

Australian attitudes to getting online

2026 | Fourth edition

Good Things Australia consumer research report



Summary

53%

worried scams
are becoming
harder to spot

22%

feel comfortable
keeping up with
tech changes and
the internet



1 in 5

would like more
education on
how to stay
safer online



1 in 3

want to learn
more about AI



1 in 5

need help to keep
up with rapid
changes in
technology



Half

unsure when
it is suitable
to use AI
tools in
everyday life

39%

feel keeping up
with rapidly
changing
technology is
expensive

26%

think new
technology is
making life easier

Good Things Australia's latest research highlights Australian attitudes toward getting online in 2026.

We surveyed 2,018 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 and ongoing cost of living crisis, we also investigated how they view and engage with AI and perspectives on the affordability of getting online.

Now in its fourth year, the research continues to provide actionable insights into Australian consumer behaviours, attitudes and needs, highlighting opportunities for action to close the digital divide so no one is left behind.

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Introduction

We live in a rapidly changing world. The fast adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) is increasing the pace of change, devices and apps continue to evolve, and scams are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Yet, one in five Australians are digitally excluded, with the digital divide affecting some groups of people more than others.¹ 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 essential to full and equal participation in society, enabling people to work, learn, access services and connect with their communities. Attitudes, motivations and people's experiences interacting with technology are a core element in the digital inclusion picture, alongside affordable access and digital skills.

This report presents the findings of a national survey of two thousand everyday Australians exploring how people are navigating rapid technological change, AI, online safety and the cost and pressure of keeping up. The research by Good Things Australia uncovers trends, attitudes and behaviours of individuals and communities across the country.

Across four years of research, the findings continue to show that ongoing support is essential to help many people develop digital skills and build the confidence needed to keep pace with technology. Rates of digital inclusion remain uneven across different demographic groups and communities, identifying those more at risk of being left behind as the digital world rapidly changes.

Ensuring everyone in Australia is digitally resilient and able to participate equally in ways that are meaningful to them continues to be a challenge, with this research showing both demand for digital skills support and preferences around its delivery. Achieving this support will require ongoing investment in digital skills programs and campaigns, alongside strong measures to improve access and affordability, so the digital divide can be closed for good.



¹ Thomas, J., McCosker, A., Parkinson, S., Hegarty, K., Featherstone, D., Kennedy, J., Ormond-Parker, L., Morrison, K., Rea, H., & Ganley, L. (2025) Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: 2025 Australian Digital Inclusion Index. Melbourne: ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society, RMIT University, Swinburne University of Technology, and Telstra.

The cost and pressure of keeping up

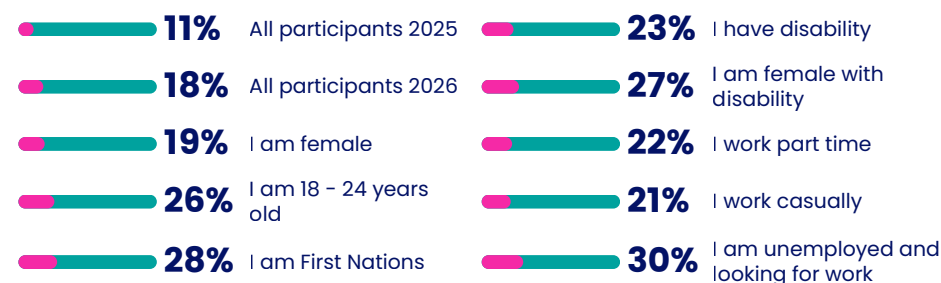
As the digital world rapidly changes, everyday Australians and businesses are facing the challenge of keeping up with tech. This has various costs, both financial and personal, that overlay existing affordability barriers within the digital divide.

Already, some people are more likely to be digitally excluded due to affordability challenges, with low income earners or people with low levels of education, people living in public housing, older people and First Nations among those more likely to left behind on this basis. With the rise in demand for tech hardware due to increased usage of AI and the data centres needed to power this technology, everyday personal device prices are predicted to continue to increase.² Meanwhile, cost of living pressures have continued in 2026 around key items such as housing, food and petrol.³

To understand the impacts of this across the population, survey participants were first asked how the rising cost of living and the affordability of technology impacted them, with a range of options to capture attitudes and perspectives. Some questions were repeated from the 2025 survey, while others were asked for the first time.

Responses show that levels of device based affordability stress have increased in the past year. In 2025, 11% of respondents said they could not afford a new computer, laptop, or smartphone but needed one, in 2026 this has risen to nearly one in five (18%) of respondents. The same demographic groups continue to experience greater impacts in 2026 as in 2025. Women (19%) were again more likely to report struggling to afford a device than men (16%). Younger people continued to be more likely to than older generations to report that they couldn't afford a new device, with one in four (26%) 18 - 24 year olds saying this was the case. This was reflected again with higher rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents, and people with disability, particularly women with disability and culturally diverse people with disability (see Figure 1). In terms of workforce participation type, people employed part time, casually, and people who are unemployed but looking for work were more likely to say that they need a device but cannot afford one, which has potentially significant impacts on their broader economic and social participation when considering the essential nature of digital technology for work.

