

Australian attitudes to getting online

Consumer research by
Good Things Foundation Australia

October 2023



Good Things
Foundation Australia

Attitudes to getting online: Findings summary



1 in 4

Need more support to keep up with changes in technology



1 in 5

Feel overwhelmed with constant changes in technology



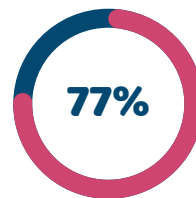
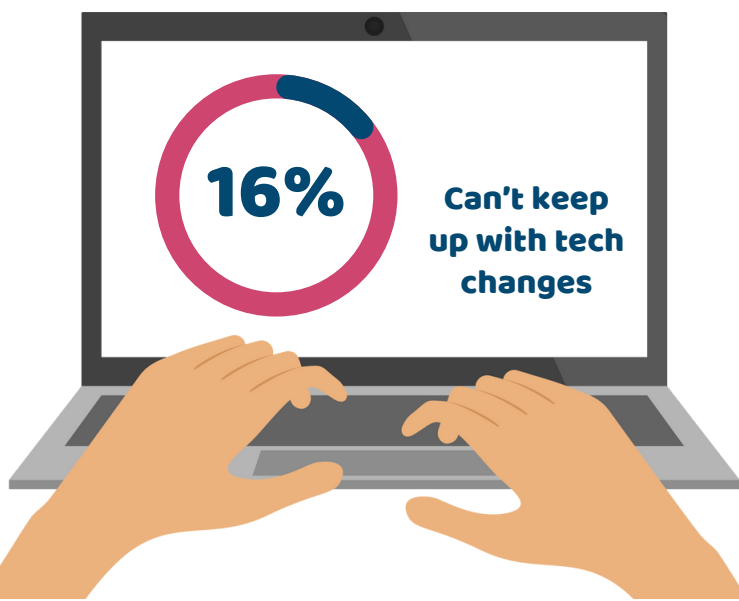
1 in 5

Have to decide between paying for internet or phone and other essential bills like food or housing



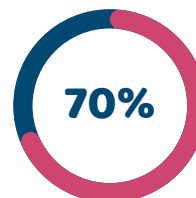
1 in 3

Seek out opportunities to widen their skills and knowledge



18-24 yr olds

Cost of living increases have affected their ability to get online



65+ yr olds

Aren't confident they can stay up to date

Good Things Foundation's new consumer research findings shine a spotlight on the technology challenges currently facing many Australians.

We surveyed 2,000 everyday people to understand what is stopping them from getting online and how we can help.

This research highlights opportunities for change so that together, we can close the digital divide for all, for good.

Introduction

Digital technologies are so deeply woven into the fabric of modern life that an internet connection has become vital to enabling full participation in society.

Today, having digital skills and affordable access to the internet is not a luxury, it is a 'must have'. Being online enables people to stay connected to family and friends, shop, pay bills, bank, apply for a job, find a home to live in, and access essential government, transport and health services.

Although we know that everyone 'should' have the digital skills, confidence and the financial means to get online safely and perform online activities as needed, the reality in Australia in 2023 is quite different.

This report explores the results of new consumer research by the digital inclusion charity Good Things Foundation Australia, which identifies the online barriers faced by many people across the nation today. The research reveals how consumers feel about being online and that many are struggling to keep up with technological changes. The research also explores how Australians are coping with the financial pressure of affording an internet connection and paying for data, with the rising costs of living impact people's ability to get online.

These survey results back up current research in the field that shows the persistence of a 'digital divide' in various parts of Australian society, with almost 1 in 4 people being digitally excluded due to a lack of access, affordability or ability to use technology*.

