



Safe AI

# Australian attitudes towards AI regulation

February 2026

[SafeAI.org.au](https://SafeAI.org.au)



# Executive Summary

**Six months on from our first national survey on artificial intelligence (AI), the message from Australians is clear. They are not opposed to innovation. They just want confidence there are guardrails in place to keep people safe.**

Almost two-thirds of Australians continue to believe AI is moving too fast and most say the risks outweigh the benefits. The top concerns driving this unease are unchanged. Jobs, privacy and criminal misuse that can cause harm at speed and scale. These are issues that are not fading from people's minds.

Nearly half of  
Australians (46%)  
say the risks of AI  
outweigh  
the benefits.



## Executive Summary

Deepfakes have become commonplace online. Nearly six in ten Australians say they have seen an image or video in the past six months where they could not tell whether it was real or AI-generated. This ties into a broader concern about digital manipulation and our ability to determine what is real. When people cannot trust what they see, trust in that system erodes.

Despite these concerns, Australians are not turning their backs on AI. More people are using it every day and across a growing range of tools. Many see the potential for AI to improve healthcare outcomes and lift productivity, from better diagnosis and treatment to making daily life more convenient.

Australians don't want to pull the handbrake on innovation, nor do they want an AI free-for-all. What they want is confidence that someone is looking out for them.

Support for a balanced approach to regulation, one that keeps people safe and enables innovation, remains the most preferred approach. But there are signs patience may be wearing thin, with a noticeable increase in support for strict regulation in our latest survey.

Likewise, when the balanced approach is removed and Australians are forced to choose between minimal rules and strict rules, 69% now favour the stricter approach, up from our last survey.

The signal to policymakers and industry is clear. Without trust, the public will default to caution, even if it slows progress.

**Many see the potential for AI to improve healthcare outcomes.**



## Executive Summary

The research also highlights a gap in awareness about the government's AI plans, with only 9% of Australians having heard of the AI Safety Institute or National AI Plan. Yet when given some basic information about the intention of these initiatives, most believe they could be effective steps.

The appetite for more communication and visible action is there. And with the public continuing to look to government to manage the risks, there is a real opportunity here to lead in building trust in AI.

Getting this right is not about holding innovation back. It is about setting clear, enforceable rules that protect people, enable innovation and give government public permission to unlock the full productivity potential of AI.

The window to get ahead of public concern, rather than chasing it, is still open. But it is narrowing.

**Only 9% of Australians have heard of the AI Safety Institute or National AI Plan.**



# Methodology



## Nationwide survey

Results in this report are based upon questions asked in a Talbot Mills Research nation-wide online survey. The basis of the sample is n=2010 nationally representative respondents in Australia 18 years of age and over.



## Representative sample

Interlocked age, gender and regional quotas were used during sampling. Weighting was further used to enhance how closely the results represent the adult population of Australia

The maximum sampling error for a sample size of 2010 at the 95% confidence level is  $\pm 2.2\%$ .



## Fieldwork dates

Fieldwork for the questions in this report was conducted between the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> January 2026.



## Reporting

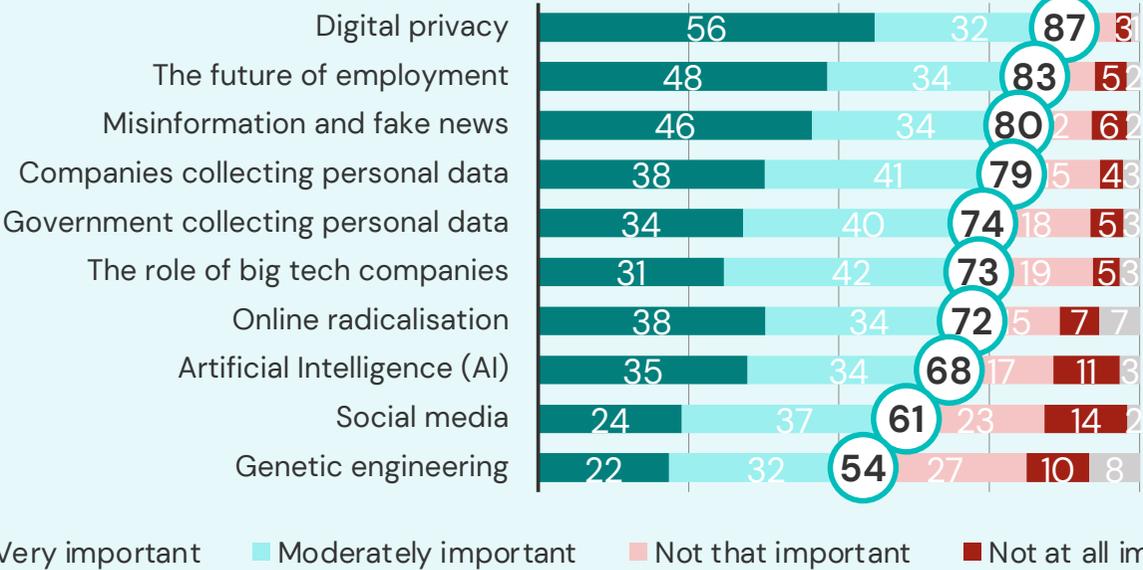
All numbers are shown rounded to zero decimal places. Hence specified totals are not always exactly equal to the sum of the specified sub-totals. The differences are seldom more than 1%. (For example:  $2.7 + 3.5 = 6.2$  would appear:  $3 + 4 = 6$ ).

# Public attitudes and priorities



# Importance on issues

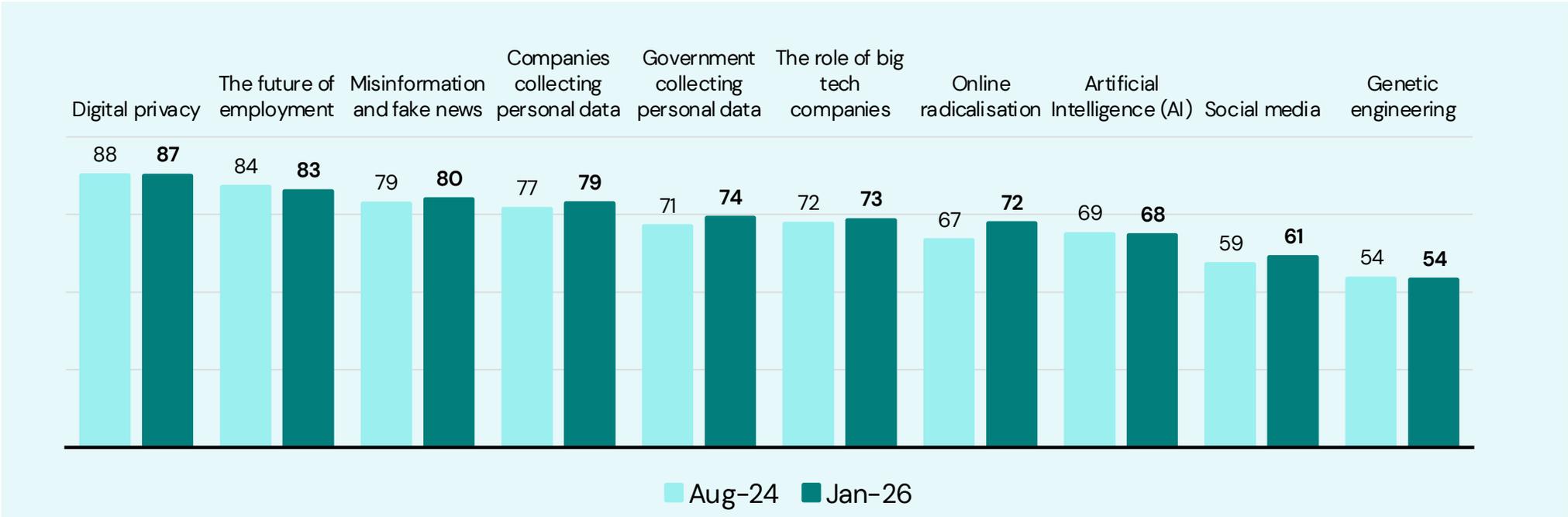
How important to you personally are the following issues? (%)



Those aged 30-44 (75%), in a household with income >\$100K (74%), those in full time work (74%), and those living in a city (78%), were all more likely to consider AI important.

