

DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

Australian Unity
Real Wellbeing

The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index

Wellbeing now and for generations to come

AUSTRALIANS' SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING IN 2026



Acknowledgement of Country

Deakin University and Australian Unity acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of all the unceded lands, skies and waterways across Australia, and recognise their enduring connection to Country, culture, and community. We pay our deep respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to Elders past and present, and extend that respect to emerging leaders. We also acknowledge the strength, resilience, and rich contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to the wellbeing of all Australians.

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Executive summary

The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index has tracked the wellbeing of Australians annually since the turn of the century. It is the nation's most comprehensive measure of subjective wellbeing and is one of the longest-running wellbeing surveys in the world.

The latest results were collected from nationally representative samples of Australian adults across two timepoints: the primary survey from 13 April to 5 May 2026 (n=10,005), and a short follow-up survey between 14-27 September 2026 on a representative subset of respondents who completed the primary survey (n=1,494).

Both surveys measured Australians personal wellbeing (i.e., how satisfied they are with their personal lives) and national wellbeing (i.e., how satisfied they are with life in Australia).

The April-May survey also focused on this year's special interest topic: intergenerational wellbeing. We examined how Australians perceive five key challenges shaping society (housing affordability, artificial intelligence (AI), healthcare access, climate change, and changing geopolitical conditions) as negatively impacting their own lives and the lives of future generations;

Australians' sense of connection to future generations; and, what kind of Australia they want future generations to inherit. The five societal challenge questions were repeated in the September follow-up survey to capture any shifts in sentiment following major policy announcements.

Both surveys took place amid mounting domestic and international pressures, spanning economic uncertainty, geopolitical instability, social cohesion concerns, increasing natural disasters, and growing public debate about intergenerational equity. The results are reported as follows:

- Part 1 examines Australians' personal and national wellbeing (April-May 2026), how these compare to previous years, and how wellbeing varies across population groups and complementary measures.
- Part 2 explores perceptions of key societal challenges, connection to future generations, and Australians' vision for the future (April-May 2026).
- Part 3 tracks changes in wellbeing and societal challenge perceptions across 2026, based on the September follow-up survey.

Part 1: Australians' wellbeing in 2026 (April-May survey)

Personal wellbeing remained broadly stable, but security and safety concerns emerged

Compared to 2025, Australians' personal wellbeing remained relatively stable in April-May 2026, with overall life satisfaction at 68.6 percentage points (pp) and the Personal Wellbeing Index at 67.2pp. Satisfaction with future security (-2.2pp) and personal safety (-1.2pp) both dropped meaningfully from last year, a likely reflection of economic uncertainty and heightened safety concerns.

National wellbeing dropped from 2025 rates

Compared to 2025, overall satisfaction with life in Australia and scores on the National Wellbeing Index dropped in April-May 2026, to 69.7pp (-1.9pp) and 54.8pp (-3.2pp) respectively. Falling satisfaction with Australia's economic situation (-5.7pp), government (-5.3pp), and national security (-3.4pp) suggest that the boost in national wellbeing observed following last year's federal election has reversed.

Wellbeing across population groups

In April-May 2026, Personal Wellbeing Index scores were lowest in Australians experiencing unemployment and economic insecurity. Single parents, 25-44-year-olds, those living alone, unpaid carers, and those living with multiple long-term health conditions also reported levels below the population normative range. Personal wellbeing was highest in older Australians (65+ years), middle-high income households ($156,000+), and homeowners without a mortgage.

Most population groups scored below the normative range on the National Wellbeing Index, reflecting a broad decline in 2026. Australians in the highest-earning households ($260,000+ per year), born in non-English-speaking countries, and those with a university degree, were the most satisfied with areas of national life in Australia.

Young and low-income Australians are experiencing health and social challenges

In April-May, we saw significant challenges across four health and wellbeing indicators – psychological distress, loneliness, pain, and feeling life is worthwhile – with the youngest adults and lowest-income households most affected. Around one in two young people (18-24 years) reported high or very high psychological distress and frequent loneliness (i.e., often/always or some of the time). Similarly, of those on the lowest household incomes (<$33.8k), around one in two reported high or very high psychological distress, while over 40% reported frequent loneliness and moderate or severe pain. Across all four measures, those most affected reported personal wellbeing levels well below the population normative range.

Part 2: Australia now and for generations to come (April-May survey)

Australians see major threats now and ahead, especially for housing

Australians were asked to rate the perceived negative impact of key societal challenges on their own current and future circumstances, as well as on the lives of generations to come. The five societal challenges examined closely align with the major transitions identified in the Australian Government's 2026 Intergenerational Report,[1] providing a community-level lens on how Australians feel these structural challenges will affect their own lives and the lives of future generations.

In April-May 2026, around one in two Australians rated changing global political and economic conditions (58.1%), housing cost and availability (54.0%), and access to affordable, high-quality healthcare and support services (51.0%), as likely to have a high negative impact on their current and future circumstances.

The majority believed these challenges, as well as, artificial intelligence (AI)/automation and climate change, would have an even greater impact on future generations (i.e., those not yet born).

Strikingly, 4 in 5 Australians (83.4%) said housing cost and availability would have a high negative impact on future generations – the highest perceived threat of all five challenges assessed. All threats to future generations were perceived most strongly by older generations in Australia, with the exception of climate change, which was seen as a greater future threat by younger Australians.

Australians who perceived housing and healthcare access as having a negative impact on their own lives reported personal and national wellbeing below the normal population range, suggesting these challenges are not just future concerns, but may reflect immediate wellbeing challenges for Australians today.

Australians feel connected to future generations

In April-May, almost two in three Australians agreed they were actively contributing to a better world for future generations (62.7%) and felt responsible for the wellbeing of future generations (61.0%), although only one in three reported giving up daily comforts to foster the development of future generations (38.2%). These attitudes and behaviours were largely consistent across age groups.

A broadly shared vision for Australia's future

In April–May, Australians were asked in an open-ended question to describe the Australia they want for future generations in a few words. Responses were wide-ranging, spanning 37 distinct themes and reflecting the breadth of Australians' aspirations for the future. The most commonly mentioned visions for a future Australia focused on:

1. Personal and community safety
2. Environment and climate action
3. Improved cost of living and financial security
4. A prosperous, stable and secure economy

More than half (58.1%) of Australians mentioned at least one of these themes and this was remarkably consistent across population groups, with these being the most commonly mentioned regardless of age, income, gender, location, education, or linguistic background. This points to a broadly shared vision for Australia's future.

Part 3: Changes in wellbeing and societal challenge perceptions across 2026 (September survey)

The following findings track changes within a nationally representative sample of Australians selected to complete both the primary and follow-up surveys (n=1,494), providing a direct measure of how wellbeing and perceptions shifted over the course of 2026.

Changes in personal and national wellbeing

Between April–May and September 2026, Personal Wellbeing Index scores declined overall, driven primarily by drops reported by older Australians aged 65 and over. This group experienced meaningful declines across six of the seven areas of personal life, although still had the highest wellbeing of any age group.

Additionally, satisfaction with standard of living declined meaningfully for Australians aged 35 and over, while satisfaction with personal safety also declined for those aged 18–34 and 50 and over.

National wellbeing remained relatively stable overall between the two surveys. However, declines in satisfaction with the state of the natural environment and social conditions were observed across the population, while satisfaction with national security improved slightly.

Changes in perceptions of societal challenges

Perceptions of societal challenges also shifted between surveys. Australians' perceived negative impact of AI and automation on their own lives increased markedly overall (+9.3pp), with the largest increase among those aged 65+ (+15.1pp). In contrast, perceived negative impact of changing global political and economic conditions on own life decreased overall (–8.0pp), with the largest decrease also among those aged 65+ (–13.1pp).

Overall

The 2026 Australian Unity Wellbeing Index surveys together paint a picture of a nation under pressure, and one where some personal wellbeing pressures deepened over the course of the year. All generations are broadly united in their vision for Australia – one that is safe, financially and economically secure, and has a sustainable, healthy environment. The challenge, and the opportunity, lies in building the skills, structures, and collective will to achieve this, while acknowledging that the wellbeing of future Australians cannot be separated from the wellbeing of Australians today.





Introduction and context

The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index

The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index (AUWI) has been tracking the pulse of Australians' subjective wellbeing for over 25 years. Each year, we survey a population-representative sample of Australian adults using the same core questions to assess how satisfied Australians feel about their personal lives and life in the nation more broadly, alongside a special interest topic that explores a contemporary issue of relevance to Australian society.

The Personal Wellbeing Index[2] measures satisfaction across seven domains of personal life: standard of living, health, achieving in life, personal relationships, personal safety, community connectedness, and future security. Meanwhile, the National Wellbeing Index[3] assesses satisfaction across six domains of national life: the economic situation, the state of the natural environment, social conditions, government, business, and national security.

These are measured alongside two broad questions about personal and national wellbeing: 'satisfaction with life as a whole' (Global Life Satisfaction) and 'satisfaction with life in Australia' (Global National Wellbeing).

In line with previous reports, we examine wellbeing over time and across a wide range of population characteristics. We also examine complementary health and wellbeing measures, including psychological distress, loneliness, pain, and feeling life is worthwhile. This year's special interest topic examines intergenerational wellbeing, specifically how Australians think about life today, and the world they will leave behind.

As in recent surveys, the 2026 Australian Unity Wellbeing Index survey was conducted with participants recruited mostly from Life in Australia™, Australia's only randomly recruited online research panel, and therefore its most population-representative. The survey was conducted in two waves in 2026:

1. Primary survey (April–May): The full questionnaire was administered to 10,005 Australians.
2. Follow-up survey (September): A shorter survey was completed by 1,494 Australians who had also completed the primary survey earlier in the year. This survey repeated the core wellbeing measures and questions about perceptions of societal challenges.

This two-stage design enabled examination of whether wellbeing and perceptions shifted within the same group of Australians across 2026, amid changing national and global conditions. Full details of the survey methodology are provided at the end of this report.

The national context: April–May 2026

The primary survey took place over 23 days between 13 April and 5 May 2026, just before the federal budget delivered on 12 May, which included major housing and taxation reforms as part of a broader intergenerational fairness agenda.[4]

This primary survey therefore captured Australian sentiment at a moment of significant domestic and international pressure, spanning economic uncertainty, geopolitical instability, social cohesion concerns and growing public debate about intergenerational equity. These pressures are outlined below.

The first included the aftermath of the devastating shooting at a Hanukkah celebration at Bondi Beach in December 2025, which claimed 15 people's lives. This event was one of the most significant acts of terrorism in Australia's recent history and prompted a Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion, heightening community concerns about safety.[5]

The second was housing affordability. According to the federal government's State of the Housing System 2026 report, rental affordability had fallen to a record-low, with home purchase affordability also continuing to deteriorate.[6] Wealth inequalities also worsened, reaching a point where just 20 of Australia's richest individuals now hold more wealth than the bottom three million Australian households combined.[7]

The third were international conflicts and tensions, particularly in the Middle East, which continued to affect Australia through economic pressures, social tensions, and national security considerations.[8] These global pressures spilled over to hit Australian budgets, with petrol prices climbing to a high of $2.60 per litre, and diesel exceeding $3 per litre, at the end of March[9] – adding further pressure on households already feeling the cost-of-living crisis. The Reserve Bank cited these inflationary pressures as a key reason for raising interest rates for two consecutive months in early 2026, reversing the rate cuts that had occurred in 2025.[10]

The fourth was healthcare. Access to affordable, high-quality healthcare amid an ageing population remained a concern, particularly given that Australians' experience of the healthcare system can be inequitably shaped by income, location, and cultural background.[11]

The fifth was artificial intelligence (AI). Rapid advances in AI and automation of services started to significantly reshape the Australian economy and workforce, with the occupations most exposed to AI growing at slower rates than others.[12]

Against this complex backdrop, the Federal Budget delivered in May 2026 included a focus on boosting Australia's fuel security, easing cost of living pressures, tax reform targeted to support first home buyers and future generations, and better care for older Australians.[4]

The national context: September 2026

The follow-up survey was conducted over 14 days between 14 and 27 September 2026, approximately four months after the federal budget and major housing and taxation reforms were introduced. This follow-up captured whether Australians' wellbeing and perceptions of key societal challenges had shifted following these significant policy changes and the evolving national context.

Between the primary and follow-up survey, the negative gearing and capital gains tax reforms were passed into law, with changes set to take effect from 1 July 2027.[13] These reforms were explicitly framed around intergenerational fairness, addressing the reality that "younger Australians are finding it harder than earlier generations to build wealth and buy a home, as house prices have risen much faster than incomes".[13]

In the period after the primary survey and before the follow-up survey, falling house prices were interpreted as suggesting that announced tax reforms, combined with rising inflation and interest rate rises from the Reserve Bank, may be beginning to influence buyer and investor sentiment, making headlines and sparking public debate about impacts on current generations.[14]

Meanwhile, a landmark UN report announced that the world would overshoot the 1.5°C climate target within the next five years,[15] while other experts warned we were heading into the strongest El Niño in history.[16]

These climate change impacts were being felt in real time, with catastrophic flash flooding in Nepal in late August 2026[17] and heatwaves and wildfires ravaging Europe across its summer.[18]

At the same time, AI experts and leaders issued stark public warnings that artificial intelligence posed risks to humanity, intensifying public debate about the pace and governance of technological change.[19] The announcement in September that non-public Medicare data were accessed in a hacking by an AI agent also sparked further concern.[20]

Taken together, these conditions provide crucial context for interpreting the 2026 Australian Unity Wellbeing Index results.

Intergenerational wellbeing: Australia now and for generations to come

Ensuring we leave a better world for future generations (i.e., those not yet born) is not only a key governance principle adhered to by many Indigenous groups over time, it is also a key marker of modern societal progress. Historically, many Australians have seen living standards, social mobility and life expectancy increase in Australia from one generation to the next, though these gains have not been shared equally by all. However, this intergenerational trend is no longer holding up, with stagnating wage growth meaning a person in their thirties today earns roughly the same amount as someone in their thirties ten years ago.[21] This marks the first time in modern Australian history that the next generation is not better off economically than those who came before them.

Additionally, although Australia has a high life expectancy, it has the second largest gap between lifespan and healthspan (i.e., years lived in good health) out of 183 WHO member states and behind only the United States[22] – meaning that while Australians live longer, they spend over 12 years, on average, living with disease or disability.

There is increasing interest, globally, to increase population healthspan and secure better health and wellbeing for generations to come. Wales' landmark Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015)[23] has demonstrated the practical benefits of collaborative long-term thinking in government, and the United Nations' recent Declaration on Future Generations (2024)[24] reflects growing international consensus that current decisions must account for those not yet born.

In Australia, similar momentum is building, with cross-partisan efforts to explore how existing and new approaches can address the pervasive effects of short-term thinking and planning in policymaking. Building on the foundations of the Parliamentary Group for Future Generations and the Intergenerational Fairness Coalition, the National Conversation Development Lab was recently established to more effectively engage the Australian public in these efforts. This initiative will undertake a year-long collaborative design process to develop an Australian model for a National Conversation about our future.

Critically, improving wellbeing for current Australians and securing a better future for the next generations should not be competing priorities. The Australian Government's 2026 Intergenerational Report identifies five major challenges that will have profound implications for Australia's economy and society over the next 40 years: the rise of AI, geopolitical fragmentation, the renewable energy transition, an ageing population and the ability to care for it, and industrial transformation towards services.[1] Alongside these structural shifts, the Report notes that concerns about intergenerational equity have deepened, with young Australians increasingly locked out of the housing market and trust in institutions declining. Many of these challenges are not only future concerns – they are already shaping the lives of Australians today.

It is against this backdrop that this year's special interest topic – Australia now and for generations to come – explores three interconnected questions: how Australians perceive the impact of key societal challenges on their own lives, and on the lives of future generations; the extent to which they feel connected to, and responsible for, those not yet born; and what kind of Australia they want future generations to inherit.



Part 1:

Australians' wellbeing in 2026

Part 1 presents findings on how Australians are faring in April-May 2026 across a range of personal and national wellbeing measures, including:

1. Wellbeing over time

The core Australian Unity Wellbeing Index measures: Global Life Satisfaction, the Personal Wellbeing Index and its seven domains, Global National Wellbeing, and the National Wellbeing Index and its six domains. These are tracked across three time points with comparable data (2024, 2025, and April–May 2026).

2. Wellbeing across population groups

How personal and national wellbeing varied across key population groups, including by age, household income, and other characteristics.

3. Complementary health and wellbeing measures

Overall levels of psychological distress, loneliness, pain, and feeling that life is worthwhile, and how these varied by personal wellbeing and two key population characteristics: age and household income.

Where relevant, results are compared against the Australian population normative range – the typical range of wellbeing scores for Australian adults – established using 2025 data (see Khor et al., 2026).[25]

Subjective wellbeing over time

Personal wellbeing over time

Global Life Satisfaction

In April-May 2026, over 10,000 Australians rated their satisfaction with life as a whole (Global Life Satisfaction). When standardised to a 0-100 percentage point (pp) scale, the average overall life satisfaction score of Australians was 68.6pp, similar to 2025 levels (-0.2pp; Figure 1).



Figure 1. Global Life Satisfaction, 2002-2024 (telephone surveys) and 2024-2026 (online surveys)

Personal Wellbeing Index

In 2026, Australians' average Personal Wellbeing Index score was 67.2pp, down from 67.9pp in 2025 (-0.7pp; Figure 2), although this change was not statistically meaningful. The stability in the national averages of personal wellbeing aligns with the theory of subjective wellbeing homeostasis, which proposes that humans have evolved to maintain a stable mood that can strengthen defences against negative experiences.[26]

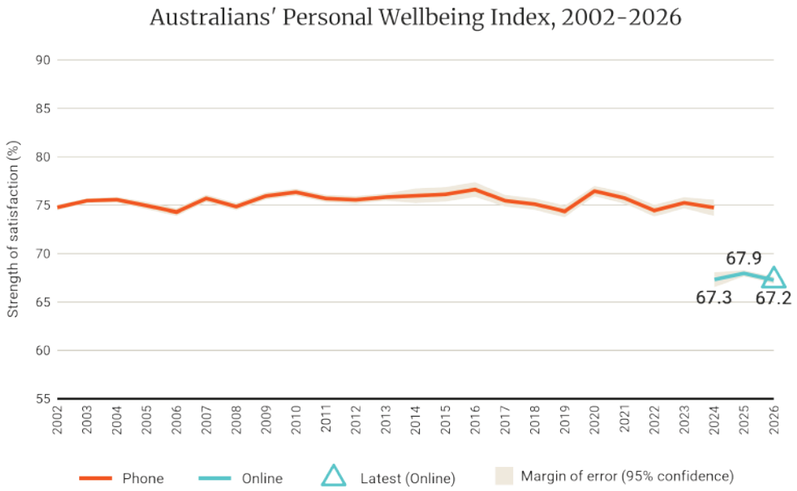


Figure 2. Personal Wellbeing Index, 2002-2024 (telephone surveys) and 2024-2026 (online surveys)

Personal Wellbeing Index domains

Average scores on the Personal Wellbeing Index domains were largely consistent with the 2024 and 2025 average scores (Figure 3). However, satisfaction with two domains was meaningfully lower in 2026, compared to 2025. This was for future security (-2.2pp) and personal safety (-1.2pp).