Figure 1: I can't afford a new computer, laptop or smartphone but need one

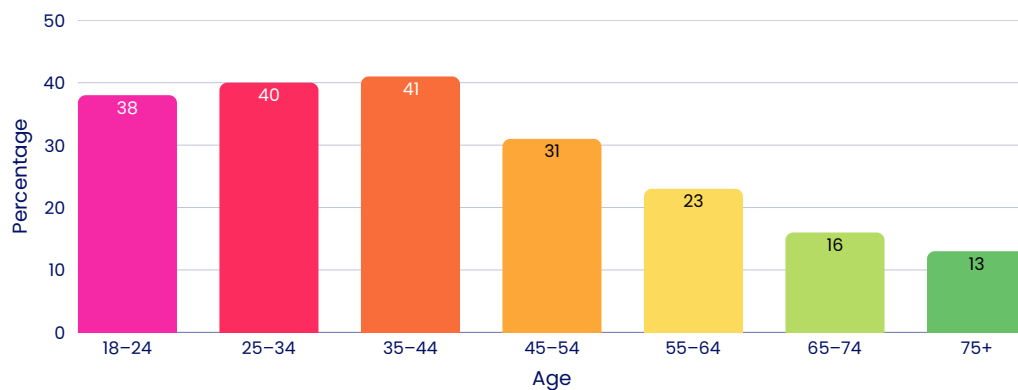


² Morris-Grant, B, Tan, T, & Kyd, A (2026). How the AI boom is forcing tech prices higher. ABC, 1 September 2026, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-09-01/how-the-ai-boom-launched-a-memory-shortage/106893046>
³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2026). Selected Living Cost Indexes, Australia. ABS, 5 August 2026, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/selected-living-cost-indexes-australia/latest-release>



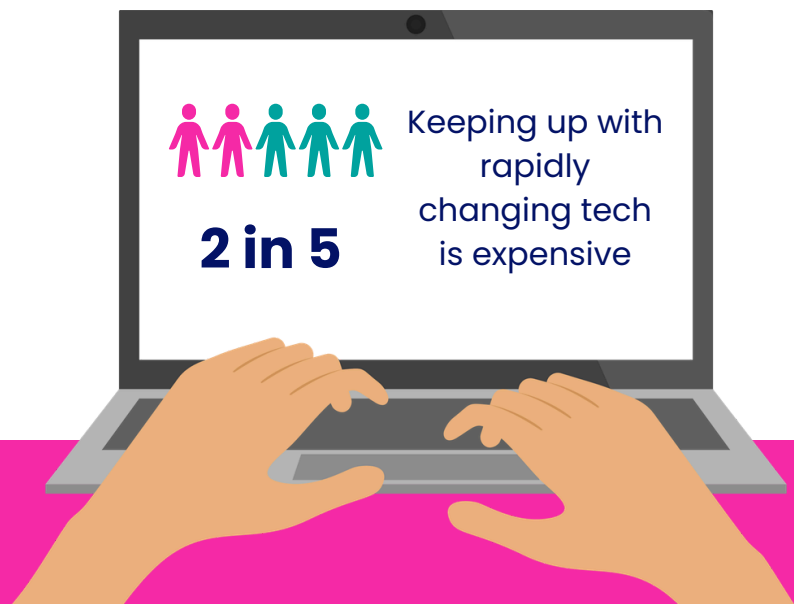
Beyond the affordability of physical devices, in 2026 the survey looked at the cost of connectivity and apps. More than one in ten (12%) respondents agreed that they are struggling to afford their internet or phone plan, with women slightly more likely than men to select this option (13% vs 10%). Demographic groups more likely to have this as a barrier to getting online are people who are unable to work (26%), First Nations (21%), people who finished Year 10 or below (20%), grandmothers (17%) and mothers (14%) when compared to fathers and grandfathers, people who are carers across all age groups, and people with disability (21%) - particularly women with disability (26%). When asked if they have to choose between paying for the internet or phone bills and other essentials such as food or housing, more than one in ten people (13%) said this was the case. Both people who are unemployed and looking for work, as well as those employed part time were more likely to select this option, with rates rising to one in five for people in this situation. Younger people were more likely to struggle with this compared to older generations, as were First Nations people.

Figure 2: I am cutting back on subscriptions to paid online services because I am struggling to afford it, by age



Further, nearly one in three people (30%) said they are cutting back on subscriptions to paid online services because they are struggling to afford them. While there was not an overall gender-based trend here, age did play a significant role in response rates (see Figure 2). Employment status also saw an interesting trend, with people employed full time (37%) and students (36%) the most likely to say they are cutting back. Similarly, First Nations (42%), particularly First Nations women (47%), culturally and linguistically diverse carers (43%) and people with disability (37%) say they are cutting back on due to affordability. Together, these trends point to a potentially complex range of reasons for cutting back on paid digital services and subscriptions, reflecting a person's economic circumstances, broader economic stressors, or the number of subscription based services they had been accessing.

A significant number of respondents saw that the cost of keeping up is problematic. Two in five people (39%) agreed that keeping up with rapidly changing technology is expensive, with this sentiment particularly strong with over 75s, of whom 50% agreed.

