

Amplifying the voices of young people



Australian Youth Digital Index 2024

About the Telstra Foundation



For over two decades, Telstra has funded a ‘youth and tech’ social impact investment unit called the Telstra Foundation with the goal of supporting young people to thrive in their connected world. Over this time, we’ve **worked as one** with leading community stakeholders to **make a difference**.

Our collaborations have improved children and young peoples’ online safety and wellbeing, their digital skills and their access to essential digital services but there’s much work to do. In 2024, Telstra increased the Foundation’s philanthropic gift to better understand what young people think about their digital lives, amplify these voices, and increase opportunities for young people and children to shape their digital world. The annual Australian Youth Digital Index project was launched to help us all to **look beyond** the adult narratives about young people’s relationships with tech and include the next generation’s perspectives too. We will continue to work closely with children and young people to guide our actions. To read more about our plans, our team and our partners, visit www.telstrafoundation.com.

Introducing the Youth Advisory Council

The Index project benefitted from the insights and lived experience of members of our Youth Advisory Council. Our Youth Advisory Council provided feedback about the Index tool which was modified based on some additional suggestions, provided further context that helped explain key insights, and shared personal findings on how young people interact with technology today. Their response to the research findings is included throughout this report.

Connection by Bobbi Lockyer

With the blue as the backdrop reminiscent of the boundless sky that arches over Australia with symbols of stars, these resemble both the constellations that have guided generations and the satellites that now facilitate modern communication.

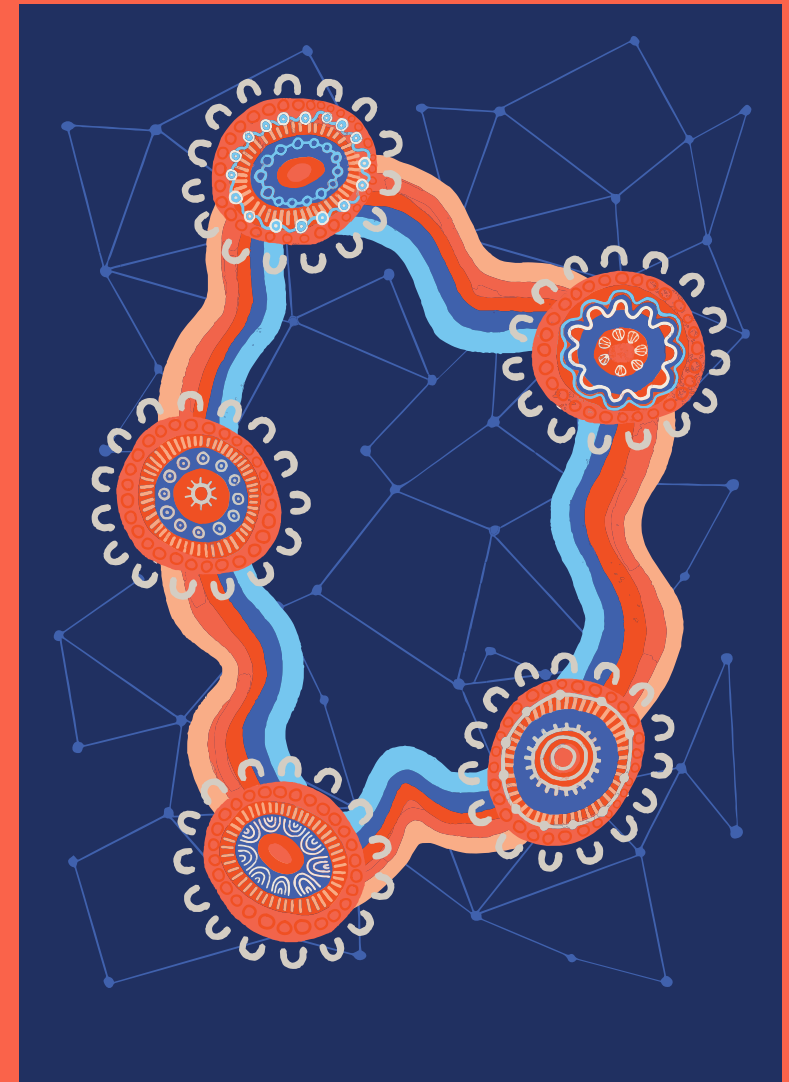
Five circular symbols each representing a distinct Aboriginal country: saltwater, rainforest, desert, sky, and freshwater. The colours within these circles – blue for the sky, orange, for the earth, and cream for the sand – echo the natural elements that define each region.

Interwoven between them are connecting lines, symbolising Telstra’s network connecting communities across the nation. Surrounding the circles are symbols of people, reflecting Australia’s multicultural community.

The artwork combines the hand painting storytelling and symbols of the oldest continuous culture in the world with the modern digital graphic design of the satellite sky. This artwork represents Telstra’s commitment to its customers, community, and the power of connection.

Acknowledgement of Country

At Telstra Foundation, we recognise and acknowledge the existing, original and ancient connection Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have to the lands and waterways across the Australian continent. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and all the First Nations people and communities we are privileged to work with on our Foundation projects. We are enriched by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ contribution to our organisation, and we commit to working together to build a prosperous and inclusive Australia.



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Forward: CEO and Telstra Foundation chair

A message to young people from Vicki and Russell: what we heard from you

Hi,
We're so excited about our first *Australian Youth Digital Index*, designed to amplify your voices and help people learn about your experiences and interactions with technology.

You've grown up digital – the first generation to do so – and we're keen to listen to and learn from your feedback, so thank you for participating.

Reflecting on your feedback, **there is much to be optimistic about when it comes to your relationship with technology.** The Index results show you understand how the digital world operates, are aware of the negative and positive aspects, and that you are developing skills to protect your health, finances and identities. You're eager to control your online presence with the support of family and the community.

You've shared that **technology and being connected is crucial in your life** and the **majority of you see technology as having a positive or neutral impact on your lives.** We can also see that, as you grow older, you have a deeper understanding of how to use technology effectively and are keen to find a balance.

Most of you **feel safe online and understand what online safety means**, but we also can see your experiences and perspectives change with age, gender and other factors. While you feel capable of navigating the digital world safely, you acknowledge there are some negative impacts of being online. However, **generally you feel in control** and you have shared your top worries with us.

The Index data also shows that **too many young people still lack essential technology for their education.** We're working to close the digital divide, so while it's great to read that most of you have access to a digital device, there is more work to do to for those still missing out.

We're impressed by the role that you're playing as digital guides. In addition to being **'inhouse' tech support to your families**, you're also teaching yourselves about tech. This insight is something we'll explore with you to see how we can do more to improve the digital skills of all Australians.

Lastly, we want to assure you that we believe **young people should have access**, connection and empowered to thrive online. This is the mission of Telstra Foundation and as we move forward with our plans, we promise to use this data to champion and support you.

Yours sincerely



Vicki Brady
CEO Telstra



Russell Higgins AO
Chairman Telstra Foundation



*Most importantly, your responses remind us all that **your digital lives are diverse** – your age, gender and where you live, all shape a patchwork of different digital experiences – and if we don't look at these nuances, **we will miss important things.***



We need to recognise that everyone needs to use technology – that is how the world is. It is part of our lives.

Abbey, 18, Youth Advisory Council



About the Australian Youth Digital Index

The Australian Youth Digital Index project aims to identify and monitor the key drivers, issues, and opportunities that relate to young people's relationships with digital technology.

We want to deeply engage with young people to learn about their experiences online, capture their insights to inform activity in this area and to amplify and advocate for young people's perspectives with respect to digital technology more broadly. The project also aims to provide an annual and reliable 'state of the nation' benchmark on the role of digital technology in young people's lives; and a source of data and emerging themes for use by key stakeholders that champion and work with young people.

The research draws on both quantitative and qualitative data about young people's digital lives, their attitudes, behaviours, perceptions, and experiences. One of the

central components of the research was to develop an 'index' measuring the experiences of young people across five key 'pillars'. The five pillars cover:

1. **Access** – devices used and how much young people can use them when they need to.
2. **Connectivity (Getting Online)** – how young people connect online (i.e. broadband or mobile data) and how much this is inhibited by limits, speed or quality of connection.
3. **Skills** – how well young people can complete digital tasks for school or work, and how they learnt digital skills.
4. **Safety** – young people's own rating of how safe they feel online, whether they are aware of various risks online, and how they learnt online safety.
5. **Wellbeing** – how young people feel about different aspects of their life in general, and the impact young people say being online has on their life, including the everyday capabilities they need online.

Responses in the quantitative survey under each of these five pillars contributed to an index for each individual pillar. The total index score is an average of the index score for all five pillars.

The Australia Youth Digital Index is built on responses from a sample of 4,718 young people aged 8 to 25 (and their parents/carers), across more than 50 core questions. The data can be split by gender as well as showing the progression of behaviour, attitudes and experience as young people mature and their relationship with technology changes. Find the Index methodology in the appendix at the end of this report.

A note about our pilot year

Telstra Foundation develops all its projects on a test and learn basis and our Index is no exception. 2024 is the pilot year for the Index. Feedback from young people during the development of this project highlighted how the Index pillars are, in real life, all interconnected. This is true and the 'pillar segmentation' while valid for the purposes of our research and advocacy, has room to evolve.

We now have data from more 4,700 young people that provides insight on what is important to them. Young people also provided insights around topics they would like deeper focus on such as ethical use of technology, everyday digital capabilities vs technical skills, and some of the challenges they experience – sometimes different things from what adults worry about.

While we modified and added some Index questions (both in the quantitative and qualitative surveys) we will take our pilot learnings and use them to finalise the Index tool for its next run. This means, the overall pillar benchmarking, year on year, will start in 2026, given the tool will evolve. We thank everyone for their insights and feedback on this journey and will continue to involve young people in our design activities.

What stands out for us – some thoughts from our expert advisers

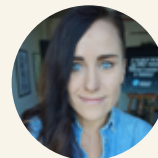
We also thank our community of youth and technology experts, organisations that align to our work to empower, include and connect young people. These thought leaders provide valuable insights and will continue to work with us as we shape our next steps to deliver on our mission. They have shared their thoughts as to what stands out for them in this report and some additional research that complements our findings.

Doug Taylor
CEO The Smith Family



This new research, which directly reflects the voices of young people, is an important and timely addition to understanding both the impact and potential of the current and future digital landscape. Ensuring all young people are digitally included is essential given the role it plays in economic, social and cultural participation. We know from our work with young people experiencing disadvantage, the impact of digital exclusion on their participation in education, skill development and future employment. As we grapple with appropriate policy measures and governance for an evolving digital landscape, it is essential that quantitative and qualitative data from young people, shapes our responses. Access some of The Smith Family's most recent research reports [here](#).

Lucy Thomas OAM
Co-Founder & Co-CEO PROJECT ROCKIT



The Digital Youth Index is an incredible resource for understanding the realities of young people's digital lives. These inaugural findings challenge the notion of 'young people' as a homogenous group, highlighting interesting differences across age, gender, location, and ethnicity and their intersections. This may surprise many adults: While Safety scored highest, Wellbeing was the lowest-ranked pillar. This suggests a shift in focus is needed: many young people already feel equipped with safety skills, but would benefit from greater support in navigating the social and emotional dimensions of their online lives. By fostering self-awareness, critical thinking, boundary-setting, and balanced online engagement, we can help young people thrive in digital spaces. Read our latest research [here](#).

Caroline McDaid
CEO WorkVentures



For those of us lucky enough to be digitally independent, it's hard to imagine surviving even one day without the convenience technology affords us. This report highlights an important equity and inclusion issue that impacts young people and one that needs to be addressed with some urgency. It tells us that more than a million young people are trying to complete their education without a laptop or desk top computer at home. WorkVentures is working to address this challenge with partners, Good Things Australia and Good360 via a National Device Bank of donated and refurbished laptops, tablets and mobiles. We're encouraging Australian companies and government agencies to donate their technology so that the devices can be refurbished and redistributed for free to people who are digitally excluded. Students are learning in an increasingly digital education environment so students missing out will really benefit from this if we can scale it to meet their needs. It's going to take a coalition of the willing to have an impact and if we work together, this new model could really scale and that would be a gamechanger for Australians experiencing digital exclusion. To learn more about how you can support the Australian National Device Bank visit nationaldevicebank.org.au.

What stands out for us – some thoughts from our expert advisers Continued

Katie Maskiell

Head of Policy, UNICEF Australia



When I read this report and reflect on our UNICEF Australia research in the ‘youth and tech’ space, it is clear that children and young people are telling us some important things. Firstly, they are ever-present in digital environments using the internet in all aspects of their lives, daily. Secondly, while risks remain, they generally know how to respond and use the tools that platforms provide or speak with trusted adults in their lives. The report also highlights that there’s a gap between the amount of risk perceived by parents versus the actual risk faced by children in their everyday lives. This should be top of mind when we are making decisions about what issues to address – the more we understand young people’s relationship with tech, and work with young people to address their issues, the better our decisions will be. To read more about UNICEF Australia’s work in this area, read our report – [**Protecting Children in the Digital World**](#).

Sarah Davies AM

CEO, Alannah & Madeline Foundation



Despite the dominant negative discourse surrounding digital technology and young Australians, it is inspiring to see just how capable they are in safely and respectfully navigating the online world. The Australian Youth Digital Index reveals that many young people are thriving through digital connections and identity-building, showing strong digital agency in shaping their online presence. However, disparities remain between what concerns them versus their parents, with younger Australians often facing parental restrictions despite feeling in control of their digital habits. This underscores the need to enhance parental understanding of their children’s online experiences for better support. View DigiTalk [**here**](#). While young Australians are proactive in protecting themselves online, they recognize there’s always more to learn, emphasising the need for relevant, accessible, age-appropriate online safety education and digital literacy. View eSmart [**here**](#). Addressing the digital divide, particularly in access and skill, is crucial. We must harness the creativity and knowledge of young people to address these disparities across demographics, ensuring digital equity.

Lauren Ganley

Head of First Nations Strategy and Engagement, Telstra



For me, this report signals the importance of listening to understand. It reminds us to be curious and engage, and when we do, remembering to hold our own ideas loosely, as there is so much to learn. From a Telstra perspective, young people are the next gen of our customers, so it makes sense to understand their needs – it’s part of being a customer focussed organisation. The report tells us these needs are nuanced and diverse with notable differences appearing across different demographics - this is something we need to keep site of. I’m looking forward to building on this work to better support young people in their everyday digital lives and most importantly, catch those falling through the gaps. As we know from this research and the research of others, there is much work to do to ensure everyone thrives online. For further reading on Telstra’s digital inclusion work more broadly, see the Telstra funded Mapping the Digital Gap and the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (now in its ninth year) [**here**](#).

What stands out for us – some thoughts from our expert advisers Continued

Professor Mario Alvarez-Jimenez
Chief Orygen Digital



In this report, young people talk to its benefits and acknowledge some of the challenges and they have highlighted the critical role tech plays in their lives. Reflecting on this, we have an enormous opportunity to leverage technology to improve wellbeing and mental health. As a youth mental health organisation, Orygen Digital recognises that part of our service delivery model needs to show up in the spaces where young people are. Young people have powerful, connected devices in their pockets that can deliver equally powerful tools and resources when and where they need them – resources that can improve mental health and that’s exciting. In partnership with the Telstra Foundation, we have co-developed with young people and clinicians some ground-breaking evidence-based digital clinical therapies that sit side by side with face-to-face therapies and are showing very positive clinical trial results – they work. For example, MOST, an all-in-one, government funded digital mental health platform now integrated across 400+ youth mental health services across Australia (Find out more about MOST [here](#)), and Mello, a free mental health phone app that helps young minds break free of stuck thinking. Find out more about Mello [here](#).