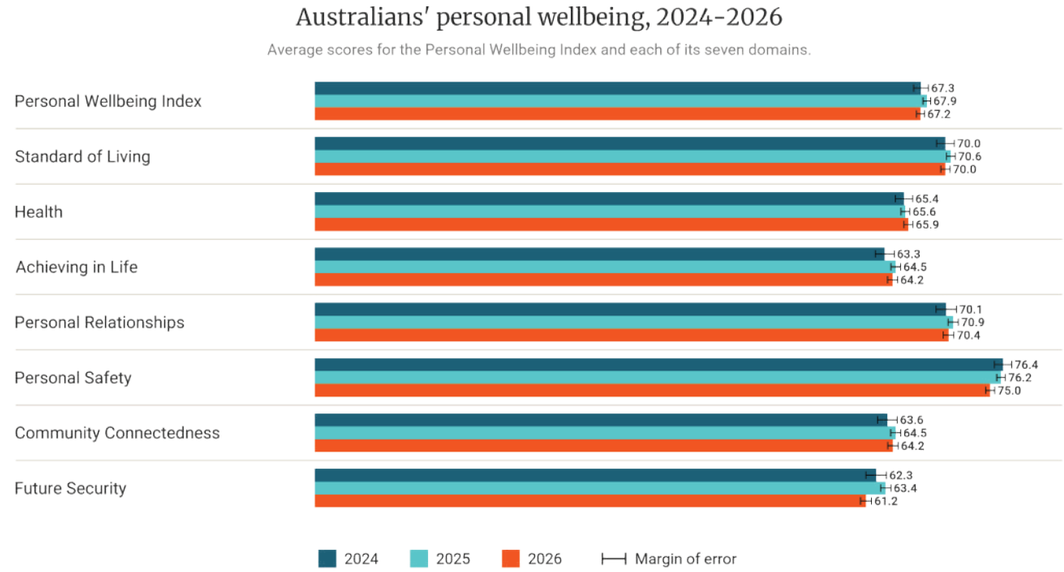


Figure 3. Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) and each of its seven domains, 2024-2026 (online surveys)

National wellbeing over time

Global National Wellbeing

Participants rated their overall satisfaction with life in Australia (Global National Wellbeing). In 2026, average Global National Wellbeing was 69.7pp, dropping from 71.6pp in 2025 (-1.9pp; Figure 4).

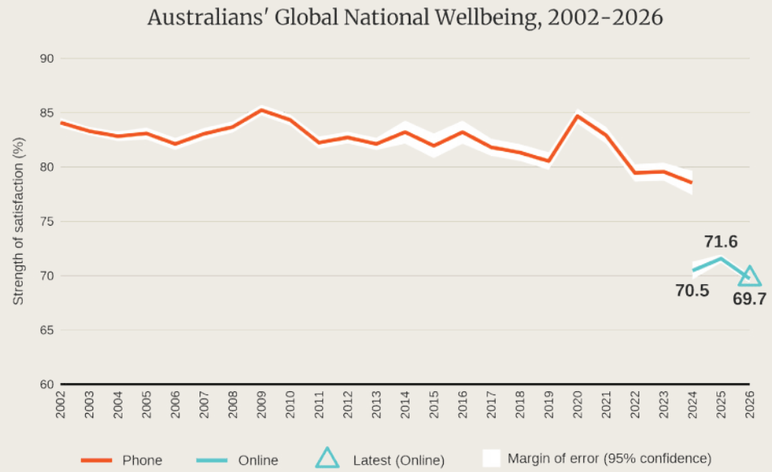


Figure 4. Global National Wellbeing, 2002-2024 (telephone surveys) and 2024-2026 (online surveys)

National Wellbeing Index

In 2026, Australians' average National Wellbeing Index score was 54.8pp, down from 58.0pp in 2025 (-3.2pp; Figure 5). The gap between Global National Wellbeing and the National Wellbeing Index is expected, as Australians consistently tend to rate life in Australia more favourably in general terms than when asked about specific areas of national life, like the economy or government.

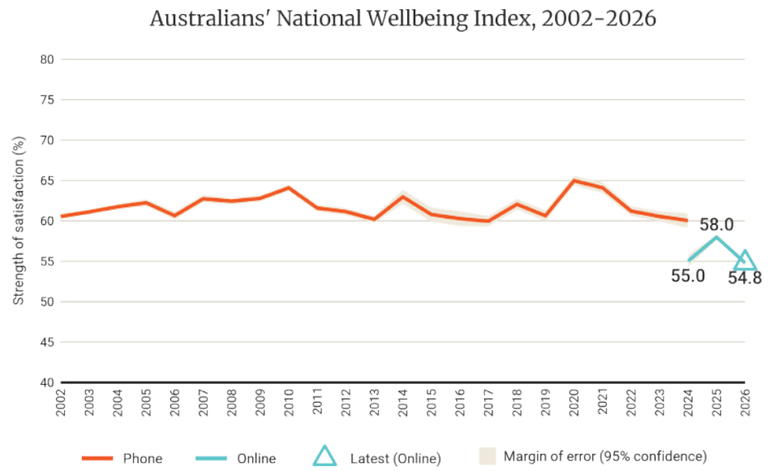


Figure 5. National Wellbeing Index, 2002-2024 (telephone surveys) and 2024-2026 (online surveys)

National Wellbeing Index domains

Average scores across all National Wellbeing Index domains, except satisfaction with the state of the natural environment, showed meaningful drops from 2025, with the biggest drops seen in satisfaction with the economic situation (-5.7pp), and with government (-5.3pp; Figure 6). Satisfaction with national security (-3.4pp) dropped below 2024 and 2025 levels, while satisfaction with the state of the natural environment was similar to 2025 scores but meaningfully higher than 2024 (+2.4pp).



Figure 6. National Wellbeing Index and each of its seven domains, 2024-2026 (online surveys

Subjective wellbeing by population groups

The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index survey examines a wide range of personal characteristics of respondents. These include: age, gender, geographic location, occupation, household income, neighbourhood disadvantage, housing tenure, education level, marital status, household composition, culturally and linguistically diverse markers, unpaid carer status, and long-term health condition status. This allows us to examine inequities in wellbeing among specific subgroups of the population.

Personal Wellbeing Index

Figure 7 summarises average personal wellbeing scores across all population groups in 2026, with meaningful differences emerging across several groups.

Personal wellbeing below the normative range

Personal wellbeing was lowest in Australians experiencing unemployment (50.1pp). Other groups experiencing economic insecurity also reported below-normative range wellbeing, including those in the lowest income households (≤$33,799 per year) and most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, non-homeowners, and full-time students. Single parents, 25-44-year-olds, those living alone or with others (but not a partner), unpaid carers, and people living with multiple long-term health conditions, also fell below the normative range, as did those who were separated, divorced, or never married.

Personal wellbeing above the normative range

Personal wellbeing was highest in older Australians (65+ years; 73.3-77.2pp). Groups experiencing economic security also reported above-normative range wellbeing, including high-income households ($156,000+ per year), outright homeowners, and those living in the least disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Australians not in the labour force, born overseas in an English-speaking country, married or widowed, living with a partner (but no children), university-educated, volunteers, or living without a long-term health condition similarly reported above-range personal wellbeing.

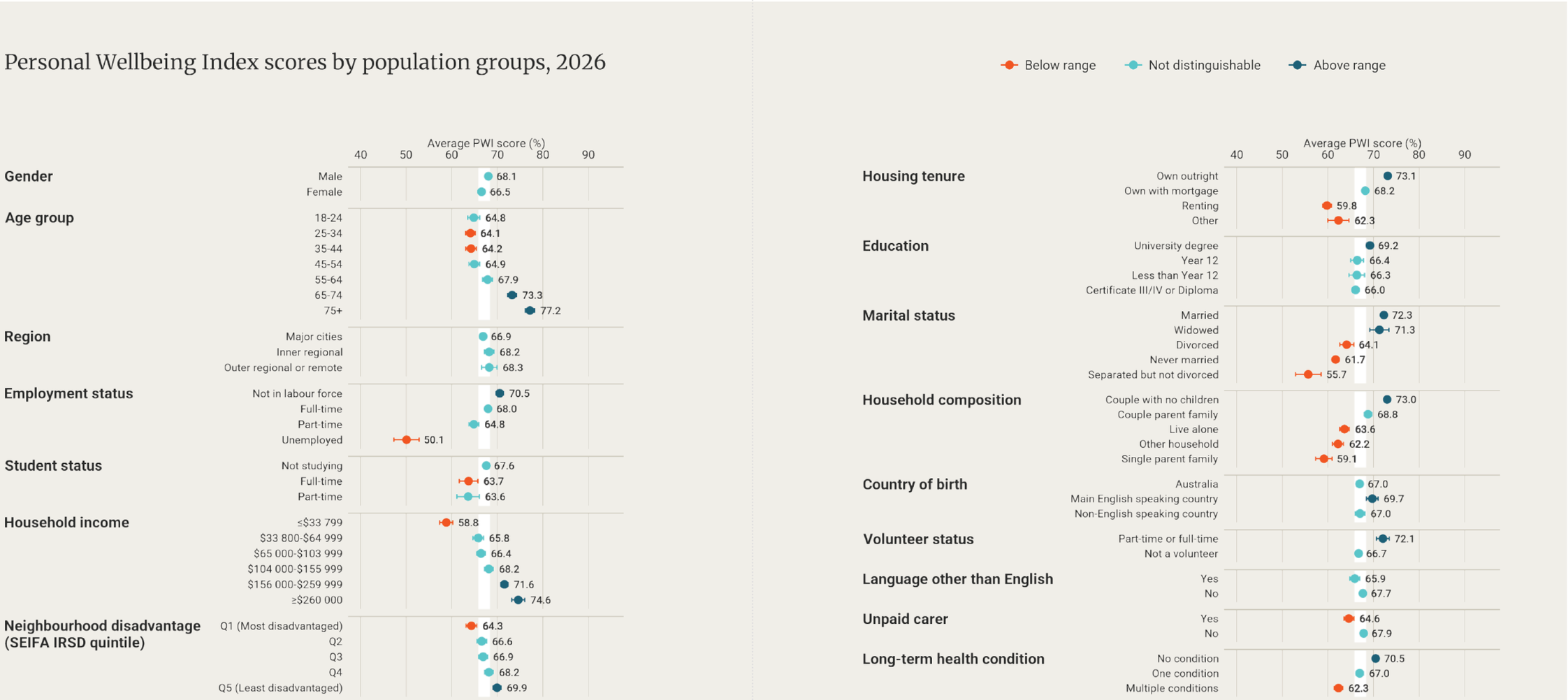


Figure 7. Average Personal Wellbeing Index scores by population groups, 2026

National Wellbeing Index

Figure 8 summarises average national wellbeing scores across all population groups in 2026.

National wellbeing below the normative range

Most groups scored below the normative range for national wellbeing, reflecting the overall drop in wellbeing observed in 2026, compared to 2025 (i.e., when the norms were established).[25] Scores were lowest among Australians who were separated but not divorced (45.2pp), experiencing unemployment (46.2pp), and single parents (48.8pp).

National wellbeing above the normative range

National wellbeing was above the normative range for Australians in the highest-earning households ($260,000+ per year), born in non-English-speaking countries, or with a university degree.

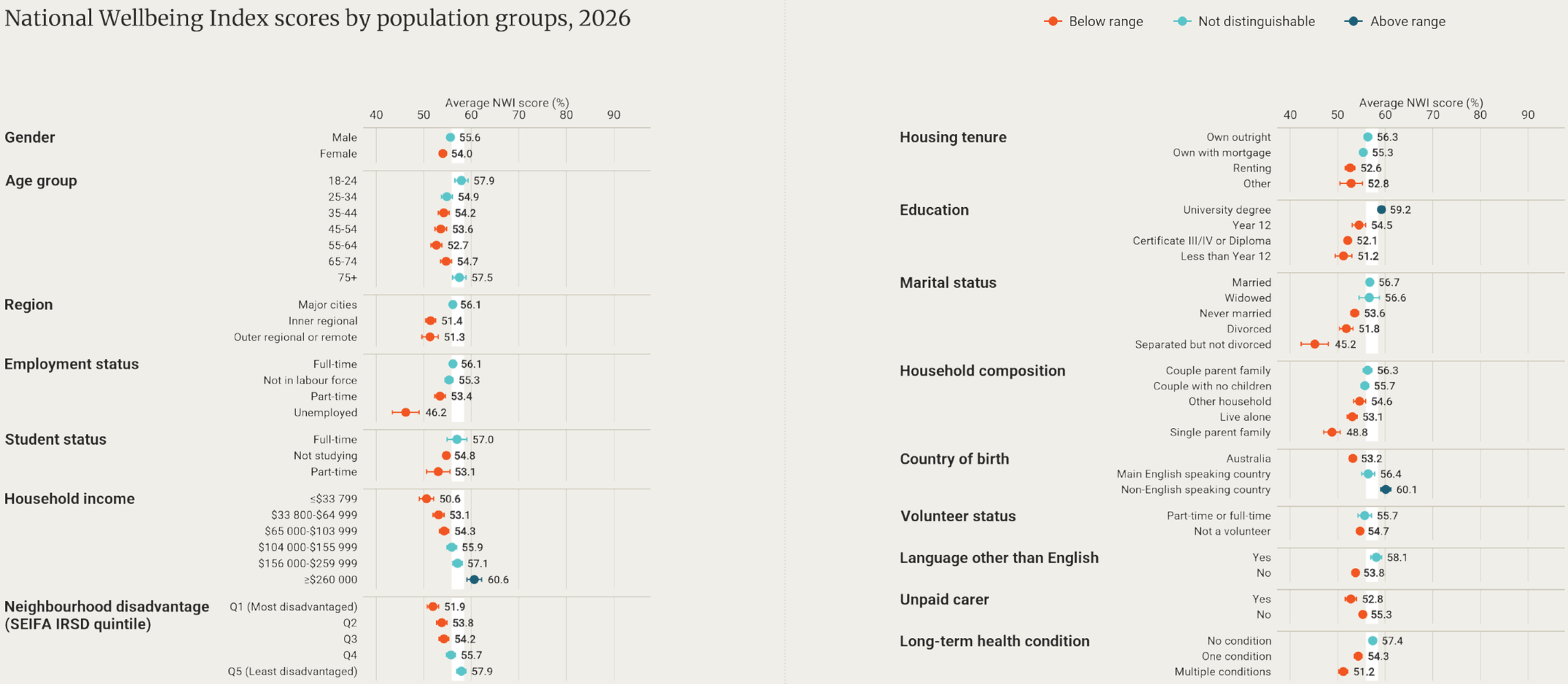


Figure 8. Average National Wellbeing Index scores by population groups, 2026

Complementary health and wellbeing measures

While the subjective wellbeing measures remain the core focus of the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index (AUWI), the survey also included four measures that capture important dimensions of Australians' wellbeing.

Psychological distress and loneliness have been tracked frequently throughout the AUWI series and are key markers of population mental health and wellbeing. Two additional measures were included in 2026: pain and feeling life is worthwhile (i.e., eudaimonic wellbeing). These align with the OECD's core recommendations for measuring subjective wellbeing.[27]

Together, these four measures extend our understanding of Australians' wellbeing, capturing markers of mental health, social connection, physical experience, and sense of purpose alongside our satisfaction measures.

Psychological distress

How Australians rate their psychological distress

In 2026, one in three (33.9%) Australians reported high or very high psychological distress (i.e., scores ≥22). Psychological distress was most prevalent in the youngest adults, with over one in two (56.1%) 18–24-year-olds reporting high or very high distress (Figure 9). Distress was lower in all older age groups.

Across income groups, psychological distress was most prevalent in the lowest-earning households, with almost one in two (48.7%) people in households earning ≤$33,799 reporting high or very high distress (Figure 10).

Psychological distress and personal wellbeing

Personal wellbeing differed meaningfully based on level of psychological distress (Figure 11). On average, people experiencing high or very high distress fell below the normative range, with lower (9.5–29.2pp) wellbeing levels than those experiencing low or moderate distress.

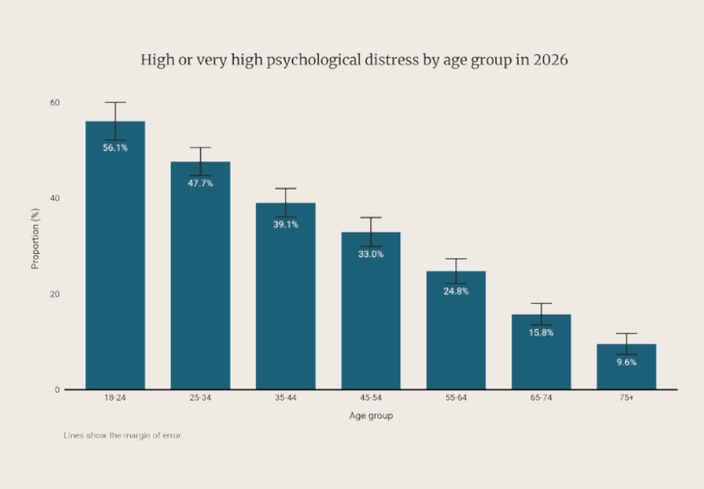


Figure 9. Psychological distress by age groups in 2026

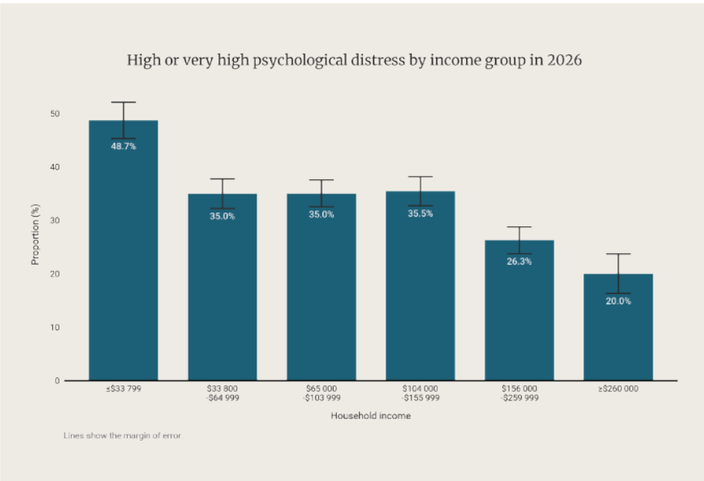


Figure 10. Psychological distress by household income groups in 2026

Psychological distress and personal wellbeing

Personal wellbeing differed meaningfully based on level of psychological distress (Figure 11). On average, people experiencing high or very high distress fell below the normative range, with lower (9.5–29.2pp) wellbeing levels than those experiencing low or moderate distress.

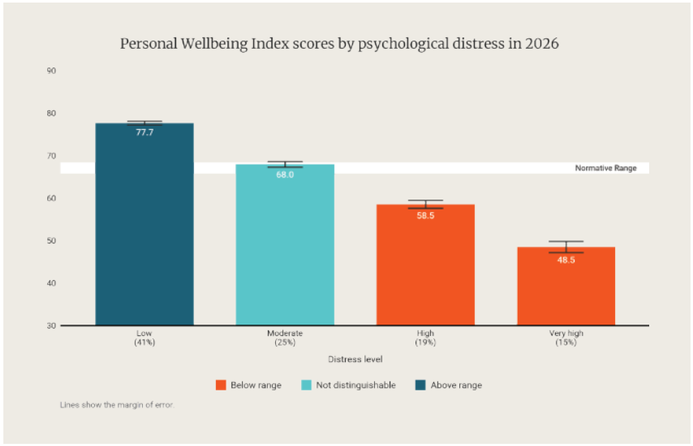


Figure 11. Average Personal Wellbeing Index scores by psychological distress level, 2026

Loneliness

How Australians rate their loneliness

In 2026, almost one in three Australians (29.6%) reported feeling lonely often, always, or some of the time. Across age groups, loneliness was felt most frequently in the youngest adults, with almost one in two (45.7%) 18-24-year-olds reporting feeling lonely often, always, or some of the time (Figure 12).

Across income groups, loneliness was felt most frequently in the lowest-earning households, with four in ten (40.9%) people in households earning ≤$33,799 reporting feeling lonely often, always, or some of the time (Figure 13).

