Australian attitudes to getting online 2024

Consumer research by Good Things Australia

October 2024

Good Things
Australia

Attitudes to getting online: Findings summary

1 in 2
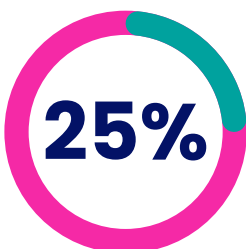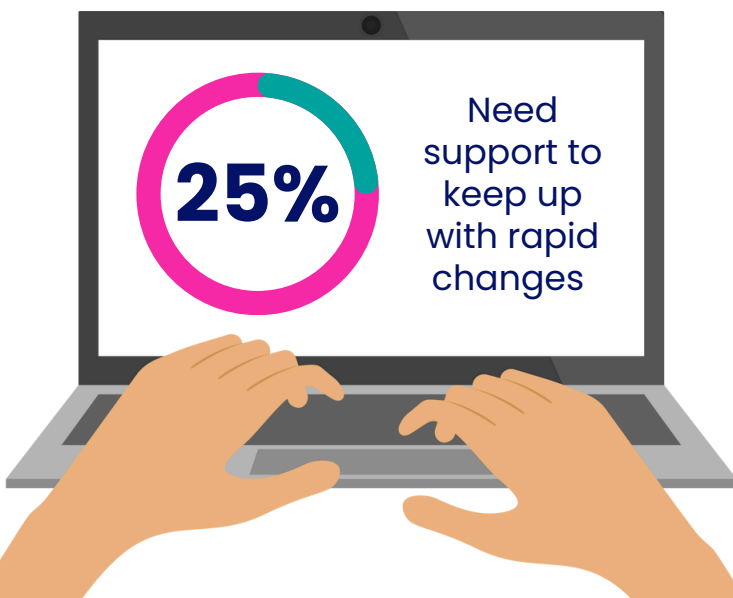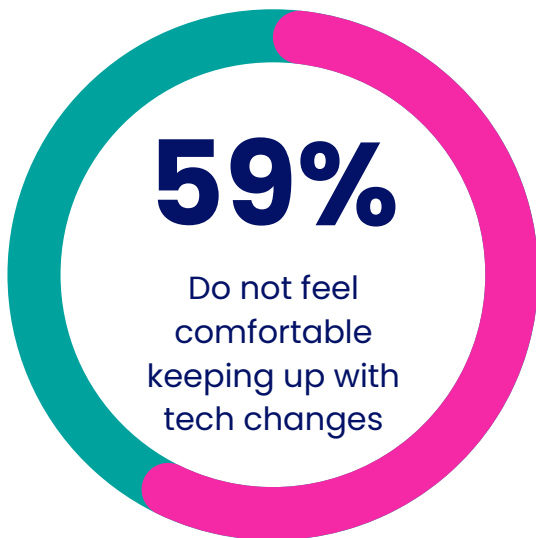Cost of living increases have affected my ability to get online

1 in 6
Have to choose between paying for the internet or phone bills and other essentials

1 in 5
Feel anxious when they can't do task online themselves

59%
Do not feel comfortable keeping up with tech changes

62%
Are not confident spotting a scam online

25%
Need support to keep up with rapid changes
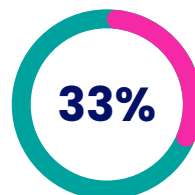
33%
Worried what AI will mean to them
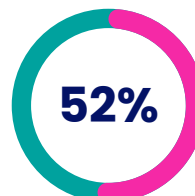
52%
Worried scams are getting harder to spot

Good Things Australia's new consumer research findings shine a spotlight on the attitudes of Australians towards getting online in 2024.

We surveyed 2,006 adults living in Australia to understand the barriers they face when accessing and using technology and the internet. With the rapid emergence of new technologies, we also investigated how they view and engage with AI.

This research provides insights into changes in consumer behaviour and views since our 2023 report, and highlights opportunities for Good Things and the broader community to close the digital divide so no one is left behind.

Introduction

We live in a rapidly changing world, where the ability to access, afford, and effectively use digital services is not a luxury, it's essential. Yet, 1 in 4 Australians remain digitally excluded, with the digital divide affecting some groups of people more than others. People on low incomes or with low levels of education, people with disability, First Nations people, new migrants and refugees, and people over the age of 65 face the greatest risk of being left behind.