Gary Groves
CEO ReachOut



This is a timely and incredibly insightful report that sheds light on the digital experiences of young people in Australia. It demonstrates the nuance and complexity of young peoples’ digital lives, and the remarkable capacity of many young people to identify and respond to online challenges. This comes as no surprise to us at ReachOut, with young people consistently telling us they want safer digital spaces that empower them to benefit from connection, skills building and creativity. The report also makes clear the need for all of us to focus on young peoples’ wellbeing online. And we’re doing just that by investing now in making help-seeking online easier – through enhancing connection and utilising cutting-edge technology to get young people the information and support they need to feel better sooner. Visit ReachOut [here](#).

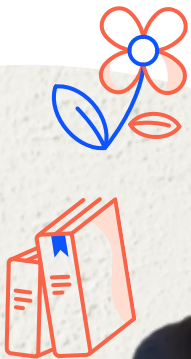
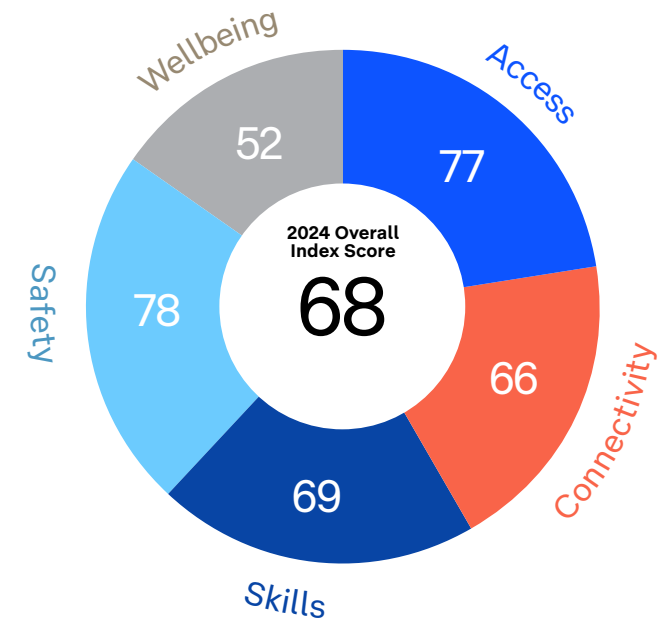
Key findings: a snapshot

Digital technology is now embedded in every part of life, and young people have embraced devices as a means to connect, create, socialise, learn, work and seek support.

The 2024 Australian Youth Digital Index provides a snapshot of young people's digital access and inclusion, their digital skills, online safety and their related physical and mental wellbeing. Age, gender and where you live (as well as other demographics) shape the experiences of children and young people and some key differences are highlighted on pages 47 to 51 of this report.

In an ideal world, the scores for individual pillars would each be 100, leading to an overall Index score of 100. We know that various challenges and realities make this unlikely, but by examining the performance on each pillar, and the contributors to it, we can identify areas to target improvements (and in some cases improvements to the tool itself). Over time, we will be able to track progress against previous years and address issues the Index identifies.

The overall Index score for the 2024 *Australian Youth Digital Index*, comprising scores for Access, Connectivity, Skills, Safety and Wellbeing, is 68.



Sucheta, 21
Youth Advisory Council member

Tech & social media intertwine with real life, it isn't a thing on the side or separate from everything. Technology is part of our identity

Key findings: a snapshot Continued

Access

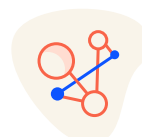
Index score: 77



Australia's population of young people are highly connected. While most have access to some sort of digital device, many still lack the essential technology needed to truly thrive. Around 19% of all young people lack access to a learning device at home (a laptop or desktop computer). This equates to 1.16 million young people across Australia. Of these, over 400,000 are high school age and above, when easy access to learning devices is often expected for homework and other tasks. This has worrying implications for educational equality and social mobility. Access for those young people missing out is a top priority for improvement.

Connectivity (Getting Online)

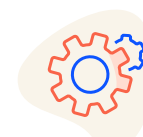
Index score: 66



Nearly all (94%) of the surveyed young people have home broadband, and four in five (81%) agree that their home Wi-Fi is good quality and the most frequent way they connect to the internet (80%). For young people with a physical health condition or disability the connectivity score was lower (61). Almost one million young people (16% or approximately 978,000) use mobile data as their main way to connect to the Internet – often a more costly method than home broadband. 13% of respondents said they had to change or cancel their internet package due to cost of living pressures.

Skills

Index score: 69



Young people are showing strong skills in using devices for schoolwork, with 78% indicating they do not need help in this area but young people from regional and remote areas have significantly lower skills. A similar proportion found it easy to use the internet to solve problems (80%). More than half of young people (58%) have aspirations for a job that uses advanced digital skills and 45% found using AI easy. Young people are stepping up to assist adults with tech challenges and many are teaching themselves the digital skills they need. Girls are more likely than boys to find digital tasks easy; but are much less likely to pursue a career using advanced digital skills. And young people from regional and remote areas tend to have significantly lower skills than their peers in the city.

Safety

Index score: 78



Nearly all young people feel safe online (94%); say they understand what online safety means (92%) and most know where to find support if they need it. Young people are most likely to learn online safety on their own, and their top online safety concern is being targeted by scams or hackers. Half (50%) of young people said they had been exposed to scams, two-in-five (39%) had been exposed to sexual content, and 35% mentioned fake news, misinformation or disinformation. Many are training their parents and family members, providing eSafety advice to avoid scams and social media pitfalls.

Wellbeing

Index score: 52



The majority of young people see technology as having a positive or neutral impact on their lives – one third say the effect is negative, with sleep being a standout health concern. A significant number of respondents (usually well over a third) are ambivalent about the impact of tech on various aspects of wellbeing and selected neutral/no impact answers. Given the neutral responses do not suggest a lowering of wellbeing, and aren't considered in the scoring process, consideration will be given in future editions of the Index to how this is composed. However, what was clear is that 73% were generally happy with life and most (80%) agree they know what it means to be a good person online, while 61% view social media as a positive experience.



Access



All young people deserve to have access to reliable digital technologies and communication as it is an essential way we live today. Our society heavily relies on these digital technologies and communication platforms, so why don't all young people have reliable access?

Bailey, 16, Youth Advisory Council member

Access – it’s all in the detail



Key Findings

Australia’s population of young people are highly connected, with most having access to some sort of digital device.

Access to connected devices is crucial for young people and they believe this is indispensable in today’s world.

However, the overall Access index score of 77 shows there are some key areas for improvement.

Notably, 30% did not agree they were able to do everything they needed with their digital devices, while only two thirds agreed they had sufficient storage space.

*While most young people have access to some sort of digital device, they do not always have access to the technology they need to thrive, especially when it comes to their education – 600,000, including 250,000 aged 14 and above, don’t have **any** access – whether at school, home or elsewhere – to crucial educational tools like laptops or desktops.*

There is also an urban/rural distinction. Young people from major cities scored more highly than those from regional/remote areas.



Elodie, 12

Youth Advisory Council member

Access to technology is really important to connect with others, especially if all your friends are online. At my school we have a complete phone ban and I find it hard to keep up when I arrive home with all those notifications that I get throughout the day.



The Access pillar examines the digital devices young people use, whether they can use these devices when they need to, and what they use their devices for when online.

The Access score for young people in Australia is 77.

The score varies slightly depending on age and location. The Access score is significantly lower for 8-13-year-olds (58), compared to teenagers aged 14 to 17 (86) and 18-25-year-olds (88), likely reflecting aspects such as lower personal ownership of devices and greater parental restrictions.

Young people from major cities in Australia have a slightly higher Access score (78) than those from regional/remote areas (74).

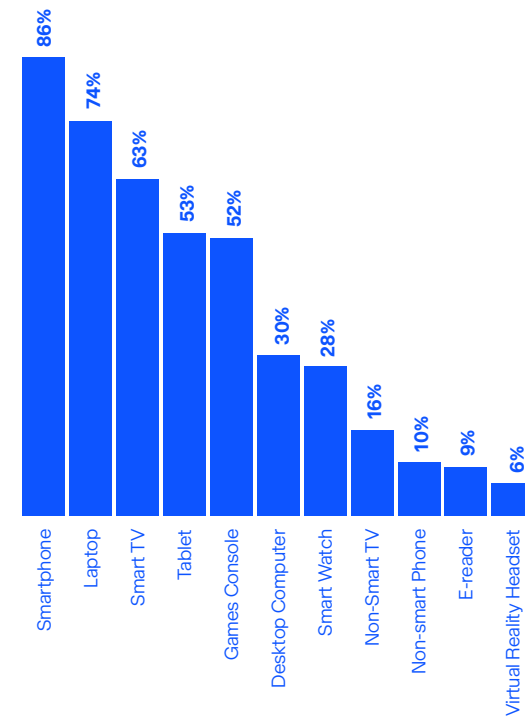
Smartphones are the device of choice for young people, with 86% using these devices for a range of activities at home including social activity and sourcing information.

Laptops (74%) were the second-most used device at home, and were more important in the lives of those in the older age groups compared with primary school children.

There were clear gender differences around the use of some devices, with girls more likely to have access to tablets and smart watches and boys more likely to have access to a games console or desktop computer.

Figure 1: Use of devices at home

Q: Which of the following digital devices do you personally use at home? Base: All n=4,718.



Access – it’s all in the detail Continued



There were also distinctions by age: over-14s are significantly more likely to have access to a smartphone (94% 14-17-year-olds and 97% 18-25-year-olds) compared to 8-13-year-olds (67%), however 8-13-year-olds are more likely to have access to a tablet (71%) compared to 14-25-year-olds (49%/40%).

Many devices were shared with others in the household, affecting young people’s ability to use them when needed. Youth workers indicated this could particularly be an issue for more vulnerable or disadvantaged young people, including those in low income households and indigenous communities, consistent with the findings of the **First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group**.

Having restricted access to learning devices – ie. a laptop or desktop computer – can have enormous impacts on the ability of a young person to reach their potential.

It is clear parents exert particular and significant control around the use of smartphones. Of the 14% who said they had no access to a smartphone, nearly all (96%) said this was, at least in part, because their parent or guardian would not allow it.

Satisfaction with device performance was influenced by factors such as internet quality, confidence with digital skills, confidence with online safety skills, and whether or not parents restricted time on devices.

Ownership of devices mostly increased with age.

Figure 2: Use of devices – by age and gender

Q: Which of the following digital devices do you personally use at home? Base: All n=4,718

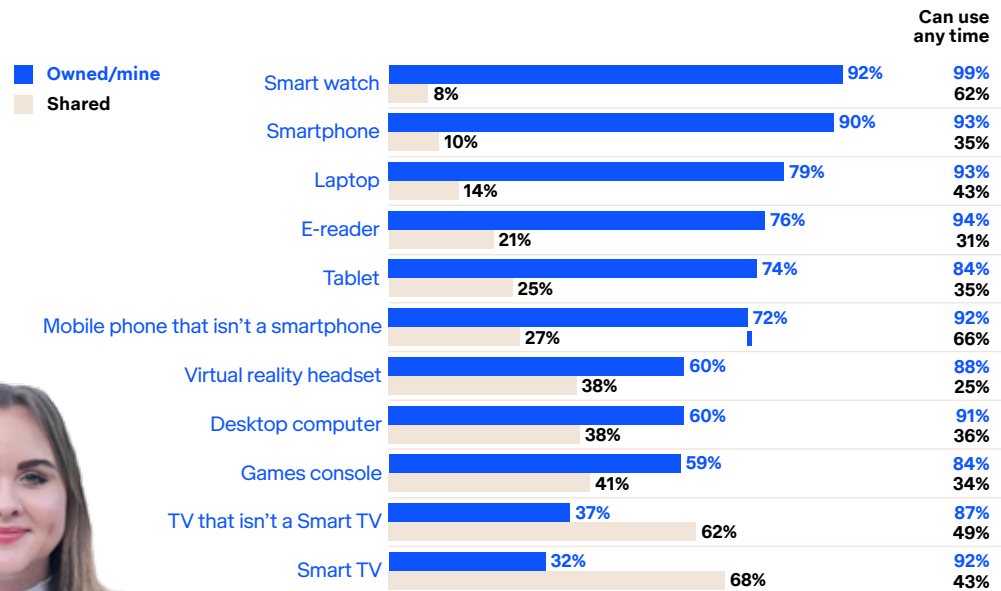
	Male	Female	8–3 year-olds	14–17 year-olds	18–25 year-olds
Smartphone	87%	85%	67%	94%	97%
Laptop	72%	76%	57%	85%	82%
Smart TV	60%	67%	68%	64%	59%
Tablet	48%	58%	71%	49%	40%
Games console	54%	49%	64%	51%	42%
Desktop computer	33%	27%	25%	28%	34%
Smart watch	25%	32%	20%	25%	37%

Figure 3: Access to devices – owned or shared

Qa: Is the digital device that you have access to owned by you or someone else?

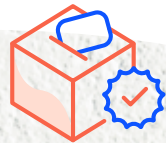
Qb: Are you able to use the device whenever you need to?

Base: has access to a device at home n=4,233



Victoria, 18
Youth Advisory Council member

When we're surprised by this data, we make assumptions, but for the vast majority of people, the first thing they cut when under financial stress is their Wi-Fi or data plan – it's the first to go.



Access – it’s all in the detail Continued



Access spotlight

Stuck in the digital dark: 19% of young people with no home learning device

One of the starkest findings in the 2024 Index was the number of young people lacking essential learning devices (a laptop or desktop computer).

Around 19% of all young people lack access to a learning device at home. This equates to 1.16 million young people across Australia.

Of these, over 400,000 are high school age and above, when easy access to learning devices is often expected for homework and other tasks.

Access to a computer is vital for young people’s education in today’s digital world. Computers open up a wealth of learning opportunities, providing access to online resources, educational tools, and interactive platforms that are essential for completing schoolwork. From researching topics and writing reports to engaging with multimedia content and collaborative tools, having a computer allows students to participate fully in education.

For students, especially those at high school, a computer is not just a tool for learning—it is a gateway to developing critical digital skills. These skills are increasingly important as technology continues to shape the workplace.

Young people who lack consistent access to a computer are at risk of falling behind academically and in their workplace readiness.

Of those who do have access to a learning device, many have shared access only, meaning they have to fit around the needs and demands of others when going online.

- Of the 14% of young people who share their access to a laptop, less than half (43%) can use the device whenever they need to.
- Of the 38% of young people who share their access to a desktop computer, around a third can use it when needed.

Around 600,000, including 250,000 aged 14 and above, don’t have any access to a learning device, even at school or in the workplace, hampering their academic success, workplace readiness, and overall potential. There is a real risk these young people will not fulfil their potential due to the digital divide.

“... Make sure that there’s a minimum standard where young people feel like they almost have a right to access the Internet if it is for school related purposes or if it is for accessing government services so that they don’t get left behind because they don’t have the access that they need to succeed.” Female, 14-17 years, Metro NSW

“University has made a phone essential. One time, I forgot my phone at home and couldn’t log into any of the systems without its 2FA code [two factor authentication]. Maybe they have accessible or affordable options, but I haven’t heard of them.” Aisha, 20, Youth Advisory Council

Amber, 21

Youth Advisory Council member

Navigating school and post-school without access would be so difficult. So much of tertiary education is online. The challenge of submitting assignments and watching lectures would be difficult. I knew someone who got a scholarship to go to a private school – but could not afford a laptop.