Loneliness and personal wellbeing

Personal wellbeing differed based on frequency of loneliness (Figure 14). On average, people experiencing loneliness often, always or some of the time fell below the normative range, with meaningfully lower (11.6–20.6pp) wellbeing levels than those experiencing loneliness occasionally, hardly ever or never.

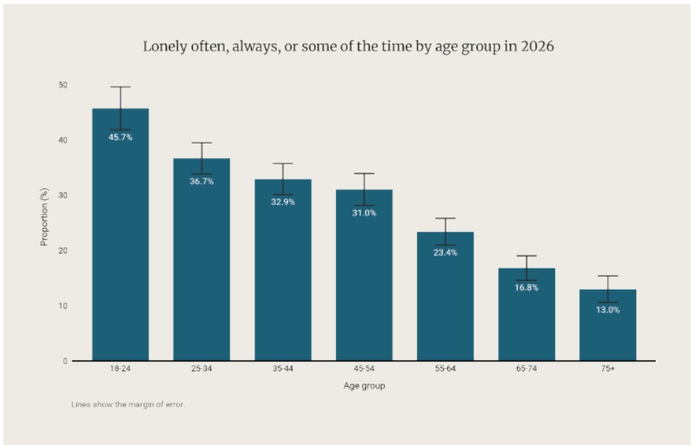


Figure 12. Loneliness by age groups in 2026

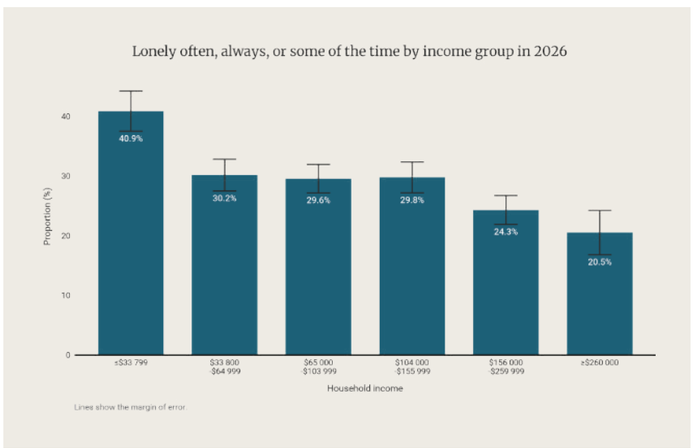


Figure 13. Loneliness by household income groups in 2026

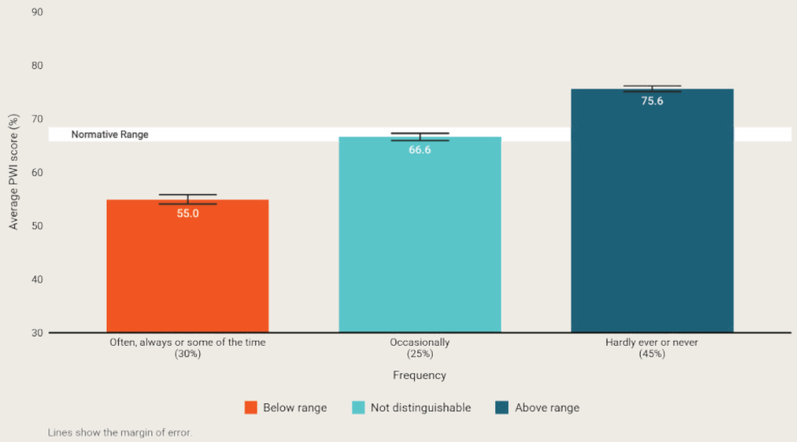


Figure 14. Average Personal Wellbeing Index scores by loneliness frequency, 2026

Pain

How Australians rate their pain

In 2026, almost one in three (31.4%) Australians reported moderate or severe pain over an average week (i.e., scores ≥5). Pain was most prevalent in adults over 45 years, with one in three (34.4-37.0%) reporting moderate or severe pain compared to one in four (26.6-27.0%) 18–44-year-olds (Figure 15).

Across income groups, pain was most prevalent in lower-income earning households, with people in households earning less than $65,000 per year reporting the highest levels of moderate or severe pain (38.2-44.3%; Figure 16).

Feelings of pain and personal wellbeing

On average, people experiencing moderate or severe pain fell below the normative range, with meaningfully lower (6.9-11.7pp) wellbeing levels than those experiencing mild or no pain (Figure 17).

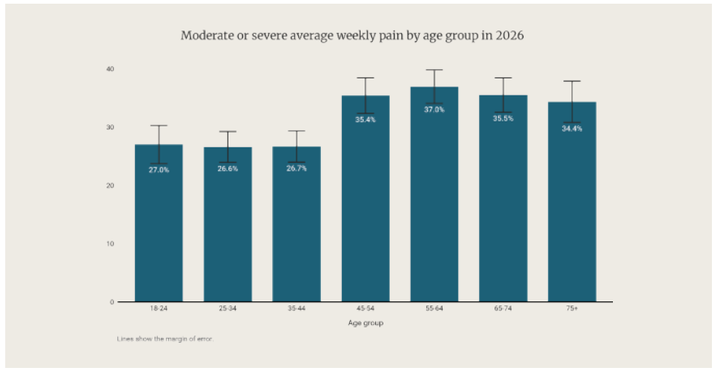


Figure 15. Average weekly pain by age groups in 2026

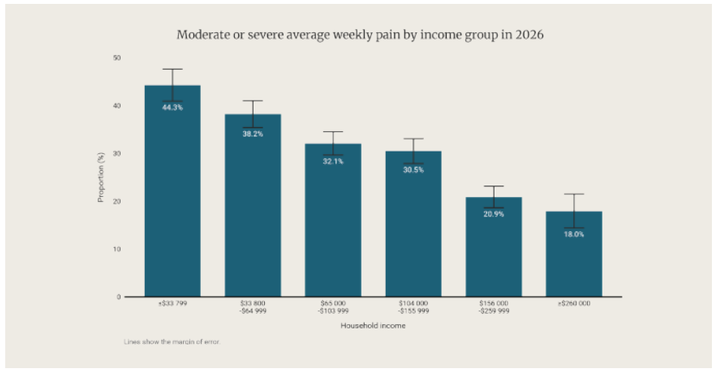


Figure 16. Average weekly pain by household income groups in 2026

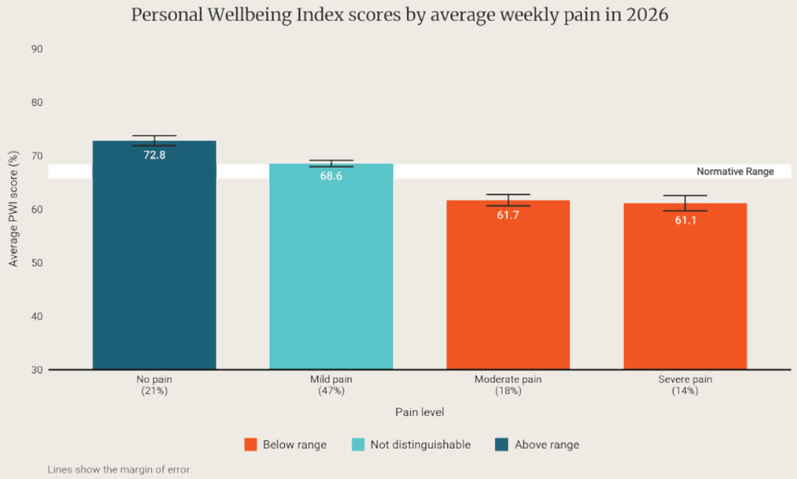


Figure 17. Average Personal Wellbeing Index scores by weekly pain levels, 2026

Feeling life is worthwhile

How Australians rate their feelings of life being worthwhile

Australians were asked to rate the extent to which they feel the things they do in life are worthwhile (i.e., feeling life is worthwhile). In 2026, around one in ten Australians (11.8%) reported low feelings of life being worthwhile (i.e., scores ≤40). Across age groups, low feelings of life being worthwhile were more prevalent in 18–54-year-olds (11.6–14.6%) compared to those aged 65 years and older (4.1–7.8%; Figure 18).

Across income groups, low feelings of life being worthwhile were most prevalent in the lowest-earning households, with one in five (21.8%) people in households earning ≤$33,799 reporting low feelings of life being worthwhile (Figure 19).

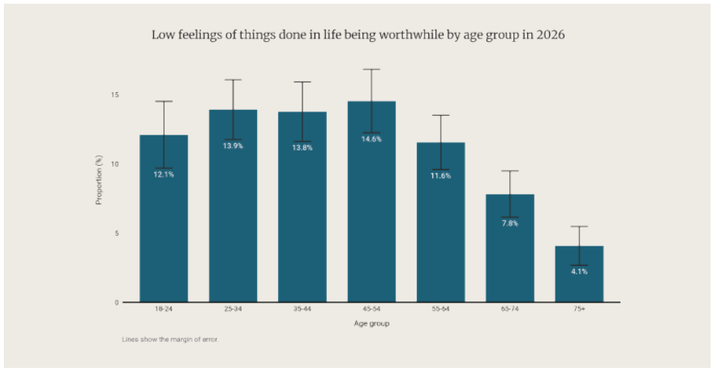


Figure 18. Low feelings of life being worthwhile by age groups in 2026

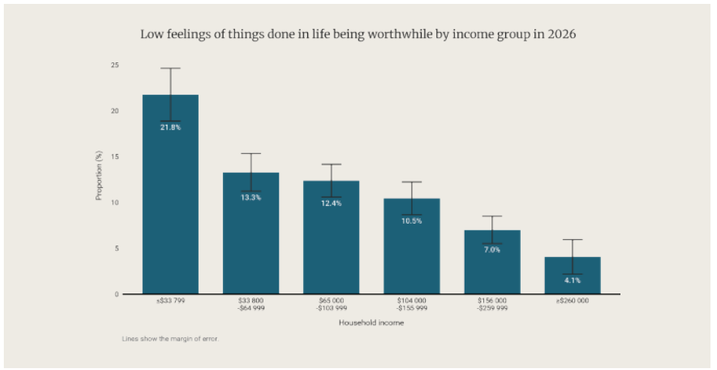


Figure 19. Low feelings of life being worthwhile by household income groups in 2026



Feeling life is worthwhile and personal wellbeing

Personal wellbeing differed based on respondent's feelings (Figure 20). On average, Australians reporting low or medium feelings of life being worthwhile fell below the population normative range, with meaningfully lower (13.3-41.7pp) wellbeing levels than those reporting high or very high feelings of life being worthwhile.

Figure 20. Average Personal Wellbeing Index scores by feeling life is worthwhile, 2026

Part 2:

Australia now and for generations to come

Part 2 examines three broad areas of inquiry explored in the April-May 2026 survey:

1. Perceptions of key societal challenges

How Australians perceive five key challenges – housing cost and availability, changing global political and economic conditions, access to affordable healthcare, climate change, and AI and automation – as negatively impacting their own lives and the lives of future generations.

2. Sense of connection to future generations

Australians' feelings of responsibility and active contributions towards the generations to come.

3. Vision for the future

What kind of Australia people want future generations to inherit, drawing on open-ended responses from over 9,500 Australians.

Throughout Part 2, we examine how perceptions, connection, and visions vary across age groups, and explore how personal and national wellbeing differs depending on where Australians sit across these three areas.

Impact of societal challenges on current and future generations

Australians were asked to rate the extent to which five major societal challenges will negatively impact their own current and future lives, and separately, the lives of future generations (i.e., those not yet born).

The five challenges assessed were:

- Climate change
- Artificial intelligence (AI) and/or automation
- Changing global political and economic conditions
- Access to affordable, high-quality healthcare and support services
- Housing cost and availability

Responses were measured on a 5-point scale from 1 *(Not at all)* to 5 *(Extremely)*.

Impact on current and future generations

Figure 21 shows the percentage of Australian adults rating each challenge as likely to have a high negative impact (i.e., a rating of 'Very' or 'Extremely') on their own lives compared with the lives of future generations. Changing global political and economic conditions (58.1%) was most perceived as having a high negative impact on oneself, followed by housing cost and availability (54.0%) and access to affordable, high-quality healthcare and support services (51.0%).

Most Australians (i.e., over 50%) believed all five challenges would have a high negative impact on future generations. However, housing cost and availability was by far the strongest perceived threat to future generations, with 83.4% of Australians reporting it would have a high negative impact, compared to 70.6% for changing global political and economic conditions.

All challenges were perceived as having a higher negative impact on future generations than current generations. The largest gaps between impacts on current vs future generations were for housing cost and availability (29.3pp), artificial intelligence (AI) and automation (22.0pp), and climate change (19.5pp).

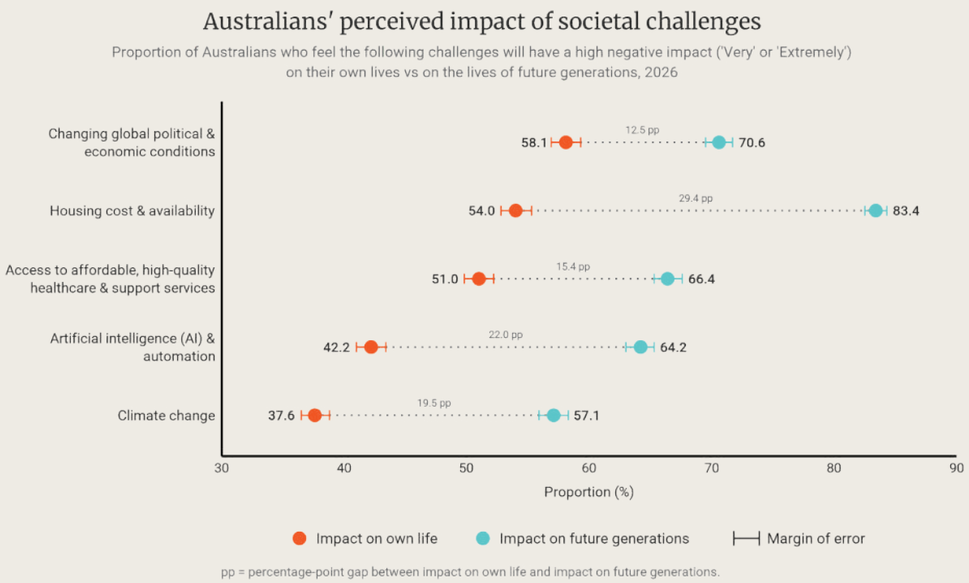


Figure 21. Perceived impact of societal challenges on current and future generations, 2026

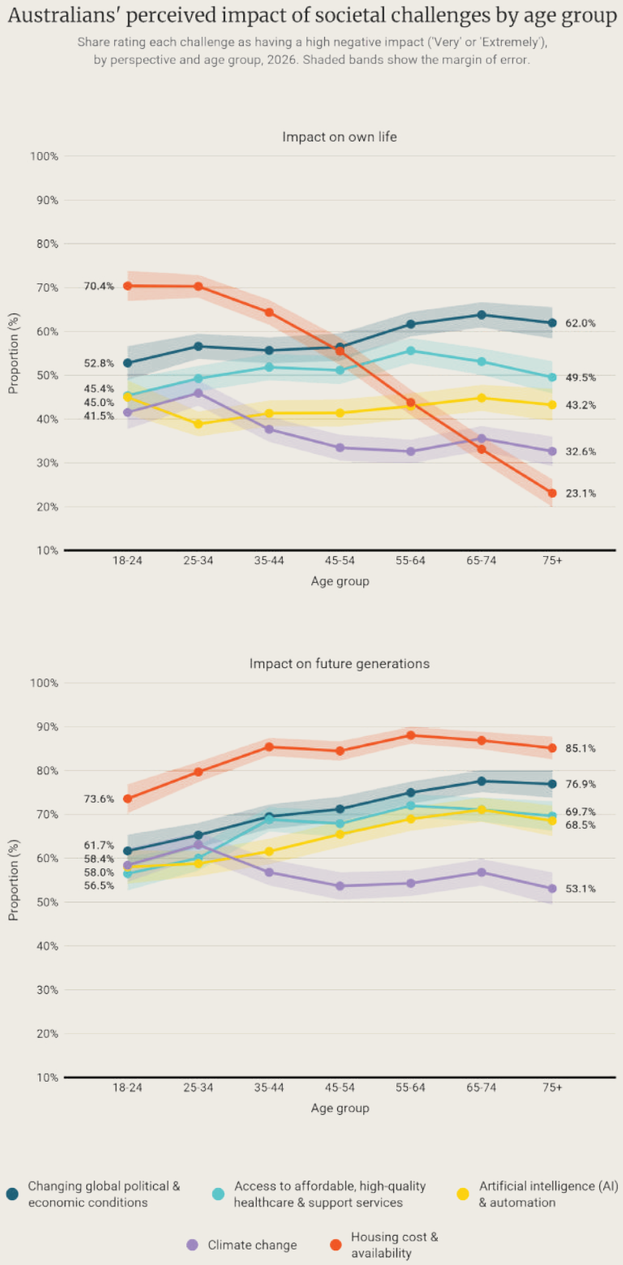


Figure 22. Perceived impact of societal challenges on current and future generations by age groups, 2026

Comparing current and future generation impacts across age groups

Figure 22 examines perceptions of high negative impact for each challenge by age group, for Australians' own lives and the lives of future generations. The most striking age-related pattern for impact on life was observed for housing cost and availability, where perceptions of high negative impact were considerably higher in younger age groups.

Around seven in ten adults aged 18-24 (70.4%) and 25-34 (70.3%) rated housing as having a high negative impact on their lives, compared with two in ten adults aged 75 and over (23.1%). Perceived negative impact for climate change and artificial intelligence (AI) and automation also tended to be higher among the youngest age groups, though the differences were less pronounced than those observed for housing.

In contrast, perceptions of high negative impact from changing global political and economic conditions and access to affordable, high-quality healthcare and support services were more commonly reported in older Australians (55+ years).

Perceptions of high negative impact on future generations were more consistently reported than a personal impact on one's own life across all age groups. Older Australians were more likely to perceive a high negative impact on future generations for most challenges, except for climate change, where perception was highest in 25-34 year-olds (63.1%). Housing cost and availability remained the highest perceived impact challenge on future generations, with perceptions peaking among those aged 55-64 (88.1%), and remaining above 80% for all groups aged 35 years and over.

Societal challenges impact on current and future generations and wellbeing

Figures 23 and 24 show the average personal and national wellbeing scores of Australian adults rating each challenge as likely to have a high negative impact on their own lives (current and future) compared with the lives of future generations.

Australians who perceived housing cost and availability and access to affordable, high-quality healthcare and support services as having a high negative impact on their own lives scored below the normative range on personal wellbeing (Figure 23).

Australians who felt that each societal challenge, except climate change, would have a high impact on their own lives or on the lives of future generations scored below the normative range on national wellbeing (Figure 24).