Digital inclusion is a requirement for full and equal participation in contemporary life to enable people to access essential government, education, social and health services. The continued shift towards a digital first society and the advent of generative AI is increasing the need for all people in Australia to have digital skills and confidence to use technology.

This report presents new consumer research by digital inclusion charity Good Things Australia, identifying trends and highlighting the online attitudes and behaviours of individuals and groups nationwide. The research also focuses on the barriers experienced by Australians that prevent them from getting online, with a particular focus on the impacts of cost of living pressures.

This research reinforces current research and statistics in relation to digital inclusion, demonstrating that there is a continued need to support people to learn digital skills. However, we know digital inclusion goes beyond skills and ability. Digital skills programs must be complemented with digital access and affordability.

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[1] Australian Digital Inclusion Index, 2023, Thomas, J., McCosker, A., Parkinson, S., Hegarty, K., Featherstone, D., Kennedy, J., Holcombe-James, I., Ormond-Parker, L., & Ganley, L..Melbourne: ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society, RMIT University, Swinburne University of Technology, and Telstra.
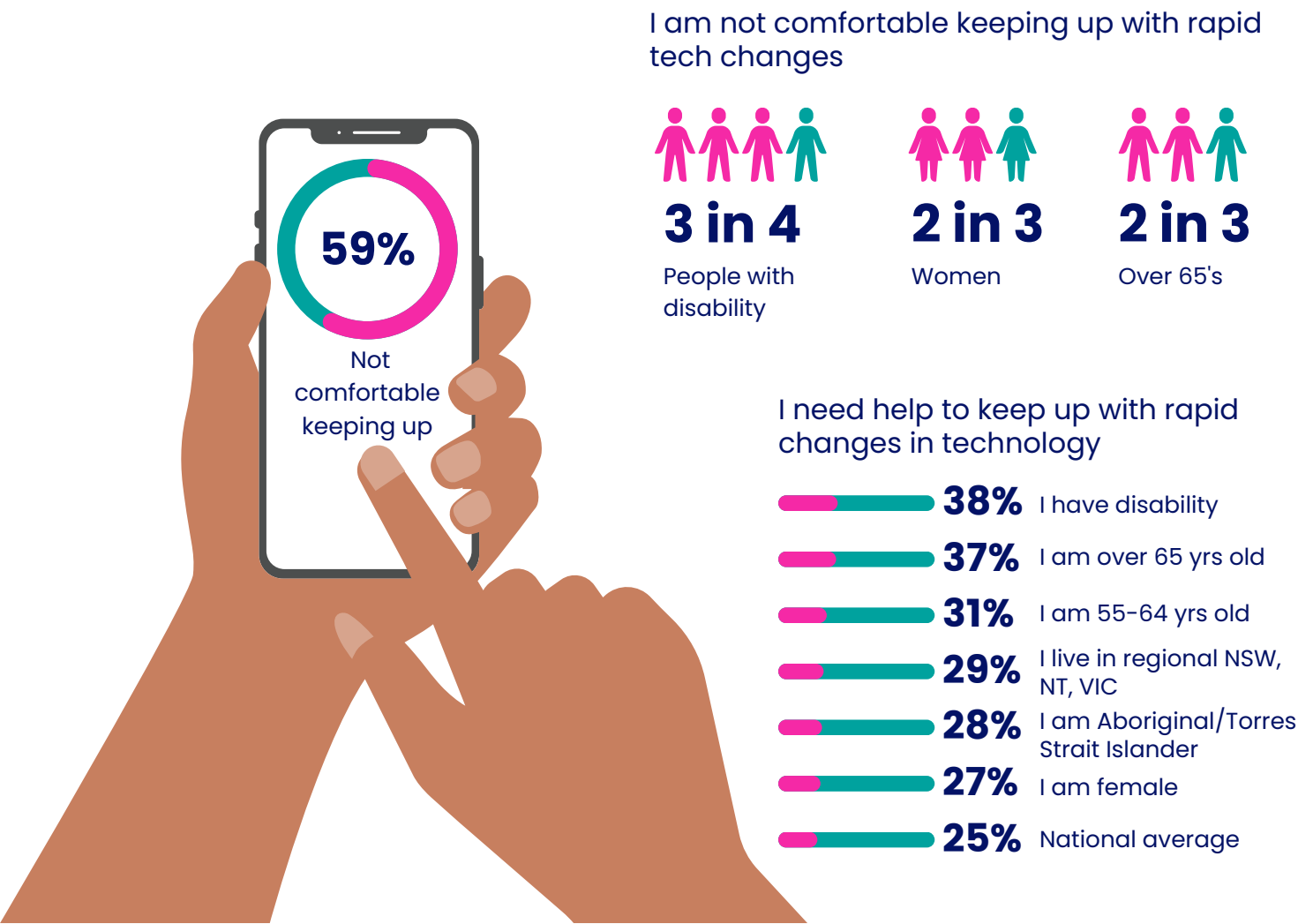
Keeping up with tech changes

