From adoption to autonomy: How Australians and New Zealanders really feel about AI

EY AI Sentiment Study 2026

Australia and New Zealand report

The better the question. The better the answer. The better the world works.

EY Studio+

Shape the future with confidence

Introducing the latest AI sentiment analysis for Australia and New Zealand

As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes more embedded in everyday life, Australia and New Zealand are entering a more mature phase in how people understand, experience and evaluate the technology. EY's latest research shows that AI use is now mainstream across both markets, with around three quarters of Australians and four in five New Zealanders saying they have used or interacted with AI in the past six months. At the same time, people's understanding of AI continues to deepen, with the proportion reporting a good understanding of the technology now roughly double 2025 levels in both countries.

What is emerging is not a story of resistance, but one of conditional acceptance. People across Australia and New Zealand can see the practical value AI may bring, particularly where it simplifies everyday life, improves services and delivers clear benefits. But they are also becoming more deliberate in how they assess the trade-offs, especially as AI moves from assisting decisions to acting more autonomously. Concerns around trust, transparency, accountability and loss of control remain defining features of public sentiment across both markets.

That is the opportunity in front of leaders. The next phase of AI adoption in Australia and New Zealand will depend not only on what the technology can do, but on how confidently people believe it is being deployed in ways that are safe, understandable and aligned with community expectations. Building that confidence will be critical to unlocking the full value of AI across business, government and society.

Katherine Boiciuc

EY Regional Chief Technology and Innovation Officer, Oceania

Australians' and New Zealanders' views on AI and the implications for leaders

Across Australia and New Zealand, everyday interactions with AI are now shaping how the technology is understood and adopted. Rather than forming views in the abstract, people are testing AI in practical situations and learning through use where it adds value, where it saves time, and where boundaries still matter. These lived experiences are beginning to set expectations around reliability, transparency and control.

This has clear implications for adoption. As AI moves from assisting decisions to taking action, acceptance is emerging unevenly across tasks, sectors and levels of risk. People are more open to delegation where benefits are immediate and safeguards are visible, and more cautious where outcomes feel harder to understand or reverse.

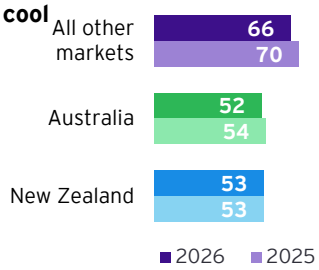
For leaders, the message is clear. Adoption will not unfold in a single wave or wait for universal comfort. It will be shaped by the quality of experience. Introducing AI deliberately, sequencing autonomy carefully and keeping human oversight visible will define how confidently AI scales across both markets.

Mike Willett

EY New Zealand
Technology Consulting Lead

Top facts to know about AI sentiment in Australia and New Zealand

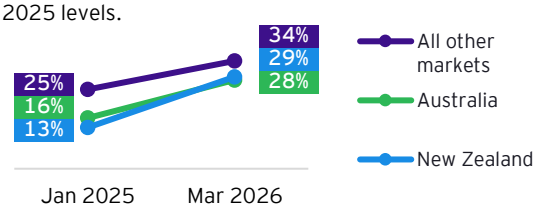
Sentiment is steady in Australia and New Zealand while some high-sentiment markets cool



AI sentiment in Australia and New Zealand remains stable compared to 2025, and continues to be notably lower than sentiment in other countries.

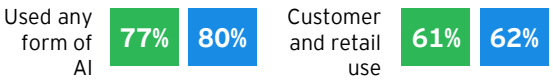
Self-reported understanding has increased markedly since 2025

Almost 30% of Australians and New Zealanders report a "good understanding of AI" in 2026, roughly **double** 2025 levels.



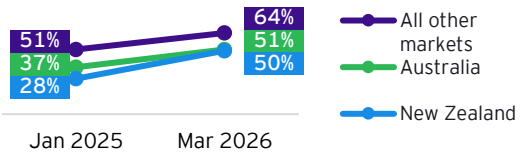
Over three quarters have used AI in the last six months, mainly in customer and retail

Recent AI exposure is now mainstream: around three quarters of Australians and four in five New Zealanders report using or interacting with AI in the past six months. Where people consciously recognise AI use, engagement is most established in customer and retail contexts.



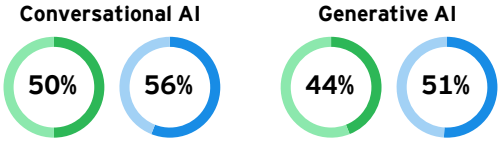
AI appeals to people where it simplifies and makes choices

Australians and New Zealanders show meaningful openness to AI in day-to-day life where it reduces effort and simplifies decisions, with full-time workers especially likely to agree.



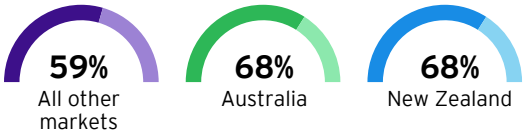
Conversational and generative AI are the dominant entry points for almost half

Almost half in Australia, and more in New Zealand, say they have used conversational and generative AI, highlighting these as the most visible and recognisable entry points to AI use.



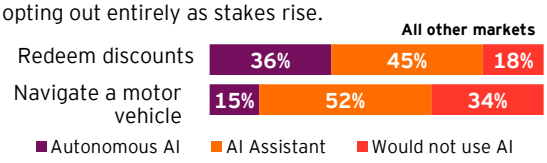
Concern about loss of control is notably higher in Australia and New Zealand

Concerns about loss of control are more pronounced in Australia and New Zealand than in other markets, suggesting that willingness to delegate decisions to AI is constrained by expectations of oversight and agency.



Delegation is conditional: autonomous AI is more accepted in lower-risk tasks

Across assistive AI vs autonomous AI scenarios, Australians and New Zealanders are most open to AI acting autonomously in routine, reversible tasks, while preferences shift strongly towards assistive AI, or opting out entirely as stakes rise.

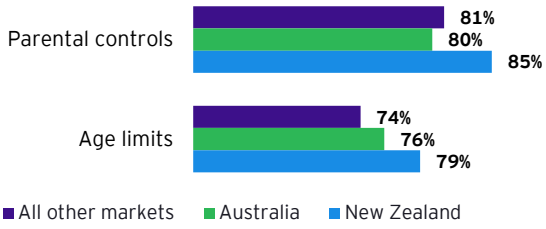


AI is a value exchange, and people expect benefits to flow down to them

Australians and New Zealanders tend to expect that when organisations use AI, the benefits should be visible and tangible, indicating a value exchange expectation rather than abstract efficiency gain.

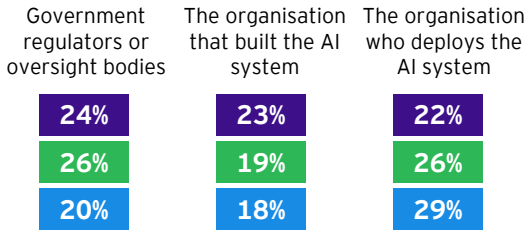
Strong agreement for AI to have parental controls and age limits

Support for built-in safeguards is high in both markets, with over four in five wanting parental controls, and over three quarters agreeing there should be age limits for younger users. This may reflect heightened public awareness following Australia's under-16 social media ban.



Accountability is placed on institutions, not individual users

When asked who should be accountable for AI decisions and actions, respondents in both markets concentrate responsibility on regulators and organisations that deploy AI, with comparatively little responsibility assigned to individual users.

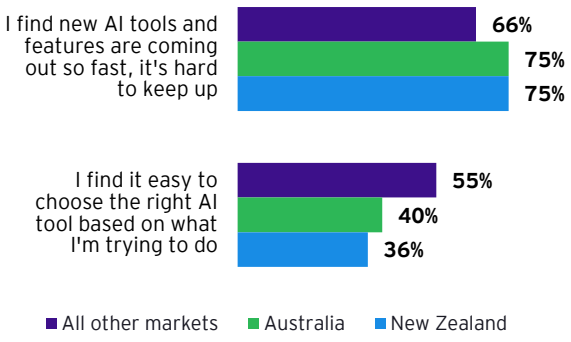


Australians and New Zealanders are struggling with the proliferation of AI tools, and don't find it easy to select the right tool to use – but training may boost confidence

Three quarters of Australians and New Zealanders agree that the pace of new AI tools being released is hard to keep up with.

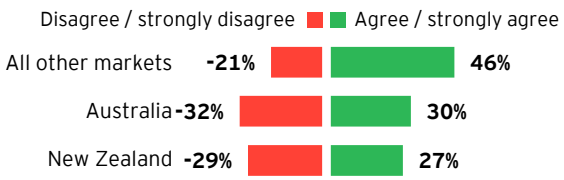
While the majority find the pace hard to keep up with, two in five also agree that they find it easy to choose the right AI tool based on what they are trying to do.

Separately, people who report having done AI training also report higher confidence in selecting the right tools for the task – an association that is consistent across both markets. This suggests that training may play a role in supporting use, and decisions on using different AI tools.



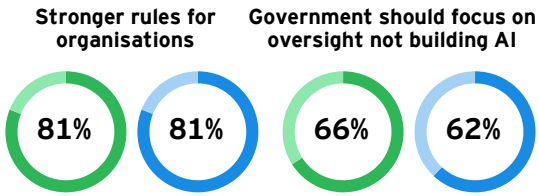
Australians and New Zealanders prefer domestic-grown AI solutions – a minority opinion compared to other markets

People in most markets are more likely to trust foreign-made AI as much as domestic-made AI. In Australia and New Zealand, however, more people disagree than agree, indicating greater sensitivity to how AI is developed, governed and controlled.



Support for stronger rules on organisational AI use

There is broad agreement for stronger rules governing how organisations use AI. In Australia and New Zealand, this sits alongside three in five agreeing that governments should focus on oversight rather than building AI for their own services.



Contents

Executive summary:

Key insights from the research

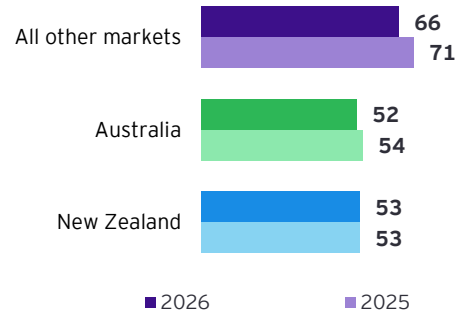
Exploring evolving AI sentiment

Since the first wave of the EY AI Sentiment Study, AI has moved rapidly from an emerging concept in 2025 to everyday reality in 2026. Governments, organisations and communities are no longer debating whether AI will shape society, but how it should be used and governed. This shift is increasingly mirrored in how everyday people think and feel about the technology.

In Australia and New Zealand, overall sentiment towards AI in 2026 has softened slightly, even as belief in AI's benefits remains strong. A majority continue to believe the benefits of AI outweigh the potential negatives, indicating that attitudes are becoming more considered. As AI becomes more visible in daily life, people appear to be reassessing its value alongside its risks.

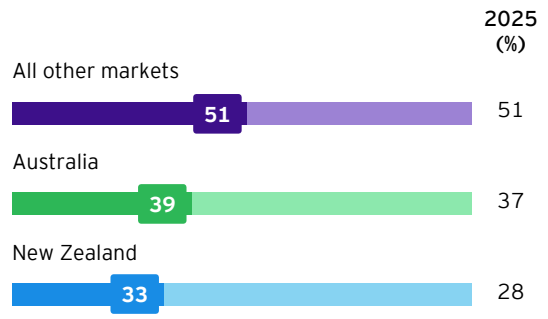
Compared to many other markets, Australians and New Zealanders continue to report lower comfort with AI. Rather than responding with early-stage enthusiasm, people in Australia and New Zealand are weighing practical benefits against concerns around trust, misuse and loss of control. The result is stable but cautious sentiment, shaped by experience rather than expectation.

EY AI Sentiment Index (avg out of 100)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, January 2025 and March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling
*Note: Average score across all other markets

Believe the benefits of AI outweigh the potential negatives (% agree/strongly agree)



Top markets in 2026: China (74%) KSA (70%), UAE (68%), India (62%), Mexico (59%)

Source: AI Sentiment Report, January 2025 and March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

Insights sequence

1 Engaged

More than 18,000 people around the world were surveyed about their feelings towards AI, including 2,022 people in Australia and New Zealand.

2 Explored

Via an online survey, people were asked about a variety of topics, including their comfort and excitement for AI, concerns around AI, what they are comfortable with AI being used for, and attitudes around assistive and autonomous AI.

3 Evaluated

All results were compared to everyday people in other markets around the world, providing clear insights for policy-makers and organisations in Australia and New Zealand through comparative benchmarks.

Australia and New Zealand's active and conditional engagement with AI

AI adoption is now mainstream, but confidence has not kept pace

AI is firmly embedded in everyday life across Australia and New Zealand. 77% of Australians and 80% of New Zealanders report using or interacting with AI in the past six months.

Yet the EY AI Sentiment Index score remains lower than the rest of the world, reinforcing a key finding: adoption and exposure can advance faster than confidence.