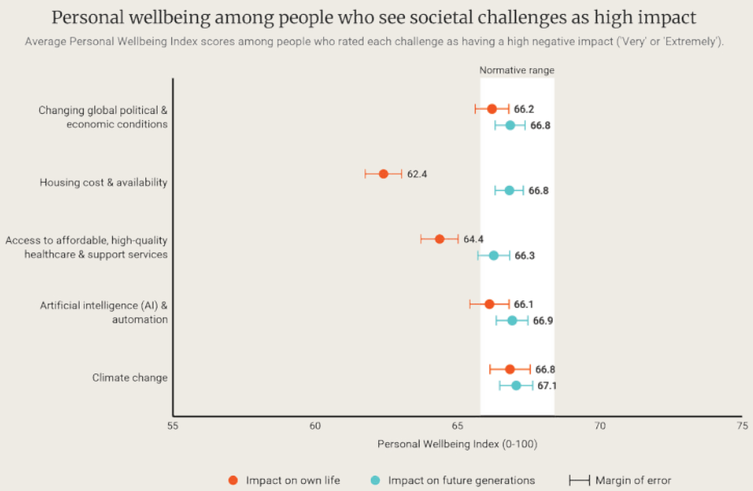


Figure 23. Average Personal Wellbeing Index scores by high perceived negative impact of societal challenges on current and future generations, 2026

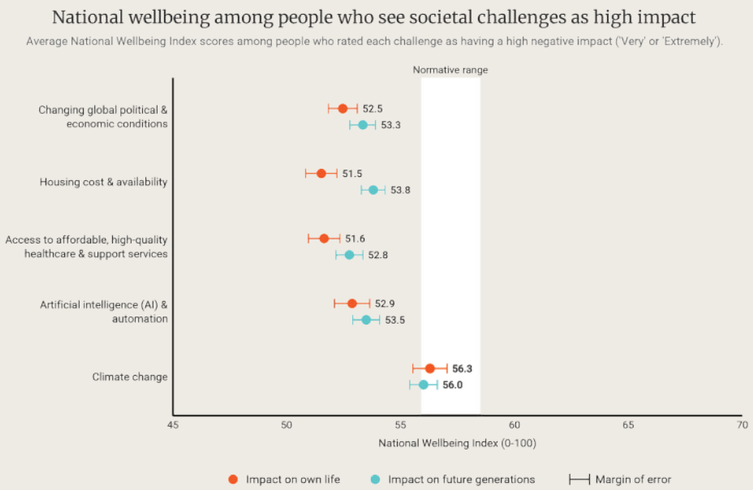


Figure 24. Average National Wellbeing Index scores by high perceived negative impact of societal challenges on current and future generations, 2026

Connection to future generations

Connection to future generations refers to the extent to which people think about, care for, and act on behalf of future generations (i.e., those not yet born). The concept goes beyond immediate personal concerns to consider our legacy and the world we will leave behind.

Why does this matter for wellbeing?

Understanding the relationship between Australians' connection to future generations and wellbeing helps us answer important questions: Does caring about the future enhance or burden our present wellbeing? Can we maintain high wellbeing while also considering future generations?

How was it measured?

Connection to future generations was measured using three items from the Social Generativity Scale (Morselli and Passini, 2015),[28] which is recommended by the OECD for measuring this construct.[27] Each item measures different aspect of social generativity, capturing both attitudes and behaviours:

- Active contribution: 'I carry out activities in order to ensure a better world for future generations' (behaviour)
- Personal sacrifice: 'I give up part of my daily comforts to foster the development of future generations' (behaviour)
- Responsibility for wellbeing: 'I think that I am responsible for ensuring a state of well-being for future generations' (attitude)

How Australians rate their connection to future generations

Figure 25 shows the level of agreement Australians expressed across the three statements measuring connection to future generations. Almost two in three Australians agreed that they actively contribute to a better world for future generations (62.7%) and that they feel responsible for ensuring a state of wellbeing for future generations (61.0%). Only one in three agreed that they give up daily comforts to foster the development of future generations (38.2%). This gap suggests that while most Australians feel a sense of responsibility towards future generations, fewer translate this into personal trade-offs in their daily lives.

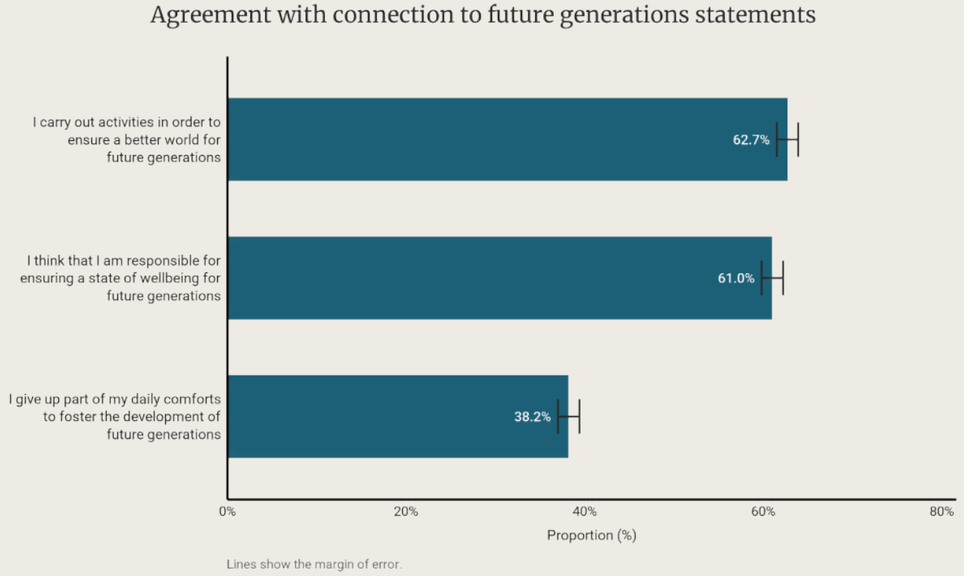


Figure 25. Level of agreement across three statements measuring connection to future generations in 2026

Connection to future generations across key population groups

Connection to future generations was largely consistent across age groups, although adults aged 35-44 years were slightly more likely to report feeling responsible for, and giving up daily comforts for future generations, than older adults (Figure 26).

Connection to future generations and wellbeing

Figure 27 shows average Personal Wellbeing Index scores by agreement level with the future generations' connection statements. People who agreed (i.e., actively contributed towards a better world, personally sacrificed comforts, and felt responsible for future generations) reported personal wellbeing above the normative range, while those who disagreed scored below the normative range.

National Wellbeing Index scores showed a similar pattern (Figure 28). People who agreed with each connection statement reported national wellbeing within the normative range, while those who disagreed or felt neutral, scored below the normative range.







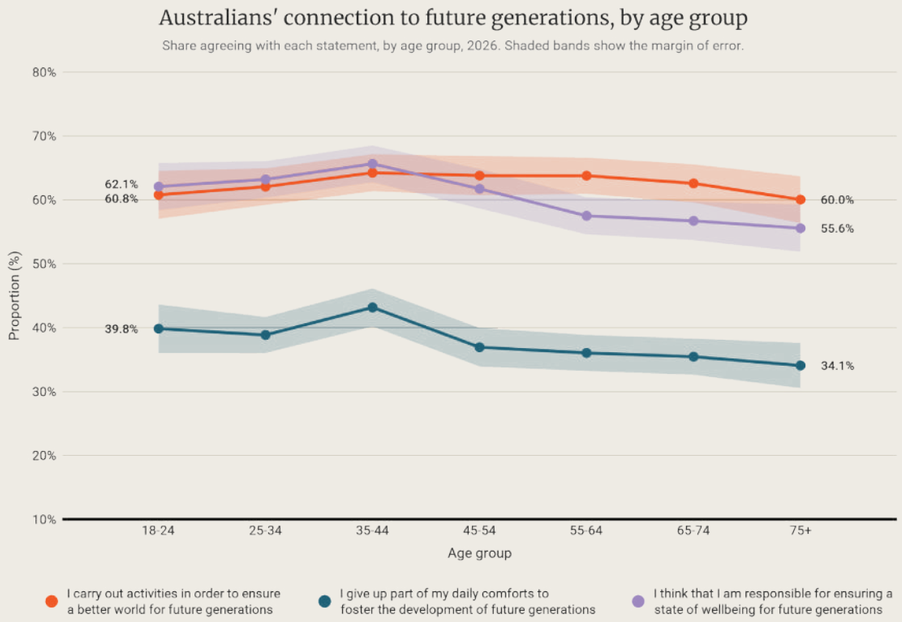


Figure 26. Connection to future generations by age groups, 2026

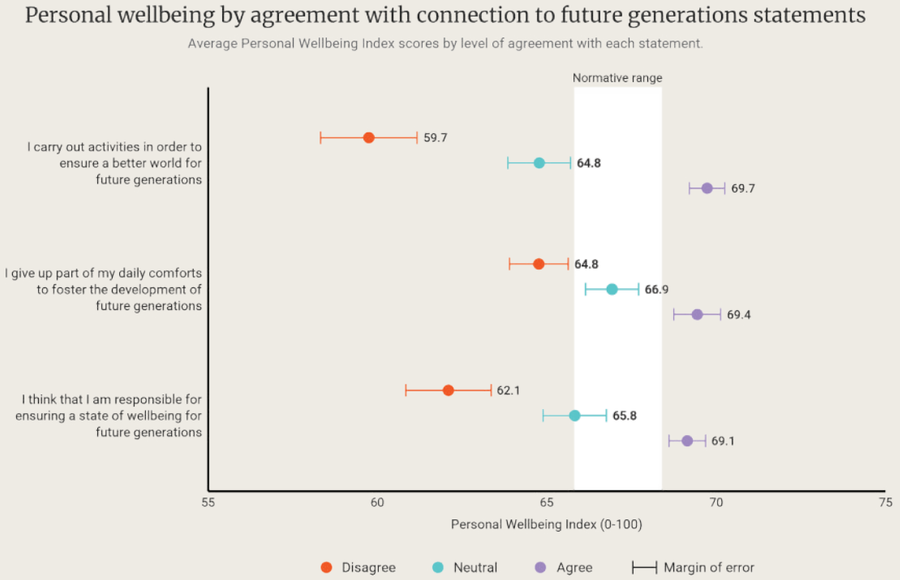


Figure 27. Average Personal Wellbeing Index scores by connection to future generations, 2026

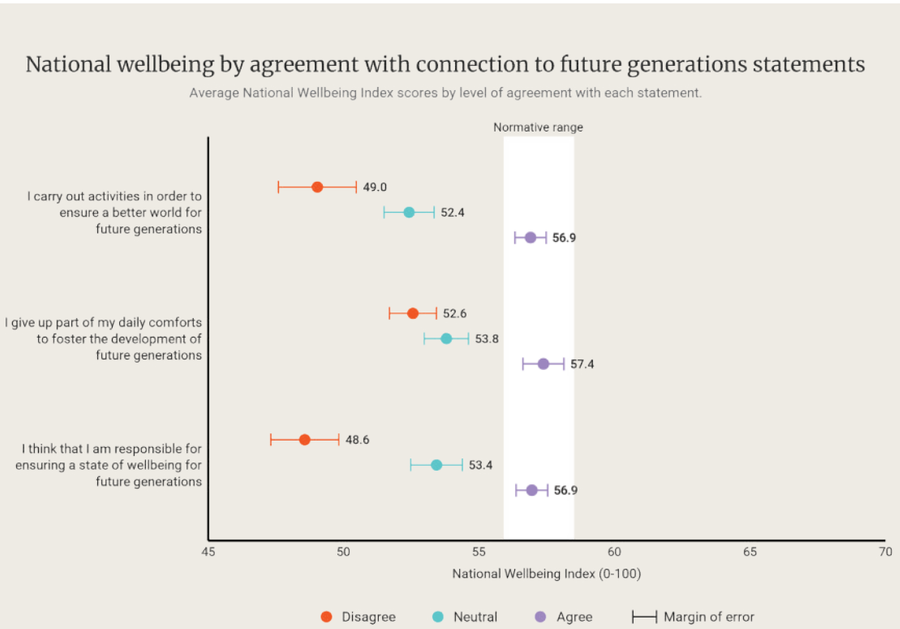


Figure 28. Average National Wellbeing Index scores by level of connection to future generations, 2026

Vision for Australia's future

Australians were asked an open-ended question: "In a few words, what is the Australia you want for future generations to come?" This open-ended question allowed respondents to express their hopes and priorities for the future in their own words, rather than selecting from predetermined options. This question was selected to serve as a localised test of the types of question styles used in the *Wales We Want*[29] and *Forward Singapore*[30] National Conversations. This style of question not only elicits input into the future direction of Australia, but also invites respondents to think about a vision for the future. The question also served as an early pilot within the National Conversation Development Lab's design process, providing insight into how Australians respond to this style of question, and informing how it might be used in a future National Conversation in Australia.

Coding Australians' visions for the future

A total of 9,556 respondents provided answers to this question (95.5% response rate). Open ended responses were coded into 37 themes which were developed by the research team through an iterative review process capturing social, economic, environmental, political, and cultural aspirations (see Appendix Table 1 for the complete themes with examples).

Examples of themes and responses:

- Good governance & leadership: "Stable, good government"; "Governing for whole of society in a long term rational strategic way"
- Access & connection to nature: "Connected to & respectful of Nature & to humankind"; "More outdoor activities"
- Australia to return to a past version: "The same that I grew up in"; "The Australia from the 90's"
- Personal & community safety: "Somewhere safe"; "No violence – safety in home"

When a respondent indicated multiple aspirations, these were coded accordingly. For example, "Housing affordability, enough employment and low crime rates" was coded as Housing affordability & access, Secure jobs & employment, and Personal & community safety. This single response has been counted under each of the three themes in the following analyses.

Because responses were open-ended, the following analyses reflect those Australians who spontaneously mentioned each theme. Full details of the coding process are presented in the Methodology section.

What Australians want for future generations

Three quarters (75.0%) of respondents indicated multiple aspirations or visions, with a total of 21,503 mentions across the 9,556 responses.

Figure 29 shows the percentage of Australians' whose responses contributed to each of the 37 themes.

The most common themes envisioned a future Australia focused on:

- personal & community safety (21.6%)
- environment & climate action (19.5%)
- improved cost of living & financial security (18.3%)
- a prosperous, stable & secure economy (17.1%)
- fairness & equal opportunity (13.3%)
- housing affordability & access (12.1%)
- wellbeing & quality of life (11.6%)
- social cohesion, connection & belonging (11.2%)

The remaining 29 themes were each mentioned by fewer than 10% of respondents.

More than one in two Australians (58.1%) mentioned at least one of the four most common themes – related to safety, the environment, cost of living, or the economy – while three in four (77.0%) mentioned at least one of the top eight themes. This points to a broadly shared set of priorities for Australia's future across the population.



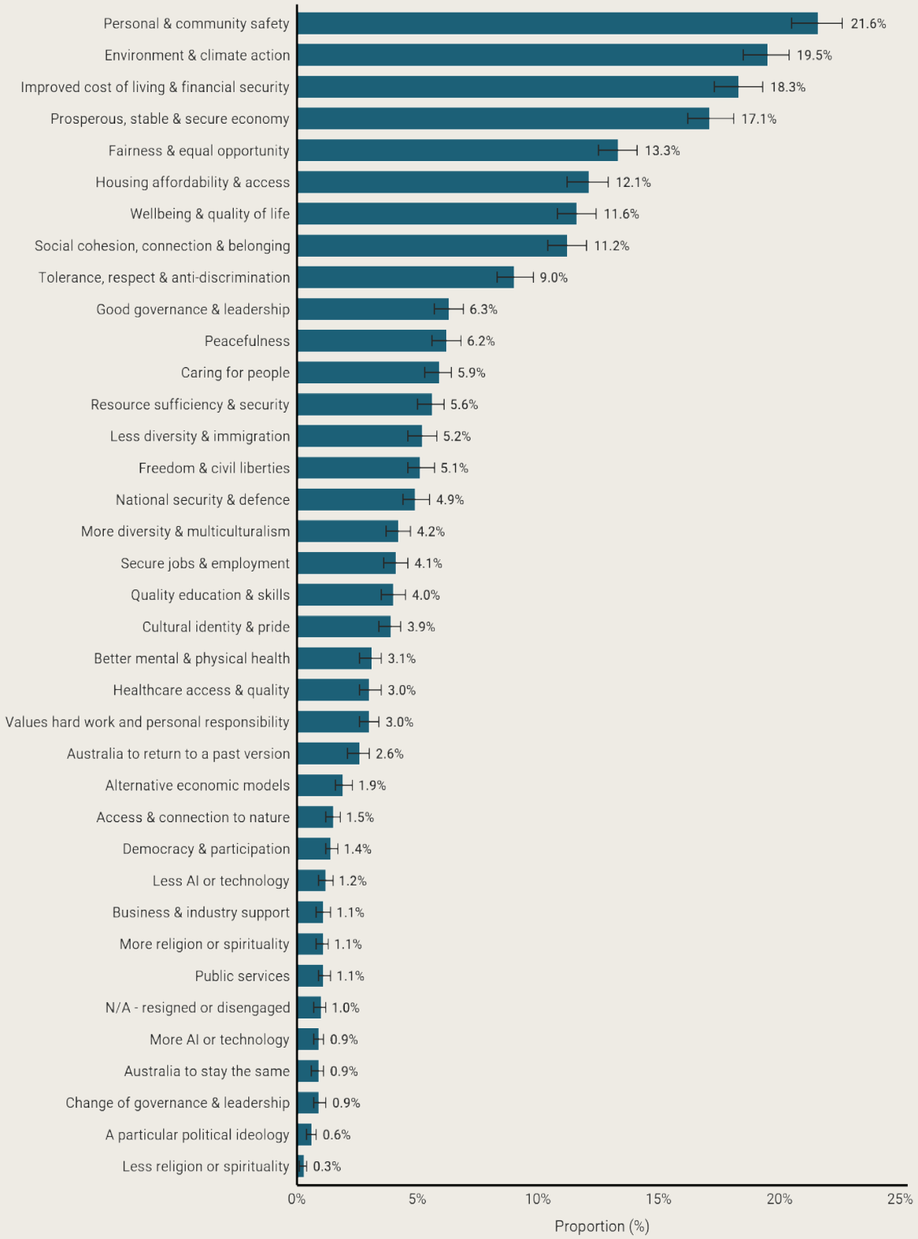


Figure 29. Prevalence of coded themes for Australians' vision for the future, 2026

Demographic differences in future visions

Table 1 shows the three most commonly mentioned themes within each demographic group. Personal and community safety, environment and climate action, improved cost of living and financial security, and a prosperous, stable and secure economy featured in the top three across almost every group examined. The only exception was Australians on the highest household incomes (≥$260,000), for whom fairness & equal opportunity was the second most mentioned theme. This suggests that regardless of age, income, gender, location, education level, or linguistic background, many Australians may share a broadly common vision for the future: one centred on safety, environmental sustainability, and economic security and prosperity.

To further examine variation across all themes, we calculated the differences in prevalence (in percentage points) between two groups for each population characteristic. For example, we evaluated the proportion of women mentioning a theme compared to the share of men. Analyses can be found in Appendix Figures 1-6. Only differences that were meaningful and exceeded 3 percentage points (pp) are reported below.

Gender differences (females vs. males)

Females were more likely to mention:

- personal & community safety (+10.9pp),
- environment & climate action (+6.1pp),
- improved cost of living & financial security (+5.2pp), and
- housing affordability & access (+4.5pp).

Males were more likely to mention:

- less diversity & immigration (+3.8pp).

Age differences (under 55 vs. over 55)

Younger Australians (under 55 years) were more likely to mention:

- improved cost of living & financial security (+9.2pp),
- wellbeing & quality of life (+5.0pp), and
- personal & community safety (+3.4pp).

Older Australians (55+ years) were more likely to mention:

- peacefulness (+4.5pp),
- resource sufficiency & security (+4.4pp),
- less diversity & immigration (+4.3pp),
- good governance & leadership (+4.0pp),
- national security & defence (+3.7pp), and
- tolerance, respect & anti-discrimination (+3.3pp).

Income differences (under $104k vs. over $104k)

Those with household incomes above $104,000 were more likely to mention:

- prosperous, stable & secure economy (+4.7pp).

Regional differences (major city vs. regional/remote)

There were no notable differences in theme endorsement for people living in major cities or in regional or remote areas (all differences <3pp; see Appendix Figure 5 for complete results).

Linguistic differences (English vs. language other than English)

English-only speakers at home were more likely to mention:

- improved cost of living & financial security (-3.2pp).