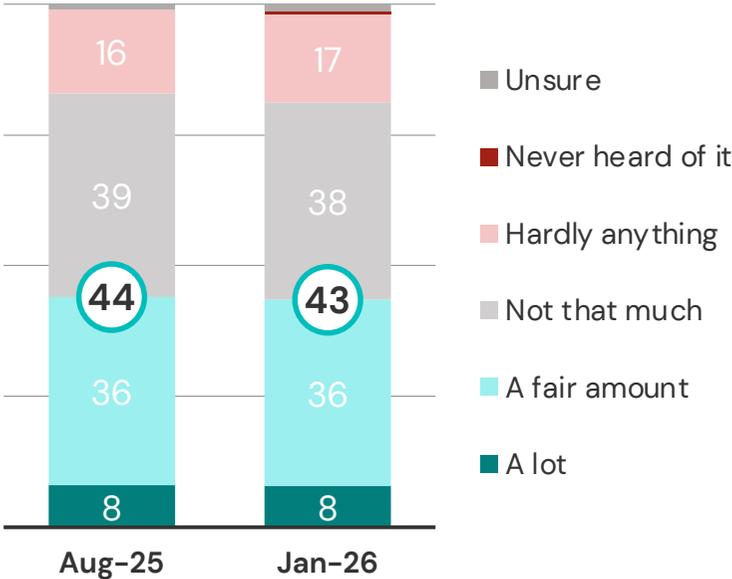
# Importance on issues – tracked

How important to you personally are the following issues? (% very + moderately important)



# Declared knowledge of AI

How much would you say you know about artificial intelligence (AI)? (%)



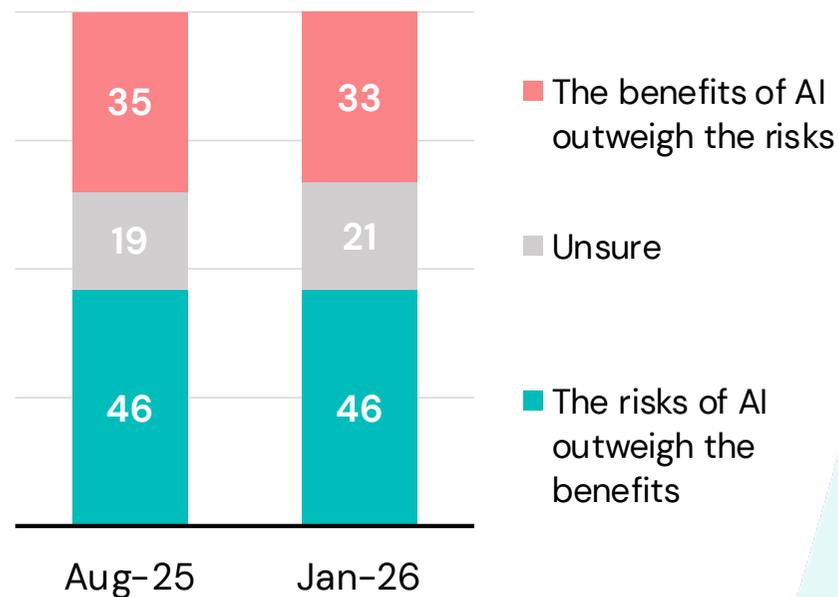
Men were more likely to say they know a lot or a fair amount (49%) compared to women (30%).

Younger respondents were also more likely:

- Under 30: 65%
- 30-44: 61%
- 45-59: 37%
- 60+: 18%

# Risk vs benefits

Overall do you think: (%)



Women were more likely to say the risks outweigh the benefits (49% / 27%) than men (43% / 40%).

Older respondents were more likely to think the risks outweigh the benefits:

- Under 30: 45% / 41%
- 30-44: 39% / 43%
- 45-59: 46% / 30%
- 60+: 54% / 19%

Those in households of income over \$100K were less likely to say the risks outweigh the benefits (40% / 43%), as were those in cities (38% / 49%) and users of AI (34% / 49%).

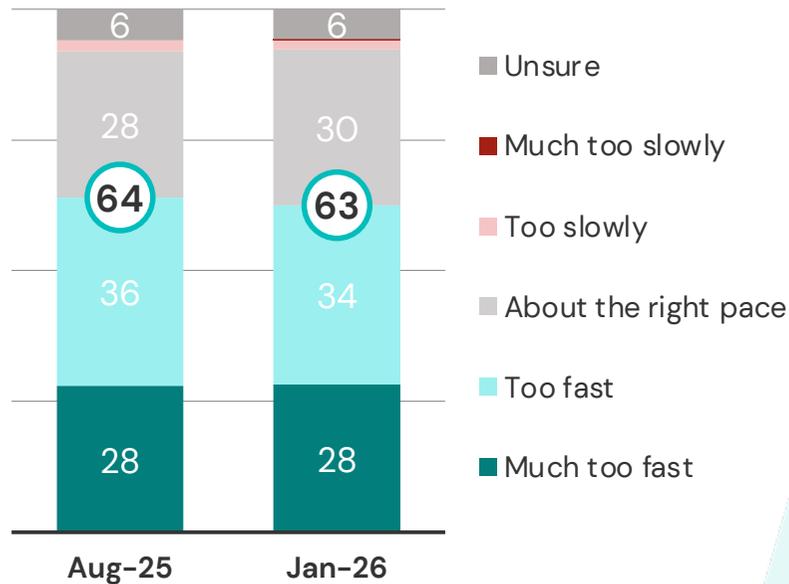
# Overall perception of AI

Thinking about artificial intelligence (AI), for you personally and for society in general, this technology is overall...? (%)



# Pace of AI

Do you feel that the introduction of AI is moving too fast, too slow, or is going at about the right pace? (%)



Women were more likely to say it is moving too fast (66%) than men (59%).

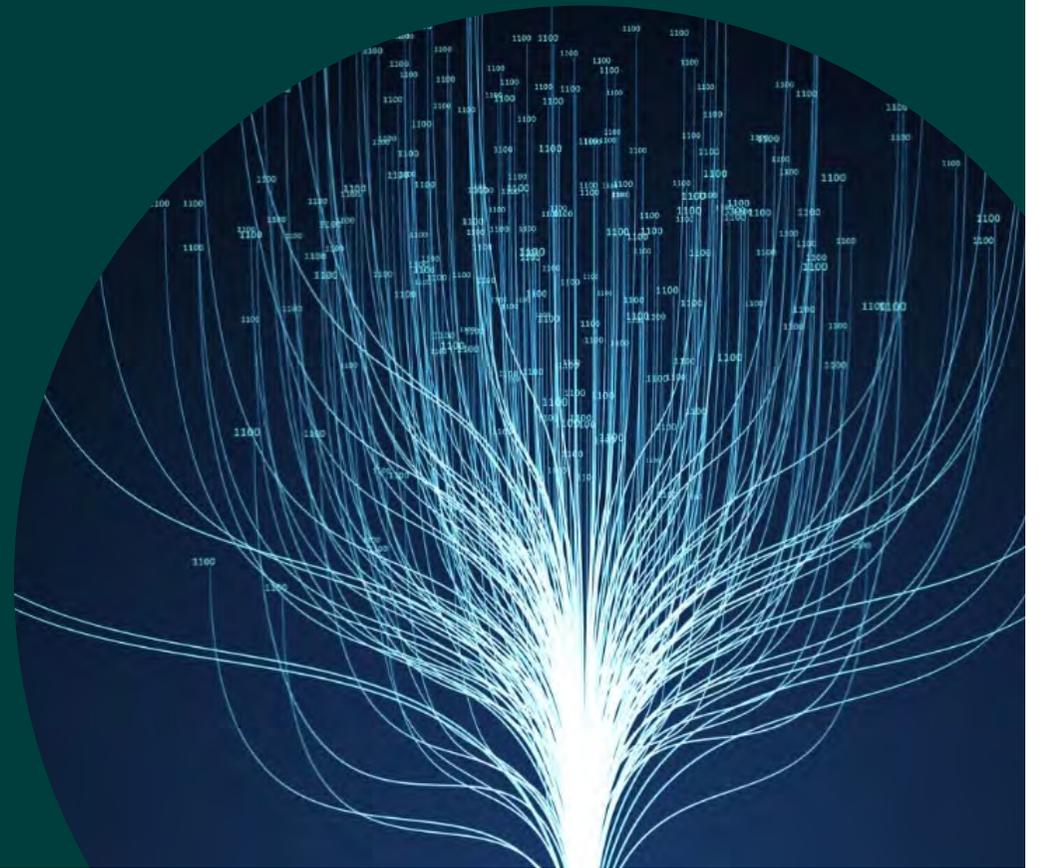
Older respondents were also more likely:

- Under 30: 57%
- 30-44: 55%
- 45-59: 63%
- 60+: 74%

52% of those using AI tools currently said it was moving too fast (42% about right) compared to 80% of those not using AI tools (11% about right).