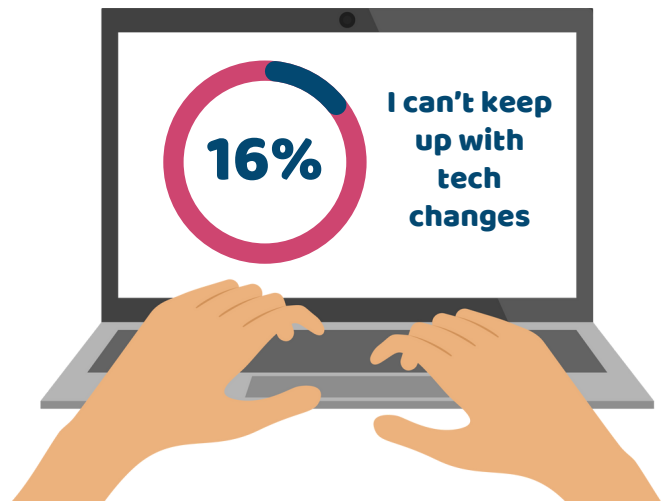
*Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2023



It's hard to keep up with tech changes

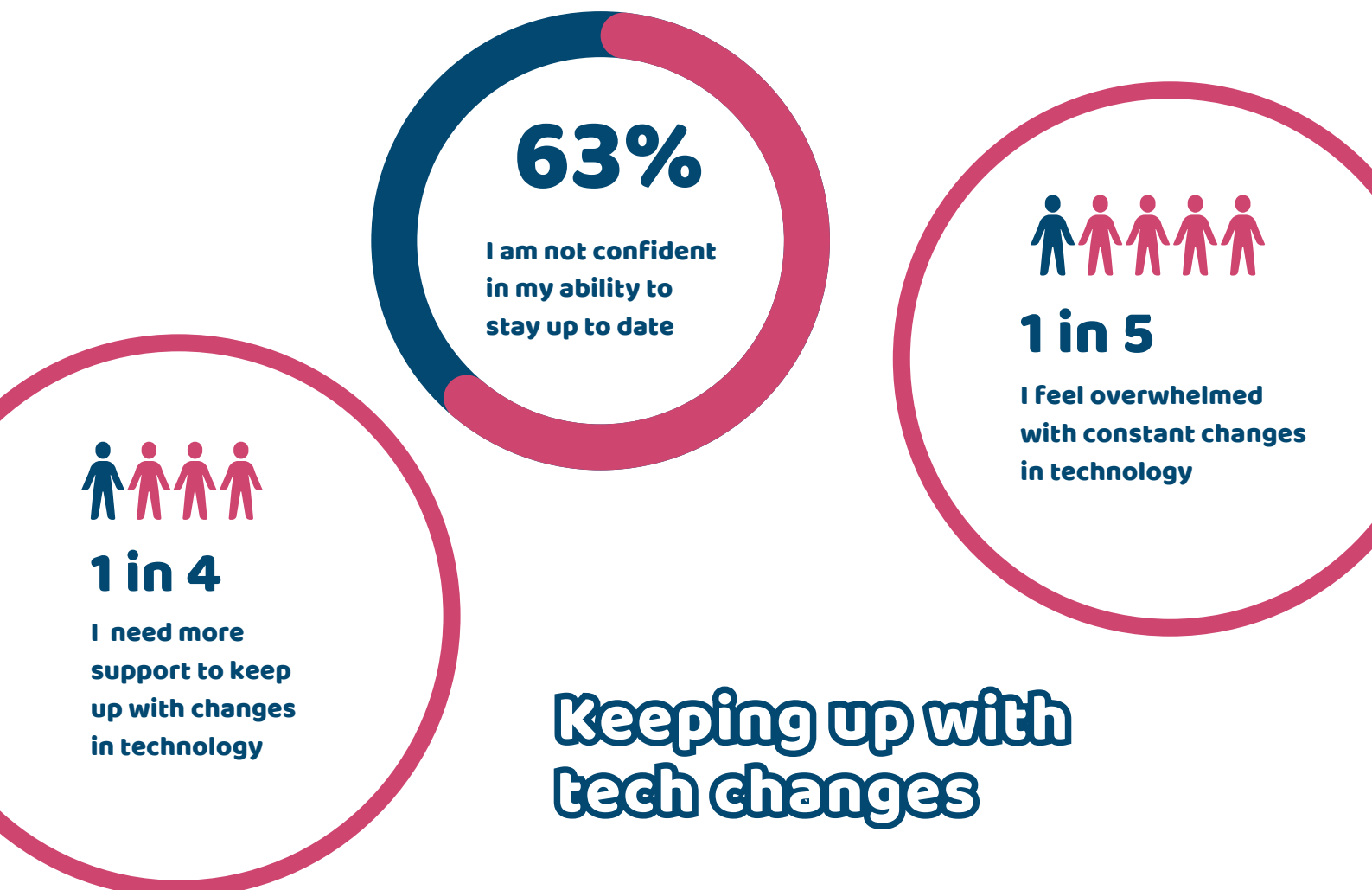
Many people are struggling to keep up with rapid changes in digital technology. It's not just people with low digital skills who are finding it difficult.