- 52/100 in Australia
- 53/100 in New Zealand
- 66/100 across other markets

Australians' and New Zealanders' enthusiasm reflects conditional acceptance, not disengagement with AI

Half of Australians and New Zealanders like the idea of using AI to simplify life and make choices, though this remains below the 64% seen globally. Excitement about AI is also more muted than in other markets, and fewer people believe its benefits outweigh the negatives. This caution extends to autonomy: only 26% in Australia and 22% in New Zealand say human oversight is not needed even if AI is accurate.

Taken together, it shows that Australians and New Zealanders are not disengaged from AI, but they are more likely to be selective and conditional in how they evaluate it.

Comfort is highest where AI is visible, familiar and low-risk

Conditionality around AI acceptance becomes clearer when it is understood where people consciously engage with AI. Deliberate engagement is highest in customer and retail contexts, with 61% in Australia and 62% in New Zealand.

By contrast, comfort drops sharply in higher-stakes, institution-led contexts like government and financial services, where outcomes feel harder to understand, reverse or control. This tension is aligned with broader sentiment: 68% in both markets are concerned about loss of control, and 81% support stronger rules governing how organisations use AI.

New Zealand sets a higher bar for the value exchange with companies that integrate AI into service offerings

New Zealanders are especially clear that AI must deliver tangible returns. New Zealanders are more likely than the global average to expect tangible returns from organisations using AI, expecting faster service and better value for money. People in New Zealand are also more likely to expect stronger protections for personal data.

Australia shows a similar pattern of concerns and expectations of practical benefits being passed on to them as consumers, and has a larger sceptical minority: 12% of Australians say they don't expect any benefit from organisations using AI, compared with 7% across other markets.

How leaders need to proceed in Australia and New Zealand

Trust is the gatekeeper to AI progress in Australia and New Zealand – and can be a strategic advantage

For leaders in Australia and New Zealand the message is clear: progress now depends less on what AI can do, and more on whether people trust how it is used. Trust is a practical condition that shapes when people will engage, delegate, or opt out of using AI — and risk people being left behind.

As AI shifts from assisting decisions to acting autonomously, expectations around transparency, oversight and accountability intensify. Trust cannot be retrofitted. It must be built in from the start, through clear guardrails, transparent oversight and the ability to intervene.

Staging autonomy, not forcing adoption

The data points to a clear path forward:

- Accelerate AI deployment where benefits are immediate and safeguards are visible
- Slow down deliberately where social licence, regulation or reassurance still matter
- Treat autonomy as something to be earned, not assumed

Closing the skills gap as a pathway to confidence and safety

Across Australia and New Zealand, around three quarters of people say new AI tools are emerging so quickly it is hard to keep up (compared to two thirds in other markets) and fewer feel it is easy to choose the right AI tool. But, uncertainty drops among those with recent AI training. In Australia, confidence rises from just 24% among those with no recent training to 74% among those with more substantial training; in New Zealand, it increases from 24% to 68%. This highlights the importance of AI skills and literacy in shaping how people experience and engage with the technology.

Capability uplift is therefore not only a productivity lever, but also a critical enabler of confidence, trust and perceived safety as AI becomes more embedded in everyday life.

Overall, the 2026 evidence sends a clear regional signal. Australia and New Zealand are not resisting AI; they support AI that helps and augments people, but remain cautious where autonomy replaces human judgement. For leaders, the opportunity is to close the gap between rising AI capability and the level of autonomy people are prepared to trust.

Implications for government

The public expects governments to play a clear stewardship role in AI. Support for stronger rules is high (around 81% in both Australia and New Zealand), and most people want governments to prioritise oversight rather than building AI themselves (66% Australia; 62% New Zealand).

This reinforces the need for visible governance: clear accountability, transparent safeguards, and demonstrable controls that align with community expectations – particularly in areas where AI is less visible but the risks are higher.

Implications for organisations

For organisations, the mandate from everyday people is increasingly framed as a value exchange. People expect that AI adoption should translate into tangible benefits such as faster service, better value, stronger data protection and improved reliability. New Zealanders, in particular, express higher expectations across multiple benefit measures, reinforcing that customer trust is likely to depend on visible "pay-back" from AI use. In Australia, the higher proportion expecting no benefit highlights a reputational risk: if AI is experienced as opaque, extractive or unaccountable, scepticism can become entrenched.

Detailed report:

AI sentiment in Australia and New Zealand

Introduction:

Background to the research

About the research

Bringing the voices of everyday people into global conversation about AI

The EY AI Sentiment Study tracks how everyday people perceive, understand and experience AI as it becomes embedded in daily life. Building on earlier waves of the research, the 2026 study captures how sentiment is evolving as AI shifts from an emerging technology to something people actively encounter through work, services and consumer interactions.

The research examines sentiment, the conditions under which people are willing to engage with AI, delegate decisions, and trust organisations and governments to use AI responsibly. The research provides insight into where AI is seen as helpful, where concerns persist, and how expectations around transparency, control and accountability are shaping public acceptance.

Overview of the research

To better understand the views of everyday people, their understanding and usage of AI, as well as their concerns and expectations for the future of this technology, more than 18,000 people across 23 markets (shown below) were surveyed. This document provides a detailed comparative analysis of AI sentiment in Australia and New Zealand, and how this differs to everyday people in other markets around the world.

One market, one voice

To ensure the results of the quantitative survey are representative of the broader population in each market, a random stratified sampling approach was used with quotas on age (18 years and older), gender and location, based on census data.

To ensure each country had an equal say on this topic, all results have been statistically weighted. Functionally, this means any global averages or comparisons shown in this document can be interpreted as one market, one voice.

Due to relatively low internet penetration in markets such as India, China, Brazil, Mexico and Japan, any results from these markets should be viewed as representative of their connected consumers who are internet-enabled.

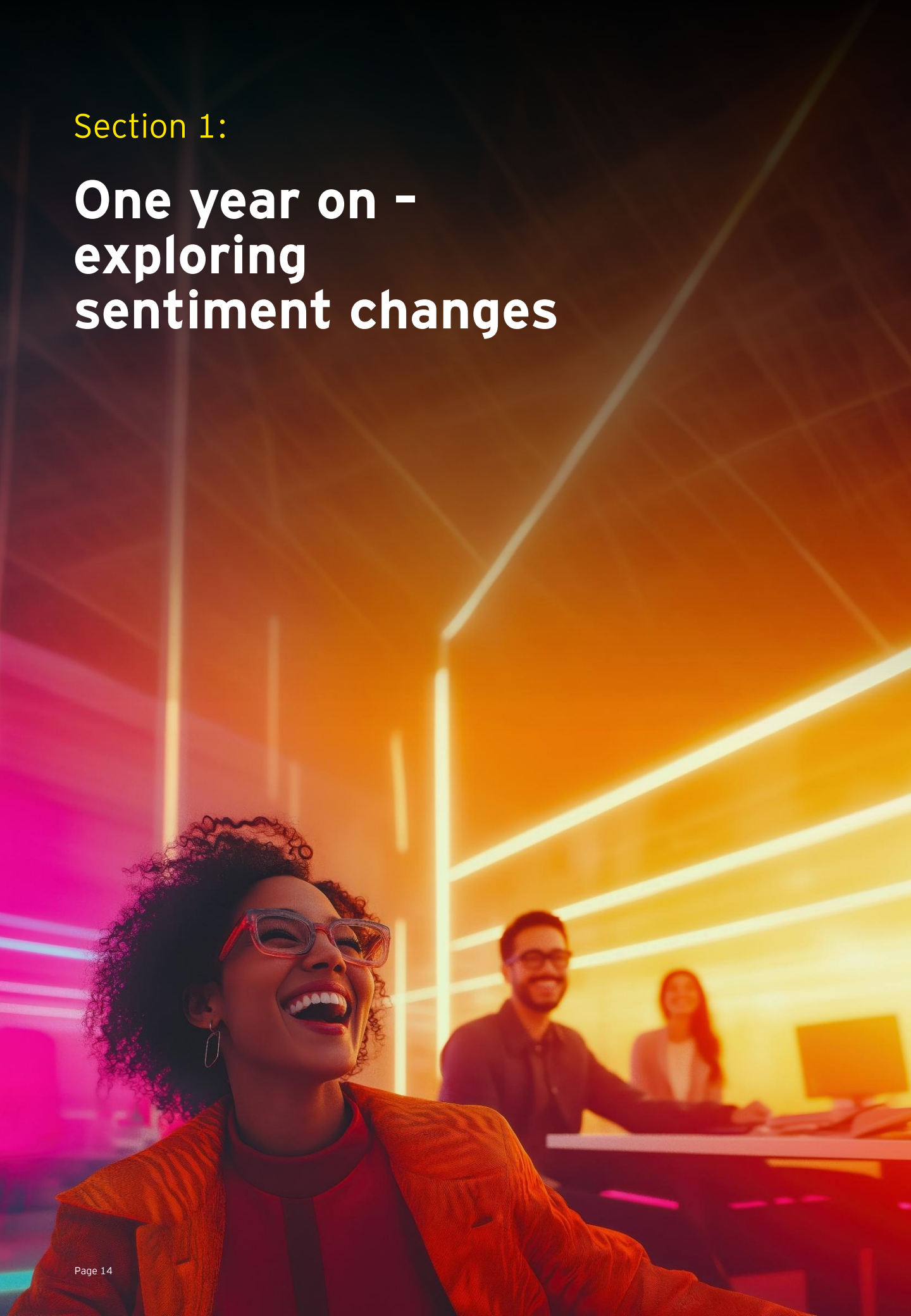
Sample profile

Australia Sample 1,019	France Sample 1,000	Japan Sample 1,010	South Korea Sample 1,005
Brazil Sample 1,000	Germany Sample 1,007	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Sample 510	Sweden Sample 500
Canada Sample 1,018	Hong Kong Sample 509	Mexico Sample 510	United Arab Emirates Sample 500
China Sample 1,002	India Sample 1,003	New Zealand Sample 1,003	UK Sample 1,013
Denmark Sample 510	Ireland Sample 510	Norway Sample 504	USA Sample 1,505
Finland Sample 505	Italy Sample 507	Singapore Sample 502	

Note: figures in this report are subject to rounding and therefore may sum to more than 100%

Section 1:

One year on – exploring sentiment changes



1

Observing our sentiment change, and gap with the rest of the world

Everyday people in Australia and New Zealand continue to feel more apprehensive about AI than in other markets.

While sentiment in Australia and New Zealand has remained relatively steady, declines observed in the most enthusiastic markets, such as China and the Middle East, as well as cooler markets, such as the UK and France, suggest that initial enthusiasm for AI in 2025 may be moderating as global impacts become clearer.

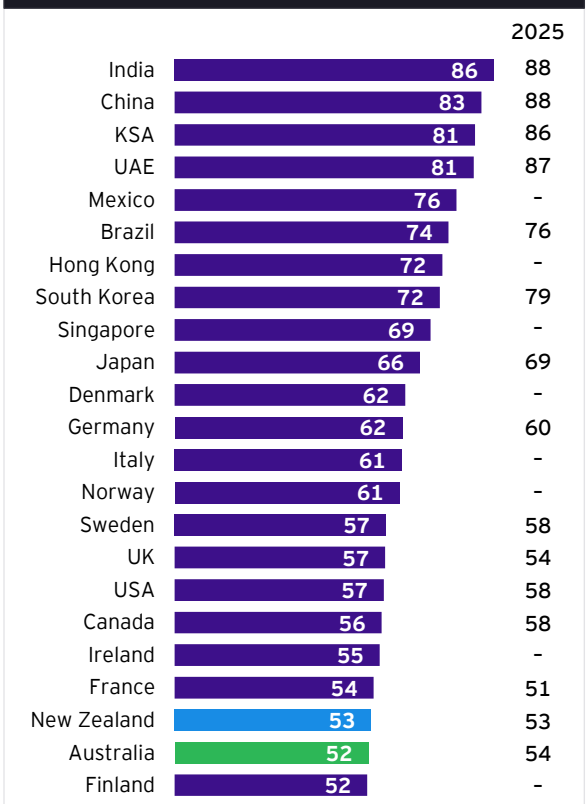
See the next page for a detailed breakdown of demographic differences in both markets.