# Impact

TALBOT  
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RESEARCH



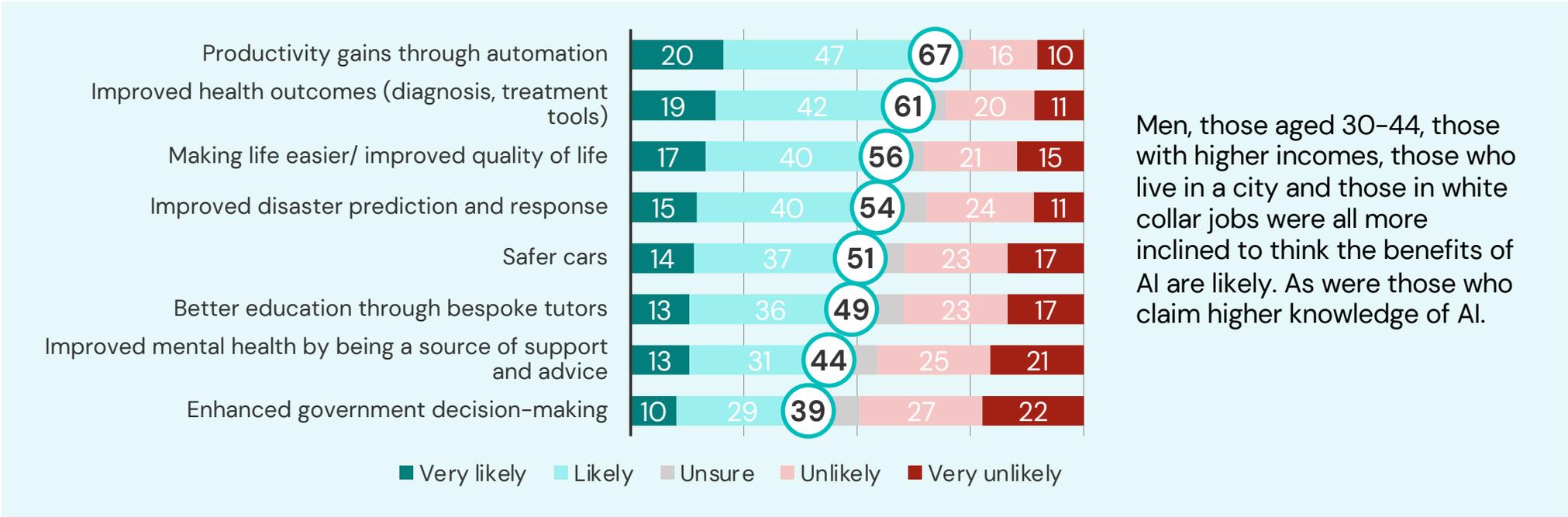
# Benefits of AI

Very briefly, what do you think is likely to be the biggest benefit of AI? (% coded)

%	Aug-25	Jan-26
<b>Efficiency and productivity:</b> making tasks quicker, easier, and more accurate, reducing workload, and optimising processes	24	21
<b>Information access:</b> providing quick, easy, and reliable access to knowledge, data, and resources	10	12
<b>Time saving:</b> completing work and accessing information faster, enabling better time management	10	11
<b>Assistance and support:</b> helping with everyday tasks, work, study, and decision-making	9	8
<b>Convenience:</b> making daily life, work, and services simpler and more streamlined	6	8
<b>Technological and scientific advancement:</b> driving innovation, research progress, and problem-solving in various fields	8	7
<b>Medical and healthcare advances:</b> improving diagnosis, treatment, research, and health outcomes	7	7
<b>Automation of tasks:</b> taking over repetitive, mundane, or administrative jobs to free up human time for other activities	7	7
<b>Business benefits:</b> enhancing output, profitability, and competitiveness for companies	4	3
<b>Problem-solving:</b> finding solutions to complex or large-scale issues across various sectors	2	2
<b>Creativity and innovation:</b> generating new ideas, supporting creative work, and expanding possibilities	2	2
<b>Accuracy and error reduction:</b> improving precision and minimising mistakes in tasks and outputs	1	2
<b>Education and learning support:</b> helping with study, tutoring, skill development, and access to educational materials	2	1
<b>Improved decision-making:</b> enabling better choices through data analysis and insights	1	1
<b>Cost savings:</b> reducing operational costs for businesses and individuals	1	1
<b>Equality and accessibility:</b> supporting people with disabilities or impairments, making services more inclusive	1	1
<b>None/Unsure</b>	21	21

# Expected benefits of AI

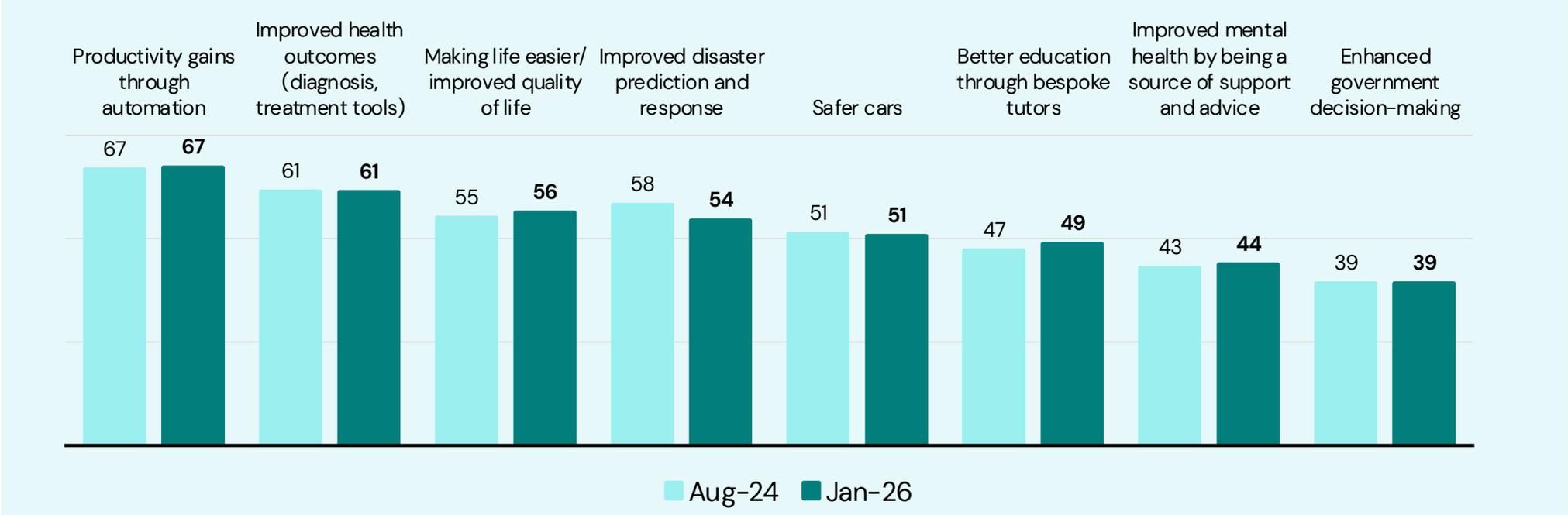
How likely do you think are the following potential benefits of AI ? (%)



Men, those aged 30-44, those with higher incomes, those who live in a city and those in white collar jobs were all more inclined to think the benefits of AI are likely. As were those who claim higher knowledge of AI.