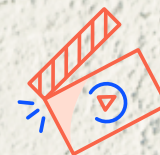


Youth Advisory Council summary: Access



The Council understands how the digital divide significantly impacts young people, challenging widespread assumptions about universal youth access to technology. Through firsthand experiences, we acknowledge how unreliable connectivity can affect rural areas and locations near major cities. As technology transitions from luxury to necessity in education, we know that universities require two-factor authentication and conduct assessments primarily online. Students without reliable access face escalating challenges in developing crucial digital skills and completing basic educational tasks. Some schools are even forced to limit technology integration due to these inequalities. Beyond education, this divide affects social connections and family relationships, making digital access critical for young people to fully participate in modern society, especially during crises and for maintaining international connections.

Summary written by Vetaka, 19, Youth Advisory Council member





Connectivity

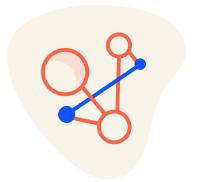


...being connected through digital technologies and communications platforms is absolutely essential in the development of a digital world we live in today. No matter where we are in Australia, especially in regional and rural communities, we should have reliable access to connectivity.

Bailey, 16, Youth Advisory Council member



Connectivity: indispensable in modern life



Key Findings

Connectivity was the second lowest-scoring pillar in the Australian Youth Digital Index and for young people their connectivity is impacted by a mix of things (including parental restrictions – see wellbeing section).

Most young people have access to Wi-Fi at home (94%), and for 80% this is the type of internet connection they use most frequently.

Almost one million young people (16% or approximately 978,000) use mobile data as their main way to connect to the Internet – often a more costly method than home broadband.

Connection quality was a problem for 7% of young people, while 27% said there were some things they couldn't do online due to limits in mobile data allowance, and 34% reported this was the case because of slow or no internet.

The Connectivity score measures how young people connect online (i.e. broadband or mobile data) and how much this is inhibited by data limits, speed or quality of connection. The overall Connectivity score for young Australians is 66.

“It’s crucial to be able to connect with others on the internet as it allows for people to find new opportunities and grow as individuals”
Aadyant, 15 Youth Advisory Council

For certain groups, the Connectivity score was markedly lower. For example, young people with a physical health condition or disability had an index score of 61, while low income households also recorded a lower score (see page 21).

Mode of Connection

Nearly all (94%) of the surveyed young people have home broadband, and four in five (81%) agree that their home Wi-Fi is good quality – 80% said this was the method they most frequently used to connect to the internet.

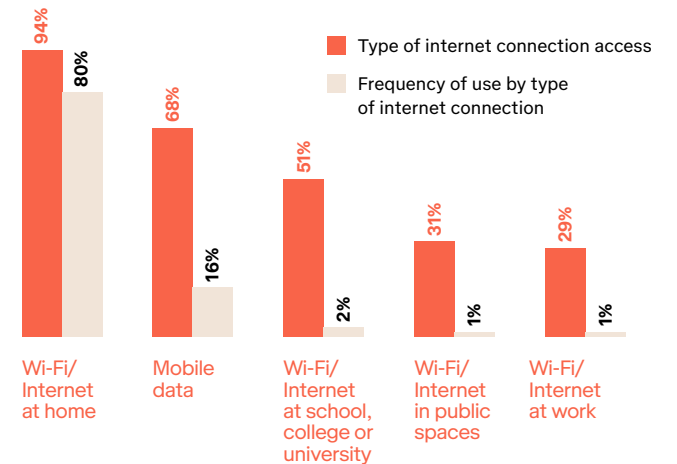
“Very easy. I always have my phone and my laptop with me. I have data on my phone so I can access Internet whenever I need.” Young person, Female, 18-25 years, Metro VIC.

Close to 250,000 young people (4%) use connections supplied by others as their most frequent method of going online. This includes their education provider, workplace and internet in public spaces such as libraries and shopping centres.

The Connectivity score varies slightly depending on gender and age. It is significantly higher for girls (70) compared to boys (62), which may be influenced by the greater use of devices for gaming by boys, potentially more impacted by connection quality and limits.

Figure 4: Type of internet connection

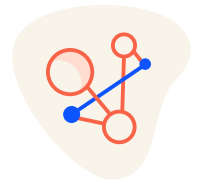
Qa: What types of internet connection do you have access to?
Qb: Which type of connection do you use most frequently?
Think of which you spend most time connected to. Base: All 4,718



Abbey, 18
Youth Advisory Council member

Growing up, I was 20 minutes outside Brisbane and we didn't have NBN. It was really difficult not having access to data for the 9 years I lived there.

Connectivity: indispensable in modern life Continued



Online Activity

Of the young people who had access to a device, most (94%) used their smartphone to get online at least daily, with more than half (52%) using it 'almost all the time'.

Satisfaction with Internet Connection

Data allowance limits, together with slow internet, weighed on the Connectivity index.

"Since we're out in the country, sometimes we don't get very good Internet. So it really depends on the weather. When it's super overcast, we don't get very much Internet and that often takes that whole day that I can't go online. It is quite annoying because obviously there's things I need to do online like you know check emails and also of course my school work [participant is home-schooled] ... it just, you know comes and goes in different parts of the house."
Female, 14-17 years, Rural SA

A quarter (27%) of young people say there are some things they can't do online due to limits to their mobile data allowance, 22% said limits to broadband allowance constrained their activity and a third of young people say there are some things they can't do online because of slow or no internet.

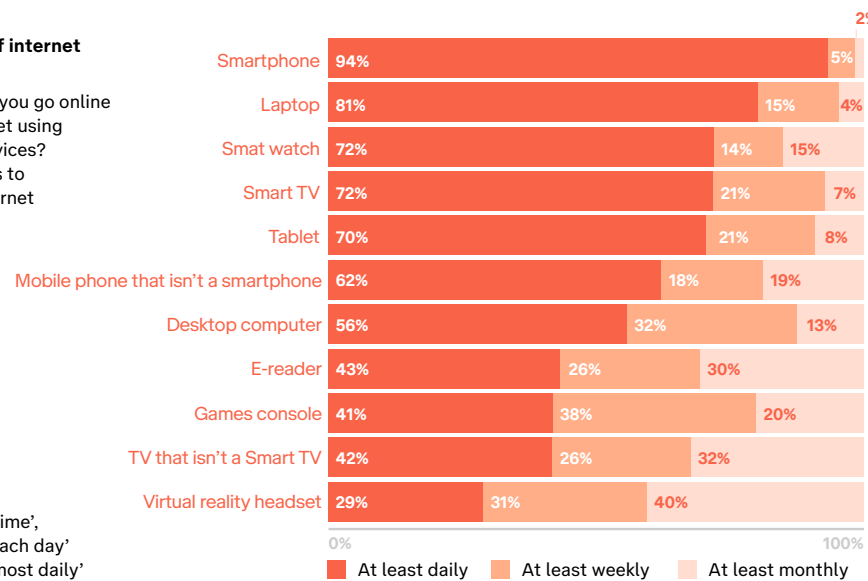
"It's vital to have easy access to technology in the ecosystem that we live in. I have grandparents in India that I enjoy talking to however sometimes it's hard to talk to them due to the restricted access to the internet." Aadyant, 15 Youth Advisory Council

One in ten young people said they had no quiet space at home to go online, while more than a third (37%) said their school could do more to help them have better access to the internet.

"Even getting a 2 step verification code like you sometimes get when you go to log into things can create a nightmare for people (with poor connection)".
Young person, Male, 18-25 years, Metro QLD

Figure 5: Type of internet connection

Q: How often do you go online or use the internet using the following devices?
Base: Has access to a device and internet n=4,263

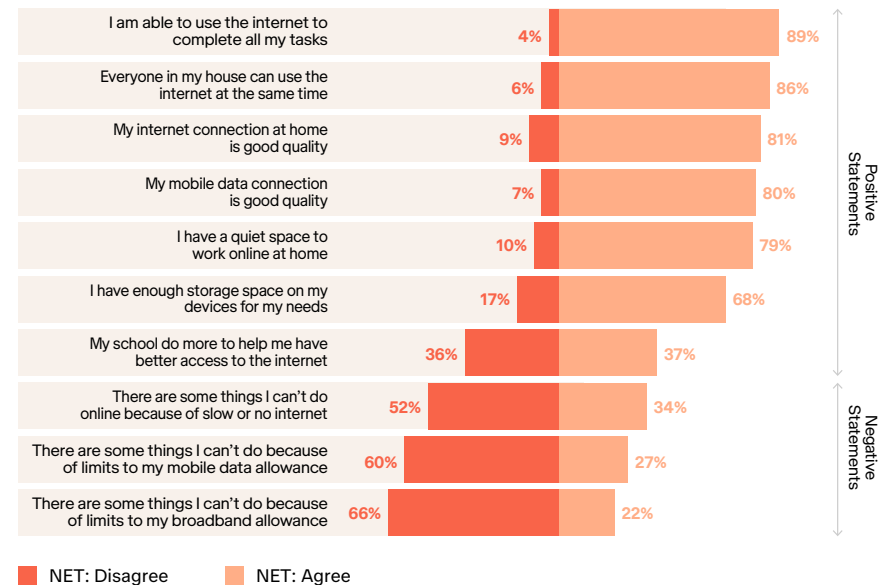


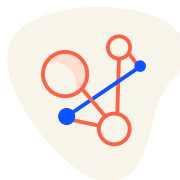
*Net measure: combination of 'Almost all the time', 'Several times each day' and 'Daily or almost daily'

Note: The percentages in this table may add up to more or less than 100% due to rounding. When individual percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number, the sum of these rounded values may not equal 100%.

Figure 6: Satisfaction with internet connection

Q: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: n=4,704





Connectivity case study

The importance of online community

Sarah is a 24-year-old LGBTQIA+ identifying woman living in Melbourne. She currently works at a library and is preparing for her PhD application after completing her Honours degree in Sociology. She has a deep interest in women's football which has been enhanced due to her involvement in online communities who share the same interest.

Sarah uses social media platforms such as Twitter (X) or Facebook to engage with other fans of women's football.

Growing up, Sarah was careful which content she engaged with online or searched for on Google because she didn't want people to know her online activity included 'figuring out' her sexuality. She was concerned that if she posted anything related to her queer identity on social media she would be met with homophobic comments from strangers online.

When figuring out her identity, Sarah said that she would take online quizzes, read fanfiction online, and watch YouTube videos and content creators who were making content about being gay. Doing these things helped her navigate and understand the way she was feeling.

The internet was a gateway for her to understand things about herself that people in her real life couldn't help her understand or explain to her.

"I think now more than ever because the [queer] communities are so much bigger, but [even] back then the Internet was such a big part of how you come to understand your identity because most of us don't know queer people, at least when I was growing up."

Sarah felt particularly grateful that being able to connect with other queer people online also played a big part in connecting her with other women's football fans.

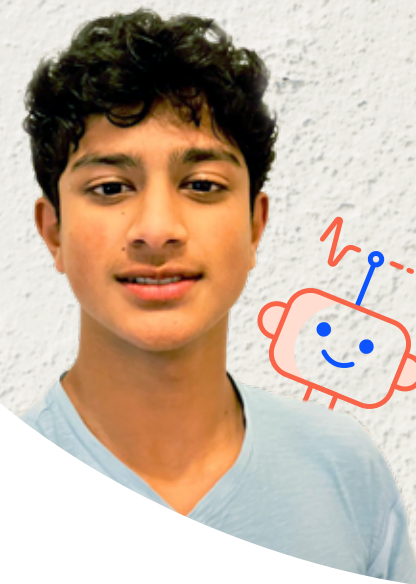
"So I think to have the online access is just so, so crucial because it's representation, it's community, it's understanding your culture and your history, which you don't have anyone maybe in your life to communicate it to you."

Aditya, 15

Youth Advisory Council member



I have a friend who doesn't have Snap and the messaging platforms we all use. But, he can't get it ... and so it's hard to connect with friends. I went to China and realised they were not using the platforms that we use. So, if friends move countries – it can be hard to connect.



Connectivity: indispensable in modern life Continued



Connectivity spotlight

Priced out of progress – cost of living crunch takes toll

There is a clear connection between household income and digital inclusion, with young people from lower-income families facing greater barriers to accessing and using technology effectively. With the current cost of living crisis, however, it is not only those in the lowest income brackets that are affected.

Eighteen per cent of young people reported that rising costs have prevented them from replacing a broken device, leaving them with outdated or inadequate equipment. One in eight (13%) had to change or cancel their internet plan due to cost of living pressures, a figure that rises to 19% in households earning less than \$50,000 per year.

Young people from low-income households often have lower digital skills and struggle with tasks like using the internet to solve problems, making online purchases, or navigating virtual work environments like Microsoft Teams. They are also less likely to learn these skills from family members or through school programs and feel less confident and less safe online compared to their peers from higher-income households.

“A lot of the young people I’m working with up here [there is] a lot of poverty... some [young people] have a shared phone that goes around families and they might have it at the time. And it depends on how much credit. Most of them don’t use computers. It’s all phone-based internet access, I would say.” Social Worker, Community Service Organisation, Northern Territory

The cost of devices is a major barrier to access, with 29% of those without a laptop and 22% of those without a desktop computer citing affordability as a key issue.

The data suggests there is a need for more support to ensure that all young people, regardless of income, have the tools and skills needed to thrive in a digital world.

Figure 7: Connectivity score by income

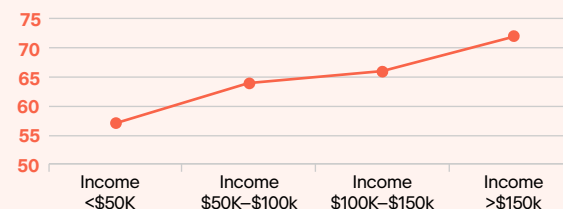
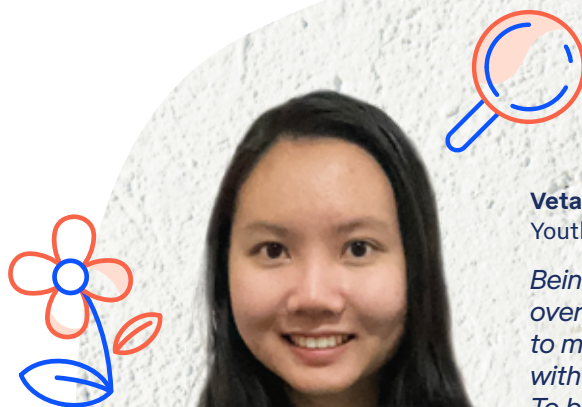
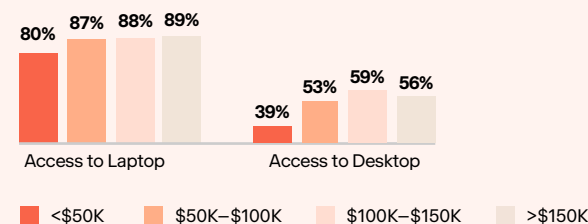


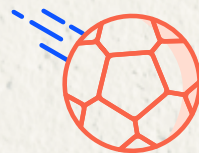
Figure 8: Access to education device by income



Vetaka, 19
Youth Advisory Council member

Being able to connect with my family while I am overseas and while they are overseas is so special to me. It allows me to be a part of their life, celebrate with them and share events occurring in our lives. To be able to chat, organise and catch up with friends and peers is also rewarding.”