The EY AI Sentiment Index

The EY AI Sentiment Index reveals how people feel about AI today. Based on four inputs, it is an average indicator and displayed as an average value out of 100:

1. How comfortable respondents feel about the presence of AI in their day-to-day lives
2. The impact AI is currently having on respondents' day-to-day lives
3. The impact AI is currently having on respondents' country
4. Excitement for the future of AI

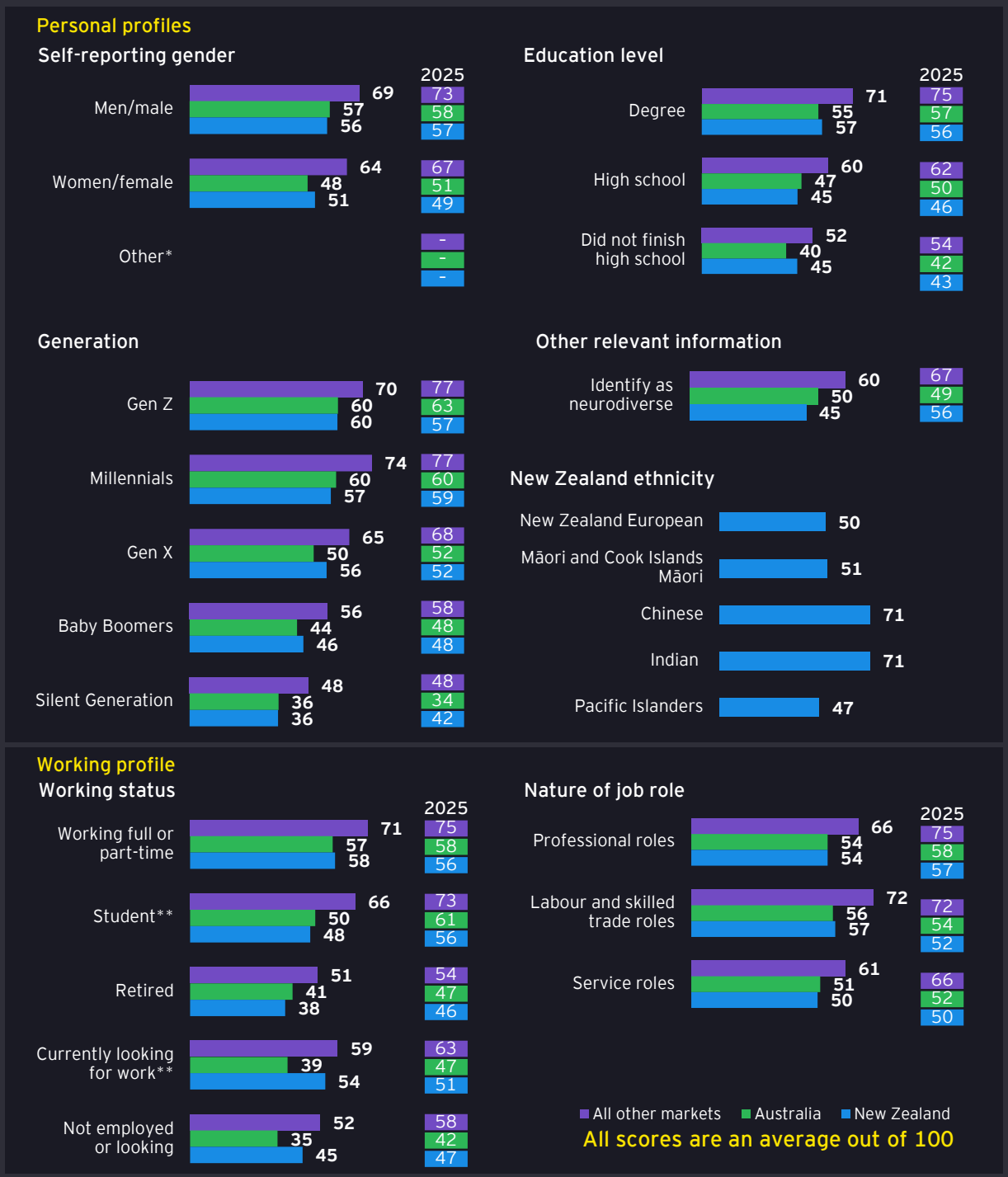
EY AI Sentiment Index (avg out 100)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, January 2025 and March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling
*Note: Average score across all other markets

EY AI Sentiment Index in key demographics (avg out of 100)

The EY AI Sentiment Index measures overall public sentiment towards AI and should be read directionally rather than as a stand-alone score. The value shown is an average number out of 100, where higher scores indicate more positive sentiment overall. A score of around 50 represents a neutral midpoint, where perceived benefits and concerns about AI broadly balance each other. Scores above 50 indicate net positive sentiment, with optimism, comfort and perceived benefits outweighing concerns, while scores below 50 reflect net negative sentiment, where unease, scepticism or perceived risks dominate



Source: AI Sentiment Report, January 2025 and March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling
*Note: There is insufficient sample size to report these figures
**Note: Sample size is below 30 for Australia and New Zealand, so results should be viewed as indicative only

Australia over time

Self-reported understanding of AI among Australians shows consistent, incremental improvement

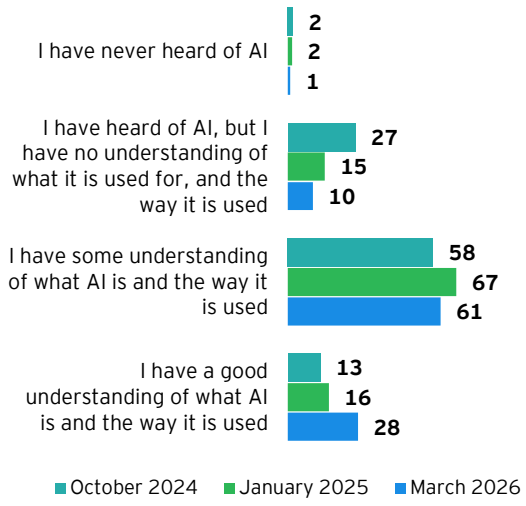
Since October 2024, the proportion of Australians who report having heard of AI but have no understanding has fallen substantially, declining from 27% to 10% by March 2026. At the same time, the share who report a good understanding of AI has more than doubled, rising from 13% to 28%.

This shift signals that awareness of AI is no longer just growing, but maturing. While media exposure continues to play a role in supporting people's use and decisions about using different AI tools, the increase in reported understanding may result from increasing interactions with AI in everyday contexts.

This growing familiarity is further shown in broader sentiment measures. Australia's EY AI Sentiment Index has increased since earlier waves, rising from 51 in October 2024 to 54 in January 2025, before moderating slightly to 52 by March 2026.

1 in 10 Australians in 2026 have no understanding of AI, falling from 3 in 10 in 2025

Knowledge of AI (%)

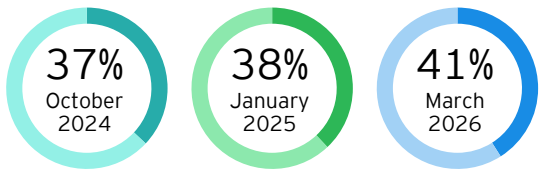


Source: AI Sentiment Report, October 2024, January 2025, and March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

EY AI Sentiment Index (avg out 100)

Source: AI Sentiment Report, October 2024, January 2025, and March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

I am excited for the future of AI and what it means for me (% agree/strongly agree)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, October 2024, January 2025, and March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

New Zealand over time

New Zealanders' self-reported understanding of AI is gradually improving

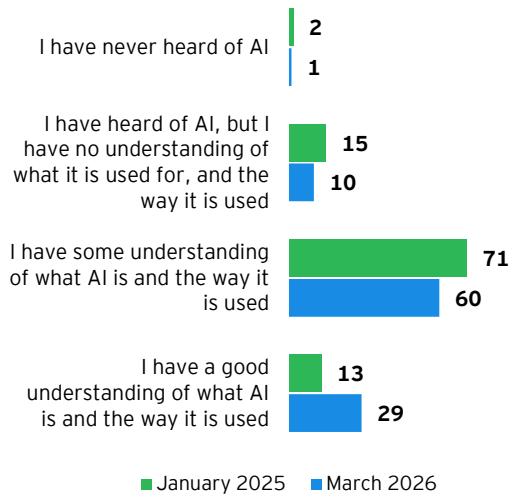
Between January 2025 and March 2026, the proportion of New Zealanders who report having heard of AI but having no understanding declined to 10%, while the share who report a good understanding increased to 29%.

This pattern indicates that awareness of AI in New Zealand is shifting from basic recognition towards more meaningful familiarity. Rather than simply hearing about AI in abstract terms, more New Zealanders appear able to articulate how AI is used and where it shows up in everyday life.

These changes are reflected in broader sentiment indicators. New Zealand's EY AI Sentiment Index has remained relatively stable across waves, sitting at 53 in January 2025 and March 2026.

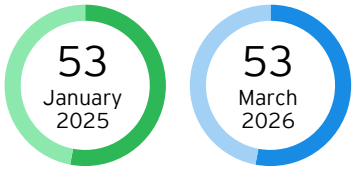
Over twice as many New Zealanders have a good understanding of AI in 2026 vs 2025

Knowledge of AI (%)



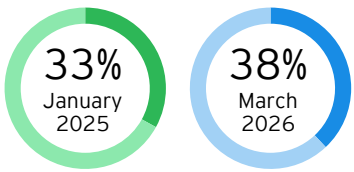
Source: AI Sentiment Report, January 2025 and March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

EY AI Sentiment Index (avg out 100)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, January 2025 and March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

I am excited for the future of AI and what it means for me (% agree/strongly agree)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, January 2025 and March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

Section 2:

How AI is experienced in everyday life

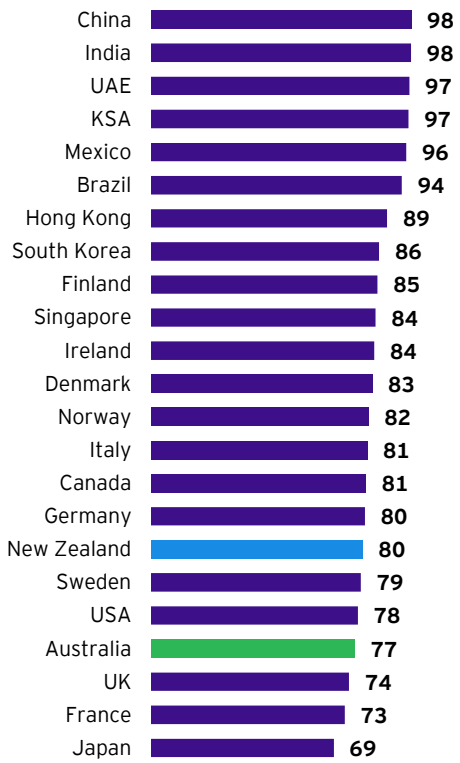
2

Conscious engagement with AI in day-to-day life and use of AI technologies

Despite widespread awareness of AI, Australians and New Zealanders remain relatively selective in how consciously they engage with the technology in their day-to-day lives.

Conscious engagement with AI is most evident in familiar, low-friction contexts, such as customer service interactions, personal productivity and information seeking. In contrast, Australians and New Zealanders are less likely to report intentionally using AI in areas such as education, financial decision-making, health and engagement with government services.

Have used or interacted with any type of AI in the last 6 months (%)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

Conscious engagement with AI

Deliberate AI use in Australia and New Zealand is concentrated in everyday consumer contexts

Patterns of deliberate AI use highlight a clear divide between everyday, consumer-led contexts and institution-led or higher-stakes settings. Over three in five Australians (61%) and New Zealanders (62%) are most likely to consciously engage with AI in customer and retail environments, where use is familiar, low-risk and closely tied to convenience.

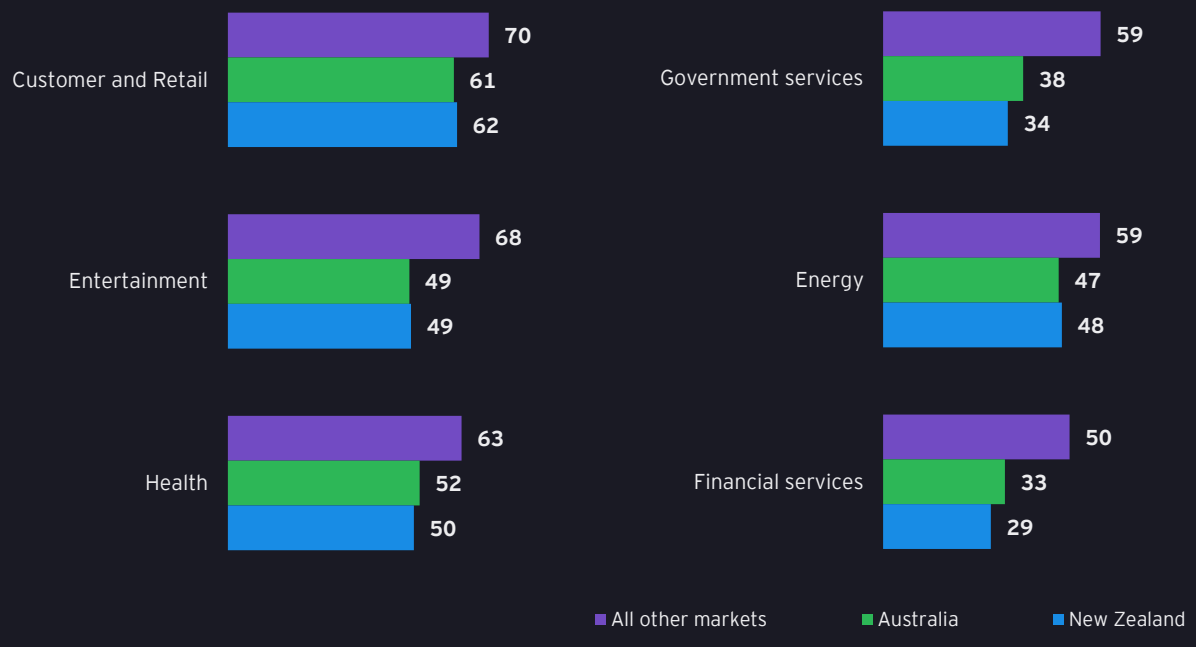
Beyond these everyday interactions, conscious use drops away sharply for Australians and New Zealanders, especially when compared to other global markets. Engagement in entertainment, health and energy-related scenarios is more moderate, sitting nearly 20 percentage points below levels reported in other global markets. This shows that while AI is present across these areas, it is either less visible to people or less likely to be actively recognised as AI-enabled technology.