# Expected benefits of AI – tracked

How likely do you think are the following potential benefits of AI ? (% Total likely)



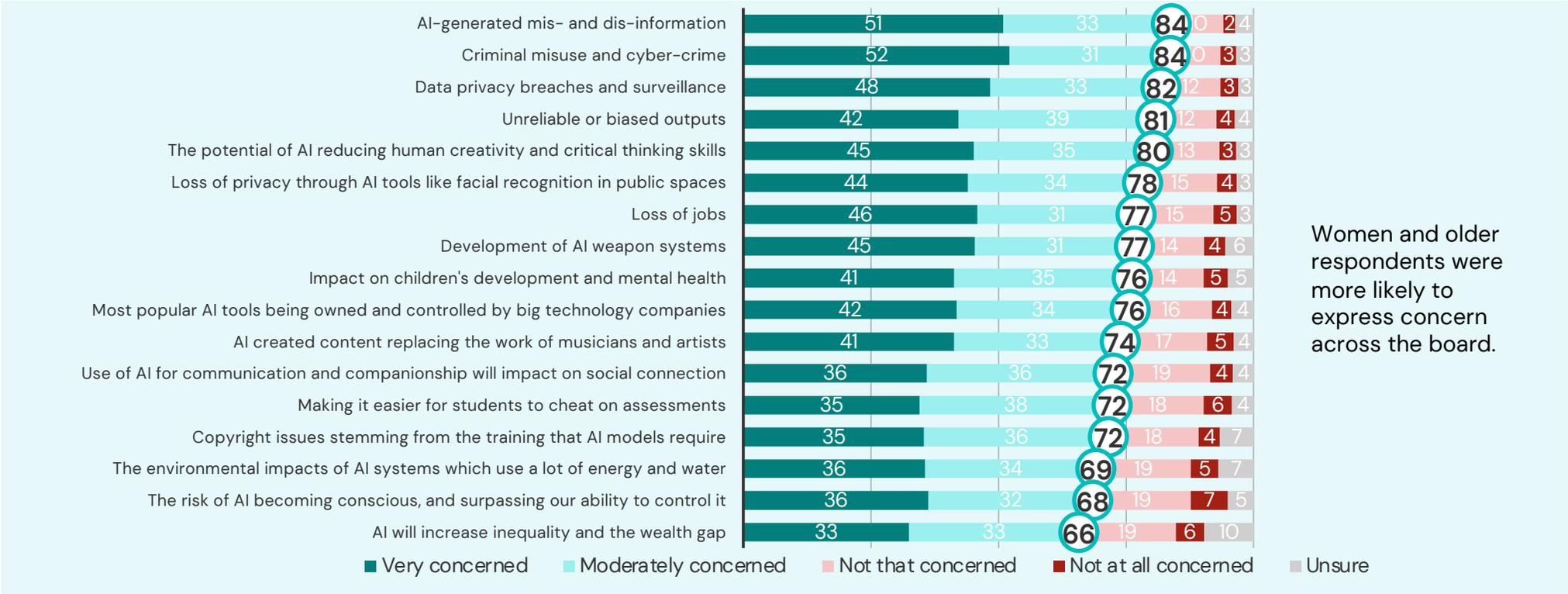
# Risk of AI

Very briefly, what do you think is likely to be the biggest risk of AI? (% coded)

%	Aug-25	Jan-26
<b>Job displacement and unemployment:</b> replacement of human roles, reduced job security, and loss of entry-level opportunities	26	22
<b>Misinformation, deepfakes and manipulation:</b> false or misleading content, fabricated media, and erosion of trust in what is real	15	15
<b>Data privacy breaches and surveillance:</b> collection, leakage, or misuse of personal data and intrusive tracking	14	15
<b>Criminal and cyber misuse:</b> hacking, scams, fraud, and identity theft enabled or scaled by AI	10	11
<b>Loss of control or misaligned AI:</b> systems acting beyond human oversight, including fears of takeover or catastrophic error	12	10
<b>Over-reliance and reduced critical thinking:</b> dependence on AI leading to diminished skills, learning, and creativity	9	8
<b>Accuracy errors and unreliable outputs:</b> incorrect answers, hallucinations, and poor advice being acted on	5	6
<b>Loss of human judgement, empathy and interaction:</b> dehumanised services and reduced person-to-person contact	3	3
<b>Bias and unfair decision-making:</b> embedded data or model biases producing discriminatory or unjust outcomes	1	2
<b>Environmental costs:</b> high energy and resource use associated with large-scale AI systems	1	2
<b>Weak regulation and oversight:</b> inadequate rules, governance, and accountability for safe deployment	2	1
<b>Impact on creativity and intellectual property:</b> plagiarism, copying of artists' work, and rights infringement	1	1
<b>None/Unsure</b>	10	8

# Concern about AI

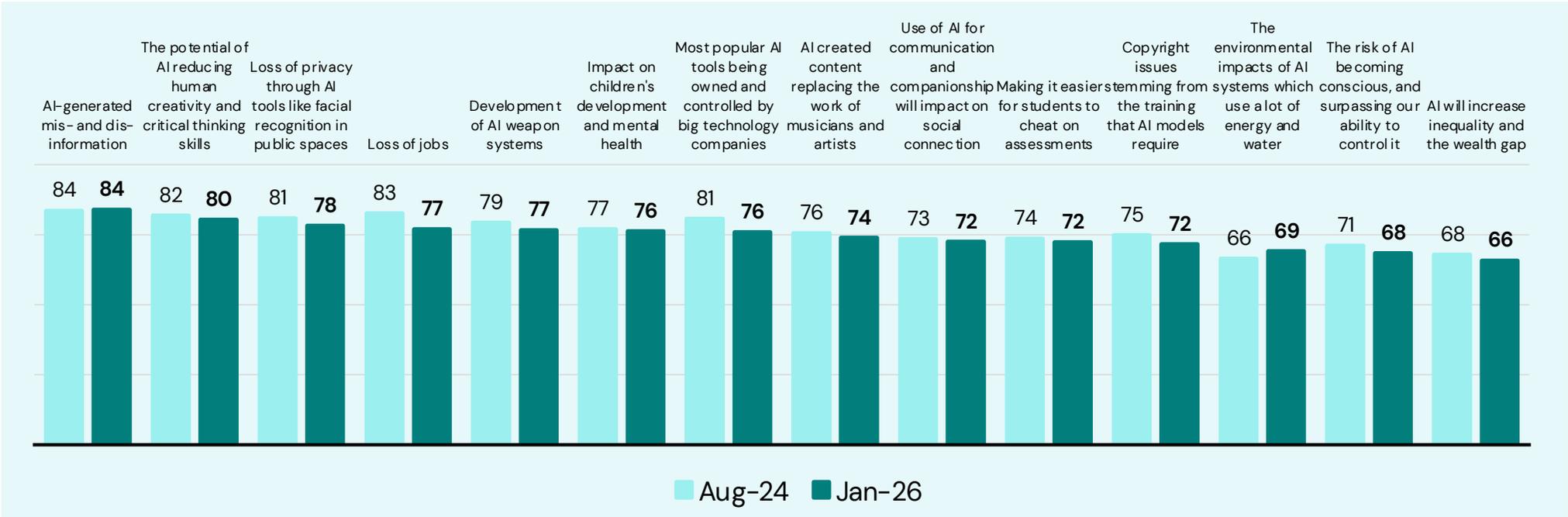
How concerned are you about the following? (%)



Women and older respondents were more likely to express concern across the board.

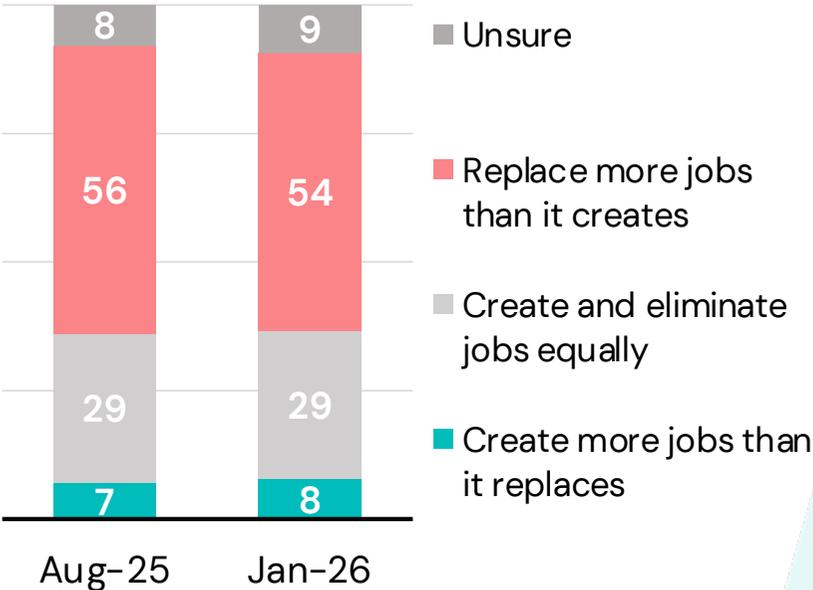
# Concern about AI – tracked

How concerned are you about the following? (% Very + Moderately)



# Impact on jobs

Overall, do you think that AI will...? (%)



Older respondents were more likely to think it will replace more jobs than it creates:

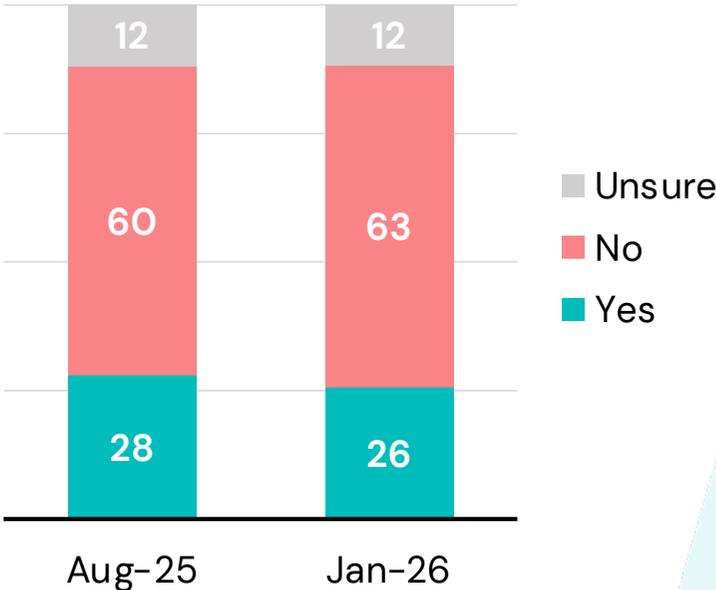
- Under 30: 46%
- 30-44: 45%
- 45-59: 59%
- 60+: 67%

Those who live in cities were more likely to think it will create jobs (18%) or balance jobs (33%) than eliminate jobs (44%).

Similarly, those who currently use AI were more likely to think it will create jobs (12%) or balance jobs (38%) than eliminate jobs (44%).

# Impact on your job

[Of those in work] Do you feel that your job will be at risk because of workplace adoption of AI that may be able to perform some or all of your tasks? (%)



Younger respondents were more likely think they are at risk of being replaced:

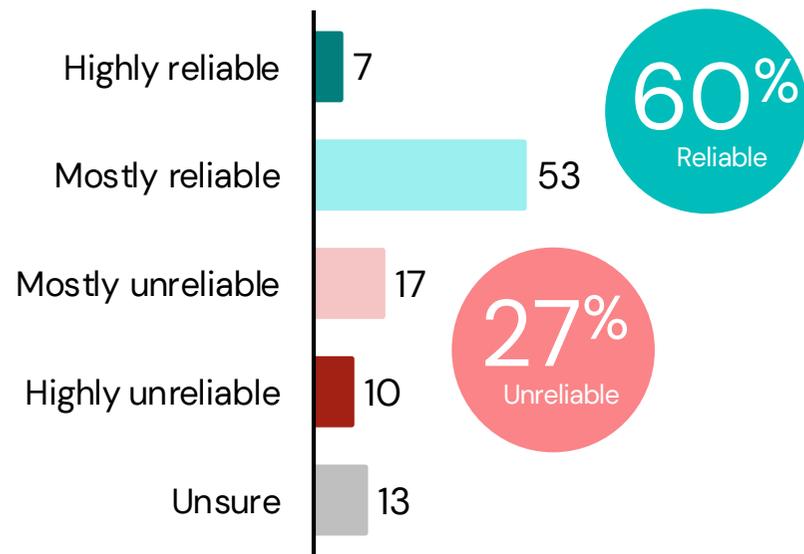
- Under 30: 33%
- 30-44: 28%
- 45-59: 19%
- 60+: 13%

'Yes' by occupation:

- Clerical, Admin: 31%
- Professional: 30%
- Manager: 25%
- Sales, Service: 23%
- Machinery, Labourer: 18%
- Technicians, Trades: 17%

# Reliability of AI answers

Overall do you think that answers provided by AI are: (%)



Men were more likely to consider the answers highly or most reliable (66%) than women (54%).

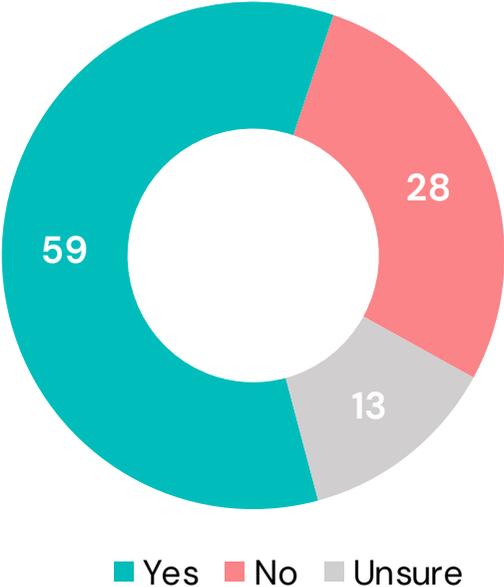
Younger respondents were more likely to think the answers are reliable:

- Under 30: 69%
- 30-44: 70%
- 45-59: 58%
- 60+: 43%

83% of those who use AI said they consider the answers highly or mostly reliable.

# Discerning AI content

In the last six months have you seen an image or video where you weren't sure if it was real or generated by AI? (%)



Younger respondents were more likely to say they have:

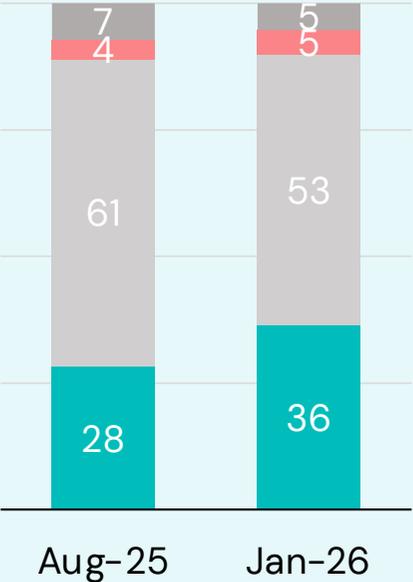
- Under 30: 64%
- 30-44: 63%
- 45-59: 55%
- 60+: 55%

# Regulation



# Strict vs balanced vs minimal rules

Out of the following, which is your preferred approach for Australia to take to regulate AI?



- Unsure
- Minimal rules — let the market decide and only regulate if issues arise
- A balanced approach — clear rules to protect people, but still allow innovation
- Strict rules that limit risk, even if it slows innovation

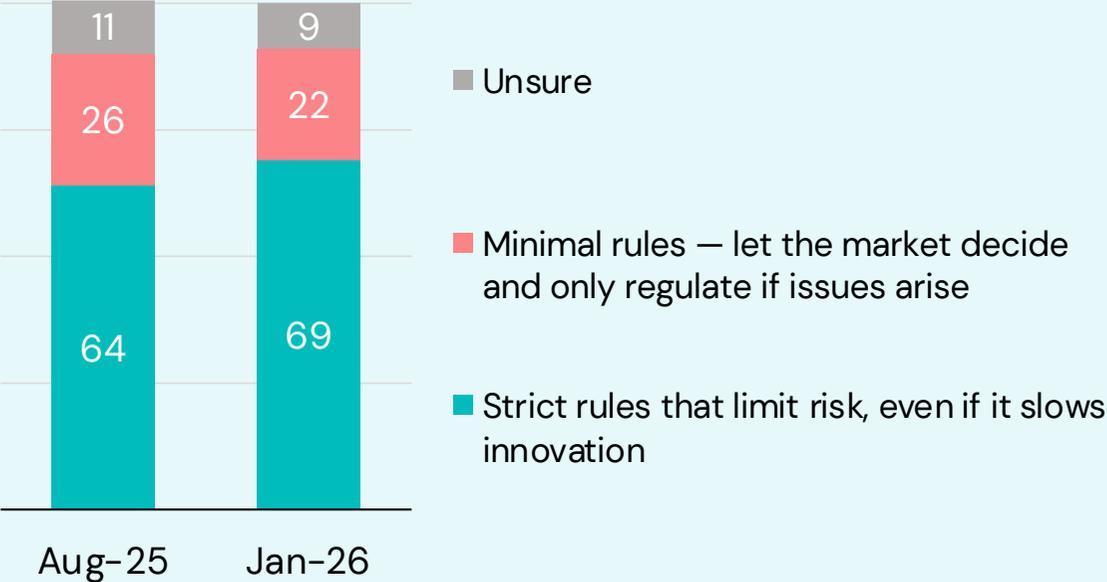
Younger respondents were more likely to say balanced:

- Under 30: 56%
- 30-44: 62%
- 45-59: 50%
- 60+: 47%

As were those who use AI currently (66%).