The technology we use everyday is constantly changing and evolving. The digital skills we learn can quickly become outdated, making the ability to keep up with changes difficult for all, including those who are digitally included.

More than half (59%) of Australians don't feel comfortable keeping up with changes in technology and the internet.

This 'digital divide' between those who can and can't keep up affects some groups of people in Australia more than others. For people living with disability, almost three quarters (73%) don't feel comfortable keeping up with changes in technology and the internet, with 38% needing help to keep up with rapid changes in technology. First Nations people, women and people over the age of 55 reported higher levels of discomfort in keeping up with changes in technology and the internet, with their responses exceeding the aggregated result (59%) by 4-5% each.

in 4 Australians need help to keep up with rapid changes in technology, while 1 in 5 feel anxious when they can't complete something by themselves online.

59%

Not comfortable keeping up

I am not comfortable keeping up with rapid tech changes

3 in 4
People with disability

2 in 3
Women

2 in 3
Over 65's

I need help to keep up with rapid changes in technology

38% I have disability

37% I am over 65 yrs old

31% I am 55-64 yrs old

29% I live in regional NSW, NT, VIC

28% I am Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander

27% I am female

25% National average

Again, rates are significantly higher for people with disability, with 2 in 5 (38%) reporting they feel anxious when they can't complete online tasks independently, and the same amount needing assistance to keep up with changes.

Age also played a role in levels of confidence getting online. 37% of people over the age of 65 require help to keep up with tech changes, and 1 in 4 feel anxious when unable to complete something online by themselves. Additionally, 6% of over 65 year olds need help to use a device, 2% above the national level (4%). For people aged 55-64 years old, 31% reported needing help to keep up with changes, 6% higher than the national result, however a lower percentage than the older age bracket.

Some struggle to keep up with rapid tech changes more than others

More than a quarter (28%) of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people stated they need help to keep up with rapid changes in technology, while 1 in 3 reported feeling anxious when unable to complete tasks without help.

1 in 4 (24%) women reported discomfort when unable to accomplish something online without assistance, 7% higher than reported rates for men.

Cost of living and affordability

Cost of living continues to impact almost half of Australians' ability to get online, with 49% struggling to afford an appropriate internet connection or digital device. Notably, this is 3% higher than 2023's results.

A slightly lower number of Australians reported needing to choose between paying for digital connections or devices and other essential household costs such as food and housing in 2024 (17% compared to 19% in 2023). But, this still sits at 1 in 6 Australians, a significant proportion of people. A similar number of Australians (14%) reported struggling to afford their internet bill in 2024 compared to 13% in 2023.

Research continues to demonstrate that the affordability of internet connections and devices disproportionately affects some demographic groups' ability to get online more than others. First Nations peoples' ability to get online is significantly more affected by cost than others, with 72% being impacted by cost of living increases, 23% higher than the national average. More than a third (36%) of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander respondents struggle to afford their internet bill, and 44% said they have to choose between paying for internet and or phone bills and other essentials such as food and housing.