The lowest levels of deliberate engagement appear in government and financial services, where fewer than four in 10 Australians and New Zealanders report consciously using AI. These are also the domains most closely associated with trust, regulation and personal risk, reinforcing the idea that awareness and exposure alone are not sufficient to drive engagement.

Even where AI capabilities exist, people appear less likely to identify themselves as active users in settings where consequences feel more significant or opaque.

Engagement is lowest where trust, regulation and risk are highest – leaders need to build confidence in tandem with technological progress

Deliberate usage of AI across different life scenarios (%)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

Customer and retail

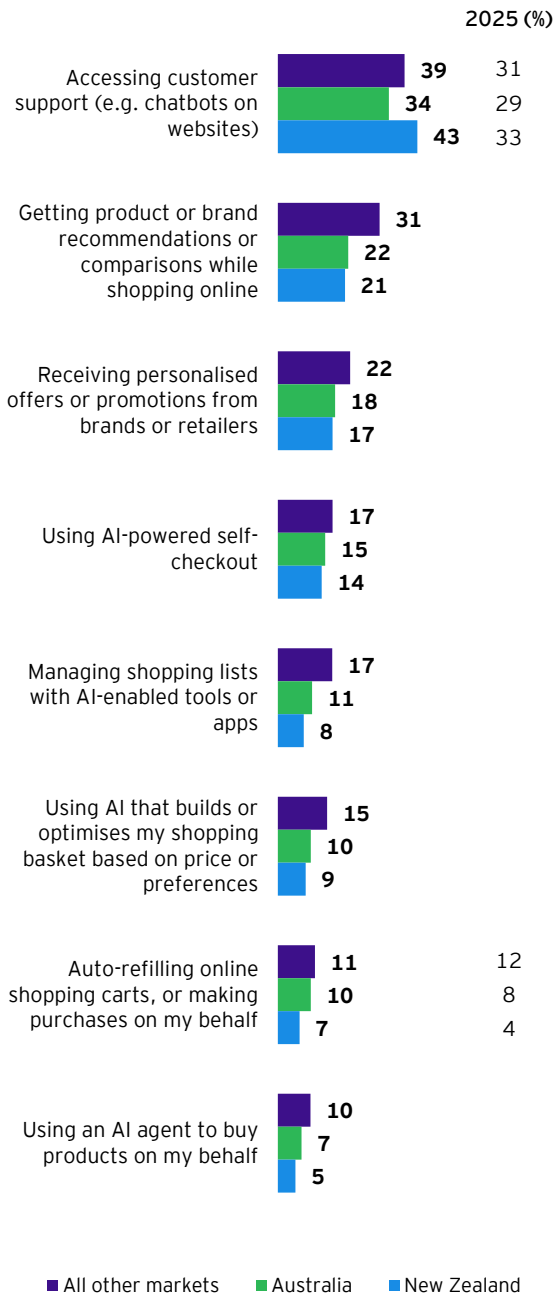
Chatbot and customer support tools remain the most common way Australians and New Zealanders engage with AI as part of their shopping experiences

This is consistent with last year's findings and illustrates the extent to which AI-powered support has become part of the retail journey in both markets. New Zealand outpaces global peers when it comes to customer support interactions, with 43% reporting using AI for this reason, compared to 39% globally and 34% in Australia. Beyond resolving issues, around one in five Australians and New Zealanders are also using AI to surface product recommendations and receive personalised offers, suggesting that AI's role is gradually expanding from reactive support into more proactive parts of the shopping experience.

Engagement drops where AI acts in a more autonomous role

Basket optimisation, auto-refilling carts, and AI agents making purchases on someone's behalf remain at the lower end of adoption in all other markets, as well as in Australia and New Zealand, with between 5-15% reporting these forms of AI interaction.

How everyday people have interacted with AI for customer and retail reasons over the last 6 months (%)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, January 2025 and March 2026
Base: Those who have consciously interacted with AI for customer and retail reasons over the last 6 months

Health and life sciences

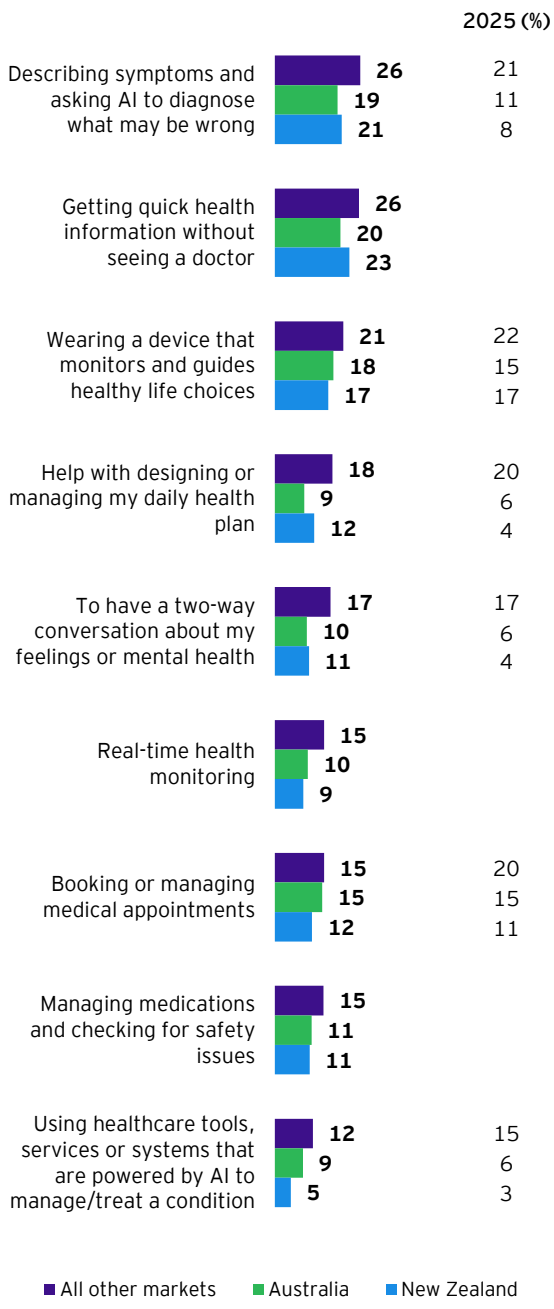
Australians and New Zealanders are engaging with AI for health reasons, but mostly in ways that feel familiar and low-stakes

Getting quick health information and describing symptoms are the most common entry points, with roughly 1 in 5 people in both markets having done so in the past six months. These are tasks where AI acts as a convenient first port of call; a way to seek information or reassurance before, or instead of, seeing a doctor. Wearable devices that monitor health behaviours also sit relatively high on the list, showing the extent to which this technology has become a normal part of everyday life for many people.

Across almost every health-related use case, both markets still trail global peers, even if the gaps are moderate. The more involved or personal applications such as designing daily health plans, mental health conversations, and using AI-powered tools to manage a condition, see the lowest engagement locally. New Zealand's use of AI for symptom checking has almost tripled since 2025, from 8% to 21%, and both markets have seen increases in people using AI for mental health conversations and daily health planning, suggesting that willingness to engage with AI in more personal health contexts is slowly building.

New Zealanders are increasingly turning to AI for symptom checking, with use having nearly tripled since 2025, signalling a growing willingness to engage with AI in health contexts

How everyday people have interacted with AI for health-related reasons over the last 6 months (%)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, January 2025 and March 2026
Base: Those who have consciously interacted with AI for health reasons over the last 6 months

Financial services

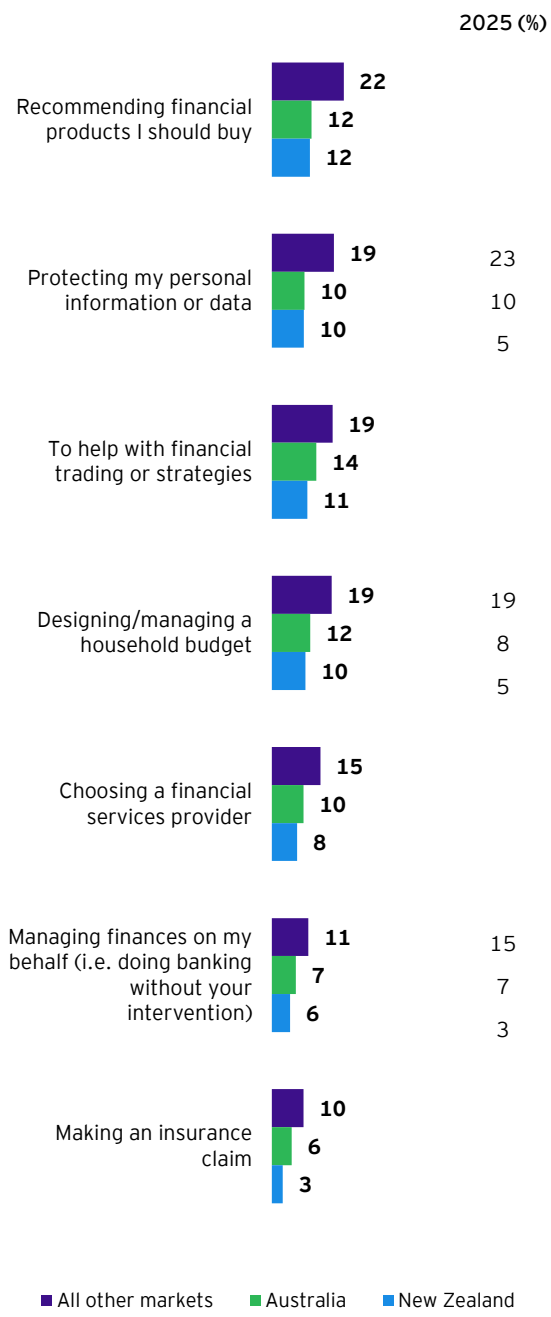
AI's role in the financial lives of Australians and New Zealanders remains limited, with engagement concentrated in areas where people retain a sense of control

Across all financial use cases, both markets trail global peers, and overall interaction levels remain modest, with around 1 in 10 using AI for financial purposes. The more advisory and informational uses, such as getting help with financial trading strategies or receiving product recommendations, see slightly higher uptake than the more autonomous ones, underscoring a broader pattern visible throughout the data.

A population that sees potential, but wants to stay in control

Managing finances on someone's behalf without their intervention sits at the lower end of adoption in both markets, with just 6% of New Zealanders and 7% of Australians doing so. With financial decisions carrying real consequences, this caution is perhaps unsurprising and may point to the need that trust building and clear demonstration of value will be prerequisites for deeper engagement for AI in financial activities.

How everyday people have interacted with AI for financial related activities over the last 6 months (%)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, January 2025 and March 2026
Base: Those who have consciously interacted with AI for financial reasons over the last 6 months

Energy and mobility

AI for energy and mobility is being used in both markets, but interaction remains largely surface-level, concentrated in the most familiar and practical applications

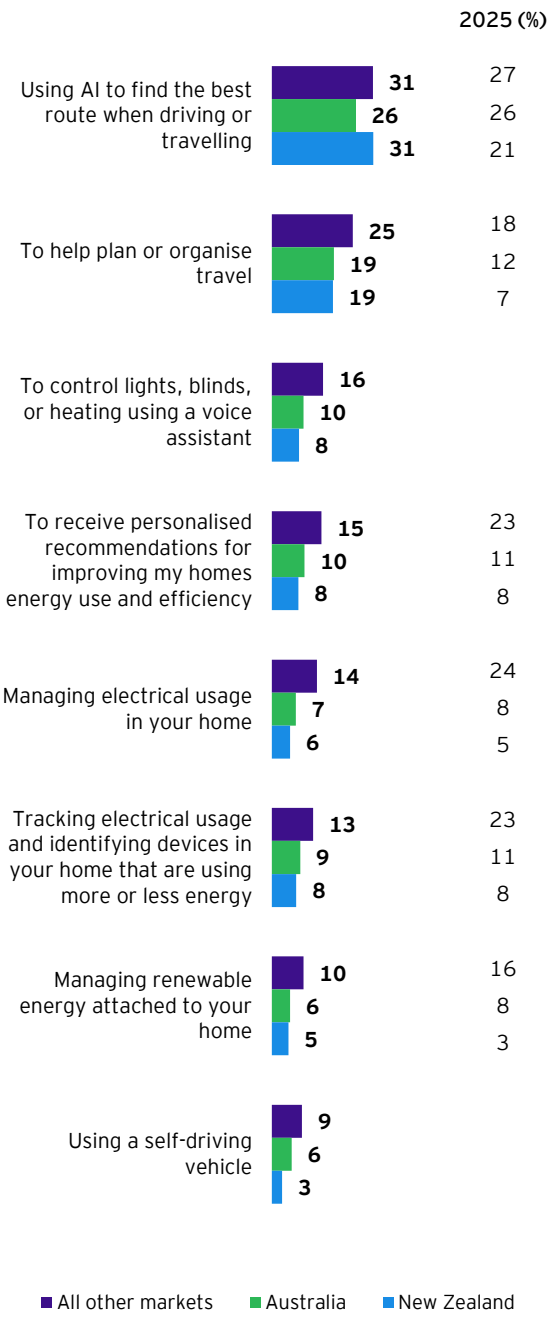
Route finding and travel planning stand out as the areas where Australians and New Zealanders are most actively using AI for over 1 in 5. These mobility tools have been embedded in everyday life through apps or in vehicle navigation screens. Travel planning has seen meaningful growth in both markets since 2025, suggesting that AI's role in helping people get from A to B is continuing to expand.