Almost two-thirds of people surveyed (63%) aren't confident in their ability to stay up-to-date with tech changes. Sixteen percent said they can't keep up with tech changes at all.



1 in 4 identified that they need more support to keep up with tech changes while 1 in 5 (20%) said they feel overwhelmed with the constant changes in technology.

Some other barriers to accessing digital services included unreliable internet connectivity (14%), not having access to a computer (7%) or smartphone (4%), not knowing how to use a device (4%) and needing someone's help to use a device (7%).



Cost of living is impacting affordability

Digital affordability is a key challenge preventing people from getting online.

Forty six percent of respondents said that rising cost of living had affected their ability to get online. Thirteen percent struggle to afford their internet bill and 1 in 10 can't afford to top up their phone data when it runs out.

Significantly, 1 in 5 people surveyed said they had to choose between paying for the internet or phone or other essential items like food or housing.

Some struggle more than others to afford getting online

Some people are struggling more than others when it comes to affording an internet connection or paying for data.

Young people in particular are at risk, with 77% of 18-24 year olds saying cost of living increases have affected their ability to get online. This compares to 46% of the broader population.

Cost of living & getting online



1 in 5

I have to decide between paying for the internet or phone and other essential bills like food or housing



1 in 10

I can't afford to top up my phone data when it runs out

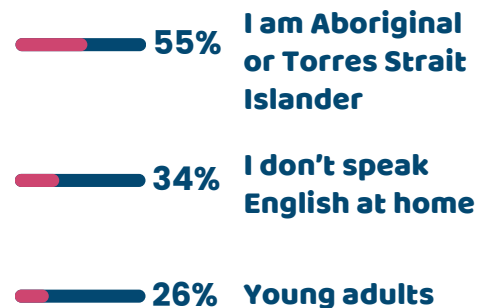


Women report being slightly worse off than men against all affordability measures tested.

While 1 in 5 (20%) say they are now choosing between paying for their phone or internet and other essential items like food and housing nationally, this is much worse for First Nations peoples (55%), people who don't speak English at home (34%), people living with disability (31%), and young adults (26%).

This demonstrates the need for digital affordability measures that support people most at risk of being left behind in the cost of living crisis.