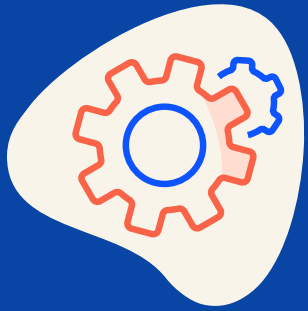
Youth Advisory Council summary: Connectivity



As young people, we recognise that digital connectivity is a fundamental part of modern life, not an optional luxury. However, when facing financial stress, internet and data plans are often the first expenses cut, despite their importance. This creates significant challenges, particularly in education, where online platforms are essential for assignments, lectures, and academic success. As shared through personal experiences, platforms like social media enable young people to find youth councils (like the Telstra Foundation YAC) that aren't readily available in person, fostering a sense of belonging and exposure to diverse perspectives nationwide. Digital access also maintains vital family connections across distances and enables social relationships. However, this digital dependence has created a generational gap, with younger people who seamlessly transitioned into the digital age and those in older generations struggling to connect. We also recognise the complexity of managing online access, suggesting that complete content restriction can be counterproductive, potentially leading to riskier behaviours.



Summary written by Vetaka, 19, Youth Advisory Council member



Skills

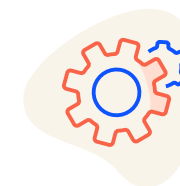


A key skill is adaptability. We need to be able to work across all the changes and new apps and new platforms. Our ability to 'learn how to learn' in the technology space is fundamental.

Vetaka, 19, Youth Advisory Council



Skills: building capabilities with an eye on the future



Key Findings

Young people are showing strong skills in using devices for schoolwork, with 78% indicating they do not need help in this area. A similar proportion found it easy to use the internet to solve problems (80%) and three quarters found it easy to read or view documents sent online or to access a virtual work environment.

More than half of young people (58%) want a job that uses advanced digital skills.

Discussions with young people revealed they often are asked to provide tech support to their parents and family members.

Technology-related jobs are more appealing to boys and young people from major cities. However most survey respondents recognised digital skills would be important whatever career they chose, with three quarters (75%) agreeing that digital skills are essential for their future career.

The qualitative findings also revealed that boys and girls have varying opinions on what a career using digital skills would be. Boys were more likely to associate it with a career in IT helpdesk whereas girls thought about careers related to digital marketing or editing.

The Skills score measures how well young people can complete digital tasks for school or work, and how they learnt digital skills. The overall Skills score for young people in Australia is 69.

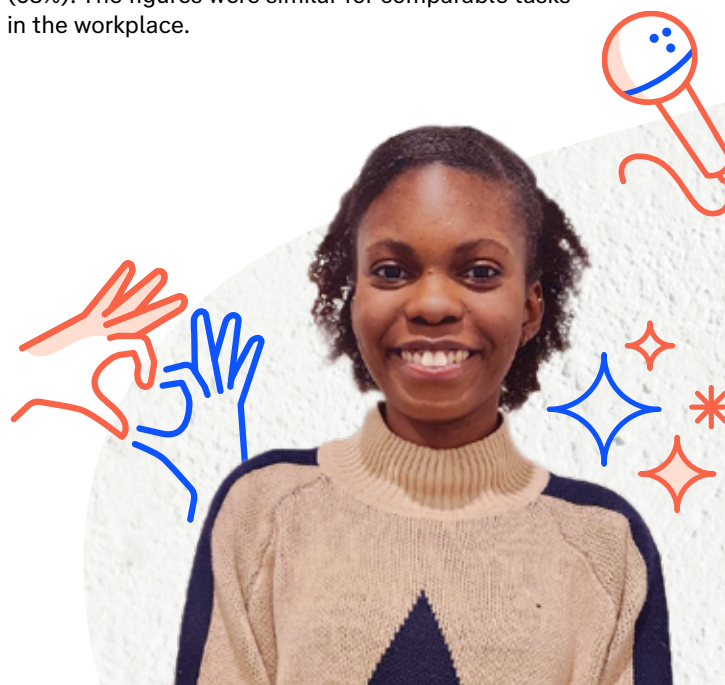
Having digital skills and confidence in using technology are crucial for active engagement in society. In education and work, these skills are essential for accessing information, collaborating on projects, and performing tasks efficiently. Young people also recognised that most careers will have some incorporation of digital technology and that a basic understanding of how to use it is integral regardless of the industry.

For those still at school, four in five (78%) find it easy to use the internet to help with schoolwork, with girls more likely to feel capable than boys (83% to 73%). Three quarters (74%) find it easy to read or view documents that their teacher sends them, and seven in ten (70%) find it easy to send schoolwork to their teachers by email or chat, communicate with their teachers by email or chat if they need help, and to access a virtual classroom or lesson (68%). The figures were similar for comparable tasks in the workplace.

Without exception, girls found tasks easier than boys at school and in the workplace. Ability also tended to increase with age.

Nevertheless there were a few personal skills where boys found tasks easier than girls. This was particularly the case when it came to fixing a problem with either the device itself or the connection, but also in making a change to online content created by others or using AI programs to assist with tasks.

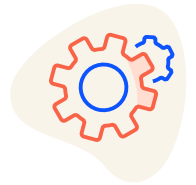
While overall only 45% found using AI easy, and a quarter (25%) said they can't or don't use AI programs to help with school or work at all, there was a sharp increase in competence between the youngest cohort (20% easy) and the older groups (58%-60% easy).



Rispah, 17
Youth Advisory Council member

I think skills can be defined in many ways when it comes to technology. Whether it be showing your grandparents how to set up an account or using tech to assist you in homework, almost anything can be classified as a skill."

Skills: building capabilities with an eye on the future Continued



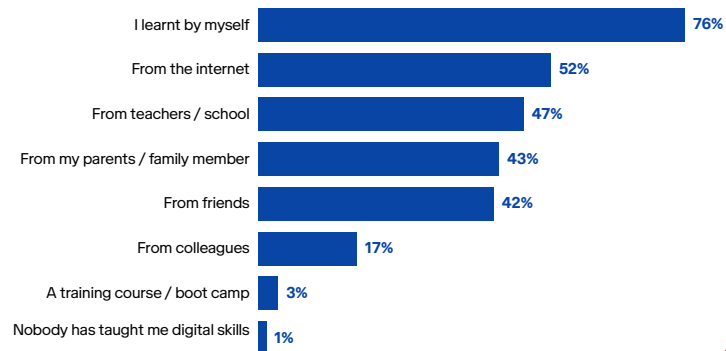
The main drag on the Skills index reflected how young people learnt digital skills. Less than half (47%) agree that their teachers/school taught them digital skills. Only two in five (43%) young people feel they were taught digital skills by their parents or family. Instead, young people are most likely to learn digital skills on their own (85%), either by themselves (76%) or from the internet (52%) rather than learning from someone they know (55%).

Three quarters of young people agreed that digital skills are essential for their future career, and more than half (58%) would like to have a career that uses advanced digital skills. Boys and young people living in major cities were more likely to express an interest in a career using digital skills than girls and those in regional and remote areas.

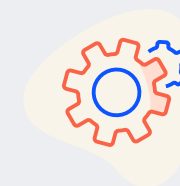
The Skills score varies depending on gender, age, and location. Girls (72) have a significantly higher Skills score than boys (66), and 8-13-year-olds (64) have a significantly lower Skills score compared to other age groups (14-17-year-olds: 75, 18-25-year-olds: 70). Young people from major cities in Australia (70) have a higher Skills score compared to young people from regional/remote areas (66).

Figure 9: Learning digital skills

Q: How did you learn digital skills? Base size: n=4718



Skills: building capabilities with an eye on the future Continued



Skills spotlight

Role reversal – digital natives schooling their parents on tech

There has been a noticeable generational shift, with young people now teaching their parents digital skills rather than the other way around. As digital natives, they have grown up immersed in technology and often possess a deeper understanding of how to use it effectively and navigate potential pitfalls. Focus group discussions revealed many parents now rely on their children for ‘tech support’, from troubleshooting connectivity issues to adjusting settings on their smart phones and avoiding scams.

This shift is also evident in how young people acquire digital skills, with young people empowered by their own resourcefulness. Fewer than half (47%) say they learned these skills from teachers or school, and only 43% feel their parents or family taught them how to navigate technology. Instead, most young people take a self-taught approach – 85% say they learn digital skills on their own, with 76% figuring things out independently and 52% turning to the internet for guidance.

Rather than relying on someone they know, today’s young people are taking control of their digital education, including learning skills for digital careers. This reversal of roles highlights how adept young people have become with technology, and their willingness to take responsibility for bringing others on the journey.

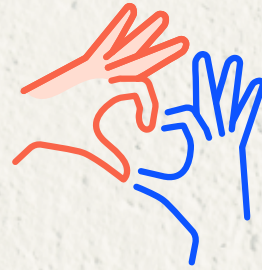
“Instead of Googling it, they ask me.” Young person, Male, 14-17 years, Metro NSW

“I found that I had to educate my parents...because they didn’t grow up with technology like we did. My mum’s had the phone call scam, hacked into the computer things and I had to go mum... you can’t do that. ... I felt like as the kid I was teaching my parents online safety.” Young person, Female, 18-25 years

“The impact of removal of 3G on my grandparents. Unless you have a techie person in your life – technology transitions are really difficult.” Victoria, 18, Youth Advisory Council

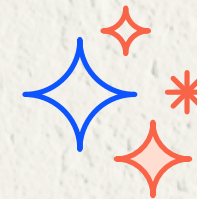
“My siblings had to teach themselves a lot, and I offered them support from my friends – instead of my parents. Which is why I think tech literacy is so important.” Abbey, 18, Youth Advisory Council

Youth Advisory Council summary: Skills



Digital technology literacy is so important for our world and young people will always be at the forefront of familiarity with new technology. We grow up adapting to the advancements in technology which left our parents and grandparents behind. The rapid growth of digital tech is not something to fear or lock up because it is inevitable that we will interact with it somewhere, and it is important that we are prepared with the skills and experience to handle it effectively. That is why we should respect young people's access to digital technology. Education is a far more potent tool for digital skills and safety than censorship.

Summary written by Aisha, 20, Youth Advisory Council member





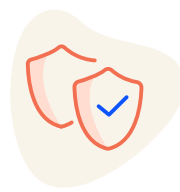
Safety



It is essential that all young people have the right to feel safe in their ideal digital world, feeling safe is being comfortable in who you are truly without feeling the world is against you, having a positive experience without negativity, having reliable access to support services and digital protection organisations

Bailey, 16, Youth Advisory Council member

Safety: knowing the risks and building skills to deal with them



Key Findings

Nearly all young people feel safe online (94%); say they understand what online safety means (92%) and most know where to find support if they need it.

The top online safety concern for young people is being targeted by scams or hackers, consistent with government and eSafety research. This finding was supported by both the quantitative and qualitative elements of the research.

Young people are most likely to learn online safety on their own, either by themselves or from the internet. Discussions also revealed that most young people attribute their online safety skills to personal experience.

Four in five (78%) related online safety to protecting their data or their device compared with a quarter (26%) to protecting themselves from strangers or online harassment.

Of all safety risks, young people are least likely to be confident dealing with cases of fraud and identity theft.

Some differences between boys and girls also emerged in the qualitative findings – boys were more worried about being scammed financially through links promising them freebies and girls were more concerned about their physical safety so were cautious about signing up for anything that might track their location.

In terms of social media platform access, age ratings have very little impact on whether young people under the platform's age limits can access the platforms.

Nearly two in five young people have experienced unsafe sexual content, 35% have experienced fake news or mis/dis information online and 30% have experienced hate speech online. Exposure to unsafe content increases with age.

The top online safety concern for young people is being targeted by scams or hackers (44%), consistent with government and eSafety research.

Results for many components of the Safety score were high. Nearly all young people feel safe online and their awareness of a range of safety risks is high, including with new technologies such as AI bias and false information.



Isaac, 13
Youth Advisory Council member

My brother just doesn't add anyone he doesn't know, just swipes them off and just declines them, and that is what I learnt from my brother.



Safety: knowing the risks and building skills to deal with them Continued



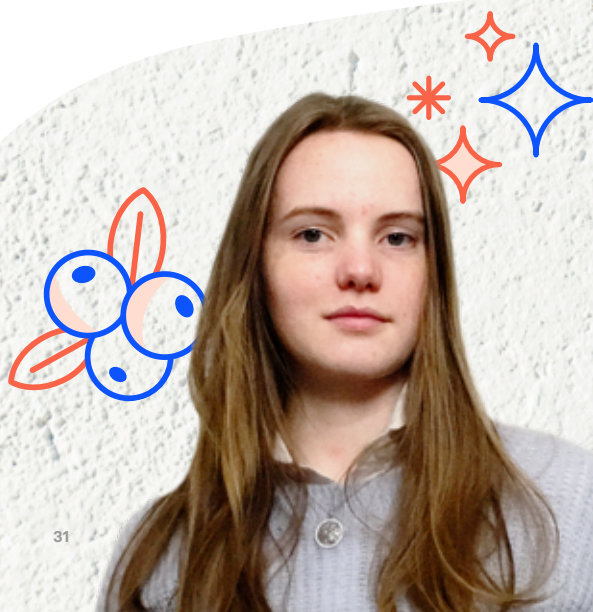
Figure 10: Awareness of online safety risk

Q: Before today, were you aware of the following? Base: All n=4,718

Online safety risk	Total aware	Male	Female	8–3 years-olds	14–17 year-olds	18–25 year-olds
That my passwords and personal information need to be kept safely as they have value to others	93%	91%	96%	90%	98%	94%
That I must not share other people's data online without their consent	89%	87%	91%	81%	94%	93%
That others can capture and use my data and that I can protect and secure my personal data against such threats through privacy settings	82%	83%	80%	65%	89%	91%
That my online activity can produce a permanent record which could be accessed by others and used both now and in the future	81%	81%	80%	63%	90%	90%
That Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems can be biased, discriminate, or provide false information	73%	77%	69%	49%	82%	88%

A significant negative impact on the Safety score was the level of contact with unsafe online content. Only 28% of young people indicated they had never experienced anything upsetting online. Half (50%) of young people said they had been exposed to scams, two-in-five (39%) had been exposed to sexual content, and 35% mentioned fake news, misinformation or disinformation.

There was no category of unsafe content that the majority had experienced, but when looked at together we can see that unsafe content is a major element of young people's online experience. Figure 11 on the next page shows the level of interaction young people have with different forms of unsafe content, together with their confidence in dealing with it. Young people are least confident dealing with fraud/identity theft (69%), which is concerning given the frequency with which young people experience scams, and the likelihood of encountering schemes aimed at stealing personal data.



Aisha, 20
Youth Advisory Council member

Adults are really scared about child predators online and I'm not denying that's a concern but statistically children are more likely to be hurt by someone they know. Framing social media and the internet as a dangerous place full of people with bad intentions and banning it is not helpful. Social media can be harmful but it can also be a really positive experience full of lovely, caring people. We need a careful and positive way to educate young people about the harms of social media and the internet while acknowledging and respecting their benefits.



Safety: knowing the risks and building skills to deal with them Continued



Figure 11: Dealing with unsafe online content

Qa: Have you ever seen or experienced any of the following while online? Base: All n=4,718
 Qb: How confident are you dealing with the following?