Younger people also continue to be highly affected by cost of living increases, with 63% of 18-24 year olds stating their ability to get online has been impacted. For those aged 25-44 years old, almost one in five (18%) struggle to afford their internet bill compared with 14% of the broader population. Moreover, 19% of those aged 18-25 have to choose between paying for internet or phone bills and other essentials such as food and housing, with this figure jumping to 24% for 25-34 year olds.
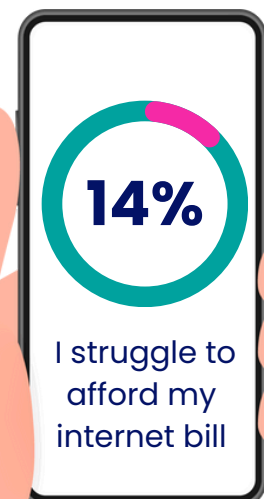
1 in 2
Cost of living increases have affected my ability to get online

1 in 6
I have to choose between paying for the internet or phone bills and other essentials eg food or housing

14%
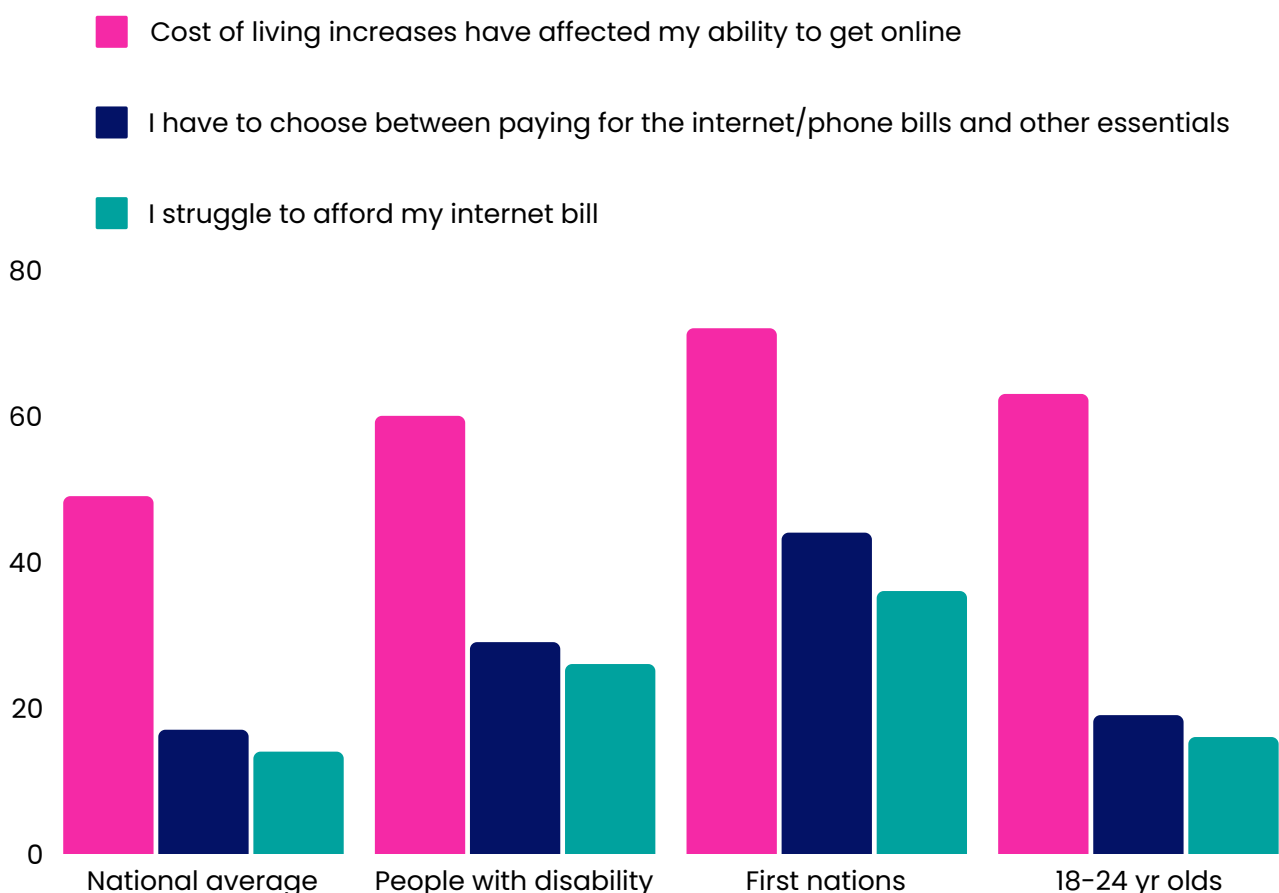I struggle to afford my internet bill

Rising cost of living also continues to significantly impact digital access of people living with disability. A substantial 60% of this group reported that cost of living increases have affected their ability to get online, 11% higher than the national average. Notably, 1 in 4 (26%) people with disability struggle to afford their internet bills, a considerably higher rate than the broader population statistics (14%). Nearly one third (29%) of individuals living with disability reported having to make difficult choices between paying for internet or phone bills and other essential expenses such as food and housing.