Use cases like managing electrical usage, tracking energy consumption, and managing renewable energy all see low levels of interaction in both markets, and in several of these areas, Australia's figures have remained flat or edged slightly lower since 2025, a notable contrast to the growth seen elsewhere. New Zealand has shown more movement in this space, but from a very low base.

Familiarity drives adoption

People engage with AI where the technology already feels like a natural part of their lives. For example, route finding has been normalised over many years of everyday use, while home energy management is newer and a less intuitive application for most people. Closing that familiarity gap will likely require both greater education and products that make the value of AI immediately tangible.

How everyday people have interacted with AI for energy and mobility reasons over the last 6 months (%)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, January 2025 and March 2026
Base: Those who have consciously interacted with AI for energy and mobility reasons over the last 6 months

Entertainment

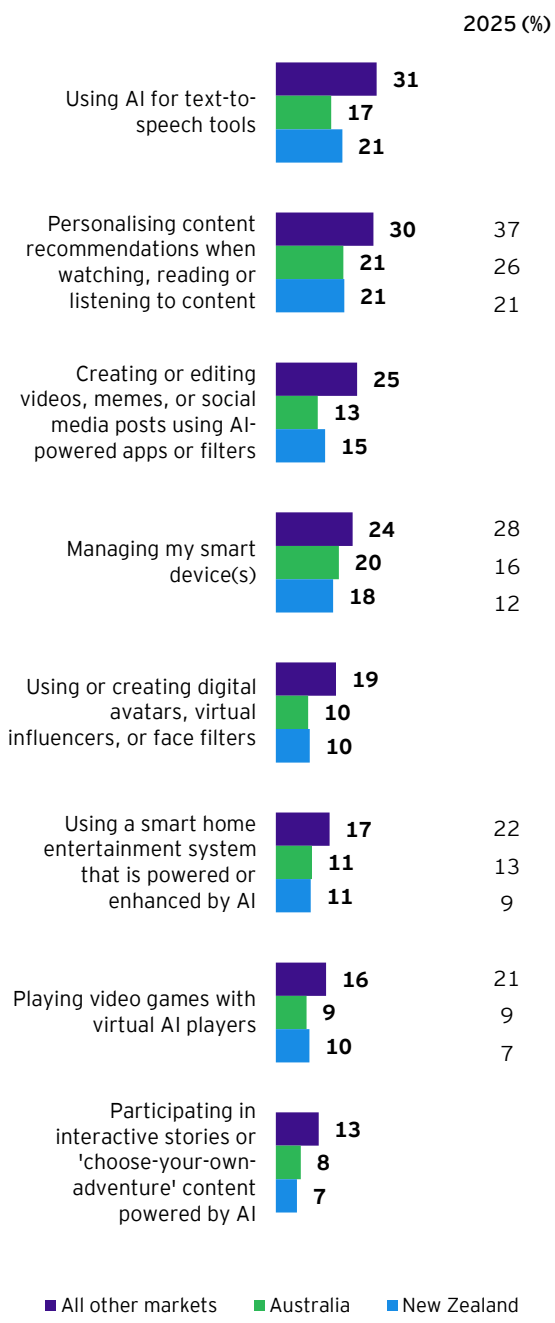
In Australia and New Zealand, AI for entertainment is primarily being used as a consumption aid, helping people get more out of content rather than create it

Personalising content recommendations is the top entertainment AI interaction for 21% of Australians and New Zealanders. The same proportion of New Zealanders using text-to-speech tools, both of which are fundamentally enhancing or facilitating how people consume content. Smart device management rounds out the top three uses in both markets, which is also oriented around making the experience of consuming entertainment more seamless.

AI in entertainment contexts remains largely a passive rather than participatory experience

Where Australia and New Zealand lag behind all other markets is in the more active and creative applications of AI. Creating or editing videos, memes, and social media content using AI-powered apps or filters sees lower engagement locally, with both markets trailing by around 10 percentage points. Digital avatars, interactive AI-powered content, and virtual AI gaming companions also remain relatively niche.

How everyday people have interacted with AI for entertainment related reasons over the last 6 months (%)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, January 2025 and March 2026
Base: Those who have consciously interacted with AI for entertainment reasons over the last 6 months

Government

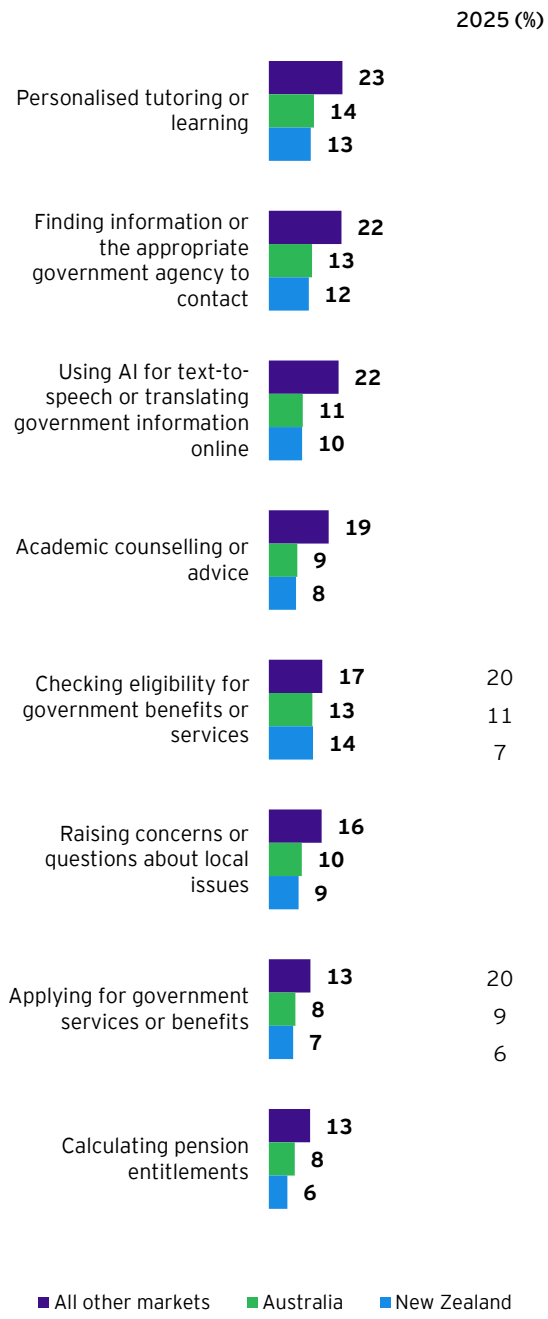
Across every government service use case, both Australia and New Zealand trail global peers, pointing to a broader gap in how AI is being experienced in this space

Personalised tutoring and learning, finding the right government agency to contact, and checking eligibility for benefits or services are the areas of highest engagement in both markets. But even these top use cases sit below all other markets, and overall interaction levels across the category are modest. New Zealand has seen a doubling in people who have checked eligibility for government benefits since 2025 (7% to 14%), while Australia has seen less notable growth in this use case (11% to 13%). Applying for services has stayed largely similar in both markets, though it is worth observing that proportions of people who report these uses have fallen on a global scale, from 20% in 2025 to 13%.

Awareness, access or appetite?

The consistent gap with global peers raises this interesting question. It may be that AI-powered services do not exist, or if they do, whether people are aware of them. It could also be that people do not trust the AI-powered services, or they are not designed in a way that makes AI feel visible or useful or accessible. Either way, there is a clear opportunity for governments in both Australia and New Zealand to explore and better serve society.

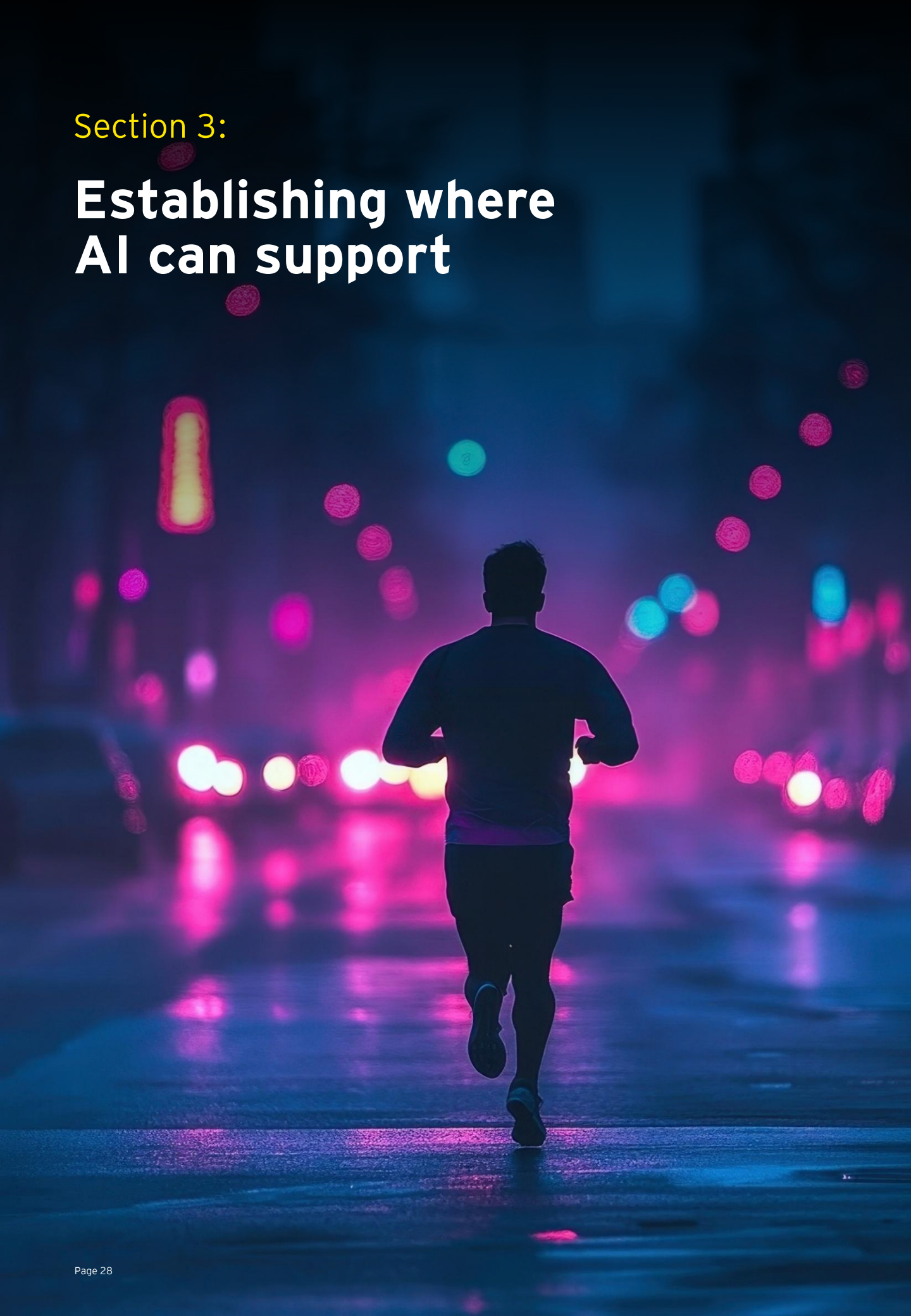
How everyday people have interacted with AI for government services over the last 6 months (%)