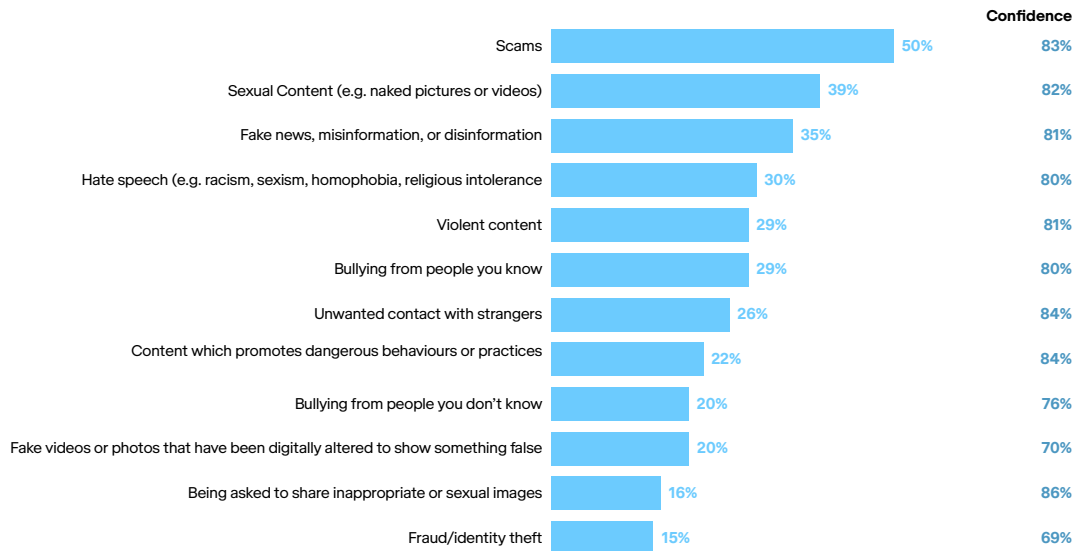
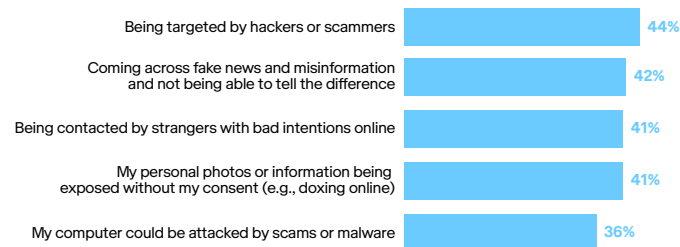


Figure 12: When asked about their online safety concern, young people most frequently mentioned:

Q: Thinking about your everyday experience online, from the list below – please select all issues that worry you.
 Base: All n=4,718



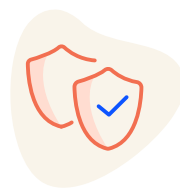
The five areas of concern listed in figure 12 consistently rated highly across age groups, although there were a few key differences:

- 14-17-year-olds showed the most concern around hackers/scammers (47%) but had the same top five concerns as the broader group.

“Safety can be hard to navigate when online. There are so many factors we have to take into account like who gets access to our page and what we choose to share. Social media is a large tool that Gen Z use to share their lives with friends and strangers. So sometimes I think the line between what should be kept private versus appropriate information gets blurred.” Rispah, 17, Youth Advisory Council

- 8-13-year-olds were most concerned about strangers with bad intentions (53%), and a different area, “being cyberbullied or harassed”, was second most-concerning (45%). They were noticeably less concerned about fake news and misinformation (30%).
- In contrast to the youngest group, 18-25-year-olds expressed greatest concern about fake news and misinformation (52%) and were noticeably less concerned about being cyberbullied or harassed (21%). Instead, the concern that someone could access personal information and steal their identity (38%) made it into their ‘top five’.

Safety: knowing the risks and building skills to deal with them Continued



Exposure to unsafe content online increases with age. For example 18-25-year-olds are much more likely than 8-13-year-olds to be exposed to content such as fake news and hate speech. There were also differences between genders. Girls were significantly more likely to be exposed to unsafe online content than boys across most types of content, particularly scams, unwanted contact with strangers and being asked to share inappropriate or sexual images. Girls were also significantly less likely to feel confident dealing with unsafe online content.

Experience of unsafe content also varied by ethnicity. Overall 29% of young people said they had experienced bullying online from someone they knew, however this figure was significantly higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (44%) and also higher for those of European descent (35%), while significantly lower for those of Chinese descent (20%). Indigenous young people also reported a much higher exposure to unwanted contact from strangers (39% compared with 26% overall).

Results for how young people learnt about internet safety also lowered the Safety score. As with digital skills, safety skills were more likely learned independently (including via the internet) (71%) rather than from family/social connections (56%) or teachers/ community (49%). However there were differences across the age groups, with independent learning more common in older groups and learning from adults more common for primary-aged children.

Many young people share parents' concerns about younger children being online, especially as some acknowledged that it was not difficult for children to lie about their age so they could create social media accounts.

The data showed that age limits on popular social media platforms have very little impact on whether young people access these platforms. All platforms are being used by young people who are under the age rating. This suggests that children or their parents/guardians are either unaware of the age rating, are not concerned or aware, or have decided that the benefits of using the platform outweighs the risks – perhaps allowing use with close monitoring.

Finally, the Index was particularly impacted by the perspective of the 8-13-year-olds cohort – this age group have a significantly lower Safety score (70) compared to other age groups (14-17: 84, 18-25: 81). Unsurprisingly, primary-aged children find it much harder to use safety features (such as muting, blocking or reporting users) and privacy settings, or to recognise suspicious links and secure websites, than young people in high school and above.



I'm more worried for the younger kids... I feel like I can just report it and skip over it, but younger kids could actually be affected by it.

Young person, Female, 14-17 years



She had a friend and then I think her [friends] brother sent her a message saying 'send some photos of your boobs'. [She] came and told me straight away, so it's something we dealt with. And then obviously, you know, had a big chat around that. That was definitely the right thing to do."

Parent with Young person, 8-13 years, Female, Regional WA



If it's insanely serious, then I'm definitely going to go to [mum].

Parent with Young person, 8-13 years, Female, Metro WA

Safety: knowing the risks and building skills to deal with them Continued



Safety spotlight

Scams and hackers top concern

Young people are aware of the safety risks they face online, but many are still developing the skills to manage them effectively. Scams, phishing attempts, and personal safety are particularly concerning to this generation. Young people understand the potential permanence of their actions online, which makes them more cautious about what they share, post, or engage with. This awareness is a positive step towards safer online behaviours, but developing additional skills to manage risks is essential as they spend increasing amounts of time online.

Most young people are aware of that their passwords and personal information needs to be kept safe (93%), but only 71% find it easy keeping their information online secure. Similarly, while four in five (82%) young people were aware that others can capture and use their data and that they can protect their personal data through privacy settings, less than two thirds (64%) found it easy to use privacy settings on their social media or other accounts. However, the ability to protect themselves increased significantly between the youngest cohort and those aged 14 and above.

“With [digital technology] advancing..., it’s just going to get more and more difficult to protect your identity because programs, features and technology are just getting harder to use and people are getting more sophisticated with it. They’re learning new ways just to trick you into sharing your information with them.” Female, 14-17 years

“... it could come back to bite you if you say something you regret later. So being a good person online helps avoid you...behaving in ways that could potentially hurt you down the track.” Male, 14-17 years

“If you did do bad stuff on the Internet, you don’t know how it’s going to affect someone and it could affect someone really badly.” Female, 18-25 years

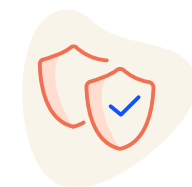
“You see a lot of predators online and so having digital skills to know what to post, what not to post, where to go, what not to access is very important. Like [not] posting your school uniform online live and having the skills to determine if this person is contacting you because they actually know you in the outside world versus if they’re a predator.” Female, 18-25 years

“Turning your location off for Snapchat ... I don’t think I’ve ever had mine on, but it’s gotten to the point where if someone has their location on, you can click ‘move to their location’ and you can see the exact address they’re at and it will tell you how long it will take to get there, the steps, kind of everything.” Female, 18-25 years

“...being able to identify bias in the media and being able to identify, especially in the current year, suddenly you have all these AI images and you have, you know, a bunch of content that you can’t trust and being able to go, cool, do I trust this content?” Female, 18-25 years

“I think a massive problem with algorithms is that ... these people just see the same thing that they want to see and it validates their own one world view ... So it’s constantly an echo chamber of validating what they want to see and what they believe.” Female, 18-25 years

Safety: Scams and hackers top concern Continued



Safety case study

More than a device: safety implications for family violence situations

As part of our qualitative survey work, we spoke to community youth workers working with vulnerable young people.

Social workers noted that for those experiencing family violence, being able to access their phones at all times provides a sense of security as it enables them to check in on their parent and siblings. Some of these children and young people assume the role of family protector. Mobile phone bans at school were therefore a source of anxiety as these young people felt powerless to intervene if something happened to a family member during school time. Social workers also felt that school bans contributed to some instances of school refusal.

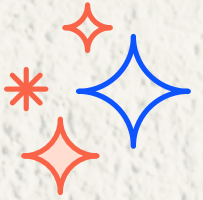
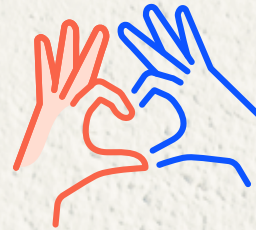
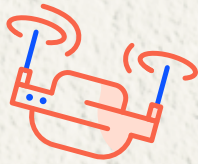
On the other hand, digital technology can increase risks for this group due to location sharing. In our qualitative discussions, professionals working primarily with children and young people with trauma backgrounds reported that an awareness of online safety was often lacking.

In part they attributed this to the children and young people's parents' (and caregivers') lack of awareness of online safety and sometimes limited capacity to understand the risks. Some parents and caregivers had not provided their children with appropriate boundaries and did not monitor their online activity, including social media use. Some parents and caregivers thought that ensuring that their child's social media profile was set to private was all that needed to be done for the child to be safe online. Some also expressed the view that because they had never felt unsafe online, their child would be fine too.

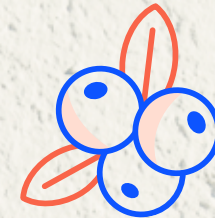
Social workers noted that parents and caregivers may assume that a child or young person using Snapchat, for example, is safe if they have blocked a person who may pose a risk. However, parents and caregivers may lack knowledge that the child or young person may inadvertently be sharing their location if they have their Snap Maps on, and this information may be shared with the person posing a risk, or that other apps may also turn on users' location services without informing them first.

“What I find interesting, having spoken to the younger kids that access Snapchat ... we talk about risks of other people contacting them. They're more concerned around say if there was a perpetrator of violence... being able to contact them than a stranger that, you know, could be just as dangerous or risky online. So they kind of go, well, you know, I've blocked so and so, so I'm safe, but not being aware of the broader picture that there are other people around that can pose a risk as well. So they blocked dad or uncle or whoever it is that was ... the child might have the Snap Maps on, which means anyone can see where they're located... And it might be the child doesn't potentially have understanding that that's even on.”
Social Worker, Community Service Organisation.

Youth Advisory Council summary: Safety



Digital offers a mode of unlimited connection. In a few taps, young people can access their friends, tune into trends, and observe global events directly as they unfold, all through their 3x8 screen. This connectivity empowers us to stay hyper-aware of their political, social, and environmental climate, with news travelling faster online than through traditional sources. But it can be a double-edged sword. It is clear how vital the internet is for information access, but sometimes young people's inability to decipher misinformation is a risk. This extends beyond basic parental fears, scams and identity theft. With the rise of rage-bait content there can be consequences. And where young people can observe the outside world, the outside world can similarly peer in. This vulnerability draws a fine line between connectivity and concern, and control of how media is used. Within evolving AI software, deepfakes and misinformation are online safety risks. Despite this, to deem the internet unsafe in its entirety is an oversimplification. With education – not just on how to navigate the interwebs safely, but how to be an upstanding “netizen”, the online world can become a better space for everyone.



Summary written by Aieshewarrya, 18, Youth Advisory Council member



Wellbeing



I use it to do drawing and sometimes to create videos. I love watching basketball videos like slam dunks, crossovers and other times I use it to express my feelings.

Isaac, 13, Youth Advisory Council member



Wellbeing: happy with time online and in control of what they see and do



Key Findings

73% of young people surveyed were generally happy with life and most (80%) young people agree that they know what it means to be a good person online.

The importance of technology in young people's lives to stay connected with friends, for entertainment, and as a tool for school and work is clear.

Many young people highlighted positive aspects of their experience online, including 67% saying it helped them keep in touch with people and 61% saying social media is a positive experience for them.

Young people were generally happy with the amount of time they spent online (time spent, increases with age) and generally feel in control of what they see and do online. Entertainment activities, such as watching TV/movies or short videos, listening to music or playing games, were the activities young people said they conducted most online.

However, nearly two in five young people – equivalent to nearly 2.2 million individuals – said being online negatively affected the sleep they got.

Just over half (56%) of primary and secondary aged young people said they have parental limits in place regarding how much time they can spend on their device.

Young people also confirmed their preference for talking to someone in real life for advice, rather than seeking advice online.

The Wellbeing score is higher for young people living in major cities in Australia (53) compared to those living in regional/remote areas (50).

The Wellbeing score covers how young people feel about different aspects of their life in general and the impact that being online has on their life. Young people largely see technology as having a positive or neutral impact on their lives – one third say the effect is negative, with impact on sleep a key concern. The overall Wellbeing score for young Australians is 52.

While the Wellbeing index recorded the lowest index score of all pillars, this is partly due to the index construction which allowed for young people who were ambivalent about the issue to select that response. The index score includes a number of questions around the level of positive impact of technology but does not take account of the significant number of respondents (usually well over a third) who described the impact as neutral. Given an ambivalent 'no impact' response does not suggest a lowering of wellbeing, consideration will be given in future editions of the Index to how this is composed.

The Wellbeing pillar explored how the use of their devices and internet impacted their physical, mental and sleep health. Young people ranked mental health impacts as the lowest negative health impact of the three with the majority of young people stating being online is either positive for their mental health (36%) or had no impact on their mental health (41%).

Regarding impact on relationships, young people highlighted that their device and internet usage had more negative impact on their family relationships (13%) than on their relationships with friends (4%). 73% of young people agree they can build respectful relationships online and 79% agree they can communicate effectively online. 69% believe the people they engage with online behave well, with 5% disagreeing. Only 8% of young people *disagree* or *strongly disagree* that social media is a positive experience for them.

There are also encouraging signs about young people's ability to control what they see and do online and their awareness of negative impacts of some aspects of technology use. This suggests that, if equipped with the right skills and knowledge, young people will be able to improve how they engage with technology to maximise the benefits and minimise any detriment.



Bailey, 16
Youth Advisory Council member

The internet is where you are figuring out who you are.



Wellbeing: happy with time online and in control of what they see and do Continued

Time Spent Online

Young people report spending significant time on devices. This is consistent with the important role technology now plays in education, entertainment, work and social connection.