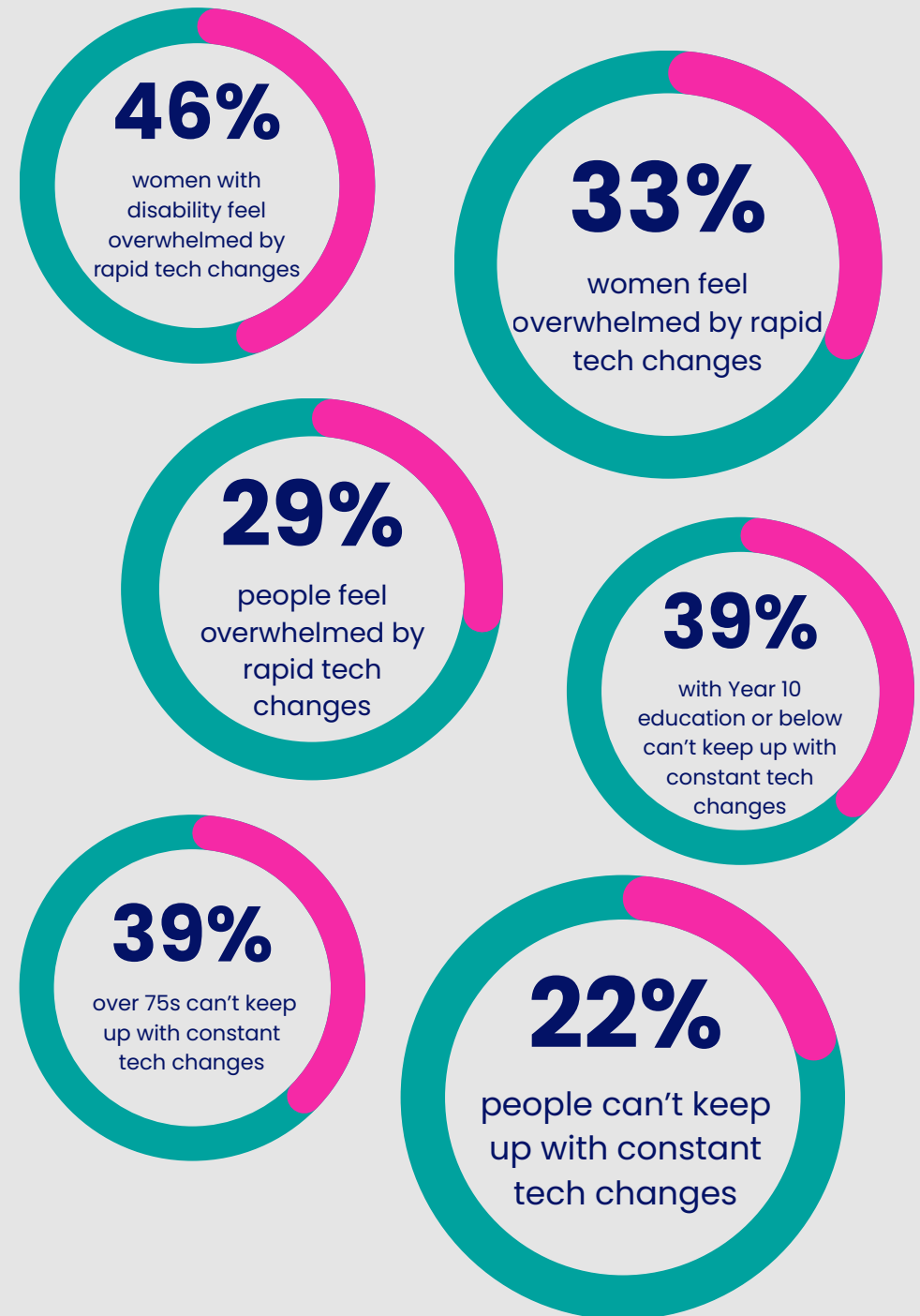


Overall, affordability remains a concern for many Australians, with nearly three quarters of respondents experiencing at least one of the affordability barriers listed. Just 29% said they did not experience any of these barriers. Results in 2026 continue to show that cost of living and affordability pressures continue to affect some Australians more than others, consistent with 2025 results.

Beyond financial pressures, participants were asked how they feel changing technology impacts their life. This sentiment has been represented in digital inclusion research through the lens of “technostress”, and was explored in this survey through several measures.⁴ Results showed that more than one in four Australians said they feel overwhelmed by rapid changes in technology (29%). Some groups were more likely than others to feel this way. One in three women said they feel overwhelmed by rapid tech changes, compared to one in four men. This rises to nearly half of women with disability (46%), with people with disability overall more likely to feel overwhelmed than the general population. Women aged over 75 were also much more likely to report feeling overwhelmed, at 47% compared to 26% of men in this age group. Similarly, both mothers and grandmothers were more likely to report feeling overwhelmed than fathers and grandfathers.

Beyond this, respondents were also asked whether they felt unable to keep up with constant changes in technology or needed help to keep pace with these changes. One in five people (22%) said they can’t keep up, and the same number agreed that they need support to do this. Those more likely to be looking for this help include mums (29%), grandmothers (35%), women aged over 75 (32%), culturally diverse women (25%) and First Nations people (27%) (see Figure 3).

⁴ Stowell, M. “Technostress: why many older people feel shut out by the digital world (2026) The Conversation: <https://theconversation.com/technostress-why-many-older-people-feel-shut-out-by-the-digital-world-283879>, accessed 28 September 2026



Participants were asked if they feel responsible for their family being safe and confident online. One in five people (19%) agreed with this sentiment, with men slightly more likely to hold this sentiment than women, particularly fathers (25%) and First Nations men (35%) reversing other trends around online safety. Grandfathers were also more likely to feel like they have this responsibility, when compared to grandmothers (see Figure 4).

Further, nearly one in four (23%) agreed that they don't feel like they have a choice but to do everything online, speaking to the concept of digital agency and the potential need for digital alternatives such as in person or telephone based services so people are not left behind.

Figure 3: I need help to keep up with rapid changes in technology, by demographic group