Education differences (university degree vs. no degree)

University-educated respondents were more likely to mention:

- fairness & equal opportunity (+7.6pp),
- environment & climate action (+6pp), and
- social cohesion, connection & belonging (+3.0pp).

Those without university degrees were more likely to mention:

- less diversity & immigration (-3.4pp).

Future visions and personal wellbeing

To better understand whether different visions for Australia's future related to respondents' personal wellbeing (i.e., how they feel about their own lives), we compared average scores on the Personal Wellbeing Index with the population normative range. Figure 30 shows average personal wellbeing scores for respondents who mentioned each theme. Only themes with 100 or more respondents were included.

People who mentioned they wanted an Australia with more religion or spirituality (73.9pp), peacefulness (70.5pp), or a prosperous, stable & secure economy (69.6pp), reported meaningfully higher personal wellbeing, above the normative range. Conversely, those who mentioned improved cost of living & financial security (64.5pp) or less diversity & immigration (62.7pp), scored below the normative range.

Population group	Most mentioned	Second most mentioned	Third most mentioned
Age group			
18-24	Improved cost of living & financial security (22.8%)	Personal & community safety (21.7%)	Environment & climate action (19%)
25-34	Improved cost of living & financial security (26%)	Personal & community safety (23.4%)	Environment & climate action (19.6%)
35-44	Personal & community safety (23%)	Environment & climate action (21.8%)	Improved cost of living & financial security (18.8%)
45-54	Personal & community safety (22.9%)	Improved cost of living & financial security (19.4%)	Environment & climate action (17.7%)
55-64	Personal & community safety (21.5%)	Environment & climate action (19.1%)	Prosperous, stable & secure economy (18%)
65-74	Personal & community safety (20.2%)	Environment & climate action (19.7%)	Prosperous, stable & secure economy (17.2%)
75+	Environment & climate action (18.5%)	Prosperous, stable & secure economy (16.6%)	Personal & community safety (14.9%)
Gender			
Male	Prosperous, stable & secure economy (17.3%)	Environment & climate action (16.3%)	Personal & community safety (16.2%)
Female	Personal & community safety (27.1%)	Environment & climate action (22.6%)	Improved cost of living & financial security (21%)
Household income			
≤$33 799	Personal & community safety (19.4%)	Improved cost of living & financial security (16.8%)	Environment & climate action (15.9%)
$33 800-$64 999	Personal & community safety (19.9%)	Environment & climate action (19.3%)	Improved cost of living & financial security (17.9%)
$65 000-$103 999	Personal & community safety (21.3%)	Improved cost of living & financial security (19.4%)	Environment & climate action (18.9%)
$104 000-$155 999	Personal & community safety (23.9%)	Environment & climate action (20.2%)	Improved cost of living & financial security (19%)
$156 000-$259 999	Personal & community safety (22.8%)	Prosperous, stable & secure economy (20.7%)	Environment & climate action (19.4%)
≥$260 000	Environment & climate action (25.4%)	Fairness & equal opportunity (22.7%)	Prosperous, stable & secure economy (21.4%)
Region			
Major cities	Personal & community safety (21.8%)	Environment & climate action (20%)	Improved cost of living & financial security (18.2%)
Inner regional	Personal & community safety (21.6%)	Environment & climate action (19.7%)	Improved cost of living & financial security (17.9%)
Outer regional or remote	Improved cost of living & financial security (20.1%)	Personal & community safety (19.2%)	Prosperous, stable & secure economy (16%)
Language spoken at home			
Language other than English	Personal & community safety (22%)	Prosperous, stable & secure economy (17.8%)	Environment & climate action (17.3%)
English only	Personal & community safety (21.4%)	Environment & climate action (20.1%)	Improved cost of living & financial security (19.1%)
Highest education			
University degree	Environment & climate action (23.7%)	Personal & community safety (21.3%)	Prosperous, stable & secure economy (18.9%)
Certificate III/IV or Diploma	Personal & community safety (21.9%)	Improved cost of living & financial security (21.3%)	Environment & climate action (17.8%)
Year 12	Personal & community safety (19.8%)	Environment & climate action (18.5%)	Improved cost of living & financial security (16.5%)
Less than Year 12	Personal & community safety (23.8%)	Improved cost of living & financial security (18.9%)	Prosperous, stable & secure economy (14.3%)

Legend

- Improved cost of living & financial security
- Personal & community safety
- Environment & climate action
- Prosperous, stable & secure economy
- Fairness & equal opportunity

Table 1. The three most commonly mentioned themes by population group, 2026

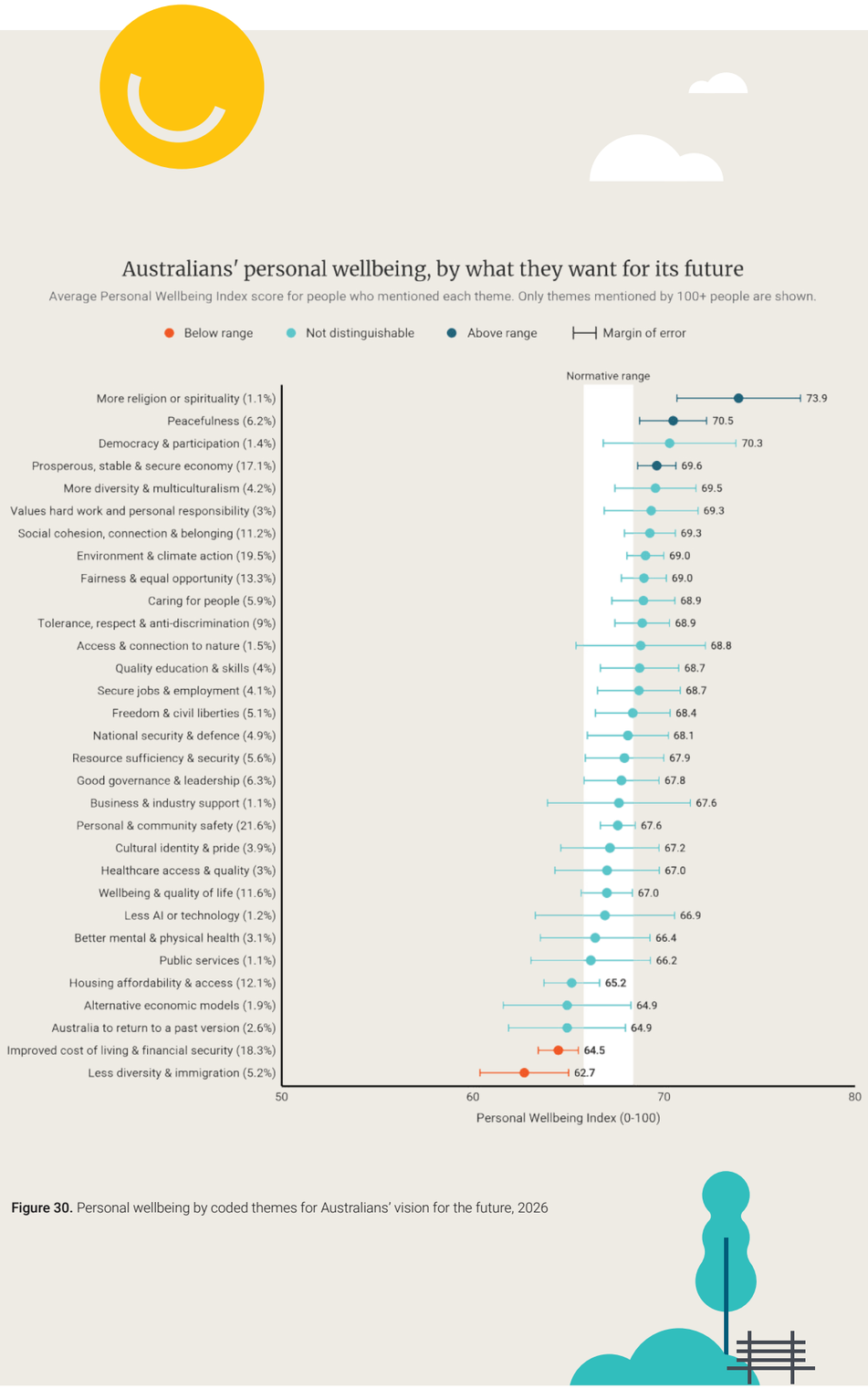


Figure 30. Personal wellbeing by coded themes for Australians' vision for the future, 2026

Future visions and national wellbeing

We also compared average scores on the National Wellbeing Index (i.e., how Australians feel about life in Australia) for each theme with the population normative range. Figure 31 shows average national wellbeing scores for respondents who endorsed each theme. Only themes with 100 or more respondents are included.

People reported meaningfully lower national wellbeing, below the normative range, if they mentioned they wanted Australia to return to a past version (39.9pp), less diversity & immigration (42.1pp), business & industry support (47.1pp), good governance & leadership (47.7pp), cultural identity & pride (48.6pp), resource sufficiency & security (49.1pp), alternative economic models (49.8pp), housing affordability & access (51.7pp), or improved cost of living & financial security (51.8pp). No groups had meaningfully higher national wellbeing.

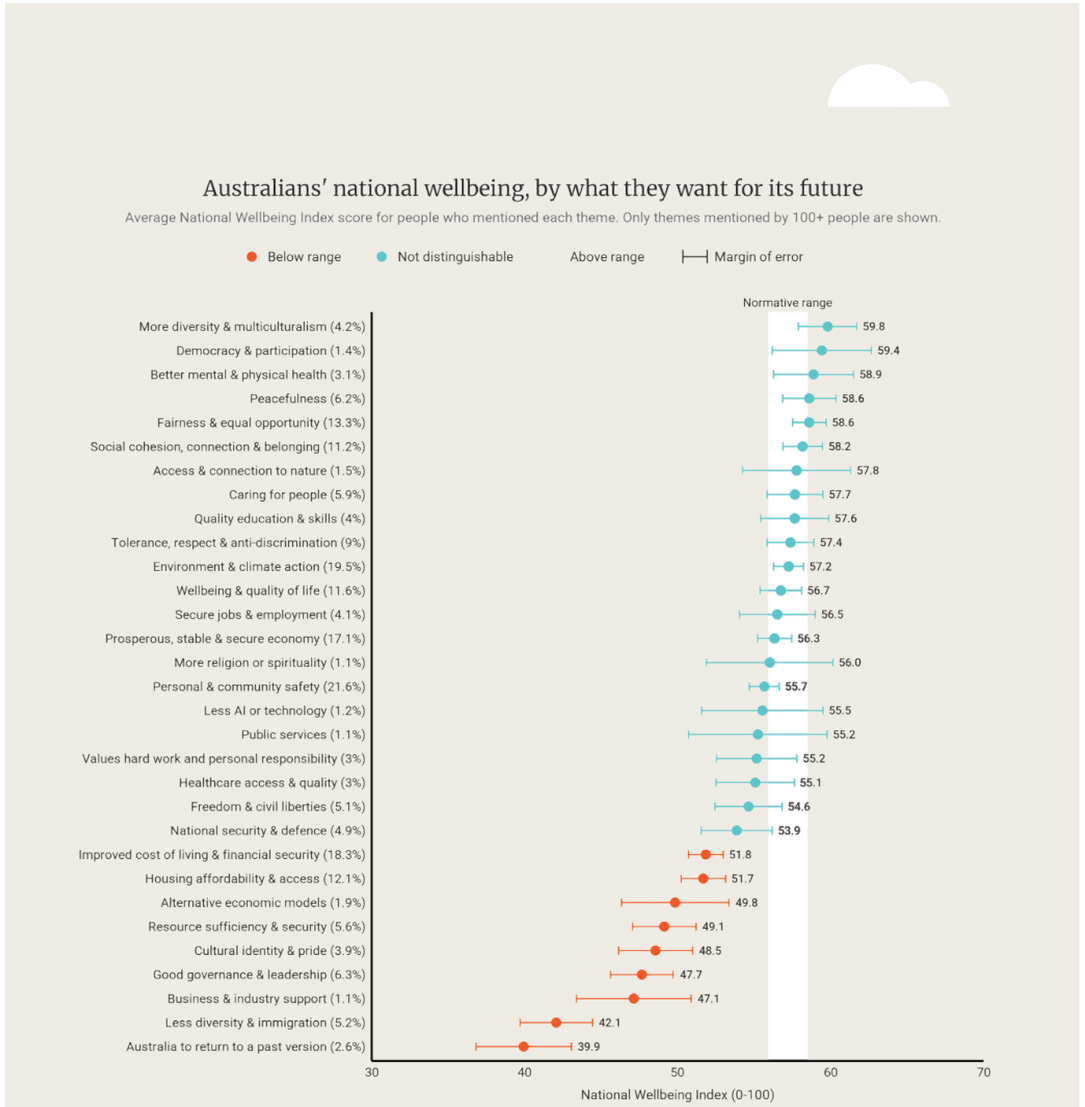


Figure 31. National wellbeing by coded themes for Australians' vision for the future, 2026



Part 3:
Changes in wellbeing and societal challenge perceptions across 2026

Part 3 examines whether Australians' wellbeing and perceptions of key societal challenges shifted between April-May and September 2026, based on the 1,494 Australians who completed both surveys. Longitudinal survey weights have been applied to ensure results are representative of the Australian adult population.

1. Changes in personal and national wellbeing

Whether average scores on the Personal Wellbeing Index, National Wellbeing Index, and each of the domains shifted between April–May and September 2026.

2. Changes in perceptions of key societal challenges

Whether Australians' perceptions of five key societal challenges – housing cost and availability, changing global political and economic conditions, access to affordable healthcare, climate change, and AI and automation – as negatively impacting their own lives and the lives of future generations shifted over the same period.

Given the report's focus on intergenerational wellbeing, all results are examined across four broad age groups: 18-34, 35-49, 50-64, and 65+ years. These groupings were chosen to capture broadly different stages of life, while ensuring enough people in each group to draw meaningful conclusions.

Changes in personal and national wellbeing

Personal wellbeing

Between April-May and September 2026, average Personal Wellbeing Index scores meaningfully declined overall (-1.1pp), driven primarily by older Australians – those aged 65 and over showed a meaningful decline of 2.4pp over the period (Figure 32). No meaningful change was observed for the 18-64 age groups.

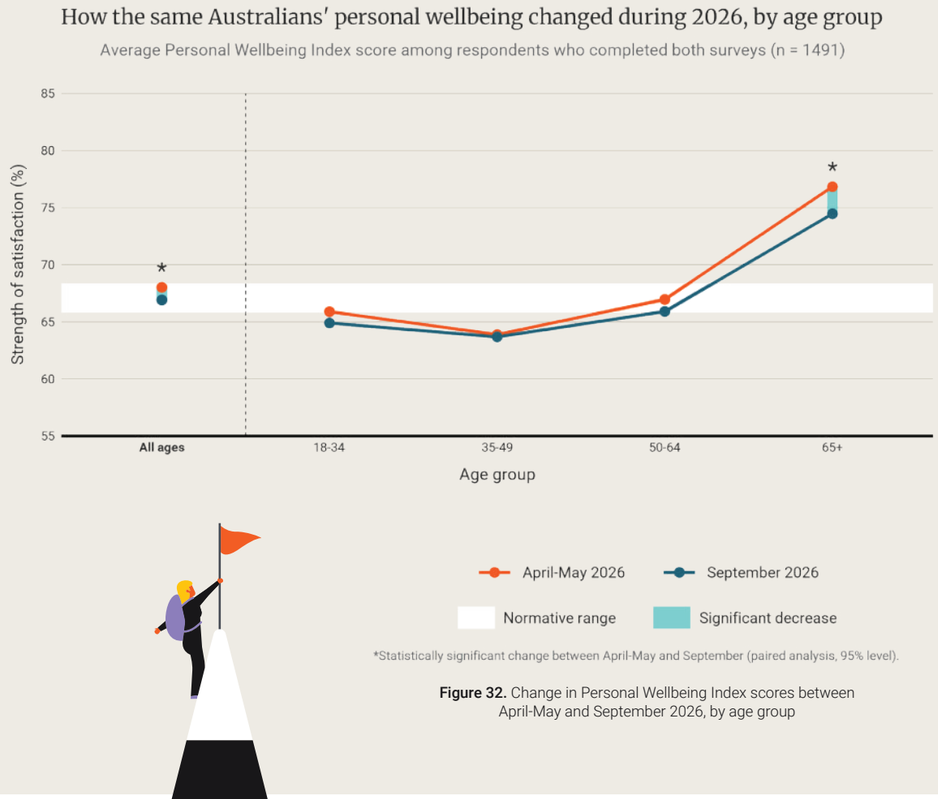


Figure 32. Change in Personal Wellbeing Index scores between April-May and September 2026, by age group

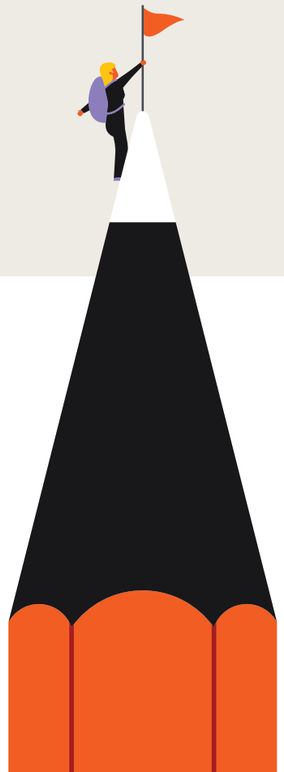


Figure 33 shows changes across the seven Personal Wellbeing Index domains by age group. Three domains showed meaningful overall declines: standard of living (-2.2pp), personal safety (-2.1pp) and future security (-1.3pp).



Figure 33. Change in Personal Wellbeing Index domain scores between April-May and September 2026, by age group.

The pattern of change varied considerably across age groups:

- 18-34 years: satisfaction with personal safety declined meaningfully (-2.5pp), with scores dropping below the normative range in September.
- 35-49 years: satisfaction with standard of living showed a meaningful decline (-1.5pp).
- 50-64 years: declines were observed in satisfaction with standard of living (-2.2pp) and personal safety (-2.4pp).
- 65+ years: the most widespread declines were observed among older Australians, with meaningful drops across six of the seven domains – standard of living (-2.3pp), health (-2.5pp), personal relationships (-2.8pp), personal safety (-2.9pp), community connectedness (-2.0pp) and future security (-2.5pp). Satisfaction with achieving in life was the only domain that did not decline meaningfully for this group.

National wellbeing

Between April-May and September 2026, average National Wellbeing Index scores remained stable overall, with no meaningful change observed at the population level or across any age groups (Figure 34).

However, at the domain level, some meaningful shifts were observed. Figure 35 shows changes across the six National Wellbeing Index domains by age group. Overall, satisfaction with the state of the natural environment (-2.3pp) and social conditions (-1.4pp) declined meaningfully, while satisfaction with national security improved (+1.8pp).

The pattern varied across age groups:

- 18-34 years: meaningful declines were observed in satisfaction with the state of the natural environment (-2.7pp) and social conditions (-2.0pp), with scores dropping below the normative range for the latter.
- 35-49 years: satisfaction with the state of the natural environment declined meaningfully (-2.5pp), while satisfaction with national security improved (+2.2pp).
- 50-64 years: satisfaction with social conditions declined meaningfully (-2.2pp).
- 65+ years: satisfaction with the economic situation declined meaningfully (-2.6pp).