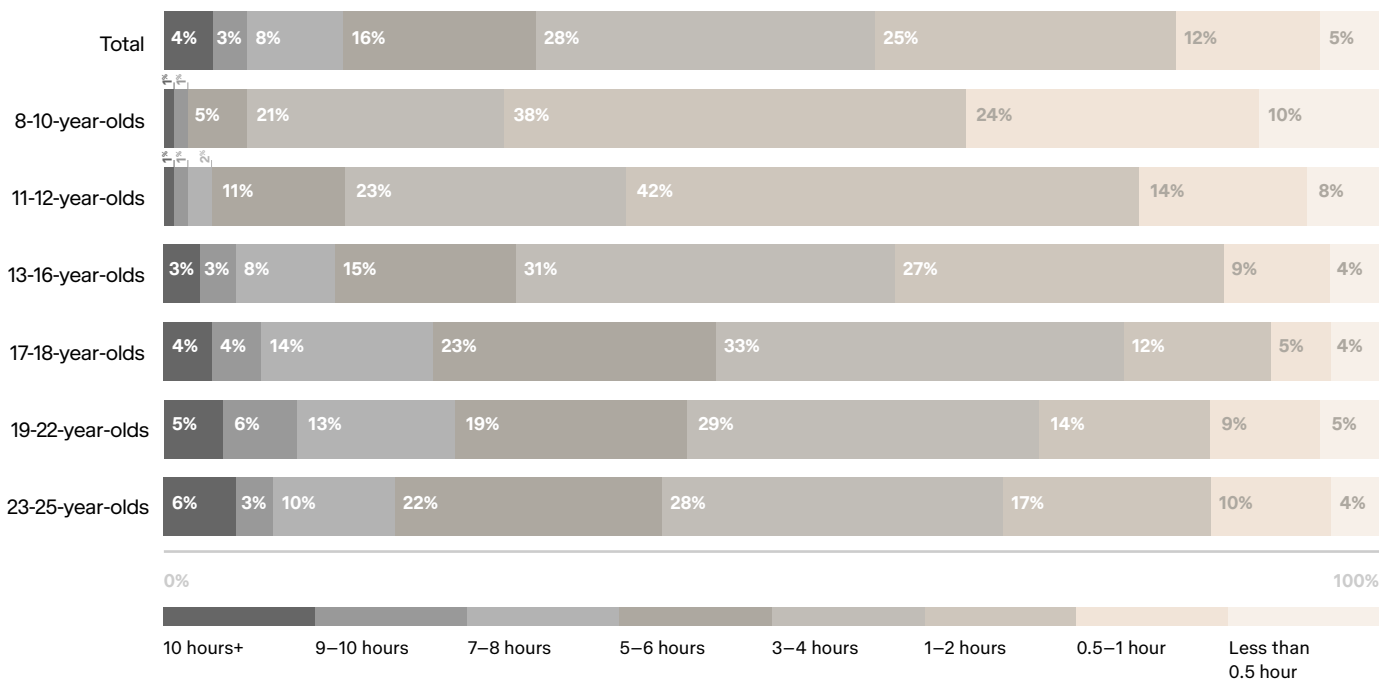
Young people spend more time online on weekends than weekdays, spending an average of 3.6 hours online on weekdays and 4.5 hours daily on weekends. The time online increases with age, likely reflecting a decrease in parental

controls and an increase in the use of technology in schooling and the workplace. The data shows 5% of young people spend more than 10 hours on devices on a typical weekend day.

Girls are more likely than boys to spend between 5-10+ hours online on an average weekday (girls: 34%, boys: 26%) and an average weekend day (girls: 49%, boys: 38%). Boys at high school are more likely than girls to have parental limits in place regarding how much time they can spend online, which could contribute to these differences.

Figure 12: Weekday time online by age

Q: How much time do you think you spend on your devices on a typical weekday?



Note: The percentages in this table may add up to more or less than 100% due to rounding. When individual percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number, the sum of these rounded values may not equal 100%.

Wellbeing: happy with time online and in control of what they see and do Continued



Entertainment activities, such as watching TV/movies or short videos, listening to music or playing games, were the activities young people said they conducted most online. Of those using devices to watch short videos, chat by text or browse material posted by others, around three-quarters were doing so every day (71%, 79%, 77% respectively).

In contrast, while watching movies was the most popular use, with 67% reporting doing this, less than half of those (48%) would do so every day.

18-25-year-olds were the most active users of devices for nearly all activities listed below, however 8-13-year-olds were significantly more likely to use their device to play games online and watch others play games online.

Figure 13: Online activities and frequency

Qa: What do you typically spend time using your devices for? Base: All n=4,718
 Qb: How often do you do the following tasks online? Base: Uses device for online tasks n=3,279

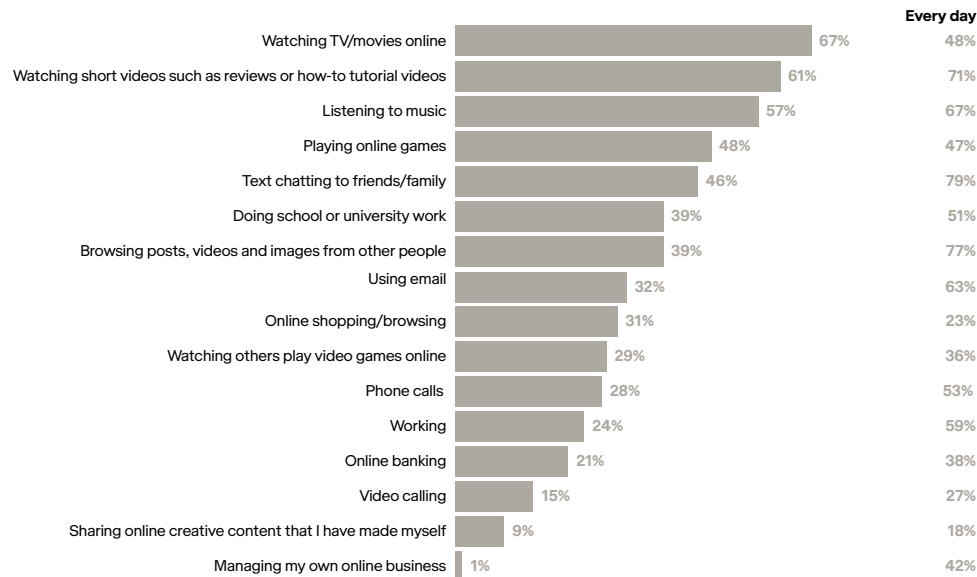
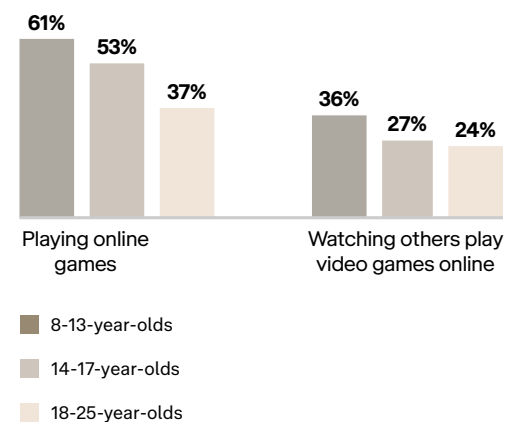


Figure 14: Online activities by age

Q: What do you typically spend time using your devices for? Base: All n=4,718



Wellbeing: happy with time online and in control of what they see and do Continued



Wellbeing Vs Technology (Impact of being online)

Two thirds (70%) young people are happy with the amount of time they spend on their digital devices and felt in control of what they see and do online (65%).

Young people say their devices are important to a range of relationships, with three in five (61%) agreeing that using social media is a positive experience for them, and 67% saying that being online helps them keep in touch with friends they would otherwise not speak to.

More than half report that use of the internet and devices had had a positive impact on relationships with friends (59%) and schoolwork (52%).

However, less than half said technology had had a positive impact on relationships with work (49%) and family (43%).

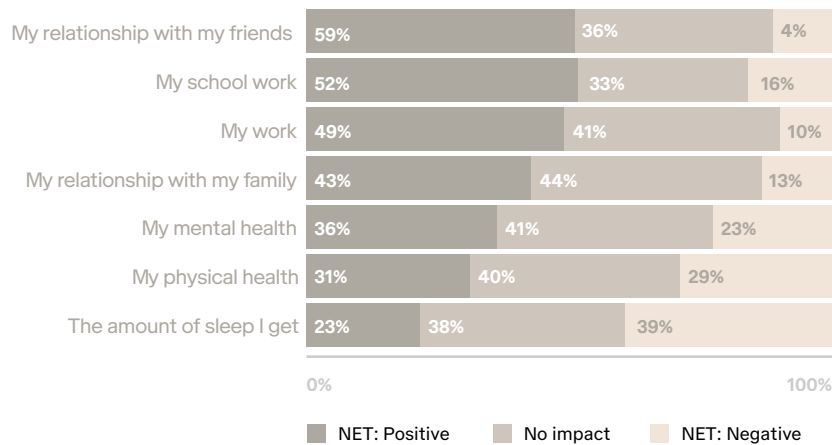
In addition, 23% said the internet has a negative impact on their mental health and more (29%) said there was a negative impact on physical health

Particularly concerning was the clear impact devices have on sleep. Nearly two in five young people – equivalent to nearly 2.2 million individuals - said being online negatively affected the sleep they got. This was the only impact discussed where the negative impact was higher than the positive impact.

“Social media can be the bane of my existence. Doom scrolling late into the night doesn’t feel good, but I keep doing it. Sometimes I think social media could be addictive like gambling. I wish social media would let me turn off the infinite scrolling feature.”
Aisha, 20, Youth Advisory Council

Figure 15: Impact of being online on other areas of life

Q: How does how you use the internet and digital devices impact other areas of your life?
Base: All n=4,718



Note: The percentages in this table may add up to more or less than 100% due to rounding. When individual percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number, the sum of these rounded values may not equal 100%.



I think a really important aspect of access that is not talked about enough is disability access. Things like alternative text and image descriptions are becoming more common on social media like Instagram, which also goes to show how social media can be so powerful, what with creating useful ‘trends’ like this.

Aisha, 20

Wellbeing: happy with time online and in control of what they see and do Continued



Satisfaction with Time Spent Online

Young people who spend less time online are more likely to be happy with the amount of time they spend online. For example, young people who spend 0-4 hours online on an average weekday were more likely to be happy with the amount of time they spend online (72%) compared to those who spend 5-10 hours a day online (55%).

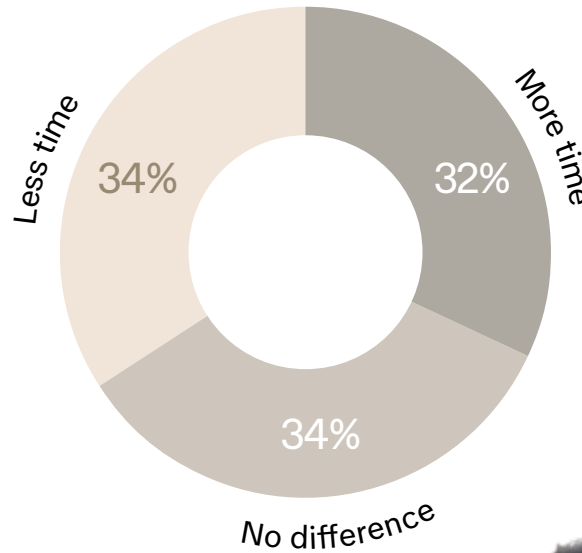
8-13-year-olds are more likely than other age groups to feel happy with the amount of time they spend online but are also much more likely to want to spend more time online. Of the youngest age group (8-13-year-olds), 74% said they have parental limits in place restricting the time they can spend on their device.

Overall, however, young people are evenly split as to whether they would prefer to spend more, less or about the same time online as currently.

Young people's relationship with technology evolves as they mature, with entertainment activities decreasing with age but use for social connection and accessing information increasing. While the youngest survey participants would like to spend longer online, older participants (especially post school) understand the risk of neglecting other aspects of their lives and are keen to find a balance in their technology use.

Figure 16: Preference for time spent online

Q: Would you like to spend more or less time on your digital devices?
Base: All n=4,718



We are the target demographic for new technology and we see it evolve around us, it still silently is for us, and even though we use it to connect with our friends – we are disconnecting from older people. Gen Z was first to seamlessly connect.

Risbah, 17, Youth Advisory Council



Aadyant, 15
Youth Advisory Council member

It's crucial to be able to connect with others on the internet as it allows for people to find new opportunities and grow as individuals.



Wellbeing: happy with time online and in control of what they see and do Continued



Young people are aware of the need to balance their digital lives with offline activities, but doing so is not always easy. Technology is woven into every part of their lives, and many of their online experiences are positive ones or necessary for their education and work. But young people also revealed how technology use was impacting their sleep, and could also have a negative impact on self-worth, health and relationships if not managed carefully.

Over half (55%) feel they've achieved a healthy balance between their online and offline worlds, and felt they knew when they needed to disconnect from being online. However, even though 65% per cent agreed they know the steps to take to get offline, they are not always implementing them: 53% said they had the discipline to stay offline when they needed to.

Young people also understand that social media algorithms are working to keep them online longer, and show strong self-awareness around how “doom scrolling” and hours online can affect other parts of their lives. The data shows that those who spend most time online are also most likely to want to reduce that time.

Young people's ability to control their online presence increases as they mature. Over 18s are much more likely to prefer being outdoors to being online (60% compared to 48% for high schoolers). They want to navigate the digital world responsibly, knowing when to engage and when to take a break.

*“I get too addicted to it at some points where I just keep and keep on scrolling and I can't get off because I want to see what's next.”
Young person, Female, 14-17 years*

“I personally sometimes can't even remember what two or three Tik Toks were about... I guess [I feel] just sort of ashamed with myself... It just feels like I'm just sort of wasting my time, not really doing anything meaningful.” Young persons, Male, 18-25 years

“... being connected [is about] maintaining a balance between being connected to the Internet and...being connected to the environment and your friends and family, because that's equally as important.” Young person, Male, 18-25 years

“If I don't have online, I get a bit stressed. And, if I do have online I have freedom to watch and do the things I want to do...” Isaac, 13, Youth Advisory Council member

*“One thing I struggle with is when I turn my phone on, deceiving myself by saying I'll only go on it for 5 minutes but then 5 minutes turns into an hour which sometimes causes me to lose sleep even after turning off my phone.”
Aadyant, 15, Youth Advisory Council member*

Wellbeing: happy with time online and in control of what they see and do Continued



Wellbeing case study

Navigating online engagement

Harry is a 17-year-old male from Sydney. He likes to play football, soccer and video games with his friends. Harry is currently completing his schooling, does refereeing and helps at his family's fish and chip shop.

As well as his other interests and after school activities, Harry has also created his own clothing brand which he advertises on Instagram.

As he hasn't been able to get a website up and running Harry has been promoting and selling his clothing through social media. Harry also spends a lot of time doing research for his brand online and is interested in a future career in digital or social media marketing due to the experience he has gained from starting his clothing brand.

While accessing the internet has benefited Harry and his clothing brand and allowed him a space to pursue something he is passionate about, he also described the negative aspects of being online. Harry highlighted how easy it is to access online gambling or betting sites despite being under the age of 18.

“There's a problem at school [with] online betting, probably a big problem. I feel like it's really easy for us 17-year-olds to seek to access that.”

Harry has since deleted the betting apps that he was accessing as he acknowledged he can be impulsive and has witnessed other boys at his school lose large amounts of money. He said although he is 17, it is easy to ask an older sibling or older kids at school to create an account using their ID, and that certain apps only ask for payID to put deposit money, which does not detect your age.

Harry explained that seeing others winning, even while others were losing, was a big part of the allure to engage in online gambling. Harry felt there should be better restrictions in place to stop kids from accessing gambling and betting sites.

Youth Advisory Council summary: Wellbeing



Social media can be a really positive aspect of young people's life, allowing them to stay in contact with loved ones, relaxing after a day, or listening to stories from around the world. However, social media can have really negative impacts too, from doom scrolling endlessly into the night to comparing yourself to your peers online. Social media and its features are undeniably entwined in our life and we have to learn to live with them. Having a healthier relationship with social media is possible. There is a role for social media to be proactive about caring for their users, or a space for government intervention, but a strict ban is not the solution

Summary written by Aisha, 20, Youth Advisory Council member



Another aspect of our wellbeing which is not just impacted, but directly contingent upon the digital sphere, is the way we interact with and access pop-culture. Whether we want to admit it or not, trends, ideas, and philosophies permeate through the "big moments" of a zeitgeist, and with access to so much information all the time – the pressure to be up-to social par can be overbearing. The pressure to uphold an external image is amplified by the invisible camera always pointed at your direction, and your digital footprint can sometimes feel like the ever-present ghost of your past. Whether it is ever-evolving-ethics, or fashion trends, or even ROBLOX fads, the way you adopt and respond to these forces outside your control can influence your social and psychological wellbeing. Tech & social media intertwine with real life; it isn't a thing on the side or separate from everything. Technology is part of our identity and this merge is both a form of self-expression, and self-restriction, depending on how it is utilised.