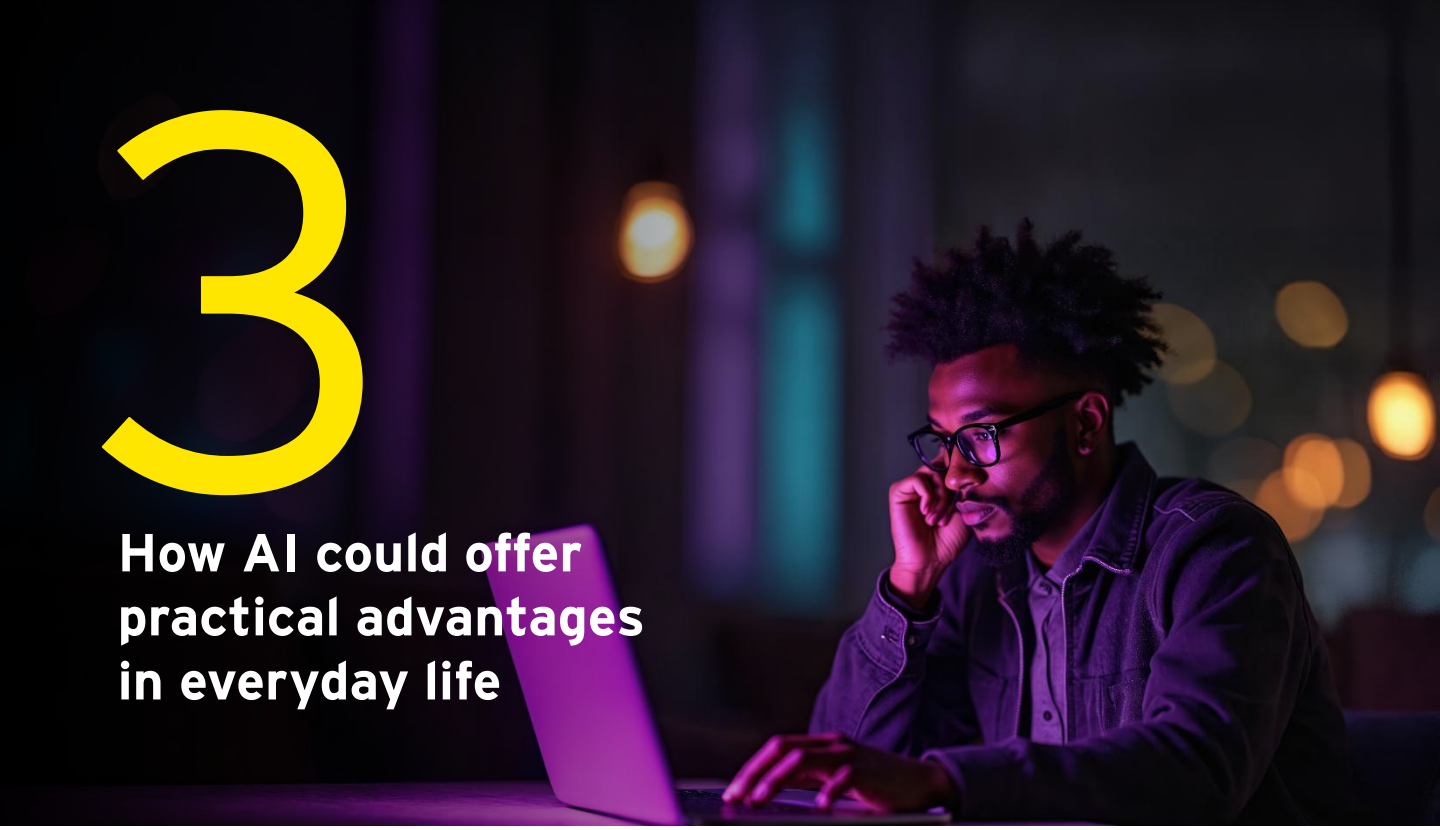


Source: AI Sentiment Report, January 2025 and March 2026
Base: Those who have consciously interacted with AI for government reasons over the last 6 months

Section 3:

Establishing where AI can support





3

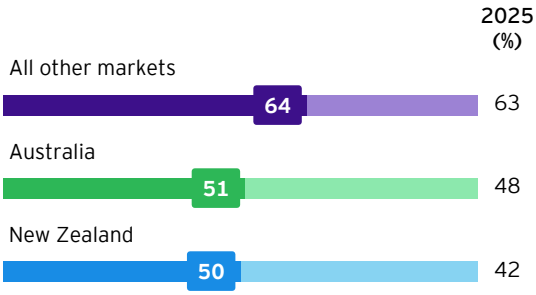
How AI could offer practical advantages in everyday life

Across Australia and New Zealand, people are open to AI when it is positioned as a tool that simplifies everyday life.

Half of Australians (51%) and New Zealanders (50%) say they like the idea of using AI in their lives to help simplify and make choices, compared with 64% across other markets. New Zealand sees the highest increase between 2025 and 2026, with more modest increases in Australia and global scores consistent between years. This highlights the potential acceptance areas for organisations and governments.

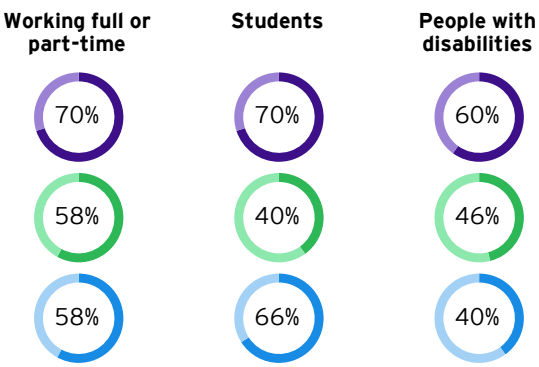
Perceived value is closely tied to relevance and immediacy. Where AI is seen to offer practical benefits, for example saving time, reducing effort or supporting routine choices, people are open to it, offering important considerations for leaders when implementing AI.

Like the idea of using AI in their life to help simplify and make choices (% agree/strongly agree)



Top markets:

India (88%), KSA (87%), UAE (84%), Japan (79%), China (79%).



Source: AI Sentiment Report, January 2025 and March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

AI's perceived helpfulness in entertainment, customer and retail environments

Australians and New Zealanders resist AI helping to personalise content, but are open to it helping protect everyday people

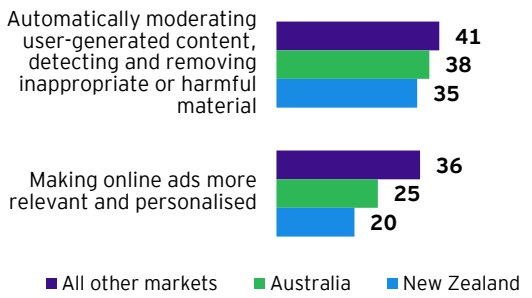
In the entertainment context, Australians and New Zealanders are most likely to see AI as helpful when it performs a protective or moderating role. Around two in five consider AI helpful for automatically detecting and removing inappropriate or harmful content, indicating stronger acceptance where AI supports safety and harm reduction rather than shaping preferences.

A similar pattern emerges in customer and retail. The most positively viewed application of AI is the use of cameras or sensors to prevent theft or improve safety, with perceptions of helpfulness broadly consistent across Australia, New Zealand and other global markets.

Beyond these areas, perceived helpfulness declines sharply. Overall, Australians and New Zealanders are less likely to view AI as improving their customer and retail experience. Ratings in New Zealand are generally lower across most use cases. In particular, there is limited appetite for AI-driven personalisation. Only around one-quarter of Australians and one in five New Zealanders consider AI helpful for making online advertising more relevant, compared with 36% across other markets.

Tech and Entertainment

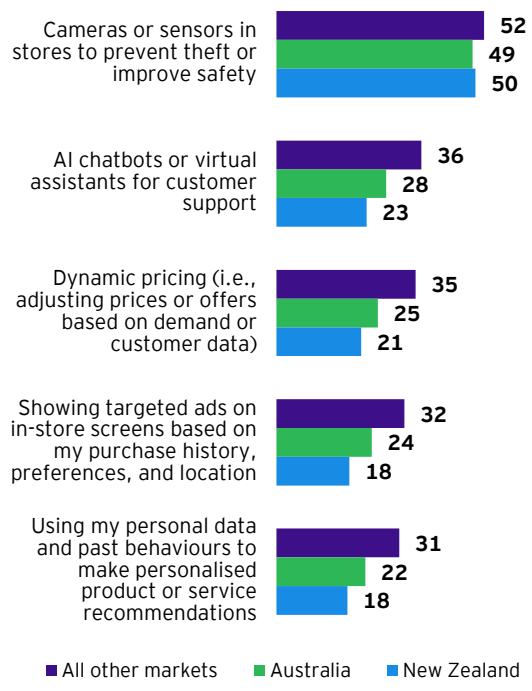
Perceived helpfulness of AI by companies for each of the following (% very helpful/extremely helpful)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents, see appendix for detailed sampling

Customer and Retail

Perceived helpfulness of AI by companies for each of the following (% very helpful/extremely helpful)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents, see appendix for detailed sampling

AI's perceived helpfulness in energy and mobility, and financial services

Australians and New Zealanders show openness to AI where it provides clear financial benefit, or safety features

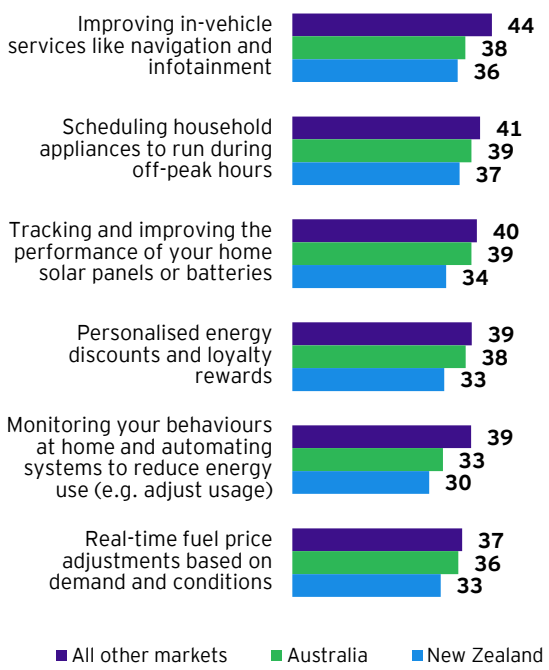
In the energy and mobility context, openness to companies using AI increases where AI is perceived to offer direct cost relief. More than a third of Australians (38%) and New Zealanders (33%) see personalised energy discounts and loyalty rewards as helpful. Similar proportions are open to AI supporting cost-optimisation behaviours, including scheduling household appliances to run during off-peak hours and responding to real-time fuel price adjustments.

Around half are open to AI helping protect them against fraud or detect fraudulent activity, in line with other global markets, reinforcing acceptance of AI in safeguarding and risk-reduction roles.

In contrast, there is noticeably less appetite for AI providing personalised advice in energy or financial contexts. Only 29% of Australians and 26% of New Zealanders view AI-driven financial advice based on personal data and preferences as helpful, indicating continued caution towards advisory and decision-shaping use cases.

Energy and mobility

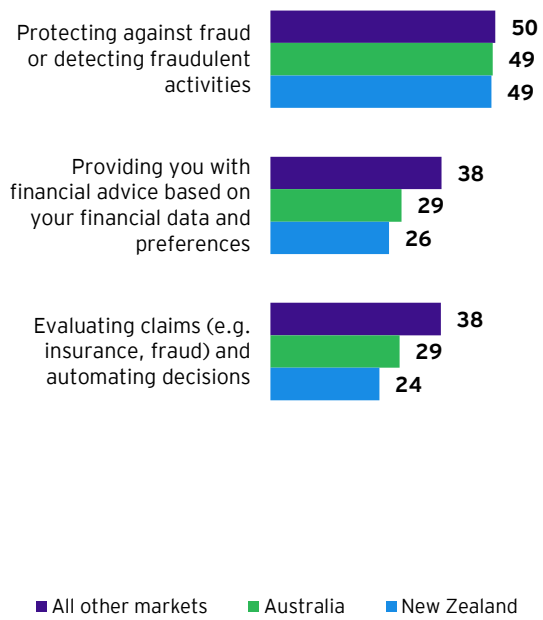
Perceived helpfulness of AI for each of the following (% very helpful/extremely helpful)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents, see appendix for detailed sampling

Financial

Perceived helpfulness of AI for each of the following (% very helpful/extremely helpful)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents, see appendix for detailed sampling

Data was collected prior to fuel price increases in March 2026

AI's perceived helpfulness in health context

Around one-third of Australians and New Zealanders see AI playing a helpful role in the health space, particularly where it supports prediction, analysis and documentation rather than replacing human care

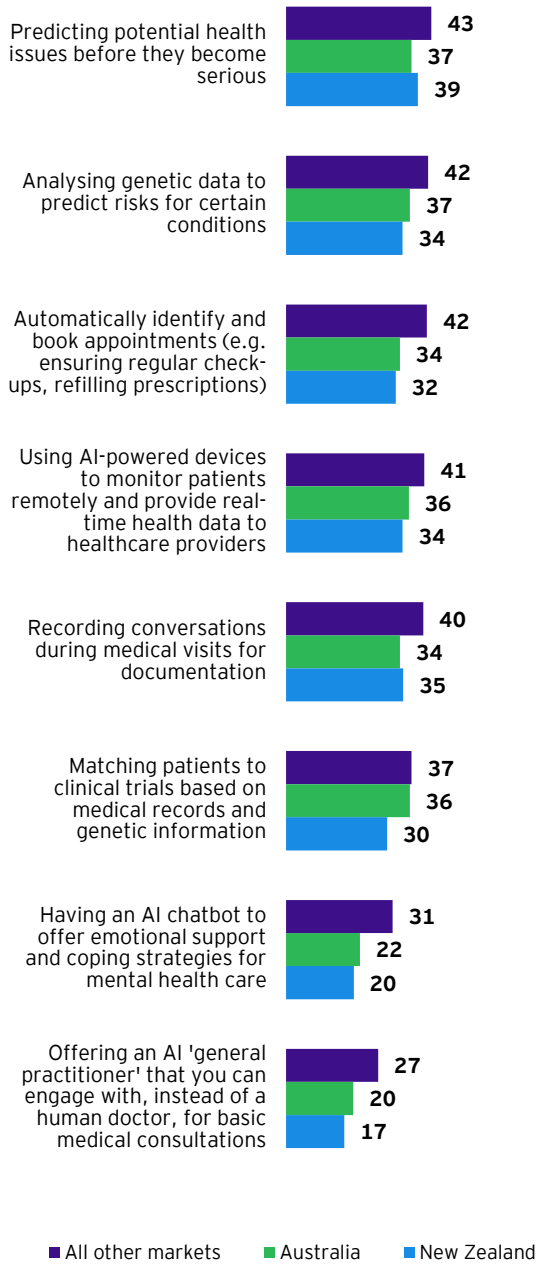
In Australia, over a third (37%) consider AI helpful for predicting potential health issues before they become serious, and the value in analysing genetic data to predict health risks. Support is also relatively strong for system-level applications such as matching patients to clinical trials (36%).

