimizing, preventing, or avoiding the harms (if you believe this is possible, and if not, please explain if you have not already)?

- Public education, criminalization of reprehensible use, and a demand for openness and transparency in AI processes are all useful and necessary. Multilateral

collaboration will further set boundaries of acceptable use for trans-national AI providers, while remaining open to beneficial innovation and development and encouraging the use of factual inputs.

- We must push back against industry pressure to be left to police itself under the guise of what has been called "permissionless innovation". The unfettered rise in abuse and indifferent industry response indicates that this approach does not work. Neither extreme approach (banning or hands-off) is workable.

Missing from the Discussion

1.*When you consider general public discussion, mainstream media coverage, and cultural conversations around AI, is there anything you think is missing from the conversation? What should be raised in public dialogue?*

•We often neglect the internet's foundational role in AI's existence, and ongoing learning. We also neglect the fact that we need to ensure that the Internet's modification and adaptation to changing needs remains a public good, broadly conceived, and a tool for human uses -- and, specifically from Telecommunities Canada's point of view, those human uses that best reflect local needs, desires and societal issues.

• We haven't considered possible community, regional and national level governance models of the physical and non-physical infrastructure involved.

•We are not talking about ownership of digital simulations. The online simulation of persons through data collection is an extension of those persons. Therefore, it must belong to them, not to the agencies that collect the data, as is currently the case. In the early days of the Internet, there was a debate about this, under the awkward heading of user-centric digital identity. That debate faded from sight, as individuals did not foresee the value of their content to corporations who quickly figured out how to monetize it. As artificial intelligence magnifies the capacity to simulate

identities by many orders of magnitude, that debate, under the heading of individual digital autonomy, needs to re-emerge.

2.*Do you have concerns with how AI technologies are positioned or framed in public discourse? How would you frame or position them differently?*

• We are in the middle of a transition. We come from a world where we believed there was something called reality. Now we are entering a world where reality is an option -- for individuals, for corporations and for states. Much of the discussion we have on things like regulations is framed on the basis of the world we now live in, because that is what we understand. In the current transition , the rate of change is being accelerated to a degree that is completely unknown to us. We need to begin framing our questions and answers and our iterative dialogues with this thing we have created based on the world we are now in, not the world we are coming out of.

•Ursula Franklin's tenet that "We make our technologies and then our technologies make us" is significant. Our technologies are making us in real time. We must seek to understand how, or we won't see the significance of the changes that we face. One of the things we can do is look for interstitial spaces where adaptation is occuring very rapidly, where a reframing of perspectives will cause users to adapt more rapidly than others.

•AI is best understood not as a static product, but as a dialogical system — an iterative exploration tool that expands the “phase space” of possible questions and answers. Used thoughtfully, AI enables new forms of cognitive exploration. Used uncritically, it risks narrowing thought to pre-structured outputs which limits change rather than expands possibilities. When we collaborate with a trusted, autonomous AI version of ourselves, mastering the practice of framing in AI use becomes crucial. The advocacy for understanding this approach is weak.

• Skills in dialogue with an AI in mind are a necessary skill. But being conscious of your own bias and the bias of the AI tool will be important. There will be a tendancy

for the tool to echo your own biases back as it is incentivized to tell you what you want to hear, to feed your biases rather than challenge them. We don't see this kind of framing in current AI discussions.

• Focusing on AI as a consumer artifact risks making agency serve corporate interests, leading to parasitic and dehumanizing effects. Agency without responsibility is harmful. Individual control over actions and relationships, rather than corporate control, is essential to maintaining humanity as extended consciousness changes our realities.

3.*What do you think lawmakers and policymakers most need to know or keep in mind when addressing AI or creating a "national strategy" on AI?*

• **Multistakeholder governance:** As this is a transformative technology, multistakeholder governance should be a default starting point. Government, private sector and civil society should agree on collectively managing the risks and setting the rules and standards around AI so that what emerges remains consistent with agreed upon values.

• **Consultation with other juridictions:** Some jurisdications are attempting to formulate guardrails. Canada should be collaborating with these efforts.

•**Extensive and ongoing consultation with Canadians:** The government needs to engage in a broad, inclusive and ongoing dialogue with Canadians to formulate and contiuously test an evolving "National Strategy" on AI to ensure that AI remains aligned with democratic values, digital autonomy and community stewardship

4.*Is there anything that wasn't covered in this submission template that you'd like to add? Include that here or wherever else in this document you see fit.*

N/A

Recommendations

1.*Do you have specific recommendations for lawmakers, policymakers, or anyone else in a position of power (e.g., school boards, employers, law enforcement, journalists) to implement when it comes to any of the things you discussed above? If so, explain them here.*

• **Engage in multistakeholder collaboration to manage risks internationally:** Canada should take a leadership role in advocating for multistakeholder governance and collaboration at the international level in the development and use of this transformative technology. What emerges must remain consistent with agreed upon values. Government, private sector, civil society and collaborative technical communities should agree on collectively managing the risks and setting the rules and standards around AI.

• **Reduce foreign dependency by focussing on Canadian innovation and content:** The world of AI will increasingly feed upon itself. We can't stop this but at least we could try to mitigate this by having some models created in Canada. We would recommend an approach that advocates for the leveraging of Canada's own considerable expertise in AI with the need for digital sovereignty, attention to accuracy, lower barriers to access, and the use of open source models to maximize transparency. It could make access to AI models not controlled by foreign bodies available to more people. Canada has the resources to do this, but has not yet started work in this area. This is all the more important as the growing call for more regulation and rules around AI are well meaning but directed to megacorporations based elsewhere over whom our power is extremely limited.

• **Support national, regional and community-based digital infrastructure models:** In the face of AI domination by foreign behemoths, Canada should encourage the development of decentralized, localized AI models and infrastructures that can be better managed and trained from trustworthy sources.

• A**ctively encourage open access and open source projects:** Canada should welcome the efforts of various actors in providing open access and open source AI models, and indeed it should contribute to this pool of knowledge. Just as the internet runs best (and maybe could only run) on open source software such as Linux, AI needs more openness and transparency as a matter of both public trust and regulation enforceability.

• **Support national education programs:** Invest in public AI literacy and increased awareness. To strengthen informed participation in democratic oversight and public ability to use AI tools in a safe and effective manner, support national education programs and new spaces for discussion of its long-term effects.

• **Assess environmental impacts:** Require environmental impact studies for large-scale AI infrastructure projects

• **Reimagine intellectual property:** Engage both nationally and internationally to modernize copyright, patent and trade-secret protection policies to rebalance the needs and interests of innovators, technologists, creators, inventors and the public. Choose approaches that reward human creativity while demanding transparency and accountability from models, tuning methods and algorithms.

• **Seek out and support community focussed AI users/groups:** As AI evolves, there are people and groups (early adopters) who will embrace AI's nature on its own terms and use it imaginatively to beneficially evolve themselves and their relationships with those around them. All new communication technologies have passed through such an early adaptor phase when communal benefits were emphasized. and sometimes realized. This is where public broadcasting originated and where community networks focused on social action emerged well before corporations saw that demand for internet access was an economic opportunity.