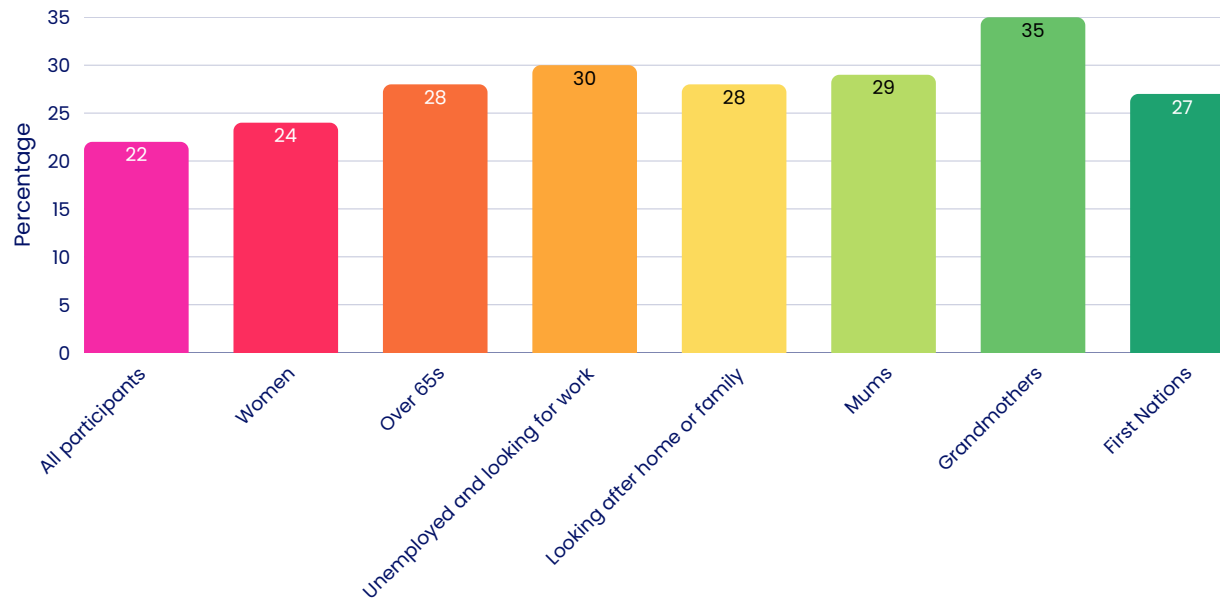
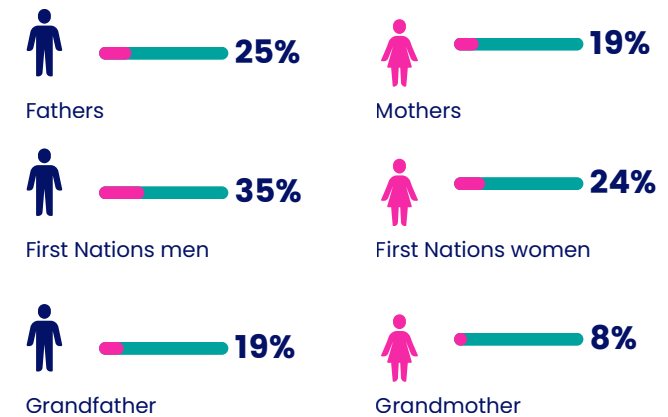


Figure 4: I feel responsible for my family being safe and confident online

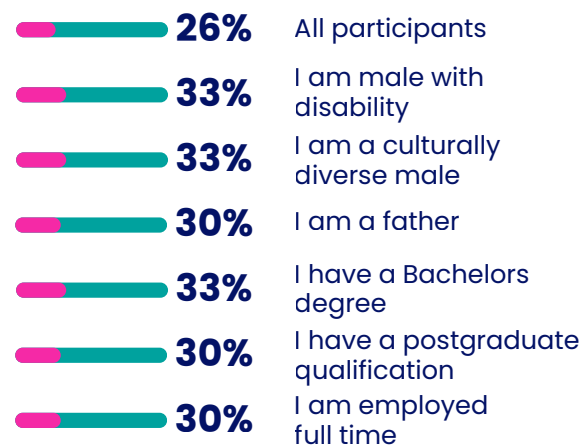


When given the positive version of statements around people's feelings towards technology, around the same proportion (22%) agreed that they feel comfortable keeping up with changes in technology and the internet. A slightly higher proportion of people (26%) said that new technology is making their life easier (see Figure 5).

Put together, results of this survey confirm affordability barriers for Australian consumers to keep up with tech in several key areas, overlaid with additional pressures due to the pace of change, are areas of significant financial and emotional cost for many people. People more at risk of these pressures are women, people with disability, First Nations people and younger people.



Figure 5: New technology is making my life easier



Attitudes around online safety

Attitudes towards online safety were a key focus of the 2026 research. Good Things Australia's program impact data indicates that concerns around a person's safety online, including scams, bullying and harassment and cyber security factors, are priority learning topics for people seeking digital skills support in community settings. Other research indicates that online safety is a concern for the broader community as well, particularly around children's safety online.⁵ This led to the topic being called out as a stand alone item in the research to reflect its ongoing presence in public discussion, explore concerns that emerging technologies are increasing online harms, and understand how this is affecting people's confidence to get online.

Survey participants were asked to select statements that best described their feelings about their safety online. Across the Australian population, one in ten people (11%) said that they do not feel safe online. This was largely a consistent rate across age groups, gender and state/territory locations. However, people with disability were more likely to say they do not feel safe online (16%), particularly men with disability (18%), as are carers with disability (20%), full time students (16%) and people who are unemployed and looking for work (15%).

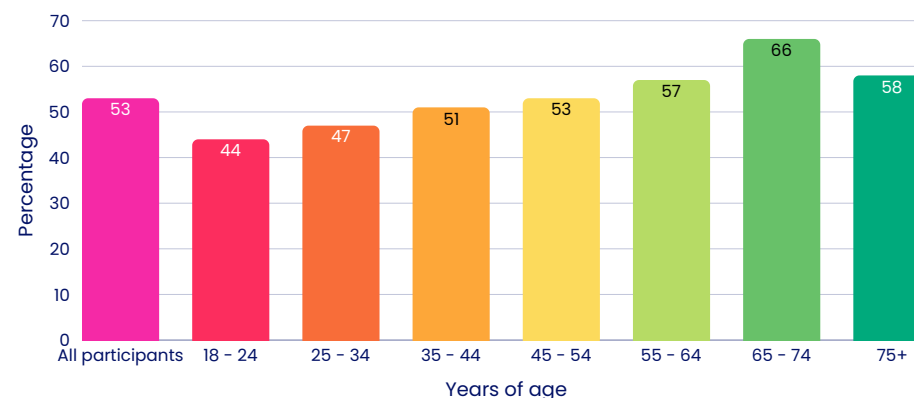
More than half the population are worried that scams are becoming harder to spot in 2026 (53%) (see Figure 6). For comparison, this has increased since 2025, where 48% of

respondents said they had this same concern. In 2026, the proportion of people concerned about this increased with age, ranging from 44% of 18 – 24 year olds up to 66% of 65 – 74 year olds (see Figure 7). Women are significantly more worried scams are getting harder to spot than men (58% vs 48%), consistent with the trend from 2025, particularly mothers and grandmothers. People with lower levels of education, retirees, part time workers and people with disability also show higher likelihood of concern (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: I am worried scams are getting harder to spot