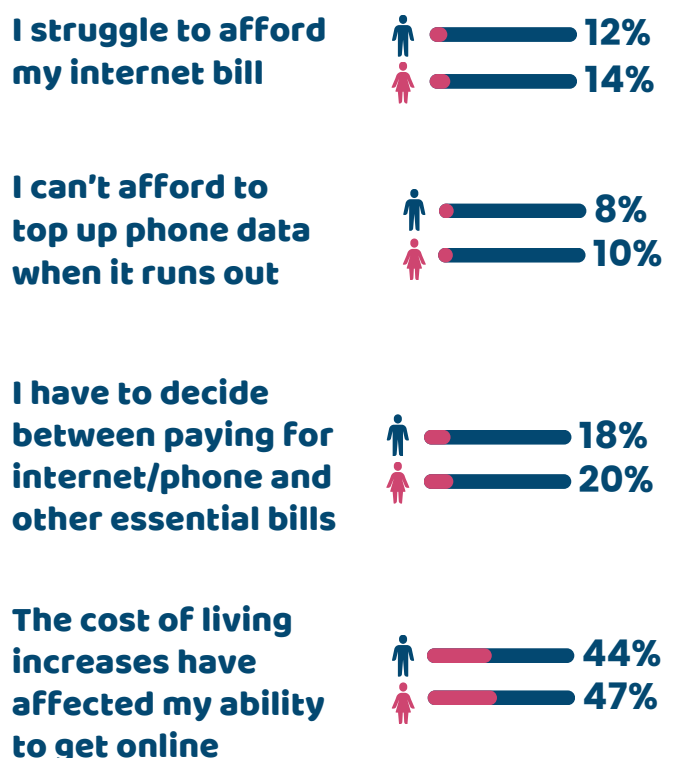
I have to decide between paying for the internet or phone and other essential bills like food or housing



Some struggle more than others



Women vs Men



The internet is essential for everyday tasks

The research showed that despite the barriers to getting online, people still find the internet essential to complete everyday tasks.

86% of participants who are confident to go online said they use the internet to pay bills or do their banking, while 84% use it to stay connected to friends, family and colleagues.

Age somewhat impacts the tasks people do online, with people more likely to access government and telehealth services the older they are. The converse is also true for those seeking work.

People with disability were much less likely to use the internet to find work (16%) than people who speak a language other than English at home (49%) or who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (48%).