This highlights the importance of implementing digital affordability measures in tandem with digital skills training to ensure those most vulnerable to being left behind are not further disadvantaged by their income status.

Cost of living pressures are impacting many people's ability to get online

Cost of living impacts by demographic group

- ■ Cost of living increases have affected my ability to get online
- ■ I have to choose between paying for the internet/phone bills and other essentials
- ■ I struggle to afford my internet bill

Access & connectivity

Unreliable internet connectivity continues to affect a significant portion of the Australian population, with almost one quarter (22%) of Australians reporting issues with their connection, compared to only 14% in 2023.

Over a quarter (28%) of people who speak a language other than English struggle with unreliable internet, while almost two in five (38%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face similar challenges. Additionally, nearly one third (29%) of people living with disability report unreliable internet, alongside 24% of women and 32% of 18-24-year-olds. Regional Australians are also more affected, with 25% experiencing unreliable internet compared to 19% in metropolitan areas.

Access to digital devices, such as computers or laptops, remains a critical barrier for many. In 2024, 7% of Australians still do not have access to a computer or laptop, the same figure reported in 2023. However, this issue is more pronounced for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with one in five (20%) lacking access to such devices. Similarly, 11% of people living with disability do not have access to a computer or laptop, further underscoring the digital divide faced by these populations.

Online safety

One in five Australians (19%) are struggling to stay safe online and in particular are worried about scams. Significantly, 62% of Australians don't feel confident they could spot a scam online with around half (52%) worried scams are becoming harder to spot. Beyond individual ability, one in three (33%) Australians are also worried about a loved one's ability to spot a scam online.

Staying safe online and keeping loved ones safe from scams is a significant concern for all

People with disability are particularly at risk when it comes to online safety, with results across the board showing they are struggling with being safe online more than the wider population. One in four (24%) people with disability are struggling to stay safe online, whilst 58% worry scams are getting harder to spot and a further two thirds don't feel confident in their ability to spot scams. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and linguistically diverse individuals also report struggling to stay safe online more than the national average.
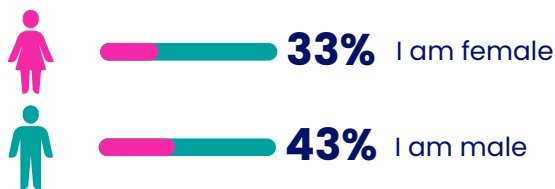
1 in 5
I struggle to stay safe online

62%
Not confident spotting a scam online

52%
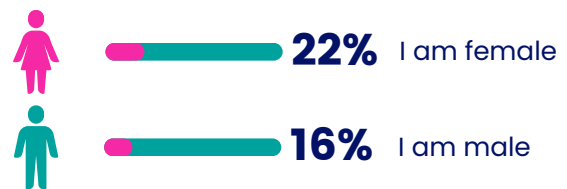Worried scams are getting harder to spot

Other notable result differences occur for women and young people aged 18-24, who were 3% more likely to struggle staying safe online than the broader population. There was also a significant gender gap reported where only 33% women felt confident in their ability compared to 43% of men.