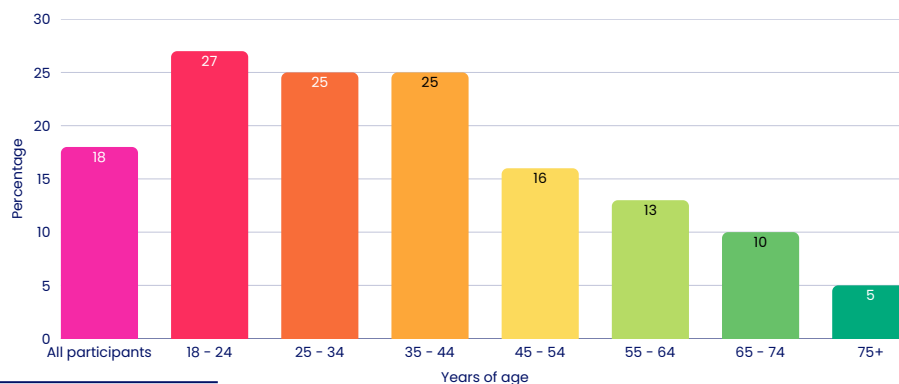
Figure 7: I am worried scams are getting harder to spot, by age



⁵ Singh, B 'New YouGov research shows cautious optimism as Australians assess impact of under-16 social media ban' (2026) YouGov, <https://yougov.com/articles/54334-new-yougov-research-shows-cautious-optimism-as-australians-assess-impact-of-under-16-social-media-ban>. Accessed 28 September 2026.

The survey asked about three further concerns around online safety. For the first time, respondents were asked if they are concerned that what they see online is impacting them negatively. Overall, nearly one in five people (18%) agreed with this statement. Younger people are much more likely to have this concern, from 27% of 18 – 24 year olds, decreasing to just 5% of people aged over 75. This is the reverse of the age trend seen in concerns about scams becoming harder to spot (see Figure 8). This is in line with findings from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey where younger people were found to have increased loneliness, poorer mental health and lower levels of life satisfaction than older generations, associated with problematic social media use.⁶ Other demographic groups reporting higher concerns about negative impacts are culturally and linguistically diverse women aged 18 – 54 (27%), people with disability (21%) – particularly men with disability (24%), First Nations people (25%) and full time students (30%). Interestingly, people with Bachelors degree or higher qualification have slightly higher rates of this concern than the general population. This may connect to increased internet usage or awareness of online harms, given the higher rates of digital inclusion for this cohort.

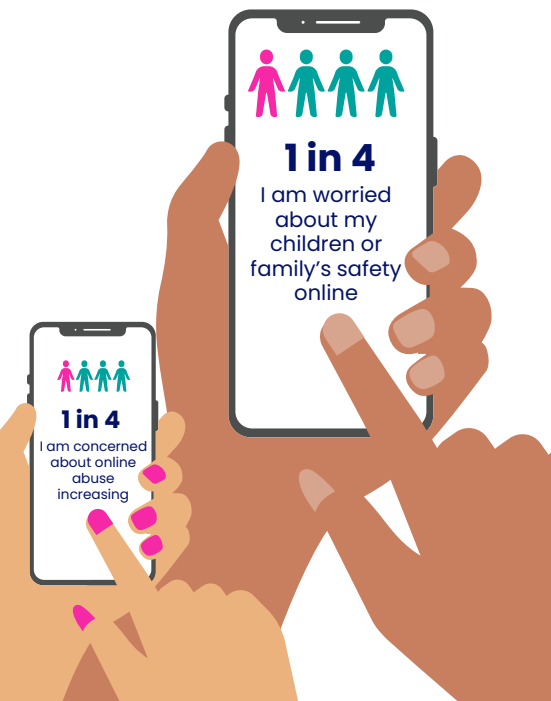
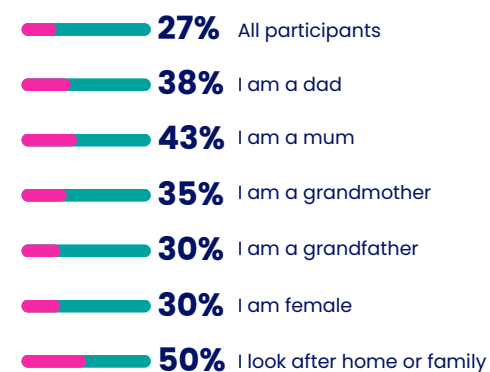
Figure 8: I am concerned what I see online is impacting me negatively, by age



⁶ Inga Laß, Ferdi Botha, Kyle Peyton and Roger Wilkins (2026) The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 24. Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, The University of Melbourne

Overall, one in four people (27%) are worried about their children or family's safety online. People in the middle age ranges of 35 – 44 years and 45 – 54 year olds were most likely to have this concern at 38% and 37% respectively, as were parents and grandparents. Women were significantly more likely to have this concern than men, at 30% of women compared to 24% men. Looking more closely, mothers and grandmothers were more likely to have this concern than fathers and grandfathers. Concern was also higher among culturally and linguistically diverse parents, First Nations parents and carers, and people who identified looking after home or family as their workforce participation type. Given men, fathers and grandfathers were more likely to feel responsible for their family's online safety, this highlights an interesting difference between levels of concern and feelings of responsibility.