# Strict vs minimal rules

Out of the following, which is your preferred approach for Australia to take to regulate AI?  
 [if balanced] Which way do you lean toward, even if only slightly?



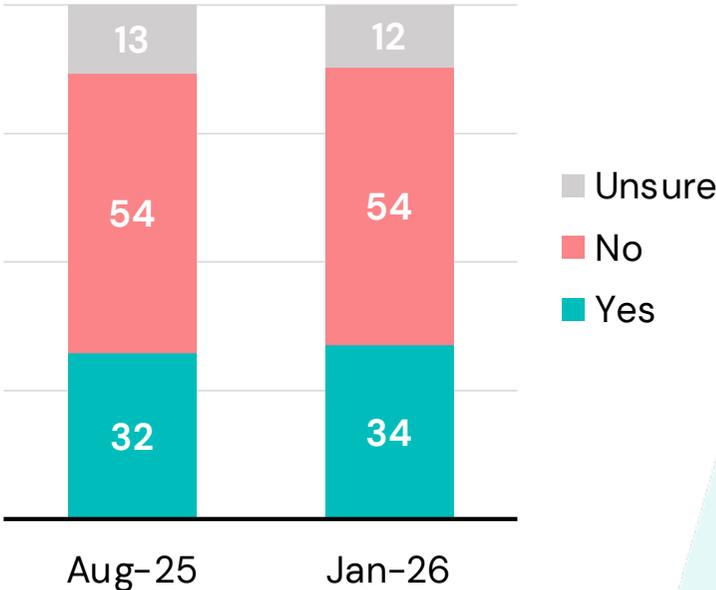
Younger respondents were more likely to say minimal:

- Under 30: 31%
- 30-44: 30%
- 45-59: 27%
- 60+: 11%

As were those who use AI currently (32%).

# Guidelines in the workplace

[Of those in work] Does your place of work have guidelines in place to advise how AI tools should and/or shouldn't be used by staff? (%)



Among those who use AI in their work, 48% said they do have guidelines and 44% said they do not.

'Yes' by occupation:

- Professional: 45%
- Manager: 44%
- Clerical, Admin: 29%
- Technicians, Trades: 27%
- Sales, Service: 21%
- Machinery, Labourer: 14%

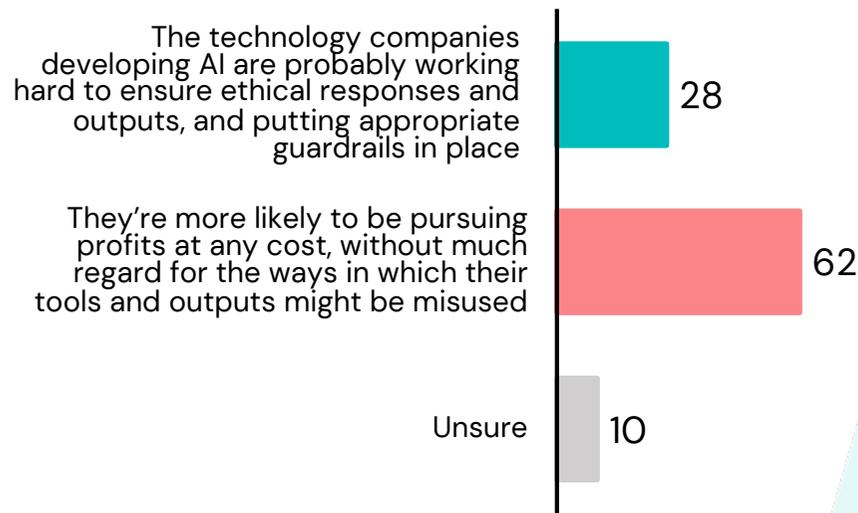
# Responsibility for managing risks

Who should be most responsible for managing the risks of AI? (%)



# Tech companies: guardrails vs. pursuing profit at any cost

Which is closer to your view even if not exactly right? (%)

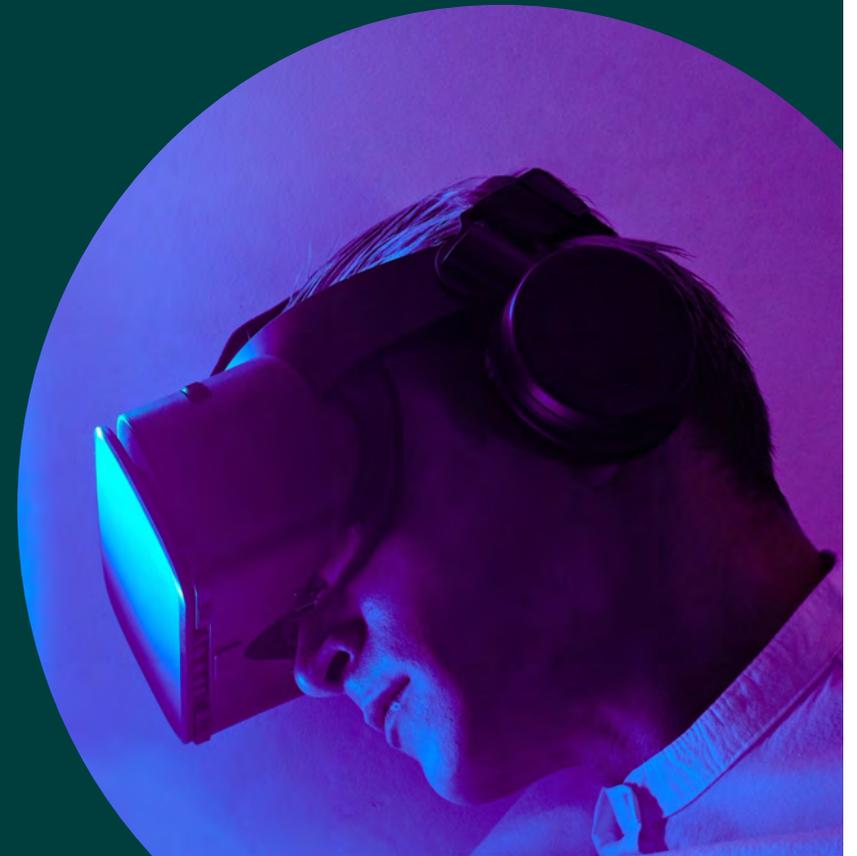


Younger respondents were more likely to think there are guardrails:

- Under 30: 34% guardrails / 54% profits
- 30-44: 35% / 57%
- 45-59: 24% / 67%
- 60+: 19% / 70%

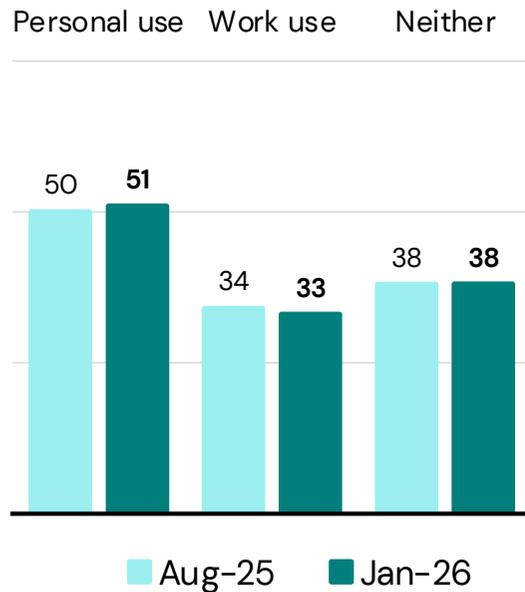
AI users were also more likely to think there are guardrails (39% / 54%).