New Zealanders show a comparable pattern of support for predictive use cases, with 39% viewing AI as helpful for predicting health issues and 34% for analysing genetic risk. Around a third also consider AI as a useful tool to support clinical documentation following a medical visit.

In contrast, there is markedly lower support for AI acting as a front-line interface in healthcare. One in five Australians (22%) and New Zealanders (20%) view AI chatbots as helpful for offering emotional support or mental health care, and support drops further for an AI GP. Many Australians and New Zealanders broadly prefer human interaction in healthcare, but have an openness for how AI could enhance clinical insights and decision-making, and reduce admin.

Health

Perceived helpfulness of AI by companies for each of the following (% very helpful/extremely helpful)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents, see appendix for detailed sampling

AI's perceived helpfulness in government environments

AI is most accepted to support government when it improves efficiency, safety and service delivery

By contrast, perceived helpfulness declines where AI moves closer to judgement, advice or policy influence. Only 28% of Australians and 21% of New Zealanders view AI as helpful for providing guidance on potential policy implications, and support falls further for using AI to help assess legal or court cases (26% Australia, 21% New Zealand) or writing or designing legislation (26% Australia, 19% New Zealand).

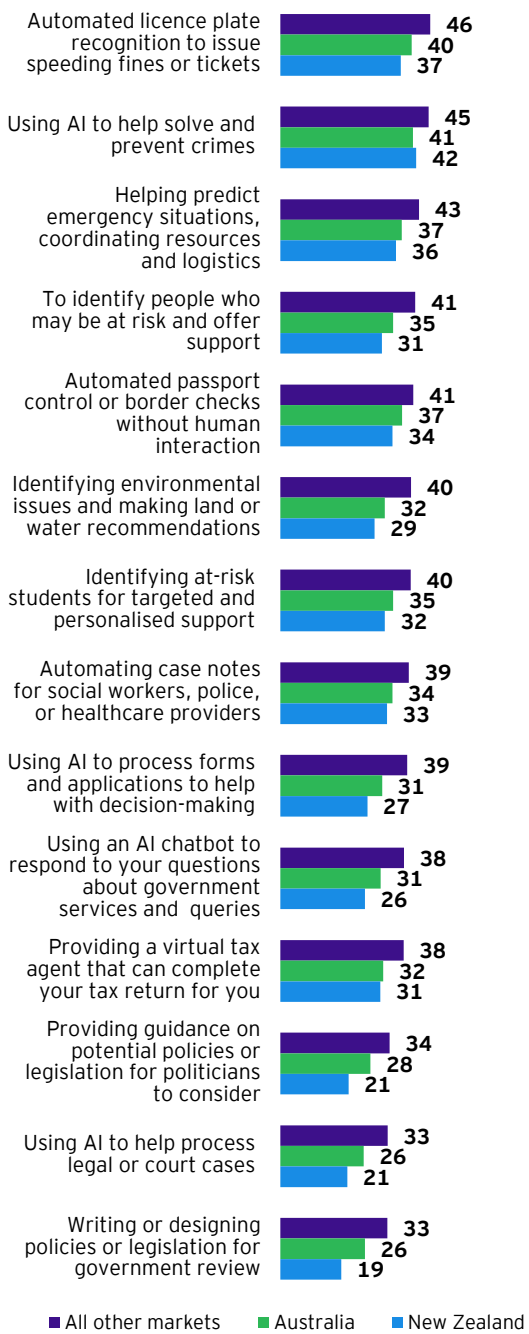
The strongest perceived value of AI sits in operational and emergency-related use cases. 40% of Australians and 37% of New Zealanders view AI as helpful for automating licence plate recognition to issue speeding fines, while 41% of Australians and 42% of New Zealanders see value in AI helping solve and prevent crimes.

Support is similarly strong for emergency response and infrastructure coordination, with 37% of Australians and 36% of New Zealanders seeing AI as helpful in predicting emergency situations and coordinating responses. There is also moderate support for AI improving public-facing services, such as responding to citizen requests and providing virtual assistance for tax-related enquiries.

Australians and New Zealanders welcome AI that helps government work better behind the scenes, but do not support AI that makes judgement calls without guardrails

Government

Perceived helpfulness of AI for each of the following (% very helpful/extremely helpful)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents, see appendix for detailed sampling

Types of AI being used

Whilst Australians and New Zealanders are actively engaging with a broad range of AI technologies, use patterns remain less widespread than in many other global markets

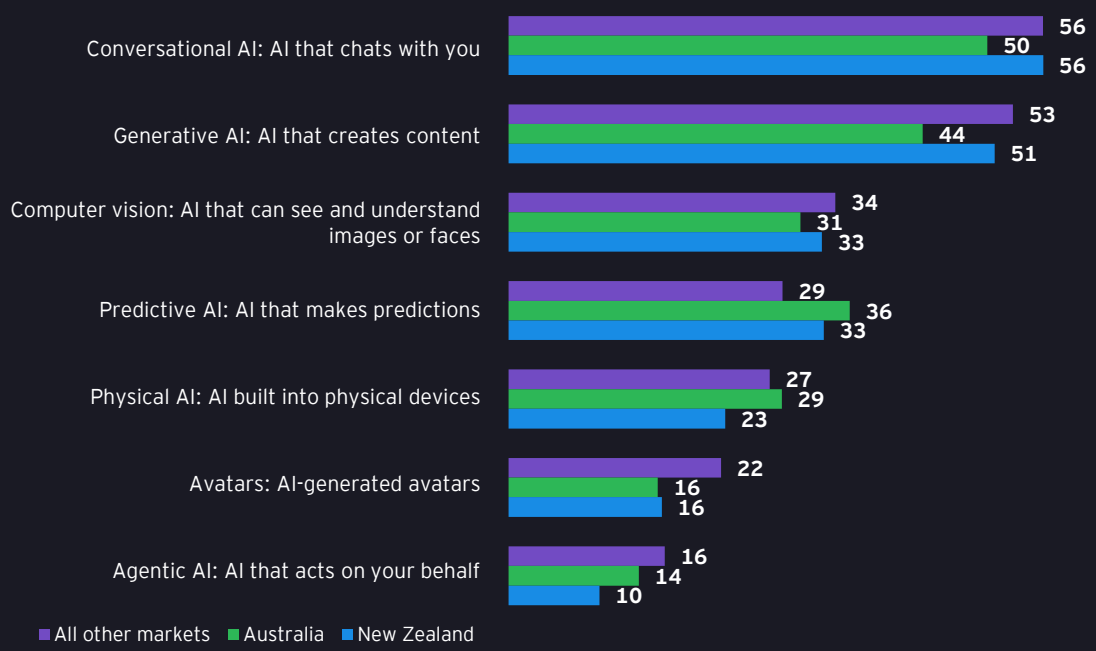
The most commonly reported forms of AI interaction are conversational AI and generative AI, with around half of people in both Australia (50%) and New Zealand (56%) reporting use in the past six months. This places both markets below global levels but suggests that language and content-creation tools represent the most visible entry point to AI for many people.

Beyond these headline technologies, usage drops off more sharply. Fewer Australians and New Zealanders report interacting with predictive AI, computer vision, or physical AI embedded in devices. This pattern reinforces the distinction between AI that is directly experienced through interaction, and AI that operates more passively in the background, where everyday people may not be aware of it.

Notably, agentic AI (systems that act on a person's behalf) remains a minority experience. 14% of Australians and 10% of New Zealanders report having used AI that takes actions for them, compared with 16% across other markets. While still emerging, this level of use may show that early experimentation with more autonomous forms of AI is already underway among everyday people, particularly in New Zealand.

Familiar AI experiences set the licence for AI elsewhere, with generative and conversational AI tools shaping comfort, trust and openness

Where people are using or interacting with AI in the last 6 months (%)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

Section 4:

Moving towards autonomous AI

4

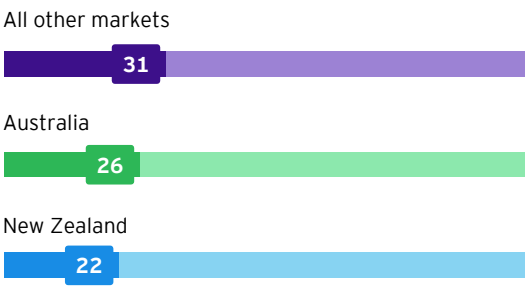
The conditions in shifting from assistive AI to autonomous AI

Acceptance of autonomous AI is emerging, but everyday people are concerned about the potential loss of control over autonomous decisions.

As AI becomes more capable, the critical shift is not whether people use AI, but whether they are prepared to let AI make decisions, and to do so without human oversight. Globally, just 31% agree that human oversight is not needed if AI makes decisions on its own and is accurate, with lower levels of agreement in Australia (26%) and New Zealand (22%).

This hesitation is closely associated with concerns about control. While 59% of everyday people report concern about decisions being made on their behalf, this concern rises to 68% in both Australia and New Zealand. As the role of AI shifts from supporting decisions to making them independently, comfort declines and concerns about loss of control become more pronounced in both markets.

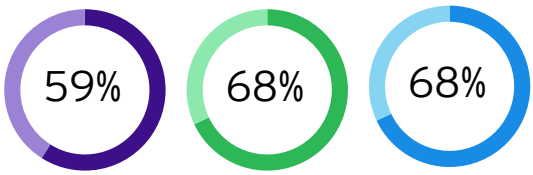
Agree that human oversight isn't needed, if AI makes decisions on its own and is accurate (% agree/strongly agree)



Top markets:

India (58%), KSA (49%), China (47%), UAE (44%), Singapore (38%)

Are concerned about the loss of control over decisions made on my behalf (% large/major concern)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling
*Note: Average score across all other markets

Scenarios where people consider delegating to AI

Across global markets, willingness to delegate tasks to AI follows a gradient driven by risk and reversibility

Delegation is most acceptable in low-stakes, transactional scenarios where outcomes are easy to understand and undo. For example, 36% of people are comfortable letting AI autonomously redeem loyalty offers or discounts, and 34% would allow AI to resolve customer service or billing issues on their behalf. In these scenarios, resistance is relatively low, with fewer than one in five saying they would not use AI at all.