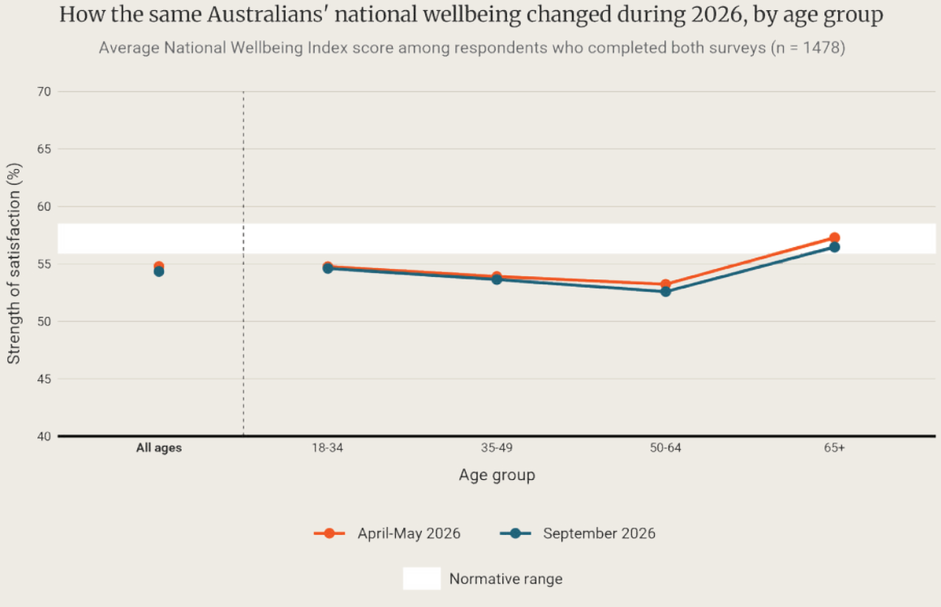


Figure 34. Change in National Wellbeing Index scores between April-May and September 2026, by age group.

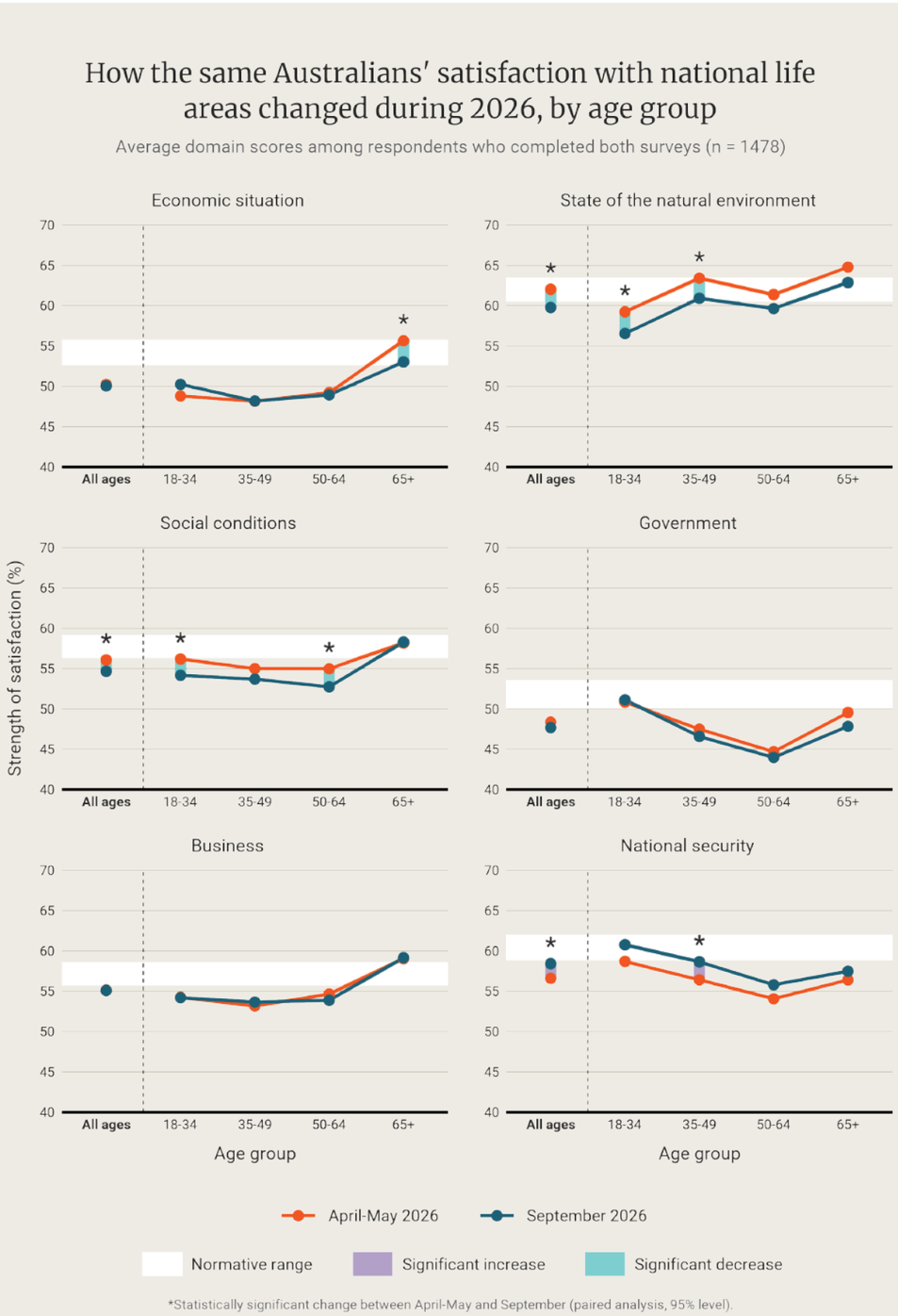


Figure 35. Change in National Wellbeing Index domain scores between April-May and September 2026, by age group.

Changes in perceptions of key societal challenges

Figures 36–37 shows changes in the perceived negative impact of five key societal challenges on Australians' own lives and the lives of future generations, between April–May and September 2026.

Impact on own life

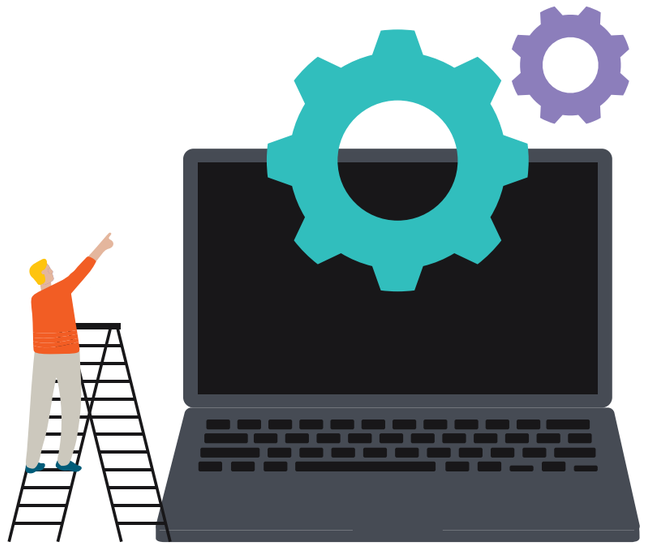
Perceptions of the negative impact of societal challenges on Australians' own lives shifted meaningfully for two of the five challenges:

- Changing global political and economic conditions: perceived negative impact decreased overall (-8.0pp), with meaningful declines across the 35-49 (-5.8pp), 50-64 (-9.4pp) and 65+ (-13.1pp) age groups.
- AI and automation: perceived negative impact increased overall (+9.3pp), with meaningful increases across the 35-49 (+6.0pp), 50-64 (+10.1pp) and 65+ (+15.1pp) age groups.

Impact on lives of future generations

Perceptions of the negative impact on future Australians were more stable overall, with meaningful change only observed for AI and automation at the population level (+4.3pp). At the age group level, a small number of meaningful changes were observed:

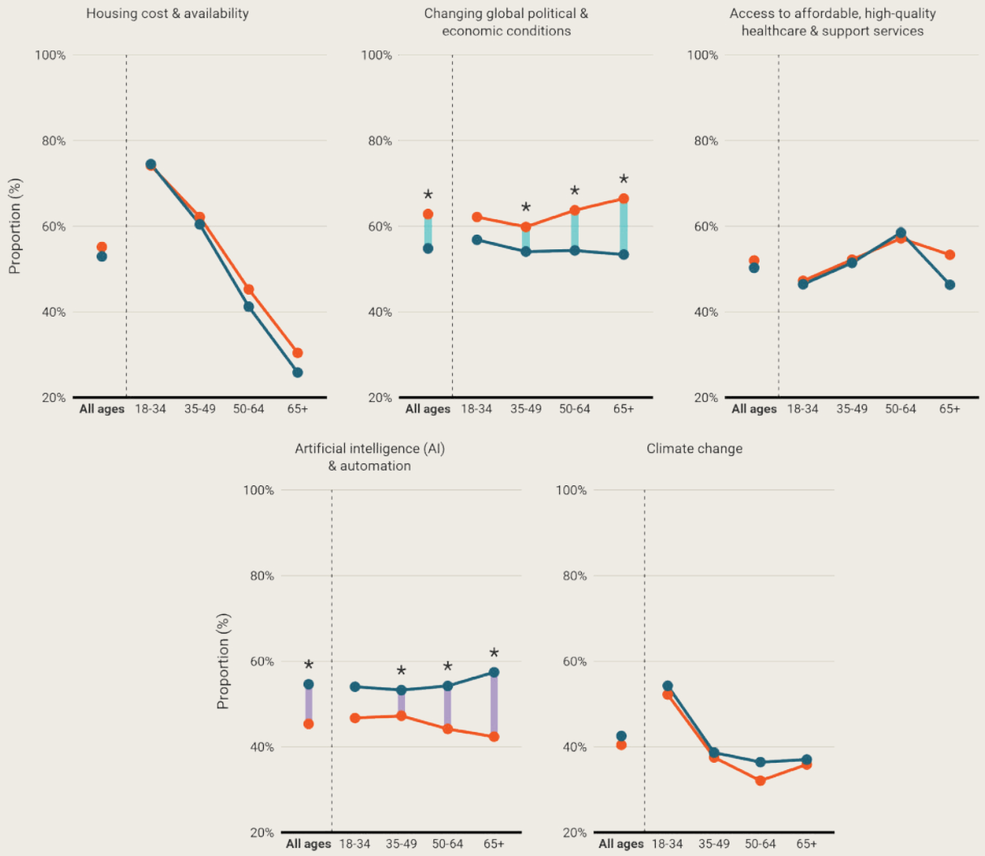
- AI and automation: perceived negative impact on future generations increased overall, with a meaningful increase among those aged 65+ (+5.7pp).
- Access to affordable, high-quality healthcare and support services: perceived negative impact on future generations increased meaningfully among those aged 18-34 (+7.8pp).
- Climate change: perceived negative impact on future generations increased meaningfully among those aged 50-64 (+6.9pp).
- Housing cost and availability: perceived negative impact on future generations decreased meaningfully among those aged 65+ (-1.3pp).



How the same Australians' views of societal challenges changed during 2026, by age group

Proportion rating each challenge as having a high negative impact ('Very' or 'Extremely') on their own lives, among respondents who completed both surveys (n=1494)

Negative impact on own life



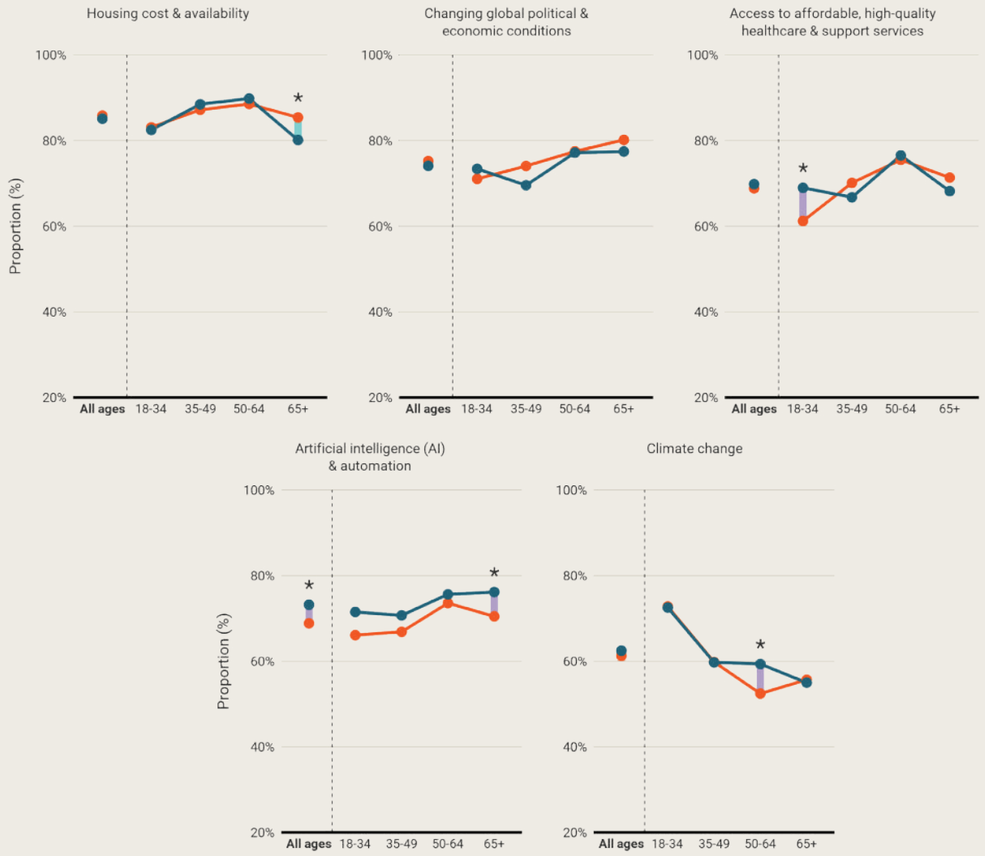
*Statistically significant change between April-May and September (paired analysis, 95% level).

Figure 36. Change in perceptions of negative impact of key societal challenges on respondents' own lives between April-May and September 2026, by age group.

How the same Australians' views of societal challenges changed during 2026, by age group

Proportion rating each challenge as having a high negative impact ('Very' or 'Extremely') on the lives of future generations, among respondents who completed both surveys (n=1494)

Negative impact on future generations



*Statistically significant change between April-May and September (paired analysis, 95% level).

Figure 37. Change in perceptions of negative impact of key societal challenges on the lives of future generations between April-May and September 2026, by age group.



Conclusion

The 2026 Australian Unity Wellbeing Index set out to do two things: track how satisfied Australians are with their personal and national life, and examine how they think about life today and the world they will leave behind for future generations (i.e., those not yet born). Conducted across two waves in April-May (primary survey) and September 2026 (follow-up survey), the two surveys captured Australian sentiment against a backdrop of economic pressure, geopolitical instability, and debate about intergenerational equity.

Australians' wellbeing in 2026

In April–May 2026, at the personal level, wellbeing remained broadly stable compared to 2025, notable given the significant societal pressures that characterised the survey period. Satisfaction with future security and personal safety both dropped, likely reflecting the impact of economic uncertainty and heightened safety concerns, including in the aftermath of the Bondi terror attack. Tracking the same group of Australians across both surveys revealed that satisfaction with these areas continued to fall over the year, alongside a decline in satisfaction with standard of living.

The shift in personal wellbeing over the course of 2026 was seen most strongly for older Australians (65+), who reported declining satisfaction in almost all areas of personal life. It is worth noting, however, that older Australians continued to report notably higher personal wellbeing than younger age groups – meaning that while their wellbeing declined over the year, they remained among the most satisfied Australians overall.

At the national level, the picture was far less stable. The National Wellbeing Index dropped considerably from 2025, with meaningful drops across almost all domains in April–May 2026. Falling satisfaction with the economic situation, government, and national security suggest that Australians' confidence in the institutions and systems that shape national life deteriorated markedly in 2026.

These findings echo and extend the lows observed in 2024, and reverse the post-election uptick that was observed in 2025.

National wellbeing remained at this lower level across the year, with three key differences across the population recorded in the September follow up survey – a small improvement in satisfaction with national security and declines in satisfaction with the state of the natural environment and social conditions.

Wellbeing inequities continue

The findings reinforce a persistent pattern of low wellbeing in certain population groups. Australians experiencing unemployment, economic insecurity, single parenthood, unpaid caring responsibilities, and chronic health conditions were all more likely to report wellbeing below the normal population range. These patterns are not new – they have been documented consistently by our survey for over 25 years – and suggest that structural inequities in Australian society continue to translate directly into wellbeing inequities.

Measures of psychological distress, loneliness, pain, and feeling that life is worthwhile, also show important patterns in Australians. That around one in two young adults aged 18–24 reported high psychological distress and frequent loneliness is a finding that demands serious policy attention.

Australians living on the lowest household incomes (less than $33,800 per year) are also struggling, with almost one in two reporting high psychological distress, two in five reporting moderate or severe pain, and one in five reporting a low sense of life feeling worthwhile.

These findings represent the everyday reality of a substantial proportion of Australians, and carry significant wellbeing costs – across all four measures, those most affected reported wellbeing levels much lower than the normal population range.

Australia now and for generations to come: A nation looking forward under pressure

The other parts of this report revealed a nation that is both grappling with current pressures, and simultaneously concerned about future generations.

In April–May 2026, more than half of Australians felt that housing cost and availability, changing global political and economic conditions, and access to affordable, high-quality healthcare and support services will have a high negative impact on their own lives. Some of these pressures were not felt equally: housing was rated as a high personal impact challenge by more than seven in ten young Australians aged 18–34, while older Australians aged 55 and over were more likely to feel the weight of changing global political and economic conditions and healthcare and support service access.

Over the course of the year, perceptions of some of these challenges had shifted. By September 2026, the share of Australians rating AI and automation as having a high negative impact on their own life increased by 9.3pp, a shift that coincided with intensifying public debate about the risk of AI during this period. At the same time, concerns about changing global political and economic conditions appeared to ease, with negative impact perceptions declining across most age groups (-8pp). Despite the federal government's housing reforms announced in the May budget, there was no meaningful shift in the perceptions of the negative impact of housing cost and availability on Australians' current and future circumstances.

Australians also recognised that these same pressures, along with climate change, may further impact future generations. In April-May 2026, over one in two rated all five challenges as likely to have a high negative impact on future generations, with housing cost and availability rated the highest by four in five Australians. These perceptions remained relatively stable across the year, although increased for AI and automation.

Those perceiving high personal negative impacts from housing and healthcare access reported personal and national wellbeing below the normal population range, suggesting these challenges are already shaping wellbeing today. Addressing them is therefore not only a matter of intergenerational fairness, but an immediate wellbeing priority for current Australians.

Despite these pressures, Australians feel a meaningful sense of connection to, and responsibility for, future generations (those not yet born). Almost two in three agreed they actively contribute to a better world for future generations and feel responsible for their wellbeing. However, only one in three reported giving up their daily comforts to foster the development of future generations.

What Australians want for our future nation

Australians' vision for the future is telling. Across almost 10,000 open-text responses in the April-May survey, there was remarkable consistency in what Australians most commonly want for future generations – regardless of age, income, gender, location, education, or linguistic background. More than one in two Australians mentioned at least one of the four most common themes: personal and community safety, environment and climate action, improved cost of living and financial security, and a prosperous, stable and secure economy. Three in four mentioned at least one of the eight most common themes, which also included fairness and equal opportunity, housing affordability and access, wellbeing and quality of life, and social cohesion, connection and belonging.

Together, these paint a picture of a broadly shared aspirational vision for a future Australia that is safe, environmentally sustainable, economically secure, affordable, fair, equitable, and socially connected. These shared priorities should provide a genuine starting point for the policy decisions being made today.

The consistency of Australians' aspirations also provides a foundation for the National Conversation Development Lab, which seeks to bring Australians together across generations, communities, and regions, to find shared direction on the long-term challenges that matter most.