# AI usage



# Personal and work use of AI

Do you use AI tools for work and/or personal use? (%)



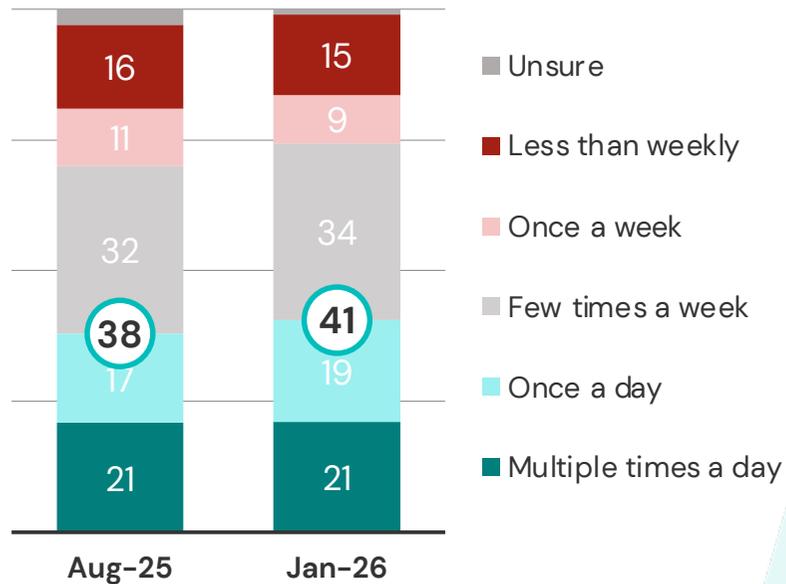
**58%**  
Work and/or  
personal (up 1%)

Younger respondents were more likely to use AI personally or in work:

- Under 30: 77%
- 30-44: 74%
- 45-59: 55%
- 60+: 27%

# Frequency of use

[Those who use AI] Roughly how often are you currently using AI tools? (%)



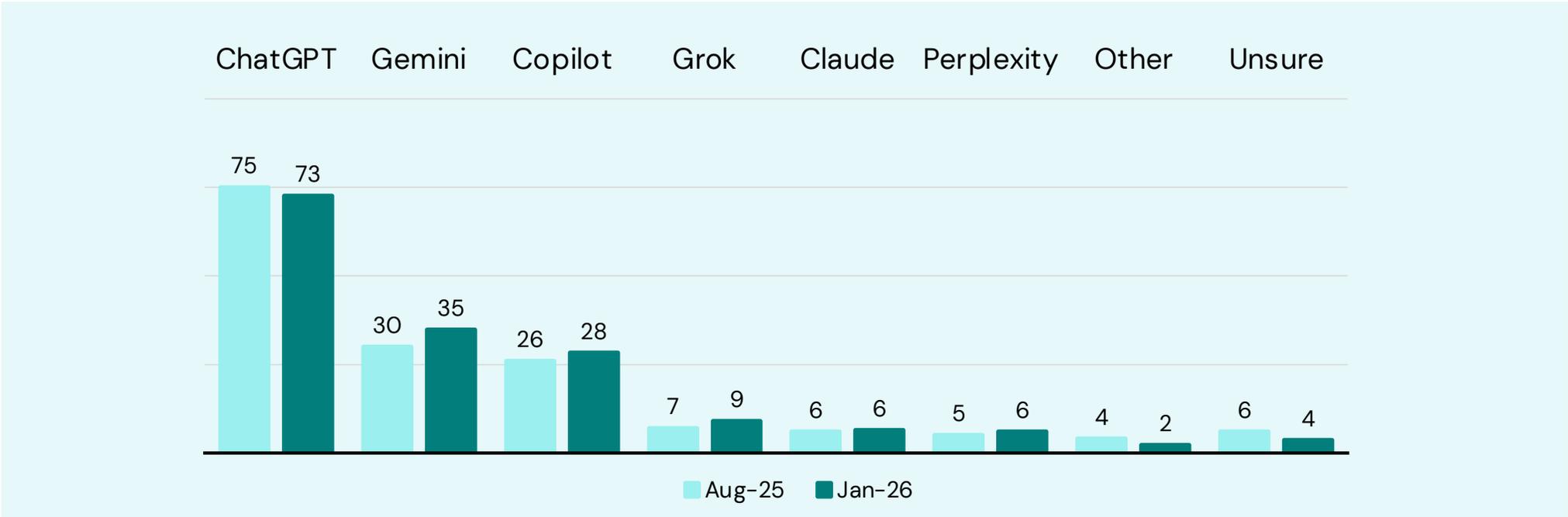
Younger respondents were more likely to say they use it daily:

- Under 30: 44%
- 30-44: 45%
- 45-59: 38%
- 60+: 25%

54% of those who live in a city use it daily and 52% of those who use it for work.

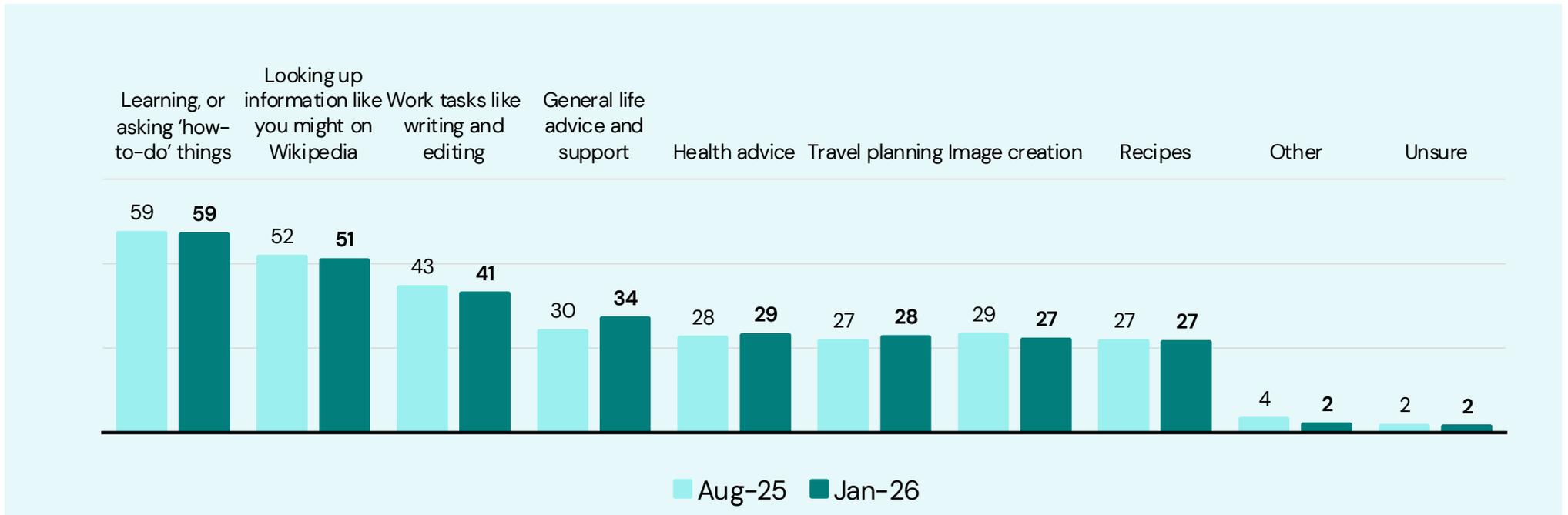
# AI tools used

[Those who use AI] What AI tools do you regularly use? (%)



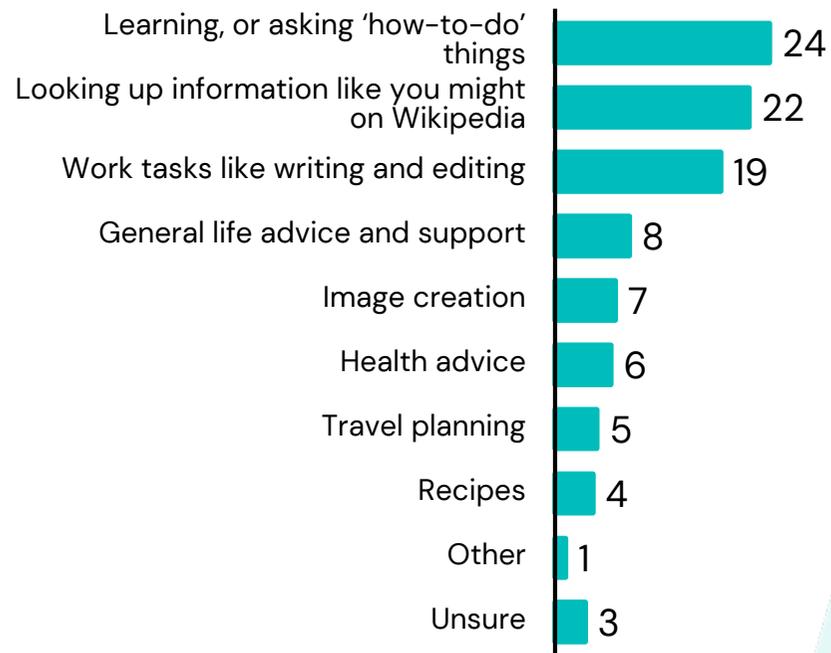
# AI usages

[Those who use AI] What are you using AI for? (%)