Age played a role in attitudes towards staying safe online, with older people more likely to worry about scams getting harder to spot and younger people more concerned about a loved one's ability to spot a scam. Middle aged respondents were the least likely to be worried that their digital skills are not good enough to spot a scam, but even here it remains at 13-14% of 35 - 54 year olds.
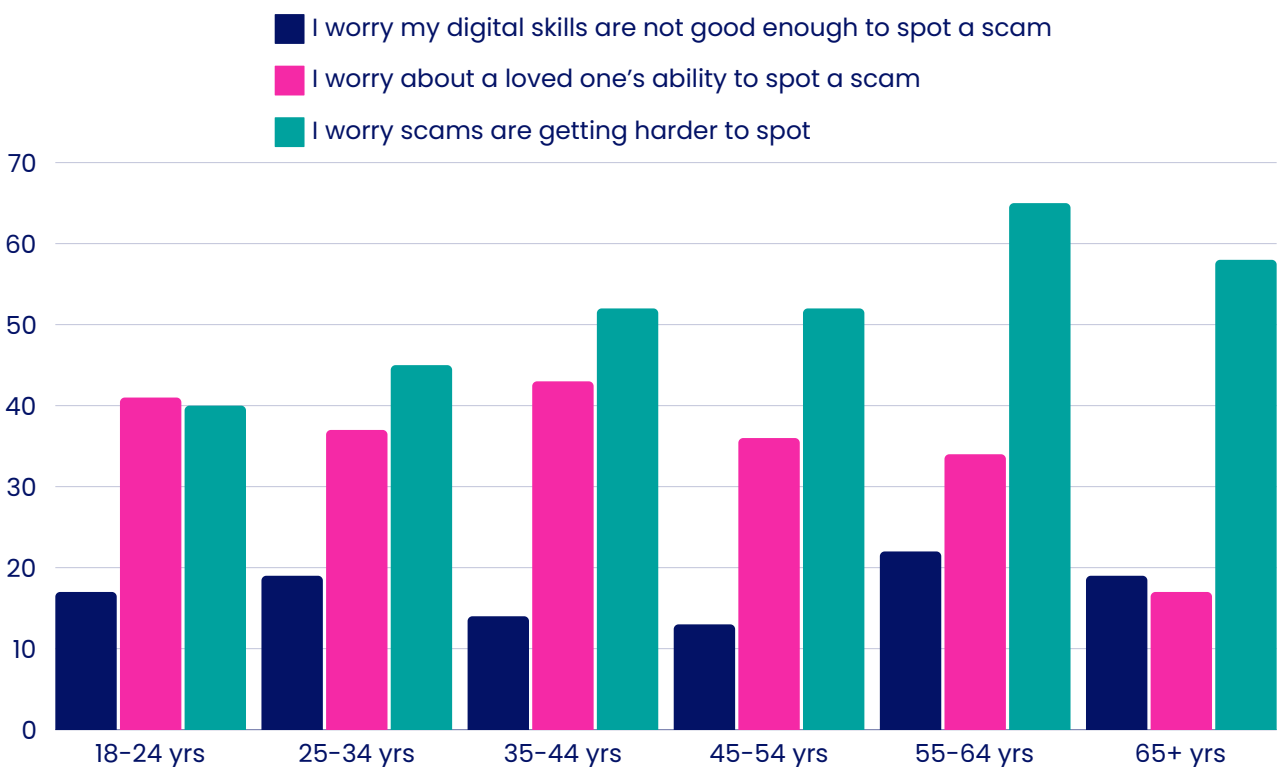
I am confident in my ability to spot a scam

33% I am female

43% I am male

I struggle to stay safe online

22% I am female

16% I am male

Attitudes to online safety by age

- I worry my digital skills are not good enough to spot a scam
- I worry about a loved one's ability to spot a scam
- I worry scams are getting harder to spot

Digital skills for everyday life

As generative AI rapidly enters public use and essential government and every day services become increasingly digitised, it is more critical than ever to ensure that people can access affordable technology and possess the confidence and skills to use it effectively. Nearly one in five (18%) Australians struggle with using online government services, with this number growing to one in three (32%) for people with disability and over a quarter (28%) for First Nations people.

Over one in four people with disability (28%) and Australians aged over 65 (27%) struggle scanning QR codes compared to 15% of the total population. One in ten (10%) Australians struggle staying connected to loved ones, however this almost doubles for young people aged 18-24 (18%) and triples for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (32%).