Looking ahead

Three in four respondents in the recent Purpose of Government Pulse 2026 agreed that the overall wellbeing of the population should be the top consideration in government decision-making, explicitly above all other concerns.[31] In 2023, the Australian government committed to tracking progress towards improved wellbeing outcomes through Treasury's first national wellbeing framework, Measuring What Matters.[32]

Australians' vision for the future maps closely onto the framework's five wellbeing themes (healthy, secure, sustainable, cohesive, and prosperous), and three cross-cutting dimensions (inclusion, equity and fairness), providing strong support for this framework.

Yet, a recent Australian National Audit Office report found Treasury had no arrangements to monitor whether Measuring What Matters was being applied in government decision-making.[33] Measuring What Matters is also not embedded within Treasury's triennial Intergenerational Report, highlighting an integration issue within the same government department. The next step for the federal government is to follow in the footsteps of several state and territory jurisdictions, moving beyond just measuring wellbeing, to building it into how budget decisions are made.[34] This will help ensure that government spending flows towards longer-term investments that prevent problems and reduce inequities, rather than addressing them after they occur. Embedding wellbeing into government decision-making could also create the conditions for businesses to prioritise long-term, sustainable outcomes, aligning commercial incentives with the broader goal of intergenerational wellbeing.

While the 2026 Australian Unity Wellbeing Index survey paints a picture of a nation under pressure, it is one that remains oriented toward the future. Australians care about those not yet born, and hold a broadly shared vision for a safer, more sustainable, more financially secure, fairer, and connected Australia. The challenge for policymakers, communities, and institutions is to match this positive forward-looking orientation with the structural investments and long-term thinking needed to turn aspiration into reality.

This matters not just for future Australians but for all generations of current Australians who are living with these pressures today. In this sense, wellbeing now and for generations to come are not separate goals but one and the same. The vision is clear, what we need is a mechanism to deliver it.



Methodology

Sample recruitment

Primary survey

The primary Australian Unity Wellbeing Index survey was completed by 10,005 adults across Australia. Most respondents (7,777) were recruited through Life in Australia™, the nation's most methodologically rigorous online panel, with data collection taking place between 13th and 27th April 2026. Of the 8,541 panel members invited to participate, 7,777 completed the survey (91.1% completion rate). A small number of members (65) completed the survey via phone or mail, and the remainder completed it online.

Recruitment was supplemented by 2,228 respondents from LiveTribe, which included a targeted sampling boost of young adults (18–34 years) to bring our full sample closer to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) population norms. This resulted in 1,310 responses across the country from this age range (58.8% of participants from the LiveTribe panel). Data collection using the LiveTribe panel was conducted between 27th April and 5th May 2026. During the collection period, 60,180 panel members were invited to participate via email, of which 2,228 participants completed the survey (3.7% completion rate). The lower completion rate reflects the nature of non-probability panels, where large invitation lists are standard practice to achieve target sample sizes.

Follow-up survey

Recruitment for the targeted follow-up survey was through the Life in Australia™ panel. Data collection for the follow-up survey took place between 14th and 27th September 2026. Of the 2,830 panel members invited to participate, 1,969 completed the survey (69.6% completion rate), with all completing the survey online. Of these, 1,494 panel members (75.9%) completed both the primary and follow-up surveys, allowing us to track within-person changes in wellbeing across the two timepoints.

Life in Australia™ online panel

Life in Australia™ comprises more than 10,000 members and is Australia's first national probability-based online panel, established by the Social Research Centre in 2016 and one of the few probability-based online panels available globally. Participants are recruited into the panel via random digit dialling methods or address-based sampling and invited to respond to regular surveys conducted exclusively for social and health research purposes. Panel members are paid $20 for joining the panel and, depending on the length, are paid approximately $10 for each survey they complete, which is limited to only a few surveys per month. Average completion rates for each survey conducted by the panel are 75–80%. Participants who do not have internet access are also invited to join the panel and are given the option to participate in a survey over the phone with a trained interviewer. Each year, the panel is topped up with new participants using different probability-based methodologies to maintain consistent geographic, gender and age representativeness.

LiveTribe online panel

The LiveTribe panel is an online research panel established in 2001 exclusively for market and social research purposes. Recruitment and panel management are conducted by i-Link Research Solutions. Members of the LiveTribe panel are recruited through a diverse range of channels, including online marketing initiatives, print media, direct mail, social media platforms, affiliate partnerships, and personal invitations, to maximise reach and minimise sampling bias.

Participation is voluntary, and participants are awarded points for completing each survey that roughly equate to $3 and can be redeemed as gift cards or donated to charity.

Fraudulent responses

The Social Research Centre applies rigorous safeguards to protect data quality and panel integrity. Recruitment is verified through controlled processes to prevent duplication or fake accounts, with options for offline participation to reduce bias. Ongoing validation and audit trails ensure transparency, while survey participation is actively monitored for unusual patterns. Additional fraud controls include logic checks, secure incentive management, and bot-detection measures, such as identifying inattentive or automated responses.

Historic data (2001-2024)

All Australian Unity Wellbeing Index surveys from 2001 to 2024 were conducted using random-digit dialling to recruit a probability-based sample of Australians, with participation completed by computer-assisted telephone interviewing. Between 2001 and 2014, participants were recruited solely through randomly generated landline phone numbers. As landline use declined, randomly generated mobile numbers were introduced, with an 80/20 landline-to-mobile phone ratio used from 2015 to 2017 before moving to a fully mobile sample in 2018.

In 2024, an additional 2,000 participants were recruited through the Life in Australia™ panel to support the transition to online data collection, as phone responses had declined notably in recent years. Further details on these methodological changes can be found in the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index 2024 Technical Report.[35]

Mode effects

The transition to online data collection has produced notably lower average scores across all wellbeing measures, indicating a clear mode effect consistent with findings from other mixed-method surveys. Evidence suggests that while selection bias plays some role (for example, incentivised online panels may attract participants with lower wellbeing),[36] its impact is generally smaller than that of social desirability bias, whereby respondents tend to give more positive responses in face-to-face or telephone interviews than when answering independently online.[37-41] Despite these differences in overall levels, patterns across population groups remain consistent, supporting the comparability of trends over time.[42] For over-time wellbeing comparisons examined in Part 1, a clear mode effect is evident, thus the 2026 survey means are comparable to those from the 2024–25 online surveys only.

Measures

The full wording of all measures is included in Appendix Table 2.

Subjective wellbeing

Since 2001, the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index has uniquely tracked Australians' subjective wellbeing using the same set of core questions. These include the two global items – Satisfaction with Life as a Whole (Global Life Satisfaction) and Satisfaction with Life in Australia (Global National Wellbeing) – as well as two multi-item measures: the Personal Wellbeing Index[43] and the National Wellbeing Index[3].

Population characteristics

Each year, the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index collects socio-demographic details from participants. In 2026, this information was collected differently across the two survey panels. For the Life in Australia™ panel, most socio-demographic information was collected as part of the panel's annual profiling survey, conducted in February 2026, approximately two months before the primary Wellbeing Index fieldwork. For the LiveTribe panel, socio-demographic questions were asked directly within the Wellbeing Index survey itself.

Average national levels of the Personal Wellbeing Index and National Wellbeing Index are compared across 16 population characteristics: age group, household income, gender, region, employment status, student status, neighbourhood disadvantage, housing tenure, education, marital status, household composition, country of birth, language other than English spoken at home, volunteer status, unpaid carer status, and long-term health condition status.

Average national levels of all other measures are compared across age group and household income only, with the exception of the key themes identified in the qualitative analysis. These are compared across gender, age, household income, region, linguistic diversity, and education.

Data preparation

Creation of indices and cut-offs

Personal and National Wellbeing Indices

Composite scores on the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) and National Wellbeing Index (NWI) were calculated by averaging participants' ratings across each respective domain.

Participants who refused to answer or selected "don't know" on any of the PWI (n=23) or NWI (n=70) domains were treated as missing.

In previous years, participants who gave identical responses of either 0 or 10 across all Personal Wellbeing Index or National Wellbeing Index domains were identified and removed from the sample due to probable false reporting. Exploration of the new online sample for respondent bias found that this approach was likely to be excluding genuine extreme experiences, and sensitivity analyses revealed little differences in the overall scores. As such, these responses have been included in 2026.

Psychological distress

Item responses on the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) were summed to produce a total score ranging from 10 to 50, with higher scores indicating greater distress. Participants who refused to answer or selected "don't know" on any of the K10 items were treated as missing (n=6). K10 total scores were categorised into the established cut-offs used by the ABS: Low distress (10–15); Moderate distress (16–21); High distress (22–29); Very high distress (30–50).[44]

Feeling life is worthwhile

Item responses were categorised into the established cut-offs used by the UK Office for National Statistics: Low (0–4); Medium (5–6); High (7–8); Very high (9–10).[45]

Pain

Item responses were categorised into the established cut-offs recommend by the OECD for subjective wellbeing measurement: No pain (0); Mild pain (1–4); Moderate pain (5–6); Severe pain (7–10).[27]

Standardisation of outcomes

All measures on a 0–10 scale have been converted to a percentage of scale maximum score, which standardises any scale to 0–100 percentage points (pp).

Weighting of survey results

Cross-sectional weights

To ensure the survey results are as nationally representative as possible and comparable across population groups, all data are weighted to population benchmarks.[46] Each respondent was assigned a base weight that combined their probability of selection (i.e., enrolment weight) and their likelihood of responding (i.e., response propensity weight). These weights corrected for both sampling design and non-response bias. Final weights were then calibrated to match Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Census distributions for key population characteristics, including age, gender, highest education, household size, language spoken at home, and geographic location.

Longitudinal weights

To facilitate longitudinal analysis of respondents who participated in both the primary and follow up surveys, a set of weights was calculated. Each respondent was assigned a base weight that combined their cross-sectional weights from the primary survey, and their likelihood of responding, based on collected profile information as well as outcomes from the primary survey. These base weights were then calibrated to match Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Census distributions for the same population characteristics used in the calculation of the cross-sectional weights.

Analysis of open-text responses

Responses to the open-text question "In a few words, what is the Australia you want for future generations to come?" were analysed using an inductive thematic analysis approach, combining human judgement with large language model (LLM)–assisted coding to manage the large response set of 9,556 valid responses.

Developing the codebook

A member of the research team independently read a subsample of 200 responses and generated an initial set of provisional codes that emerged from the data. Three additional team members then piloted the codebook against the same responses, providing written feedback that informed further development.

Through successive rounds of review – including manually coding a random subsample of 972 responses (10.2% of the full response set), discussing variances, and refining definitions – the codebook was iteratively developed and refined, with codes merged where there was conceptual or semantic overlap (for example, cost of living and financial security). This process resulted in 37 thematic codes. Each response could be assigned up to five codes, reflecting the range of aspirations commonly expressed within a single response. The complete codes, including example responses, are provided in Appendix Table 1.

LLM-assisted coding

The finalised codebook was then used to code the full response set using a locally hosted LLM model (Qwen 3, 35B), which applied the codebook definitions, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and worked examples from the research team's own hand-coded responses. No survey responses were transmitted to any external service at any stage of the analysis.

Human judgement remained central throughout: the research team reviewed difficult or edge cases across successive review rounds and validated and interpreted the AI-generated coding to ensure accuracy and contextual appropriateness.

Analysis of changes across 2026

To examine how wellbeing changed for the same individuals over the course of the year, we analysed respondents who completed both the April–May and September surveys. Responses from the two surveys were matched using each participant's unique panel identifier. In total, 1,494 participants were matched across both surveys.

For each respondent, we calculated the within-person difference between their two responses on each outcome of interest in the two surveys. We then calculated the weighted mean of these differences across all matched respondents, with a 95% confidence interval (CI). Weighting was applied using longitudinal survey weights (see 'Weighting of survey results').

Data presentation

Normative range

Normative ranges indicate the range within which a score is considered typical for the Australian population. Normative ranges have been calculated for the core wellbeing measures. In this report, normative ranges are depicted by the white and sandstone shaded areas on figures. Scores above this range indicate higher than typical wellbeing, while scores below indicate lower than typical wellbeing.

Compared to previous AUWI reports, the method used to calculate normative ranges has been updated. Rather than recalculating the normative range each year, normative ranges were established at a single time point using data on 9,948 Australians collected in 2025 and will remain fixed as a stable reference point for future reports for a set time period. This approach allows for more consistent year-on-year comparisons. Normative ranges for the core AUWI wellbeing measures are presented in Appendix Table 3. Full details of the methodology used to calculate normative ranges are provided in Khor et. al (2026).[25]

Meaningful differences

In this report, "meaningful differences" are defined by assessing 95% confidence intervals. For comparisons between groups and between years, meaningful differences are identified where confidence intervals do not overlap between two estimates. For within-person change analyses (Part 3), meaningful differences are identified where the 95% CI around the mean change score does not include zero.

A note on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's wellbeing

The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index survey collects information on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status to understand the extent of representation in the sample, but it does not report differences in wellbeing between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

The subjective wellbeing measures used in this report are conceptualised from a Western, individualistic perspective. They do not capture the holistic understanding of wellbeing held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which recognises the importance of culture, social, historical and political determinants such as connection to country, water and land.[47] Likewise, measurement by survey is a Western methodology and may not be relevant or appropriate to Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing.[48]

Australia has a problematic history of using data about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in ways that conflict with principles of Indigenous data sovereignty. This includes: presenting Indigenous/non-Indigenous data comparisons that imply blame or emphasise deficits; aggregating data in ways that obscure Indigenous cultural and geographic diversity; and decontextualising data without attention to the broader social and cultural context.[49]

Sample characteristics

Overall, the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index 2026 survey sample was broadly consistent with the Australian population (see Table 2).

Age and gender patterns reflected the different recruitment strategies of the two panels. The primary probability-based Life in Australia™ panel over-represented older adults (Mean=54.8 years; SD=16.8) and females (58.2%), whereas the top-up non-probability LiveTribe panel was younger (Mean=38.7 years; SD=17.5) with more gender balance (female=48.8%).

When combined, the two panels partially offset each other's biases. Compared with the most recent population norms from the 2021 Census, the overall survey sample remained somewhat skewed towards older (55+ years: 45.4% vs. 37.1%) and female (56.1% vs. 51.2%) Australians.

Some socio-economic indicators displayed notable departures from population norms in the whole sample. Compared to national norms, respondents in full-time employment (44.3% vs. 35.5%) and outright homeownership (37.5% vs. 30.8%) were over-represented, while those not in the labour force were under-represented (32.9% vs. 36.8%). The labour-force discrepancies may be due to the fact that employment status was unable to be established for 4.2% of the sample.

The sample was less culturally and linguistically diverse compared to population norms: respondents were more likely to be born in Australia (73.0% vs. 65.1%) and to only speak English at home (85.4% vs. 75.9%).

For these reasons, we report weighted data, which provides a more accurate snapshot of Australian adults across the country.



Table 2 Summary of the unweighted 2026 primary and follow-up survey sample characteristics presented for the overall sample, Life in Australia™ and LiveTribe panels, and population norms (18+ years)

	Proportion, %				
Characteristic	**Whole sample (N = 10,005)[a]**	**Life in Australia™ (n = 7,822)[a]**	**LiveTribe (n = 2,083)[a]**	**Folow-up survey (Sep 2026; n=1,494)**	**2021 Population Norms[b]**
Panel					
Life in Australia™ (probability)	77.7	100.0	0.0	100.0	n/a
LiveTribe (non-probability)	22.3	0.0	100.0	0.0	n/a
Gender					
Male	43.3	41.0	51.1	41.1	48.8
Female	56.1	58.2	48.8	58.0	51.2
Non-binary / gender diverse	0.6	0.8	0.1	0.9	n/a
Age groups					
18-24	7.8	2.7	25.8	5.3	10.8
25-34	16.3	11.5	33.0	15.1	18.2
35-44	15.5	17.1	10.3	19.5	17.5
45-54	14.9	16.4	9.5	17.3	16.3
55-64	16.2	18.3	9.1	17.5	15.1
65-74	17.6	20.6	7.2	13.8	12.4
75+	11.6	13.4	5.1	11.5	9.6
State or Territory					
New South Wales	31.4	30.9	33.0	32.3	31.8
Victoria	26.1	25.8	27.3	23.3	25.6
Queensland	19.2	19.5	18.3	19.5	20.3
South Australia	7.9	8.2	6.9	8.9	7.0
Western Australia	9.6	9.6	9.6	9.5	10.5
Tasmania	2.8	2.8	2.8	3.1	2.2
Northern Territory	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.9
Australian Capital Territory	2.5	2.7	1.6	3.0	1.8
Employment status[c]					
Full-time	44.3	40.7	57.1	45.5	35.5
Part-time	15.6	15.3	16.7	15.9	18.7
Not in labour force	32.9	36.8	19.4	30.3	36.8
Unemployed	3.0	2.5	4.6	3.1	2.9
Unable to establish	4.2	4.7	2.2	5.2	n/a
Student status					
Full-time	3.4	2.4	6.9	3.6	
Part-time	3.7	3.8	3.4	4.4	n/a
Not studying	92.9	93.9	89.7	92.1	
Household income					
≤$33,799	13.0	13.3	12.2	13.2	16.3
$33,800 to $64,999	18.1	18.3	17.3	18.4	20.1
$65,000 to $103,999	22.6	22.1	24.4	21.8	19.5
$104,000 to $155,999	19.7	18.7	22.8	18.3	19.8
$156,000 to $259,999	19.6	19.6	19.2	21.1	17.7
≥$260,000	7.1	8.0	4.1	7.3	6.6
Housing tenure					
Renting	22.8	19.9	33.2	24.5	29.9
Own outright	37.5	41.1	25.1	33.2	26.5
Own with a mortgage	35.2	35.0	36.2	38.4	41.9
Other situation	4.5	4.0	5.5	3.8	1.7
Highest education					
University degree	56.5	57.4	53.3	37.4	26.3
Certificate III/IV or diploma	27.4	28.4	24.0	39.1	25.5
Year 12	8.3	6.7	14.1	11.7	14.9
Less than Year 12	6.9	6.7	7.5	11.4	22.6
Unable to establish	1.0	0.9	1.2	0.5	10.7
Marital status					
Married	49.1	51.3	41.3	49.4	46.5
Widowed	4.8	5.6	2.3	4.2	5.0
Divorced	11.4	13.0	5.7	11.9	8.8
Separated but not divorced	3.3	3.5	2.3	3.6	3.2
Never married	31.5	26.6	48.5	30.9	36.5
Household composition					
Couple with no children	30.3	33.0	20.7	30.8	
Couple parent family	25.6	25.6	25.6	27.0	
Single parent family	7.6	8.0	5.9	9.5	n/a
Live alone	20.9	21.8	17.6	18.3	
Other household	12.8	9.8	23.0	12.4	
Unable to establish	3.0	1.8	7.3	2.1	
Country of birth					
Australia	73.0	71.0	79.9	71.6	65.1
Non-English-speaking	15.3	15.7	13.8	15.5	24.7
English speaking	11.8	13.3	6.3	12.9	10.2
Language spoken at home					
English	85.4	85.7	84.5	84.5	75.9
Other than English	14.6	14.3	15.5	15.5	24.1
Indigenous status					
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	3.4	2.1	8.1	2.3	3.3
Neighbourhood disadvantage					
SEIFA-IRSD 2021 (M, SD)	1007 (65)	1010 (63)	998 (69)	1006 (63)	1000 (100)

[a] N's differed slightly for each population characteristic.
[b] Population norms from the 2021 Census and based on adults 18 years and over.
[c] Samples from the surveys were recategorised to approximate equivalency with ABS sample.