Summary written by Aieshewarrya, 18, Youth Advisory Council member





Maintaining a healthy well-being while scrolling on social media can feel like a love-hate relationship most of the time. Sometimes doom-scrolling is less of a negative thing for me and allows me to wind down after a busy day at school. Other times it can be the reason why I stay up so late and wake up feeling exhausted in the morning. But it's not just the scrolling that contributes to our well-being. It can also be how we perceive things online. For example, comparing yourself to content creators of a similar age. And I think most young people run into these issues with time management and self-esteem because of how accessible everything is. If there were limits on how long you could scroll for hours or whose content entered your algorithm, then I think most young people would have a slightly improved well-being.

Rispah, 17, Youth Advisory Council

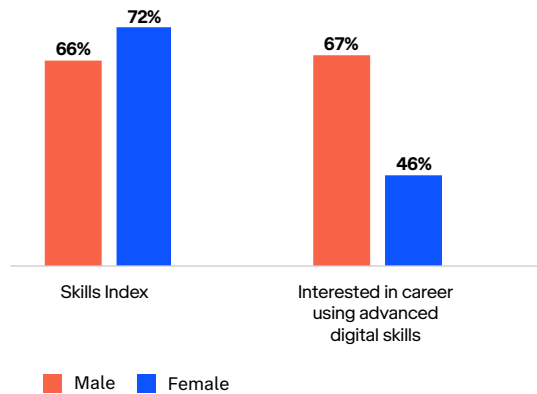
Tech by gender

Girls and boys use their devices differently

Girls are more likely than boys to browse posts, videos and images from other people (46% girls, 32% boys) and chat to their friends and families (54% to 38%). Boys are more likely to play games online (boys: 52%, girls: 44%) and watch others play games online (boys: 33%, girls: 24%).

Girls are more likely than boys to find digital tasks easy; but are much less likely to pursue a career using advanced digital skills.

Figure 16: Skills by gender

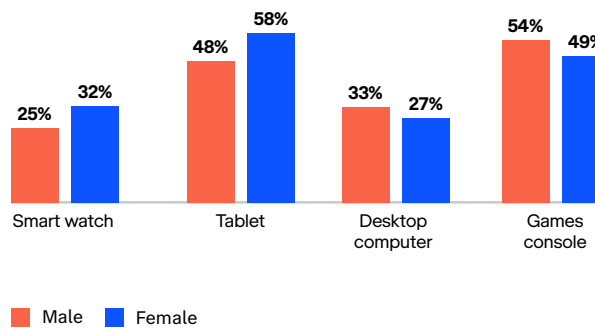


Girls and boys use different devices

Girls are more likely to have access to tablets and smart watches and boys more likely to have access to a games console or desktop computer.

Figure 17: Access to devices – by gender

Q: Which of the following digital devices do you personally use at home?
Base: All n=4,718



Anonymous
Youth Advisory Council member

In my first relationship at 14, they photoshopped my face onto a naked model. While that experience was minor and I moved on quickly, it made me realise how serious AI deep fakes could be. These technologies can be easily accessed but there isn't a lot of information around them. It needs a combined approach with greater consent and technology education.

Girls are more savvy on safety issues

Girls are more likely to be aware than boys that they should protect their own personal information online and not share other people's personal information online. Boys were more likely to say they 'don't know' how to define online safety (boys: 14%, girls: 10%).

Boys and girls interact differently with technology. They use devices for different activities, and face different challenges. Across the five pillars there were some differences with girls having a slightly higher overall Index score than boys (70 to 67) thanks to higher connectivity and skills scores. However, girls scored lower than boys in wellbeing.

Figure 18: Girls spend more time online than boys – are more likely to want spend less time

Time Online and Happiness by Gender

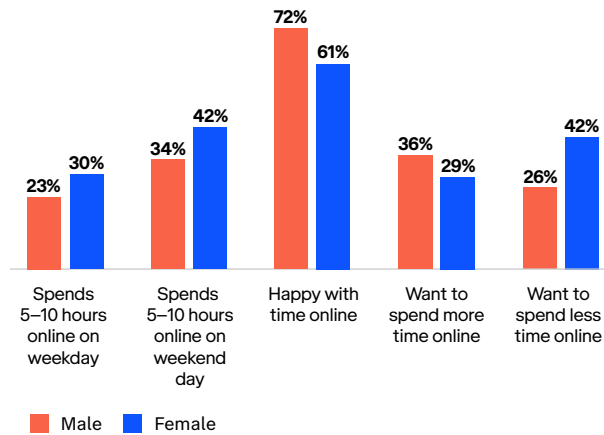


Figure 19: Defining online safety by gender

Q: Please tell us in your own words what you think online safety means. Base: All n=4,718

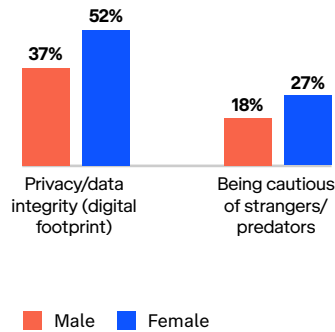
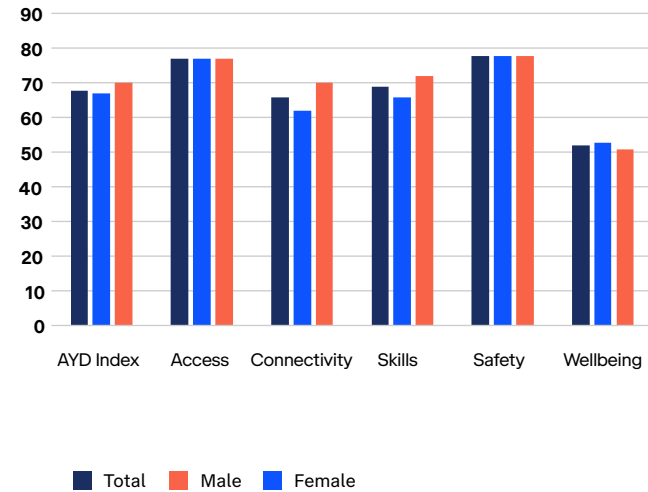


Figure 20: Index and Pillar Scores by Gender



Regional realities: how location shapes tech use

Young people in cities have higher technology skills than regional young people

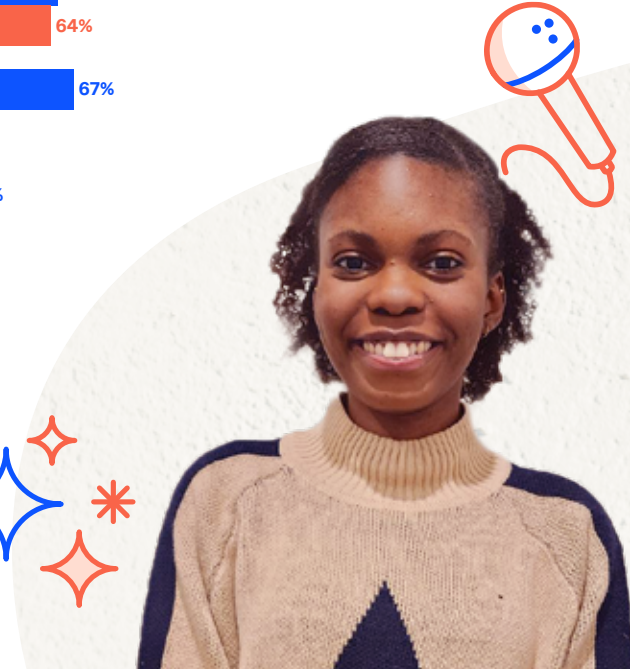
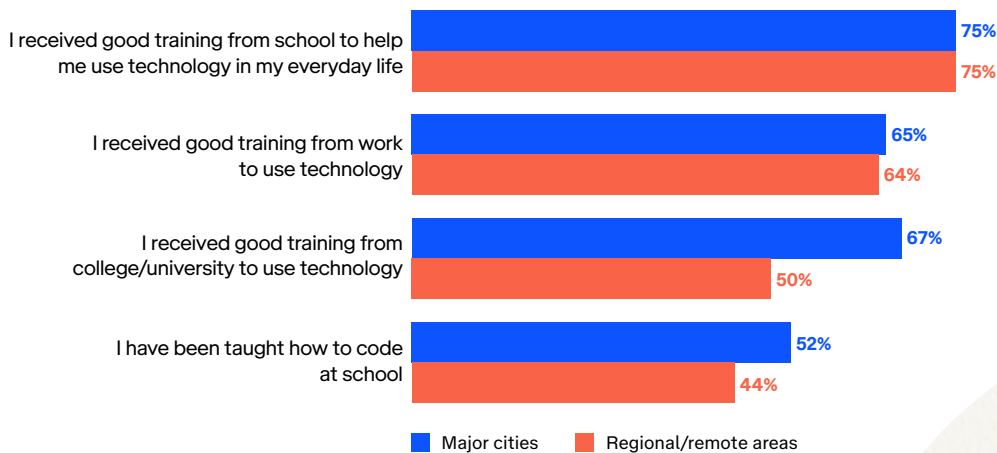
Young people from major cities in Australia (70) have a significantly higher Skills score compared to young people from regional/remote areas (66).

Young people in cities received better technology training at university than regional peers

Young people from remote/regional areas in Australia (50%) are less likely than young people from major cities (67%) to agree that they receive good training at university to use technology, or to have been taught how to code at school (major cities: 52%, regional/remote: 44%). Despite the lower coding training, young people outside the cities otherwise reported about the same digital skills training at school.

Figure 21: Received training to use technology by location

Q: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: All n=4,718



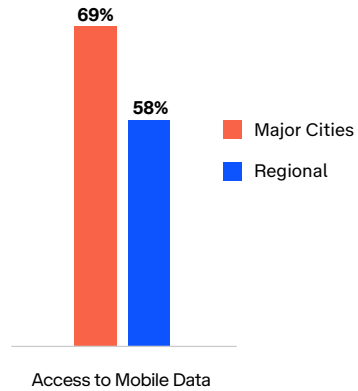
Rispah, 17
Youth Advisory Council member

I think access to technology and social media is something that constantly fluctuates in my everyday life. For example, the Wi-Fi at my school is pretty bad, so after school, I can hardly access any messages or check the internet while waiting to get picked up. Living in a somewhat rural area also presents its own challenges as sometimes the connection in my area will randomly drop out and this can last anywhere from an hour or two to a couple of days.

Regional realities: how location shapes tech use Continued

Those in regional areas have less access to mobile data than their peers in major cities.

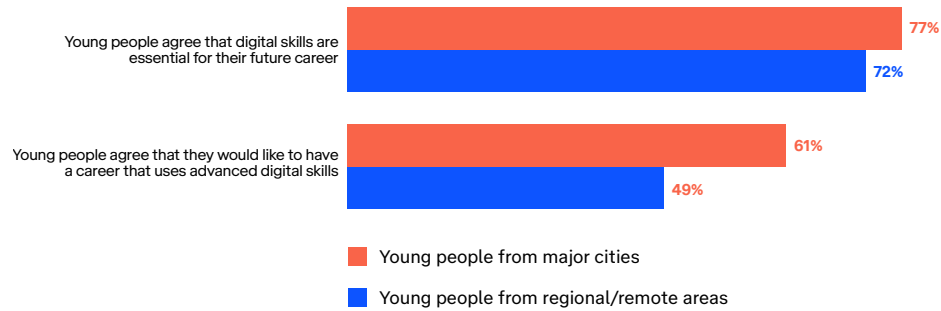
Figure 22: Connectivity by location



Young people from major cities are more likely to pursue a career using advanced digital skills compared to those from regional/remote areas.

Figure 23: Future career using advanced digital skills

Q: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: All n=4,718



Growing up digital: age and its impact

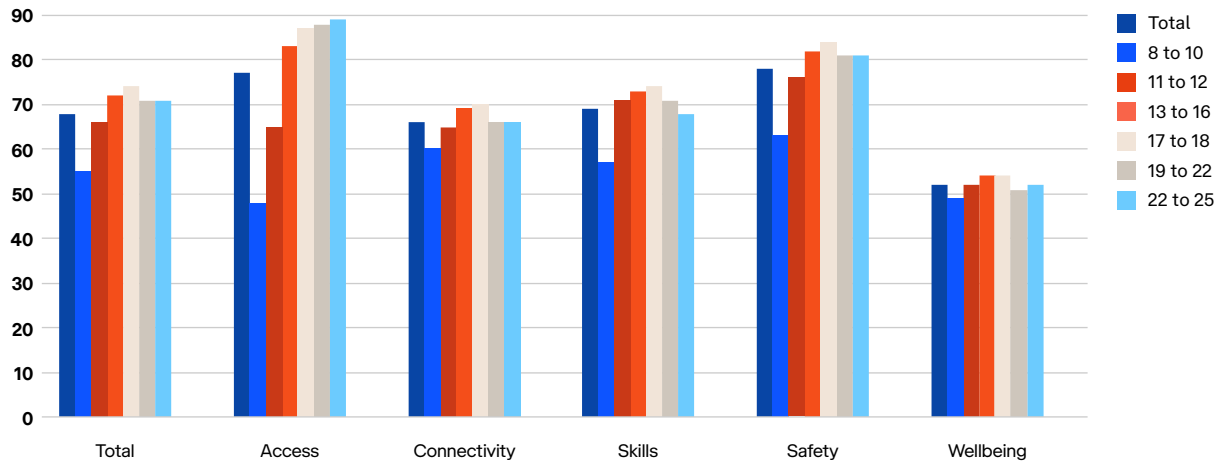
It is unsurprising that the way primary school children use and experience digital devices is very different from high school children or young people in further education or early in the workforce.

Young children score much lower on Access, for example, likely reflecting greater parental controls and lower ownership of internet-connected devices, and also scored lower on other pillars, reflecting in part their earlier life stage in maturity, education and confidence.

Young people use different devices depending on age

18–25 year-olds are significantly more likely to have access to a smartphone (97%) compared to 8–13 year-olds (67%), however 8-13-year-olds are more likely to have access to a tablet (71%) compared to 18–25 year-olds (40%).

Figure 24: AYDI Index and each pillar by age



Abbey, 18
Youth Advisory Council member

Technology literacy is implied. If we don't have the hardware and software, we can't learn and be able to have the ability to use it for basic and fundamental things. It is so important to invest in technological literacy for everyone. Young people are more aware of what it means to be ethical. The internet keeps receipts ... you have to recognise what you say can be brought up later. Another aspect of this, is the need to have each generation improving to be able to support children around online safety and those key issues. My brother and sister, who are younger, the way they can manage social media is amazing – and I am falling behind.

Growing up digital: age and its impact Continued

Different age groups enjoy devices for different reasons

8–13 year-olds were more likely to describe entertainment as the best thing about being online and 18-25-year-olds were comparatively more likely to describe connection and access/convenience as the best thing.

Young people have a different understanding of ‘online safety’ depending on their age

Young people aged fourteen and over were more likely to define online safety as maintaining privacy/data integrity, whereas 8-13-year-olds were more likely to define it as being cautious of strangers/predators (see figure 26).