Some people are missing out on essential digital skills needed for everyday life

Job seeking challenges persist for a significant portion of Australians, with one in ten (10%) struggling to find employment online. Additionally, 11% are concerned that their ability to keep up with technology may affect their job security. Certain groups face even greater barriers: 16% of people living with disability report difficulty finding jobs online, while 18% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face similar challenges. The issue is particularly pronounced among younger Australians, with nearly a quarter (23%) of those aged 18-24 struggling with the digital skills needed to find employment through online platforms.
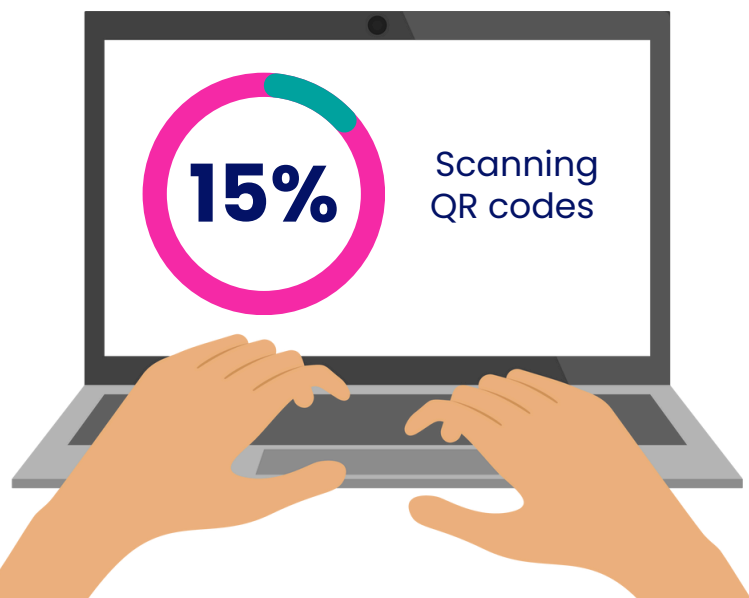
Digital skills people struggle with

1 in 5

Using online government services

1 in 3

Using AI (Artificial Intelligence)

15%

Scanning QR codes

Other digital skills people struggle with include shopping online (11%), paying bills and online banking (11%). 39% responded that they did not struggle with any of the digital skills listed in the questionnaire, again illustrating the digital divide in Australia.

Rapid tech changes are impacting digital skills and confidence, as well as online safety

Artificial Intelligence & digital inclusion

Generative AI (Artificial Intelligence) tools have become increasingly available to the public in the past two years, with AI having the potential to enhance accessibility, support personalised education, and improve efficiency in the workplace. However, recent Good Things research showed that AI does not overcome the key barriers to digital inclusion, further backed by our current consumer research results showing us that Australians are struggling to use AI and are worried what changes in AI will mean for them.

One third (32%) of Australians struggle using AI, with detailed results suggesting age negatively impacts ability. 35% of people aged 45 - 64 reported struggling to use AI, with this number rising by 7% for those aged over 65. AI is also proving challenging to use for one in three First Nations people, and 38% of people with disability.

Many are worried about what changes in AI will mean for them, whilst others are concerned they won't have skills to keep their job. One in three Australians (33%) worried what the changes in AI will mean for them, and once again the older the respondent the more likely they are to worry with 38% over the age of 55 worried compared to 25% under the age of 25.

The group most worried about what AI will mean for them is people with disability (41%), whilst people in regional areas are more worried than their metropolitan counterparts (36% compared to 34%).

Conclusion

Digital inclusion is crucial to a thriving Australian society and economy. It provides access to information, services, connections with the community and greater employment and education opportunities. Yet, Good Things and broader digital inclusion research continues to show that not all Australians can get online affordably, safely and confidently. Many people are struggling to keep up with rapid tech changes, rising cost of living pressures and are worried about their own or their loved ones digital skills. While digital skills training and connectivity is available, not everyone is able access it and gaps still exist.

The continued shift towards a digital first society and the advent of generative AI is increasing the need for all people in Australia to have digital skills and confidence and affordable access to devices and data. This is even more critical for at risk groups. The solution requires collaboration across government, industry, philanthropy and the community sectors and the prioritisation of programs specialising and tailoring support to women, people with disability, CALD communities and First Nations people.

Together with our partners, Good Things Australia advocate for digital inclusion and the importance of closing the digital divide so no one is left behind.

Methodology

This research by Good Things Australia was carried out on a national representative sample of 2,006 Australians aged 18 and over in September 2024.

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 Australia

Good Things Australia closes the digital divide so no one is left behind. Good Things supports 4,000 community organisations nationwide to deliver digital skills programs.

Find out more: goodthingsaustralia.org

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