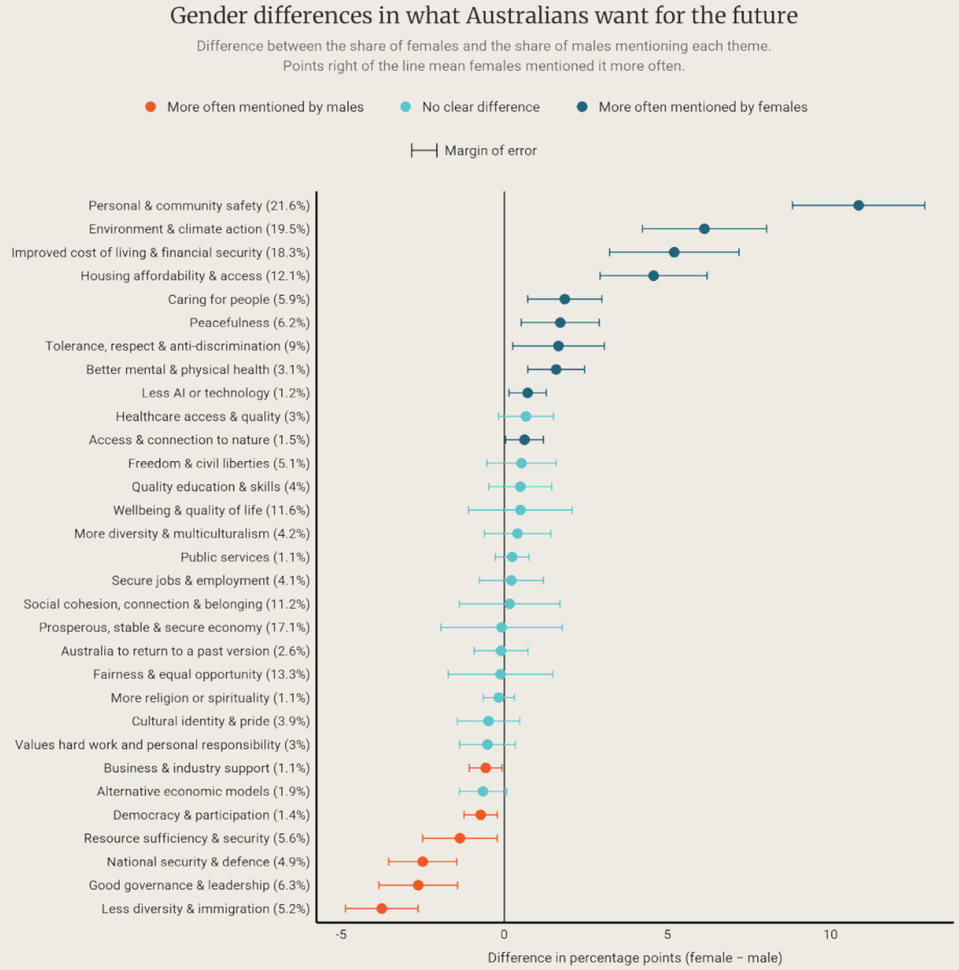
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Appendices

Appendix Table 1 Coded themes and example responses for "In a few words, what is the Australia you want for future generations to come?

Code	Example response
A particular political ideology	**Egalitarian**, Democratic, **socialist**, welcoming, environmentally clean, tolerant.
Access & connection to nature	I want young people to be able to buy a house and have financial security **lots of beaches and sun**.
Alternative economic models	**Universal basic income.**
Australia to return to a past version	**The Australia that I enjoyed as a kid** bit sadly has been eroded over time.
Australia to stay the same	Somewhere sustainable for future generations. **Being able to keep life as it is now**.
Better mental & physical health	Safe and **healthy.**
Business & industry support	More freedom for people to do what they want. **Easier to start a business**, buy a house.
Caring for people	**One where we care for our elderly**, where there are job opportunities for our young people.
Change of governance & leadership	**Not the government we have now.**
Cultural identity & pride	I want the world to survive for my grandchildren and their grandchildren and **traditions to continue**.
Democracy & participation	A free **democratic country** with no fear.
Environment & climate action	Affordable living with **clean environment** and strong economy, multicultural society and culture.
Fairness & equal opportunity	**Back to 'a fair go'**. Revive the great Australian dream, affordable living and **opportunities.**
Freedom & civil liberties	**Freedom** opportunity stability peace.
Good governance & leadership	**Governing for whole of society in a long term rational strategic ways.**
Healthcare access & quality	**Free universal healthcare**, free education for all ages including university. All paid for by tax.
Housing affordability & access	Safe community, **affordable housing**, good education, and better cost of living.
Improved cost of living & financial security	**Better cost of living** and cheaper house prices.
Less AI or technology	**Less AI** more social. Improved job opportunities, less tax, government utilise money better.
Less diversity & immigration	**Cut migration.**
Less religion or spirituality	Everyone getting along **without religion.**
More AI or technology	**AI to make everyone work only if they want to.**
More diversity & multiculturalism	**A society accepting of multiculturism.** A political landscape that fosters community harmony.
More religion or spirituality	Built on morals, people having stronger community and care and **more religious.**
N/A - resigned or disengaged	**I don't know, it's beyond my control**. But I'm sure things would be very different.
National security & defence	A strong economy with **national security** and Australia first ideals are at the front of any policy.
Peacefulness	**Peace for all.**
Personal & community safety	**Safe**, healthy, diverse, beautiful.
Prosperous, stable & secure economy	**Advanced economy** with many global leaders.
Public services	**Social security** and equity for all.
Quality education & skills	**A highly educated country with free tertiary study for all.**
Resource sufficiency & security	**Self sufficient**, resilient, good government.
Secure jobs & employment	Housing affordability, **enough employment** and low crime rates.
Social cohesion, connection & belonging	**Everybody live in harmony** without prejudice.
Tolerance, respect & anti-discrimination	**A respectful one-towards others**, the environment and self.
Values hard work and personal responsibility	I want an Australia with **moral values.**
Wellbeing & quality of life	I want generally **people be happy** and connected with a nature and community.



Appendix Figure 1. Estimated gender differences (female vs male) among coded themes for Australians' vision for the future.

Age differences in what Australians want for the future

Difference between the share of people under 55 and the share aged 55+ mentioning each theme.
Points right of the line mean people under 55 mentioned it more often.



Appendix Figure 2. Estimated age differences (people under 55 years vs people 55+years) among coded themes for Australians' vision for the future.

Income differences in what Australians want for the future

Difference between the share of people in households earning under $104k and $104k or more mentioning each theme.
Points right of the line mean lower income households mentioned it more often.



Appendix Figure 3. Estimated household income differences (households under $104k vs households $104k or more) among coded themes for Australians' vision for the future.

Region differences in what Australians want for the future

Difference between the share of people living regionally or remotely and in major cities mentioning each theme.
Points right of the line mean people living regionally or remotely mentioned it more often.



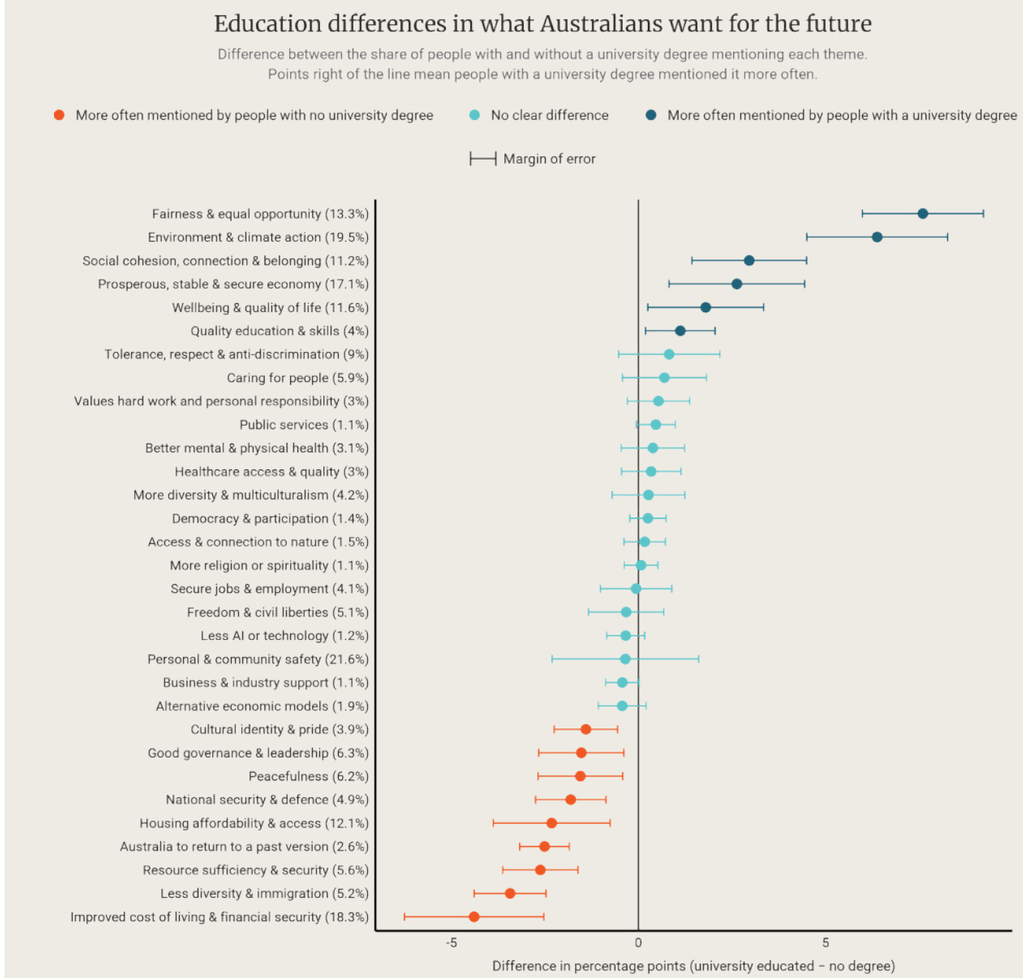
Appendix Figure 4. Estimated region differences (people living regionally/remotely vs people living in major cities) among coded themes for Australians' vision for the future.

Linguistic diversity differences in what Australians want for the future

Difference between the share of people speaking a language other than English (LOTE) at home and English only mentioning each theme. Points right of the line mean people speaking LOTE mentioned it more often.



Appendix Figure 5. Estimated linguistic diversity differences (people speaking a language other than English at home vs people speaking English only) among coded themes for Australians' vision for the future.



Appendix Figure 6. Estimated education differences (people with a university degree vs people with no degree) among coded themes for Australians' vision for the future.

Appendix Table 2 Measures used in the 2026 AUWI survey.

Measures	Description	Survey
Core subjective wellbeing measures		
Overall satisfaction items	Overall personal and national life satisfaction were measured using two single-item measures: Global Life Satisfaction (GLS): "Thinking about your own life and personal circumstances, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole?", and Global National Wellbeing (GNW): "How satisfied are you with life in Australia?" Responses were recorded on a 0–10 scale (0 = No satisfaction at all, 10 = Completely satisfied) and converted to a 0-100 percentage point score.	Primary & follow-up survey
Personal and National Wellbeing Indices	Participants were asked: "How satisfied are you with …" and rated satisfaction with seven domains of personal wellbeing (standard of living, health, achieving in life, personal relationships, personal safety, community connectedness, and future security) and six domains of national wellbeing (economic situation, state of the natural environment, social conditions, government, business, and national security). Responses were recorded on a 0–10 scale (0 = No satisfaction at all, 10 = Completely satisfied) and converted to a 0-100 percentage point score. The personal domains were averaged to form the Personal Wellbeing Index, while the national domains were averaged to form the National Wellbeing Index.	Primary & follow-up survey
Complementary measures		
Psychological distress	Measured using the Kessler-10 Psychological Distress scale. Participants rated 10 items describing psychological symptoms over the past four weeks (e.g., "feeling tired out for no good reason", "feeling hopeless") on a 5-point scale (1 = None of the time; 5 = All of the time). Item responses were summed to produce a total score ranging from 10 to 50, with higher scores indicating greater distress. Scores were categorised using ABS cut-offs: Low (10–15), Moderate (16–21), High (22–29), Very high (30–50).[44]	Primary survey
Loneliness	"How often do you feel lonely?" Responses were recorded on a 5-point scale: 1) Often/always; 2) Some of the time; 3) Occasionally; 4) Hardly ever; 5) Never. For reporting purposes, responses were grouped into: Often/always or some of the time; occasionally; and hardly ever, or never.	Primary survey
Feeling life is worthwhile	"Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?" Responses were recorded on a 0–10 scale (0 = Not at all worthwhile; 10 = Completely worthwhile) and converted to a 0–100 percentage point score. Scores were categorised using ONS cut-offs: Low (0–40), Medium (50–60), High (70–80), Very high (90–100).[45]	Primary survey
Pain	"In the past 7 days, how would you rate your pain on average?" Responses were recorded on a 0–10 scale (0 = No pain; 10 = Worst pain imaginable) and converted to a 0–100 percentage point score. Scores were categorised using OECD cut-offs: No pain (0), Mild pain (1–4), Moderate pain (5–6), Severe pain (7–10).[27]	Primary survey
Measures used in Part 2		
Vision for Australia's future	"In a few words, what is the Australia you want for future generations to come?" Responses were limited to 100 characters. Responses were analysed using inductive thematic coding, resulting in 37 thematic codes (see Methodology for more details).	Primary survey
Connection to future generations	Measured using the Social Generativity Scale.[28] Participants rated six statements on a 7-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree): a) I carry out activities in order to ensure a better world for future generations; b) I have a personal responsibility to improve the area in which I live; c) I give up part of my daily comforts to foster the development of future generations; d) I think that I am responsible for ensuring a state of wellbeing for future generations; e) I commit myself to do things that will survive even after I die; f) I help people to improve themselves.	Primary survey

Measures	Description	Survey
Societal challenges	Participants rated the perceived negative impact of five societal challenges on two separate questions: **Impact on own life:** "Thinking about your current and future circumstances, to what extent do you think each of the following issues will negatively impact your life?" **Impact on future generations:** "Thinking about future generations (i.e. those not yet born), to what extent do you think each of the following issues will negatively impact their lives?" The five issues were: a) Climate change; b) Artificial intelligence (AI) and/or automation; c) Changing global political and economic conditions; d) Access to affordable, high-quality healthcare and support services; e) Housing cost and availability. Responses were recorded on a 5-point scale (1 = Not at all; 5 = Extremely). For reporting purposes, 'Very' and 'Extremely' responses were grouped together as a high perceived negative impact.	Primary & follow-up survey
Population characteristics		
Household income	Participants were asked: "In what range was your total household income, before tax, last year?" They were given 19 response options ranging from 'Less than $15,599' to 'More than $416,000'. For this report, income has been collapsed into six categories: 1) ≤$33,799; 2) $33,800–$64,999; 3) $65,000–$103,999; 4) $104,000–$155,999; 5) $156,000–$259,999; 6) ≥$260,000.	Primary survey
Employment status, student status and volunteer status	Occupation was measured using two questions. The first assessed full-time occupation: "Which of the following full-time occupational categories best applies to you at this time?" (Full-time paid employment, retirement, volunteer, home or family duties, study, or none of these). The second assessed part-time occupations: "And which of the following part-time occupational categories also apply to you at this time?" (Part-time paid employment, casual employment, semi-retirement, part-time volunteer, part-time study, unemployed, or none of these). Data from both questions were recoded to create employment status (full-time employed, part-time employed, not in labour force, unemployed), student status (full-time student, part-time student, not studying), and volunteer status.	Primary survey
Age	Collected in years via an open-ended response question: "How old are you today?" For Parts 1 and 2 in this report, age has been grouped into seven categories: 18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55–64, 65–74, 75+. For Part 3 in this report, age has been grouped into four categories: 18-34, 35-49, 50-64, 65+.	Panel profile survey; Primary survey
Gender	Participants were asked: "How do you describe your gender?" They were given four response options: 1) Man or male; 2) Woman or female; 3) Non-binary; 4) I use a different term (please describe). For this report, the last two categories were coded as 'Non-binary/gender diverse'.	Panel profile survey; Primary survey
Housing tenure	Participants were asked: "Is the dwelling in which you live…?" Response options included: Owned outright, Owned with a mortgage, Rented, Occupied rent free, Purchased under a shared equity scheme, Occupied under a life tenure scheme, or Some other arrangement. For this report, the last four categories were recoded as 'Other'.	Panel profile survey; Primary survey
Country of birth	Participants were asked: "In which country were you born?" and selected from a list of countries. For this report, participants were grouped into: 1) Australian-born; 2) Born in a non-English-speaking country; 3) Born in a main English-speaking country.	Panel profile survey; Primary survey
Language spoken at home	Participants were asked: "Do you use a language other than English at home?" Response options were: Yes, No, Not sure, or Prefer not to say.	Panel profile survey; Primary survey
Region	Derived from postcode using ASGS remoteness classification.	Primary survey
Neighbourhood disadvantage	Derived from postcode using 2021 SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSD) national quintiles.	Primary survey
Highest education	Derived from two questions assessing highest year of schooling completed ("What is the highest year of primary or secondary school you have completed?") and highest educational qualification completed ("What is the level of the highest educational qualification you have completed, if any?"). For this report, responses were collapsed into four categories: University degree (bachelor degree or above), Certificate III/IV or Diploma, Year 12, and Less than Year 12.	Panel profile survey; Primary survey
Marital status	Participants were asked: "What is your current marital status?" Response options were: Never married, Widowed, Divorced, Separated but not divorced, Married.	Panel profile survey; Primary survey
Household composition	Derived from questions about the number and relationships of adults and children in the household, including: number of adults aged 18 and over ("Including yourself, how many people aged 18 years and over live in your household?"), relationships of other adults, number of children under 18 ("How many children under age 18 are currently living in your household?"), and relationship to each child.	Panel profile survey; Primary survey
Unpaid carer	Participants were asked: "In the last two weeks, did you spend time providing unpaid care, help or assistance to family members or others because of a disability, a long-term health condition or problems related to old age?" Response options were: Yes, No, Not sure, or Prefer not to say.	Panel profile survey; Primary survey
Long-term health condition	Participants were asked: "Have you been told by a doctor or nurse that you have any of these long-term health conditions?" and selected all that applied from a list of 12 conditions (including arthritis, asthma, cancer, diabetes, heart disease, mental health condition, and others) plus an 'other' option and 'no long-term health condition'. For this report, responses were categorised as: No condition, One condition, Multiple conditions.	Primary survey

Appendix Table 3 Bootstrapped sampling normative ranges for core wellbeing measures, established on data collected in 2025.

			95% CI	
	Mean	**SE**	**LL**	**UL**
Global life satisfaction	68.2	0.7	66.8	69.6
Personal Wellbeing Index	**67.1**	**0.7**	**65.8**	**68.4**
Standard of living	69.5	0.7	68.0	70.9
Health	64.7	0.7	63.2	66.1
Achieving in life	63.5	0.8	61.8	65.1
Personal relationships	70.8	0.9	69.1	72.4
Personal safety	75.7	0.7	74.2	77.1
Community connectedness	63.7	0.9	62.1	65.4
Future security	62.2	0.9	60.4	63.9
Global national wellbeing	**70.6**	**0.7**	**69.1**	**72.0**
National Wellbeing Index	**57.2**	**0.7**	**55.9**	**58.5**
Economic situation in Australia	54.2	0.8	52.6	55.8
State of natural environment	62.0	0.8	60.5	63.5
State of social conditions	57.8	0.8	56.3	59.2
Government in Australia	51.8	0.9	50.0	53.6
Business in Australia	57.2	0.7	55.7	58.6
National security	60.4	0.8	58.8	62.0

Note. SE = standard error. 95% CI = 95% confidence interval. LL = lower limit. UL = upper limit. See Khor et al. (2026) for normative range methodology.[25]



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