The internet is helping our lives



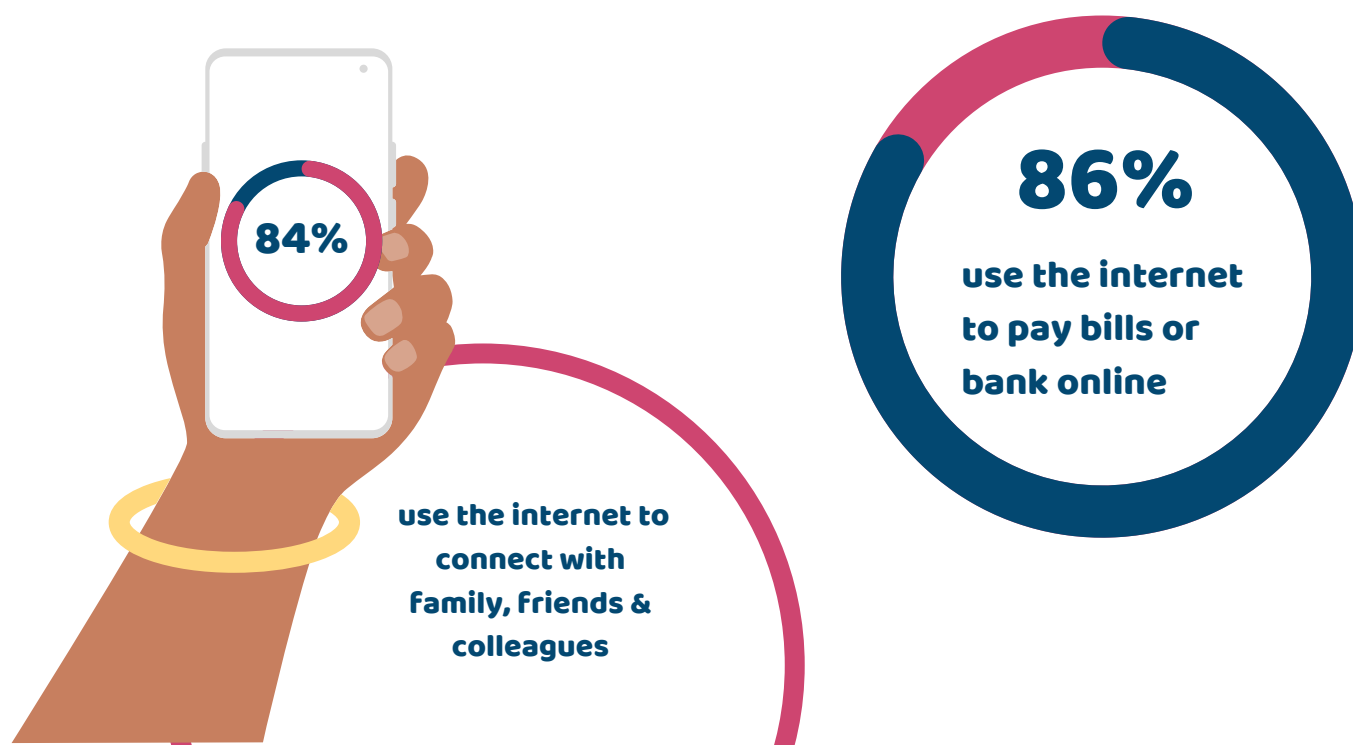
3 in 5

Use the internet to access government & telehealth services



1 in 4

Use the internet to help secure a job

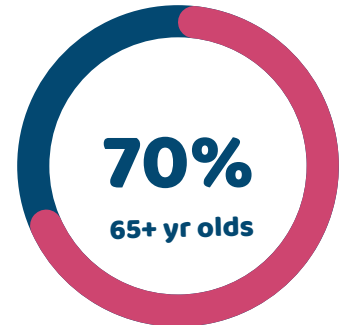


Some people need more support to keep up

While many Australians are able to get online with ease using the device of their choice, there are thousands that can't because they don't have the basic skills, money or confidence to do so.

People aged over 65, people who don't speak English at home, and people with disability may be at particular risk of digital exclusion. Seventy percent of people aged over 65 reported that they were struggling to keep up, compared to the Australian average of 63%.

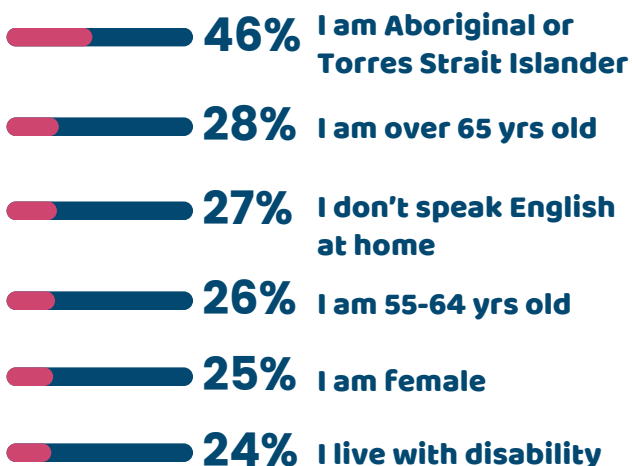
Some groups were more likely to feel overwhelmed with the constant changes in technology. More than 1 in 4 people with disability (29%) and people who don't speak English at home (26%) reported feeling overwhelmed by tech changes. Other groups more at risk of feeling overwhelmed by tech changes were First Nations peoples (43%), women (21%), people born overseas (23%), and young people aged 18 - 44 years old (19%).