## AI usages – main

[Those who use AI] What would you consider your MAIN use of AI? (%)

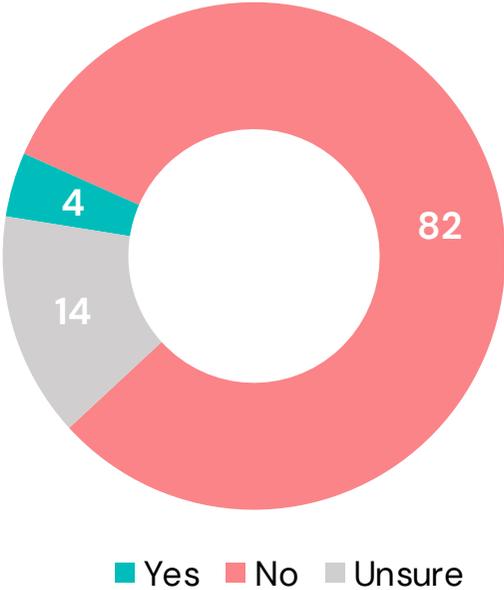


Those aged 60 or over were more likely to say 'looking up information' (36%), while those under 30 were more likely to say 'learning' (29%).

# Policy announcement

# Declared awareness of any government announcement about AI

In the past few months, have you seen or heard anything about the Australian Government announcing new plans or actions related to AI (artificial intelligence)? (%)

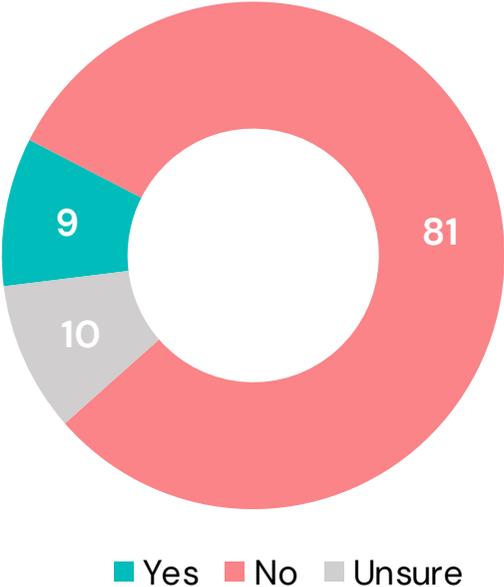


[If yes] What, if anything, do you recall? (% coded)

<b>Government rules, regulation and safety standards:</b> new rules, safety standards, guidelines and oversight for how AI is developed and used.	26
<b>Balancing investment with risk:</b> approach aimed to grow AI capability and investment while managing safety and harms.	9
<b>National AI plan and strategy:</b> "National AI plan/strategy/roadmap" (including references to 2025 and a December release) and government-wide direction on AI.	8
<b>Workforce impacts:</b> AI's impact on jobs, job protection, automation concerns, and workforce productivity.	7
<b>Surveillance and enforcement concerns:</b> increased surveillance, monitoring, and AI being used to monitor citizens or social media.	6
<b>Responsible use frameworks:</b> "AI responsibility framework" and general framing around responsible adoption and safe use.	4
<b>Sector applications:</b> AI use in areas like hospitals/health and other day-to-day applications.	4
<b>Public sector use and internal programmes:</b> AI programmes across the public service, including use by public servants and implementation guidance.	3
<b>Governance and accountability roles:</b> appointing chief AI officers, AI officers, or frameworks to guide responsible adoption inside government.	3
<b>Copyright and creative rights:</b> copyright/creative protections were discussed, including no exemption to copyright for AI companies and rights for creatives.	3
<b>Digital ID and age verification:</b> digital ID, facial recognition/age estimation, and links to social media access controls.	3
<b>Other:</b> NDIS plans and under-16 social media ban/hate speech monitoring.	2
<b>Unsure</b>	37

# Declared awareness of AI safety Institute or National AI Plan

Before today, have you heard anything about recent announcements from the Australian Government on the Australian AI Safety Institute or National AI Plan? (%)

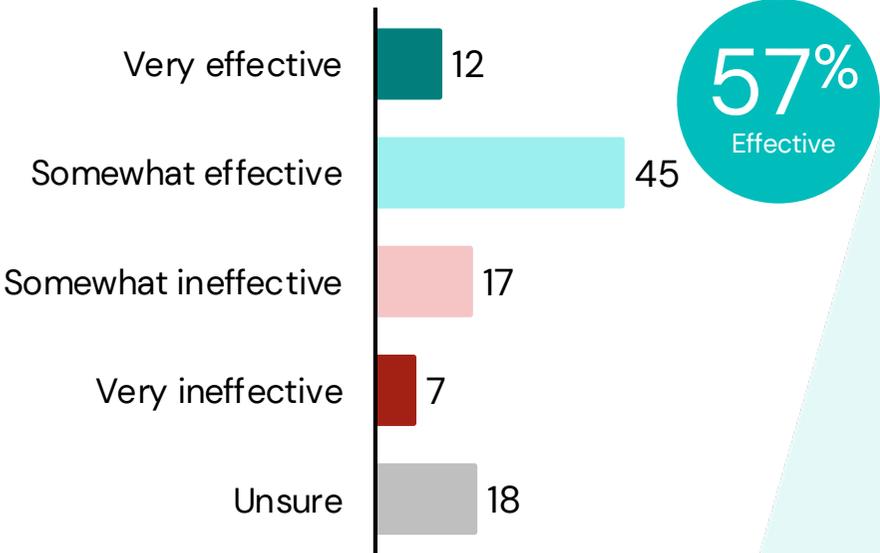


Younger respondents were more likely to say they are aware:

- Under 30: 17%
- 30-44: 12%
- 45-59: 7%
- 60+: 2%

# Effectiveness of the AI Safety Institute

The AI Safety Institute is intended to strengthen Australia’s ability to keep people safe from AI by building and sharing technical expertise on emerging risks, coordinating government responses to risks, and supporting regulators and international partners to uphold fair, transparent, and responsible AI use. Do think this approach will be: (%)



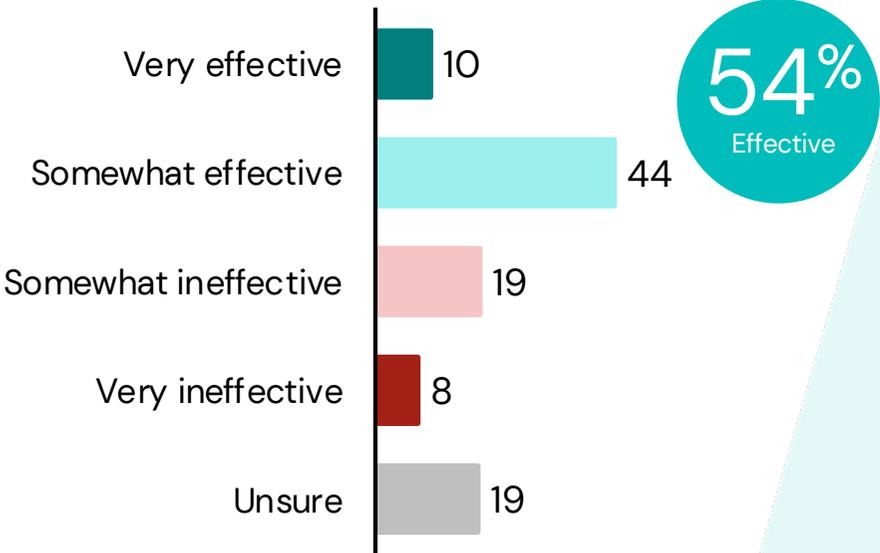
Younger respondents were more likely to think it might be effective:

- Under 30: 65%
- 30-44: 62%
- 45-59: 51%
- 60+: 51%

AI users (70%) and those who live in a city (68%) were all more likely to consider it effective.

# Effectiveness of the National AI Plan

The National AI Plan sets out how the Australian Government will grow Australia’s AI industry by building capability and infrastructure, accelerating skills and jobs, and strengthening safety frameworks so the benefits of AI are shared widely and responsibly across Australia. Do think this approach will be: (%)



Younger respondents were more likely to think it might be effective:

- Under 30: 63%
- 30-44: 60%
- 45-59: 47%
- 60+: 45%

AI users (69%) and those who live in a city (63%) were all more likely to consider it effective.