Figure 9: I am worried about my children or family's safety online





The final online safety concern explored was whether people were worried about online abuse increasing. One in four people (26%) said this was a concern. Mothers and grandmothers were more likely to be concerned than fathers and grandfathers, showing a strong gender difference. People with Year 12 or lower levels of education were less likely to share this concern, at 21% or less.

The survey also explored people's confidence in several key activities connected to being safe online. Overall, 30% of respondents are confident they can avoid scams online, 31% are confident that they can tell the difference between reliable and unreliable information, and 28% are confident managing their privacy and safety settings, showing reasonably consistent but relatively low rates across all three online safety skill areas. Across all three, men were more likely to feel confident compared to women. While overall people with disability were more likely to be confident across these skill areas, women with disability were much less likely to be confident compared to men with disability. Interestingly, over 75s also expressed a higher rate of confidence than the general population by several percentage points.

One in five (22%) respondents indicated that they would like more education on how to stay safer online. Rates of interest were higher for people aged over 65 years (27%+), women (24%), mothers and grandmothers (27%), carers across most age groups, and culturally and linguistically diverse community members (26%). Higher rates of interest were noted for people with higher levels of education, ranging from 24% of people with a Bachelor degree to 18% of people who completed Year 10 or lower. This suggests a potential link between previous educational attainment and willingness or interest in participation in further learning about online safety. Given the rapid pace of change in the online safety space, and people's concerns around scams becoming harder to spot, this insight could be critical in engaging people at greater risk of being left behind in essential digital skills education initiatives, and an area for further exploration.



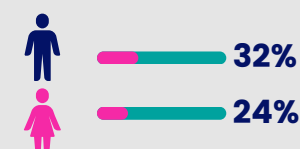
I am confident I can avoid scams online



I am confident I can tell the difference between reliable and unreliable information



I am confident managing my privacy and safety settings





Attitudes to AI

The 2025 and 2026 research placed a strong focus on attitudes towards artificial intelligence (AI), reflecting its rapid development and adoption, and growing prominence in public discussion, government policy and the media. In 2026, participants were asked to select statements that best described their attitudes towards and experiences with AI, capturing both confidence and concerns.

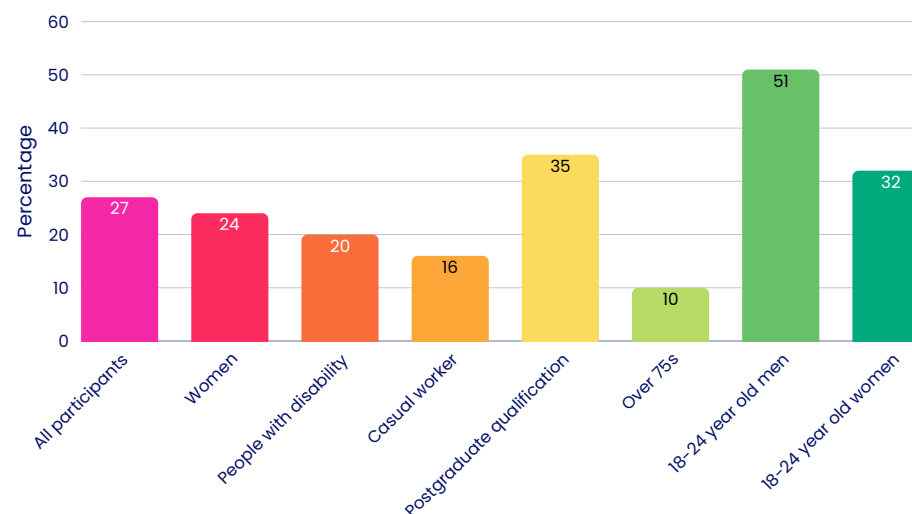
Overall, 27% of respondents said they were confident using AI. Confidence was higher among First Nations respondents (35%), men compared to women (31% vs 24%), younger people, rising to 41% of 18 – 24 year olds, and people who had completed a Bachelor's degree or higher qualification. Young men (51%) and younger culturally and linguistically diverse people (46%) were particularly likely to say they were confident.

Confidence was lowest among older people, falling to just 10% of people aged over 75, people who completed Year 10 or below at school (10%) and people with disability (20%).

Workforce participation also appears to impact confidence in potentially unexpected ways. Full time workers, people who are self employed or contractors, people who are unemployed and looking for work, and full time students were all more likely to say they were confident using AI. Retirees, casual or part time workers, people looking after home or family, and those unable to work were less likely to be confident.

Beyond confidence in using AI themselves, just 12% of respondents felt confident supporting others to use AI. Younger people were significantly more likely to be confident supporting others than older people, at 21% of 18 – 24 year olds compared to just 3% of people aged over 75. Men were also more likely than women to feel confident in this area (15% vs 9%). In terms of workforce participation, people employed full time (16%), and those unemployed and looking for work (17%) were the most likely to feel confident supporting others to use AI, although confidence remained low overall. This is a significant finding, given the known importance and value of digital mentors in boosting digital skills and confidence, and suggests additional work is needed to lift this percentage rate across the population.⁷

Figure 9: I am confident using AI, by demographic



⁷ McCosker, A., Tucker, J., Critchley, C., Hiruy, K., Walshe, J., Suchowerska, R., Barraket, J. (2020) Improving the digital inclusion of older Australians: The social impact of Be Connected, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne.

The research also tested concerns people had about AI, understanding that it is at times a controversial topic, and a new wave of technological change. One in five (22%) are unsure how to distinguish AI generated content from real content. This is a much lower rate than in 2025 (one in three people), showing significant progress over the past year in confidence in these areas. However, it is useful to note here that confidence to spot AI generated content may not be the same as the actual ability to independently or accurately complete this task.