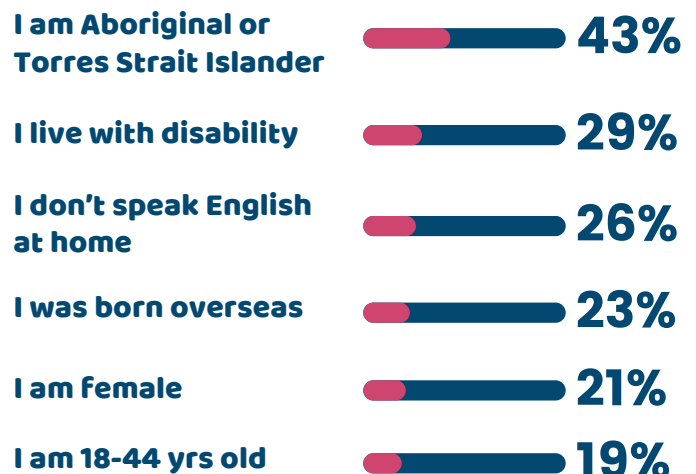
I am not confident I can stay up to date

Some need more support to keep up

I need more support to keep with changes in technology



I feel overwhelmed with constant changes in technology



Some groups of people are looking for more support to keep up than others, so that they are not left behind. This includes First Nations peoples (26%), people who don't speak English at home (27%), people with disability (24%), people aged over 65 (28%) or aged 55-64 years old (26%) and women (25%).

Digital skills and confidence are holding some people back from benefitting from technology

Beyond feelings of being overwhelmed, some people's attitudes to getting online are also holding them back. Six percent of people reported feeling embarrassed about their lack of digital skills, with ten percent saying that getting online feels confusing, or feels stressful (9%).

People's lack of digital skills are holding them back from achieving their goals. The research showed that for ten percent of people it has affected their job opportunities and meant they've had problems accessing important online services.

People also reported that their lack of digital skills has meant they need to ask others for help (23%) or upskill themselves to plug the gap (25%).

Low digital skills or confidence can hold you back

It's affected job opportunities



I've had problems accessing important online services

I've had to ask someone for help



I've had to upskill myself



My lack of digital skills have held me back

Digital skills support is in demand

Many people who lack digital skills want support to turn their digital life around. Around one quarter of all survey respondents across all age groups said they needed more support to keep up-to-date with changes in technology.

People seek support in many ways, including Googling (50%), asking friends and colleagues for help (27%), watching 'how-to' videos on YouTube (32%), and asking their children or grandchildren to help them (19%).

This varies somewhat by a person's life experience, with 1 in 4 people born overseas having asked a friend or colleague for help to navigate technology, and 35% of seniors born overseas asking their child or grandchild for online help.

Only 3% of people reported going to computer classes for help, despite community-led digital skills programs having been shown to be highly-effective when it comes to supporting people who are digitally excluded*.

Interestingly, people who are struggling the most to keep up and afford tech are also the most likely to seek opportunities to improve, such as people who don't speak English at home, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people born overseas. This demonstrates the willingness and desire from those most at risk of digital exclusion to learn digital skills that will positively impact their lives.