Figure 25: Best thing about being online by age

Q: What is the best thing about being online?
Base: All n=4,718

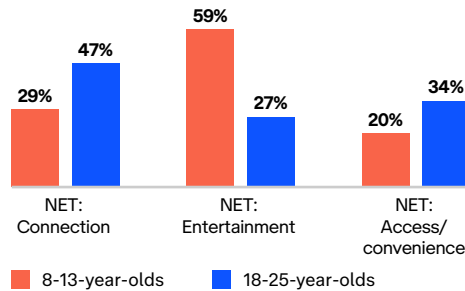
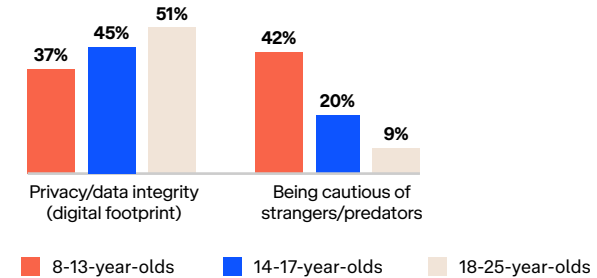


Figure 26: Defining online safety by age groups



Aieshewarrrya, 18

Youth Advisory Council member

My experience is growing up in an immigrant household. It was a blessing that my parents didn't have access to it, they had a bigger generational gap. So, growing up, I didn't have as many restrictions - I accessed things I shouldn't have been accessing. I saw the world - but it wasn't age appropriate. I see it in my brother, and the way it is presented to him is so different - he plays Roblox and is on Twitch - and the way he interacts with friends who don't have access to it.

Growing up digital: age and its impact Continued

Concerns about cyberbullying/harassment from strangers decreases beyond school age

We can see that 8 to 17 year-olds are significantly more likely than those aged 18 to 25 to be concerned about interacting with strangers online, such as being cyberbullied or harassed, or being contacted by strangers with bad intentions. Those aged 18 to 25 were significantly more likely to be concerned about coming across fake news or misinformation or that someone could access their personal information and steal their identity.

Figure 27: Time online

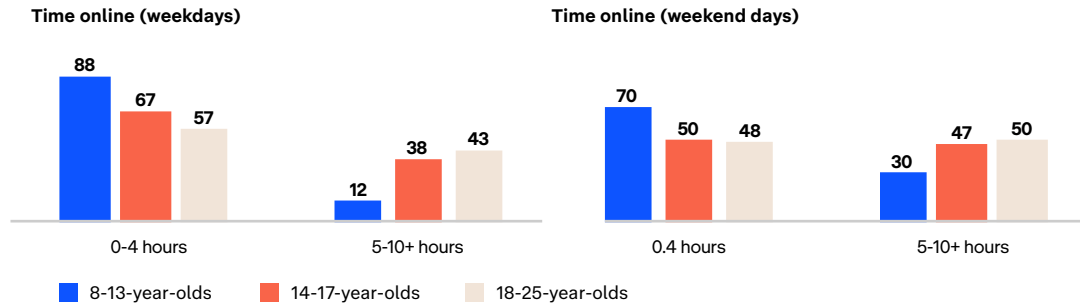
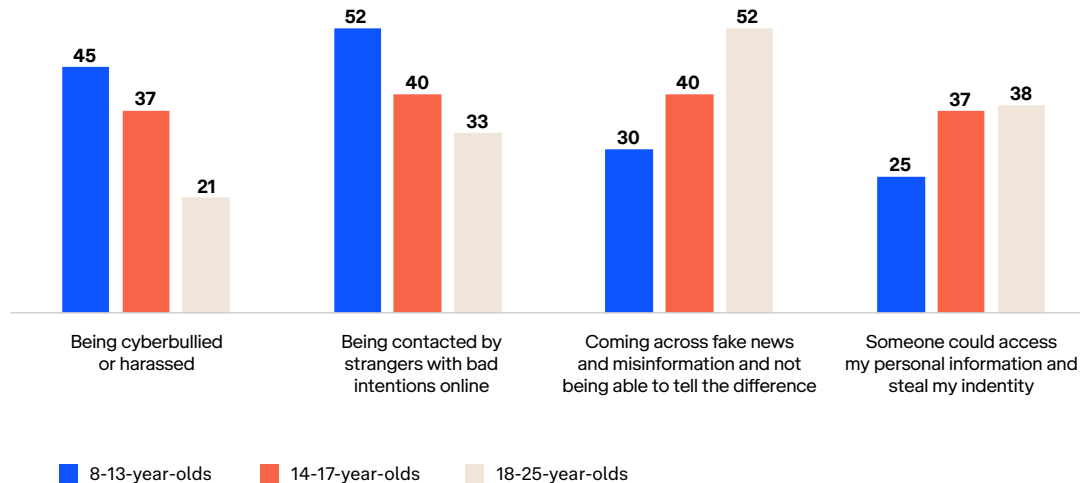


Figure 28: Online safety concerns by age



Some final thoughts: looking beyond 2024

Telstra Foundation's Australian Youth Digital Index establishes a benchmark for understanding how young people use digital technology, including how and when they go online, their experiences, attitudes and concerns.

We appreciate that children and young people have diverse needs and aspirations and understanding this starts with being curious to listen. While many young people are thriving with connection and have good device access, factors like age gender, location, household income, disability, broadband quality, data limits, skills, confidence, and safety impact their digital engagement.

Young people are also aware of digital complexities, including algorithmic influences and unsafe content. They are developing skills to manage online interactions safely and assist older household members with technology use. The data also emphasises the need for a sustainable balance in a world where digital connection is increasingly crucial for social relationships, accessing education and government services, and workforce preparation. Young people recognise these interconnections and strive to maintain a healthy balance, even when technology poses challenges.

What's next: explore the data

Telstra Foundation will publish this Index annually, tracking trends over time. We encourage stakeholders, including policymakers, researchers, educators and all those working with young people, to explore the data and use it to improve the digital experience of young people. We invite you to use our online data visualisation tool, which allows segmentation by a range of demographics, including age, gender, location, and more. You can access the tool, data snapshots, expert blogs, and additional resources on our dedicated Index website (www.australianyouthdigitalindex.com).

We look forward to seeing organisations and decision-makers using the data to support policies and programs that enhance the digital experience of young people – and young people themselves reflecting on whether the Index findings match their individual experiences.

Lastly, we ask that all those using this data, to please ensure it is used to support and champion young people and not diminish their agency.

Acknowledgements



Telstra Foundation Youth Advisory Council

Our Youth Advisory Council elevates youth voices in everything we do at the Foundation. Our council members help us gain a deeper understanding of how young people experience digital technology and its impact on their lives. We thank our Council who played a key role in shaping our Youth Digital Index project and will continue to do so as it evolves. [Meet our YAC](#).

Survey participants

We thank all the children and young people who participated in the quantitative and qualitative study, our in-depth interviews and focus groups and for trusting us with their data. It is your voices we are amplifying. We also thank the parents of younger children involved in this project and youth community workers who also participated.

Wallis Social Research, Daymark and Dassier

We are grateful to our research partner Wallis Social Research, who undertook the quantitative and qualitative research that underpins this report and produced a comprehensive analysis report to guide our final report (Daymark) and online data visualisation tool (Dassier).

Nomet Social Impact

We thank the team at Nomet UK who launched their Digital Youth Index in the United Kingdom in 2021 and have published annual indices and reports since then. Their research, Index tool and generous advice have been instrumental in guiding our pilot project to introduce the Index in Australia and amplify the voices of young people.

Our expert advisers

We thank our expert thought leaders, featured on page 8 to 10, for their time, guidance and insights shared in this report and look forward to working with them as we evolve this initiative and undertake additional research.

Appendix 1 – Index Composition

The factors comprising the individual pillar scores are listed in the table below.

Table Pillar 1: Access – summary scores

Note: Index scores are calculated on all responses (including ambivalent answers such as don't know, prefer not to say, not applicable) to capture the full range of young people's thoughts and opinions. Sometimes no answer is the answer.

Access	77
% who have access to a laptop or desktop	90
I am able to use the internet to complete all the tasks I want to do (% Agree)	87
% who have access to a smartphone	87
% who do not share a smartphone	78
% able to use a smartphone whenever they need to	76
% able to use a laptop/computer whenever they need to	74
Overall, I am able to do everything I need to with my digital devices (% Agree)	70
I have enough storage space on my devices for my needs (% Agree)	67
% who do not share a laptop or desktop	66

Table Pillar 2: Connectivity – summary scores

Connectivity (getting online)	66
% with home broadband	94
My internet connection at home / Wi-Fi at home is good quality (% Agree)	76
% with mobile data	68
There are some things I can't do online because of limits to my broadband allowance (% Disagree)	62
There are some things I can't do online because of limits to my mobile data allowance (% Disagree)	57
My mobile data connection is good quality (i.e. it is fast and reliable) (% Agree)	54
There are some things I can't do online because of slow or no internet (% Disagree)	49

Appendix 1 – Index Composition Continued

Table Pillar 3: Skills – summary scores

Skills (technical)	69
% who do not need help when you need to do something for school, university or work using a computer	82
% who find it easy to use the internet to help me with solving problems	79
% who find it easy to use the internet to help me with school work	78
% who find it easy to communicate with people at work by email or chat if I need help	78
% who find it easy to read or view documents that people inside or outside my organisation send me	76
% who find it easy to access a virtual work environment	75
% who find it easy to send files to people inside or outside my organisation by email or chat	75
% who find it easy to read or view documents or videos that my teachers send me	74
% who receive good training from school to help me use technology in my everyday life (% Agree)	73
% who find it easy to send schoolwork to my teachers by email or chat	70
% who find it easy to communicate with my teachers by email or chat if I need help	70
% who find it easy to access a virtual classroom/ lesson	68
% who find it easy to use the internet to find out about future jobs and career	62
% whose teachers / school taught them digital skills	47
% whose parents / family members taught them digital skills	43

Appendix 1 – Index Composition Continued

Table Pillar 4: Safety – summary scores

Safety	78
% feel safe online	94
% aware that my passwords and personal information need to be kept safely as they have value to others	93
% understand what 'online safety' means	92
% aware that I must not share other people's data online without their consent	89
% aware that viruses can damage my computer and that security software should be used to block them	89
% aware that the risks and threats involved in carrying out activities online and the importance of working securely	89
% aware that it is important to keep my computer systems and security software up to date and I allow them to be updated when prompted	84
% who can keep the information I use to access my online accounts secure (e.g. using different and secure passwords for websites and accounts)	84
% aware that I cannot take and use content (images and documents from the web) that belongs to others without their permission	83
% aware that others can capture and use my data and that I can protect and secure my personal data against such threats through privacy settings	82
% aware that my online activity can produce a permanent record which could be accessed by others and used both now and in the future	81
% who can identify secure websites by looking for the padlock and 'https' in the address bar	78
% who can set privacy settings on my social media and other accounts	78
% who can recognise suspicious links in emails, websites, social media messages and pop ups and know that clicking on these links or downloading unfamiliar attachments could put me and my computer at risk	77
% whose teachers / school taught them about internet safety	56
% whose parents / family members taught them about internet safety	49
% who have never experienced anything upsetting online	28

Appendix 1 – Index Composition Continued

Table Pillar 5: Wellbeing – summary scores

Wellbeing	52
% who are generally happy with life	72
% who say being online helps me keep in touch with friends that I would otherwise not speak to	67
% happy with the amount of time that you spend on your digital devices	66
% who feel in control of what I see and do online	65
% who say overall, using social media is a positive experience for them	61
% whose use of the internet and digital devices has a positive impact on my relationship with my friends	59
% whose use of the internet and digital devices has a positive impact on my relationship with my schoolwork	51
% who do not feel isolated from others	49
% whose use of the internet and digital devices has a positive impact on my relationship with my work	49
% whose use of the internet and digital devices has a positive impact on my relationship with my family	43
% who do not worry about missing out when they are not online	38
% whose use of the internet and digital devices has a positive impact on my relationship with my mental health	36
% who do not say social media has a negative impact on people like me	36
% whose use of the internet and digital devices has a positive impact on my relationship with my physical health	31

Appendix 2 – Index Methodology

Wallis Social Research conducted this study in two stages: first, a quantitative survey, then a qualitative phase. The qualitative phase involved a series of focus groups and in-depth interviews with young people and those working with young people.

Phase One – quantitative study

A large-scale online survey of young people was carried out to address the research questions. To ensure the results provided a representative benchmark of how digital technology impacts young people’s lives, a nationally representative sample of 4,718 individuals aged 8-25 was surveyed including:

1,055 8 to 13-year-olds

875 14 to 17 year-olds

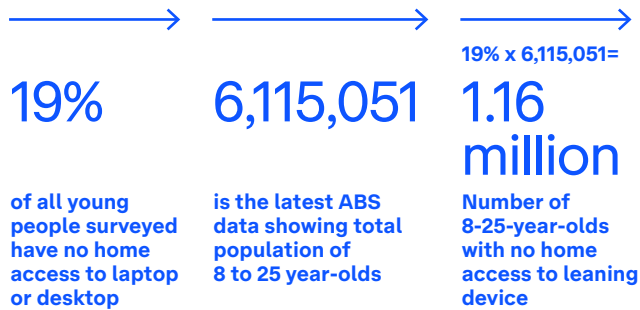
2,788 18 to 25 year-olds

Index scores were calculated to allow for year-on-year tracking of results.

The fieldwork took place from 1 July to 1 August 2024.

Final data was weighted to match representative benchmarks from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), considering factors like age, gender, and location.

When we convert a % data point from this report to an equivalent Australian population number, we base our calculations on ABS 2023 population estimates for young people in the age groups we surveyed:



Phase Two – qualitative study

The qualitative phase allowed researchers to explore some of the themes emerging from the survey results, taking a deep dive into the experiences of a diverse group of young people.

Researchers undertook a mix of focus groups and interviews to target three main cohorts:

Young people aged 8–25 years

Parents with children aged 8–17 years

Stakeholders who work with children and young people

While young people between the ages of 14 and 25 attended one-on-one in-depth interviews, children aged 8-13 years participated in the fieldwork with a parent in the form of an affinity paired depth.

Qualitative fieldwork was conducted from 9 August to 11 October 2024 using entirely remote methods – online via MS Teams or via telephone.

Focus Groups

Wallis conducted nine focus groups, each with 4-6 participants, with young people aged 14-17 and 18-25, parents and professionals working with young people.

Participants were asked a series of open-ended research questions, with the sessions actively moderated by Wallis’s expert qualitative researchers, who offered support and followed up for more in-depth information when necessary.

A discussion guide was used to guide these sessions, with topics based on insights from the quantitative phase, to enable interrogation of key findings and understand important factors affecting young people’s digital experiences. Direct quotes from participants are used in this report to highlight key insights.

In-Depth Interviews

In addition to the focus groups, 31 individual in-depth interviews were conducted. These interviews were held online and lasted 45-60 minutes. The participants were a mix of young people in high school, further education, workplace training or work, and included First Nations, LGBTQI+ and young people living with a disability. We also spoke with social workers working with young people. Quotes and case studies have been anonymised for privacy.

The last word but the conversation continues



I think a lot of media outlets and institutions that care for kids emphasise the dangers and negatives of the digital world, and they mainly teach us what not to do online (don't trust wiki, don't message strangers, don't share personal information) and although all of these things are definitely very important, I feel that it devalues the benefits that the digital world is actively giving us every day.

Young people see that it provides connection, information, varying worldviews, entertainment, and so maybe they don't listen as intently when they're told about the negatives because it ignores the positive experiences that is had not just by children but by people of all ages. We need a firmer understanding of how digital platforms can be used in multiple ways.

Alex, 21, Youth Advisory Council