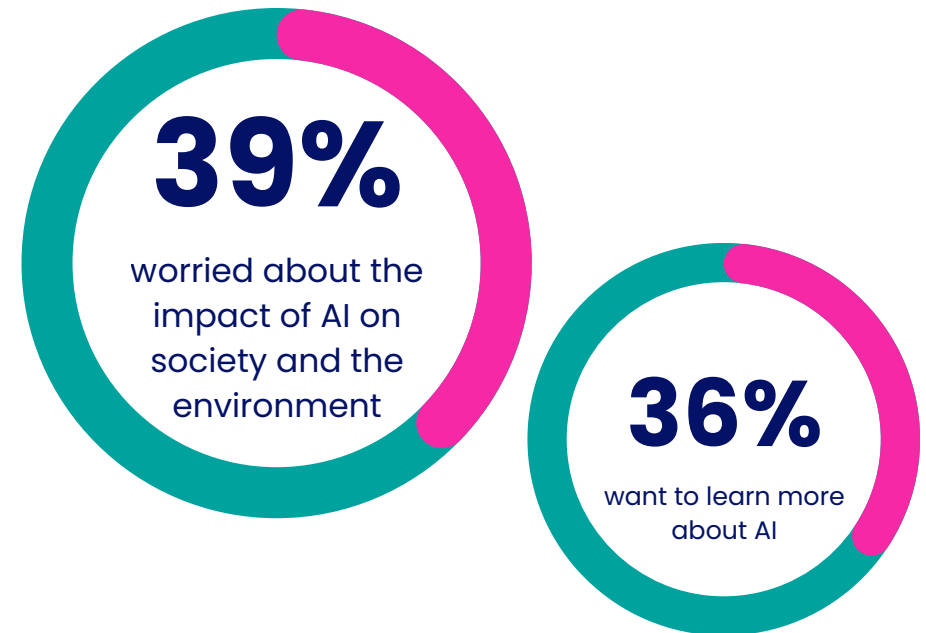
For the first time in 2026, the research asked if people are worried about the impacts of AI on society and our environment. Thirty nine percent of people had this sentiment, which was particularly evident in over 65s (47%), people with disability (51%), and women (43%) – particularly young women (50% of 18 – 24 year old women), culturally and linguistically diverse women (46%), mums (46%) and grandmothers (49%).

Overall, 15% of people were concerned that their job will be replaced by AI, with slightly higher rates among people working full time (23%) and full time students (22%), compared to people working casually (11%) or self-employed or contractors (9%).

Meanwhile, 4% of respondents said they don't really know what AI is, and 14% don't care about AI and are not planning to use it. One in ten had never used AI, rising to nearly one in four retirees (23%), indicating additional supports and education may be warranted to avoid this demographic being left behind as tech rapidly changes.

More than one in three people (36%) said that they want to learn more about AI. People most likely to be interested in learning more included people aged 35 – 44 years (47%), men (38% compared to 33% of women), people with higher levels of education, who are employed full time (42%), men aged over 75 years (38%), culturally and linguistically diverse people (41%) and people who are carers across demographic groups.

Interest in learning more about AI was lower among some groups, including people with disability (29%), with the rate lower among women with disability (24%). It was also lower among 18–24 year olds (30%), women aged over 75 (14%), mothers (33%) and grandmothers (23%), with mothers and grandmothers less likely to express interest than fathers (39%) and grandfathers (31%). It is important to note that interest in learning more may be influenced by multiple factors, including existing levels of knowledge, interest in the topic, motivation to learn, time and availability.



Respondents who said they wanted to learn more about AI were asked additional questions to provide additional insight.

Of those, 36% of respondents, the topics they are most interested in learning about ranked in order of priority are:

- Using AI apps and tools – 51%
- AI and online safety – 47%
- What is AI and how I can use it – 32%
- Getting AI to do things for me (prompting) – 44%
- AI skills for work – 38%
- How to identify and verify AI content – 38%
- Using AI ethically and responsibly – 36%
- None of the above – 2%

When asked how they would like to learn about AI, responses ranked in order of selection were:

- In my own time using online resources eg short videos – 65%
- With the support of a trusted person – 33%
- As part of my job – 31%
- Attending in person workshops – 24%
- Through support from my library, community centre or local community organisation – 18%
- None of the above – 4%

Support offered through a local organisation was more popular among older respondents and women of all ages. Learning with the support of a trusted person ranked highly among both younger and older respondents, while people more likely to be of working age and balancing family life (35–64 year olds), and women overall, were less likely to select this option. However, women were more likely than men to prefer an in person workshop, as were people aged 35–44.

There was strong support across all groups for learning “in my own time using online resources eg short videos”. Interestingly, younger people (18–24 year olds at 56%) and older people (over 75s at 60%) were the two age groups least likely to prefer this learning model.

These findings show that a mix of learning models may be needed to support people with different needs and life experiences to keep up with AI and rapidly changing technology, even among those interested in further digital skills education. A one size fits all approach is unlikely to meet the different needs and interests of communities when building AI skills and confidence.