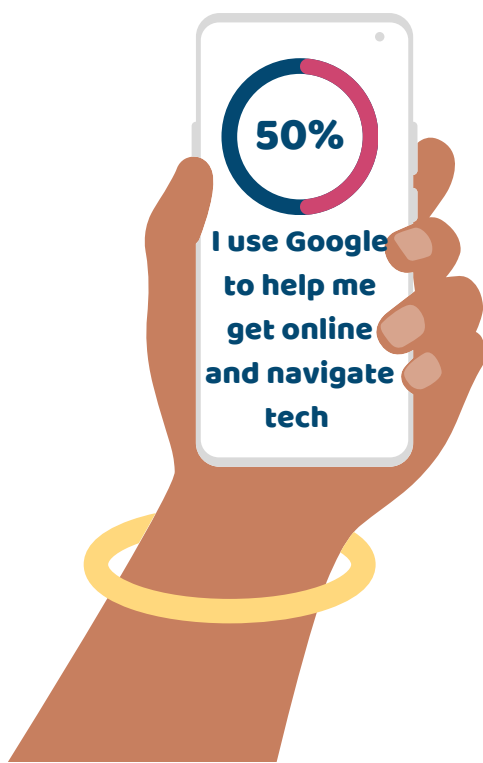
1 in 3

Seek out opportunities to widen their skills and knowledge

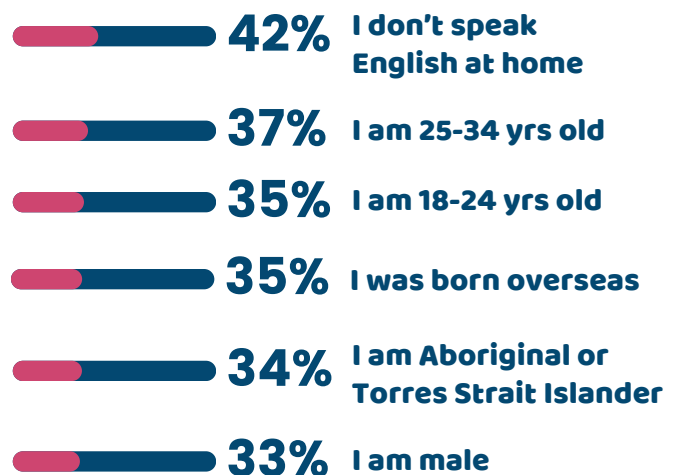


1 in 4

Ask friends & colleagues for help



I seek out opportunities to widen my skills and knowledge



Conclusion

Ensuring all Australians can get online is essential to increasing social and economic participation.

Together, this research indicates that while many people use the internet for everyday tasks, they may still not feel comfortable or confident getting online independently as the digital world around them changes.

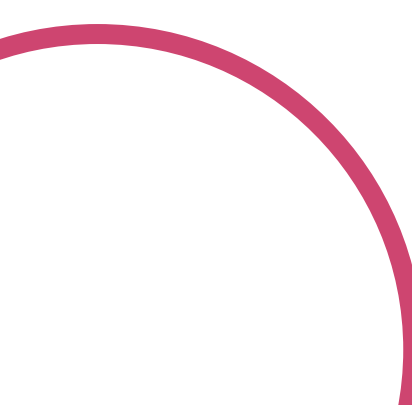
Learning to use technology and the internet can enable an individual to stay connected with loved ones, apply for a job, find a rental property, receive an online education, participate in telehealth consultations and bank online.

Good Things Foundation Australia knows that once an individual is empowered to confidently acquire digital skills, they are more likely to become digitally included and able to benefit from everything the digital world has to offer.

Provision of digital skills support is critical to empowering people to stay connected. This research shows the need for more prominent community-based digital skills training and support for all ages, so that people who are at risk of digital exclusion do not have to rely on family, friends or Google to stay connected.

It is vital that people who are most at risk of digital exclusion and people who are finding it difficult to stay up-to-date with technology are able to get support in a trusted environment that can be tailored to their needs.

Digital skills are a 'must' not a 'nice to have'. Ensuring all Australians have the access, skills and confidence they need to use technology will help close Australia's digital divide and truly improve lives.



About this research

This research by Good Things Foundation Australia was carried out on a national representative sample of 2,000 Australians aged 18 and over in August 2023.

The data sample was weighed against ABS data for age, gender and location using an online survey that was independently conducted by MediaCast and verified by PureProfile.

It is important to note that given the collection methodology (online) the impact of digital exclusion may be even higher than the findings in this report illustrate.

About Good Things Foundation Australia

Good Things Foundation Australia is a social change charity helping people to improve their lives through digital. Good Things Foundation Australia supports more than 3,500 community organisations nationwide to deliver digital skills programs.

Find out more at www.goodthingsfoundation.org.au

Learn about our national digital inclusion campaign Get Online Week at www.getonlineweek.com/aus

**Get Online
Week**

a campaign by
 **Good Things
Foundation Australia**