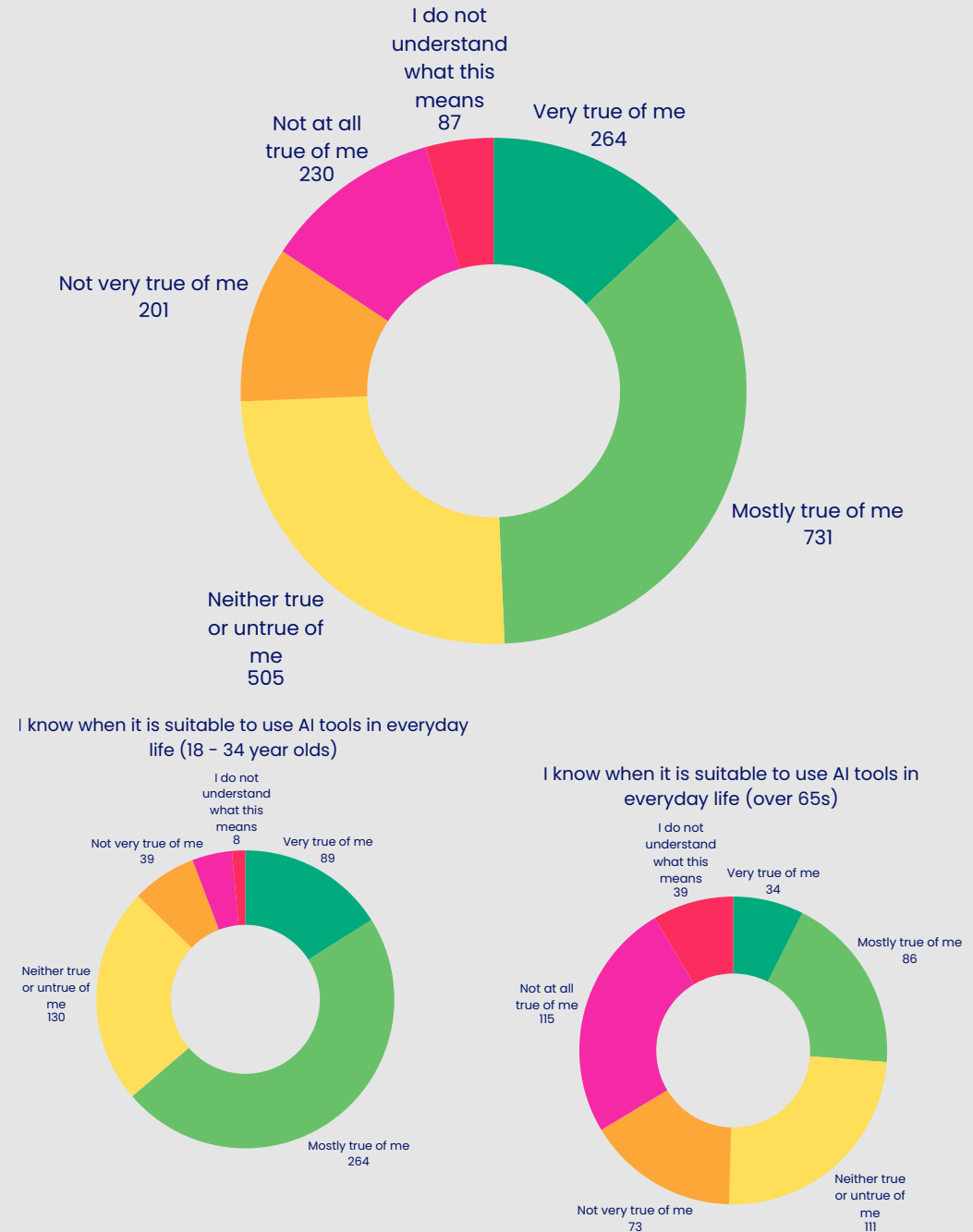


For the first time in 2026, the survey asked all respondents to select from a scale what best described their level of knowledge about when it is suitable to use AI tools in everyday life. This mirrors questions asked in the Australian Digital Inclusion Index and provides insight into people's deeper and practical understanding of AI tools and media literacy. Overall, 49% of Australians selected a positive response, leaving 51% unsure about when it is appropriate to use AI tools in their everyday lives.

There was a strong age based trend in the results, with younger people much more likely to report higher levels of knowledge in this area. Among younger people, 64% responded positively, compared to just 26% of people aged over 65 who said the statement was very true or mostly true of them. Other groups reporting lower levels of knowledge included women with disability, with 39% in the highest two tiers, women aged over 75 (14%), grandparents (23%) and people with Year 10 or below level of education (22%).

Groups reporting the highest levels of knowledge included men aged 25–34 (72% positive) and people with postgraduate qualifications (62%). This appears to support previously identified trends in AI literacy showing an age based digital divide.¹ It also reinforces findings that factors such as education, disability and gender can affect confidence, as they do across other areas of digital skills and inclusion.

Figure 10: I know when it is suitable to use AI tools in everyday life



Conclusion

With four years of Good Things Australia's consumer research into Australian Attitudes to Getting Online now complete, the findings provide a deeper, longer term understanding of how everyday Australians feel about getting online and navigating a rapidly changing digital landscape. They highlight the pressure many people feel trying to keep up, both personally and financially, as technology changes rapidly, scams become more sophisticated, AI requires new skills and knowledge, and the cost of digital subscriptions, connectivity and devices adds further pressure. The 2026 findings show that people of all ages are affected by different aspects of digital exclusion, from skills and confidence to affordability and access, while some demographic groups face greater barriers or pressure than others.

The findings also show that many people are willing to learn new skills and see value in ongoing education around online safety and AI. They reinforce the need for ongoing digital skills and confidence building support, with a particular focus on people more likely to experience digital exclusion, including people with disability, women, grandparents, people who are not in the workforce and First Nations communities. Addressing these barriers can strengthen social inclusion and economic participation, with benefits for individuals, communities and the broader Australian economy.⁸

Ultimately, the research confirms that as the digital world continues to evolve, Australians need ongoing support to keep up. Long term, up to date and flexible digital skills support must go hand in hand with improved affordable access measures to close the digital divide. Ensuring everyone in Australia can participate confidently and affordably in our increasingly digital world will be essential to building a more equitable digital future.

⁸ Hutley, N. (2024). The Economic Benefits of Overcoming Digital Exclusion. Good Things Australia: Sydney, NSW.



Methodology

This research by Good Things Australia was carried out on a national representative sample of 2,018 Australians aged 18 and over in August 2026.

The data sample was weighted against ABS data for age, gender and location using an online survey that was independently conducted by PureProfile, ISO 20252 & 27001 accredited panel.

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.

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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, and partners with social impact organisations, industry and government to close Australia's digital divide.

Find out more: www.goodthingsaustralia.org



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