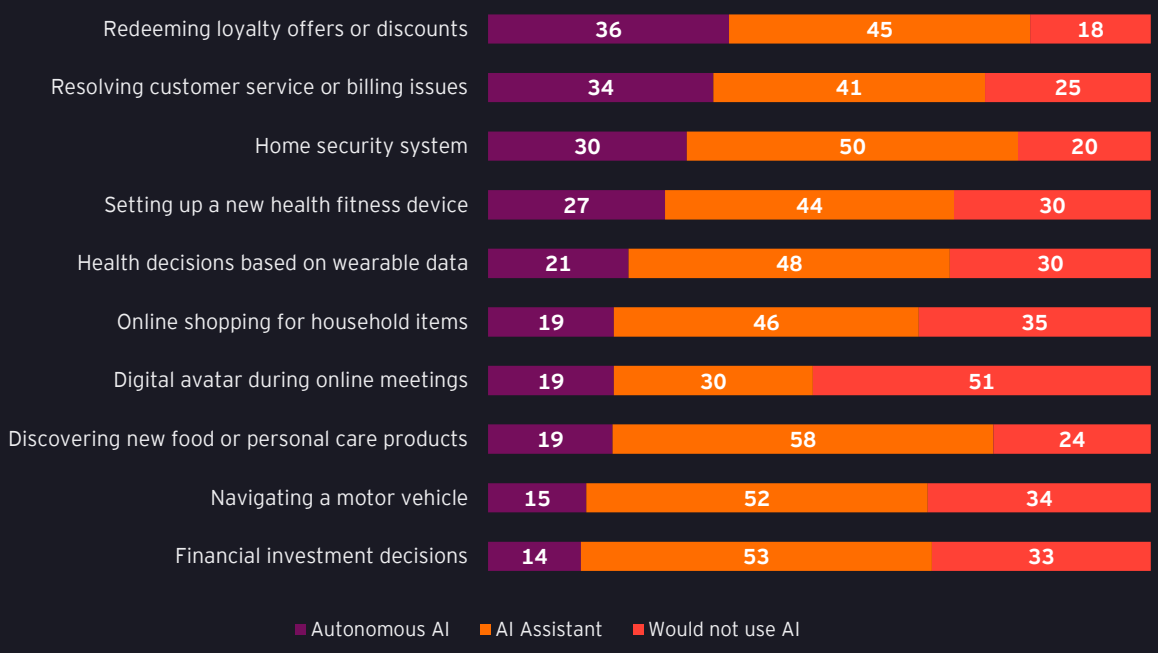
As tasks become more personal or consequential, preferences shift away from autonomy towards AI as an assistant. In areas such as setting up a new health and fitness device (27% autonomous vs 44% assistant) or making health decisions based on wearable data (21% autonomous vs 48% assistant), people clearly prefer AI to support decisions rather than make them independently. These mid-range scenarios represent the largest assistive area where openness is high, but delegation remains conditional.

The strongest resistance to delegation emerges in higher-stakes scenarios. Only 15% of people would allow AI to autonomously navigate a motor vehicle, and 14% would delegate financial investment decisions. In these same scenarios, around one-third say they would not use AI at all.

Globally, people are already willing to hand over routine, low-risk tasks. They are open to assisted decision-making in more complex contexts and remain highly cautious where outcomes are perceived as irreversible or deeply personal.

People trust AI with routine actions, but not yet where actions are irreversible

Preference of AI as a tool in each scenario (%)
Scores for all 23 countries in 2026 study



Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

Australians' preferences for assistive vs autonomous AI

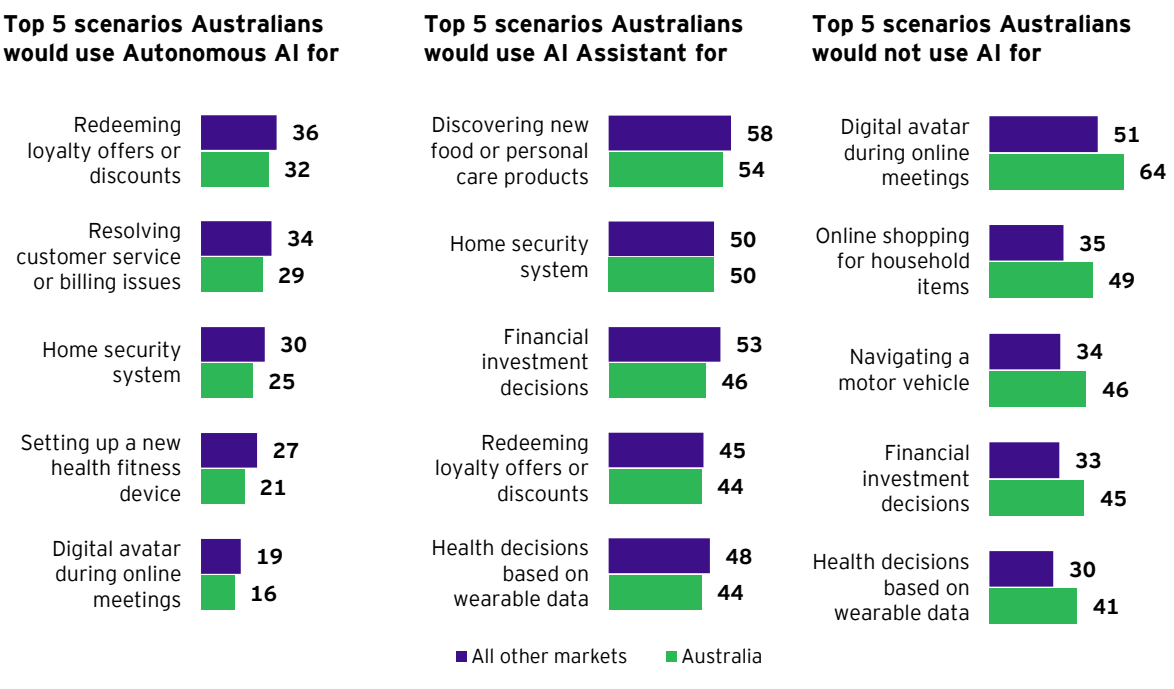
Australians are open to delegating routine tasks to AI, but remain cautious about autonomy in higher-stakes decisions

When asked to consider where AI could act on their behalf, Australians show a clear preference for delegation in familiar, low-risk scenarios, while retaining a stronger role for AI as an assistant in higher-stakes contexts. Despite this, around half would not use AI in any of the scenarios proposed.

The strongest openness to autonomous AI sits in routine, transactional tasks. Around one-third of Australians would be comfortable with AI automatically redeeming loyalty offers or discounts (32%) or resolving customer service or billing issues (29%). These are situations where outcomes are easy to review or reverse, and where convenience is prioritised over control.

Australians consistently prefer AI as an assistant rather than a decision-maker for more complex or consequential activities. For example, while 50% would use AI to support a home security system, only 25% would allow AI to operate autonomously in this context.

Resistance becomes more pronounced in scenarios perceived as personal or risky. A majority of Australians say they would not use AI at all for activities such as digital avatars joining online meetings (64%), online shopping for household items (49%), or navigating a motor vehicle (46%).



Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

New Zealanders' preferences for assistive vs autonomous AI

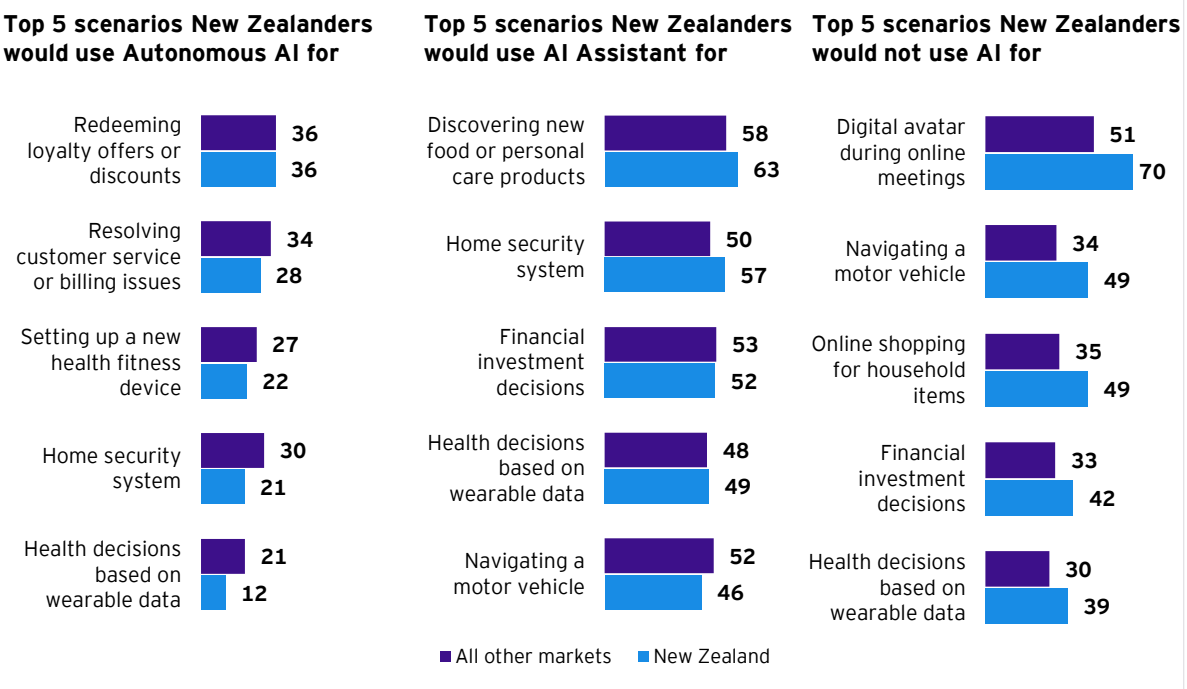
New Zealanders are comfortable with AI assistance over AI autonomy, with many opting out entirely

New Zealanders demonstrate a similar overall pattern to Australians with regards to assistive vs autonomous AI, with higher proportions of people compared to other markets, who would not use assistive or autonomous AI in the scenarios.

Openness to autonomous AI is highest in low-risk, everyday activities. Around 36% of New Zealanders would allow AI to redeem loyalty offers or discounts, and 28% would delegate customer service or billing issues. These scenarios mirror areas where convenience and reversibility are high, and outcomes feel manageable.

As task complexity increases, New Zealanders show a clear preference for AI as an assistant rather than an autonomous decision-maker. For example, while 57% would use AI to assist with a home security system, only 21% would allow AI to act autonomously. In health-related contexts, only 12% are comfortable with autonomous AI making decisions based on wearable data, compared with 49% preferring an assistive role.

A majority of New Zealanders say they would not use AI at all for digital avatars joining online meetings (70%), online shopping for household items (49%), or navigating a motor vehicle (49%).



Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

The AI value exchange with organisations

People are clear that the use of AI by organisations should translate into practical, visible benefits for customers, rather than benefits being retained solely by the organisation

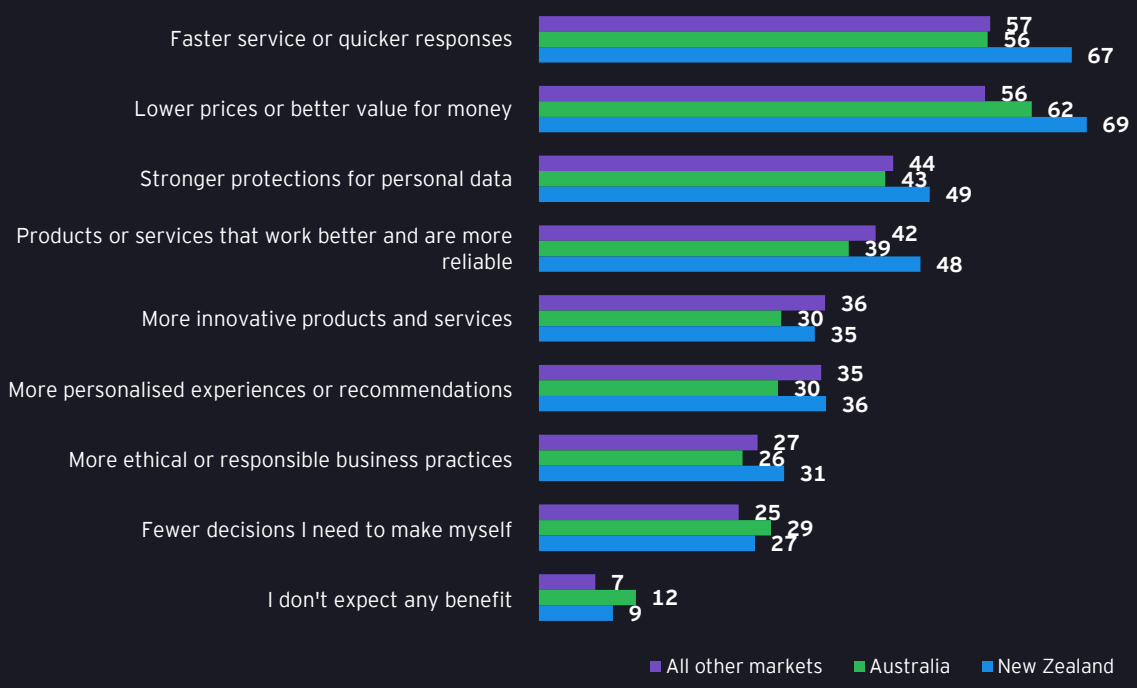
Expectations focus strongly on improvements to efficiency, value and protection – particularly where AI is used to automate or optimise services. New Zealanders consistently expressing higher expectations of organisations that use AI than Australians. For example, New Zealanders are more likely to expect companies to pass on time savings and cost efficiencies, including faster service and better value for money. This pattern reveals that New Zealanders view AI adoption as a shared value exchange, rather than a purely operational gain for organisations.

Expectations around data protection are especially pronounced. Almost half of New Zealanders (49%) expect organisations using AI to provide stronger protections for personal data, placing New Zealand behind India (61%), Brazil (56%) and Mexico (53%) globally.

In contrast, Australians sit below the global average on expectations for stronger data protections.

A minority remain unconvinced of AI's value. More than 1 in 10 Australians (12%) say they do not expect any benefit from organisations using AI – a higher proportion than most global markets and exceeded only by the UK and the USA (13% each).

Benefits people expect in return from organisations using AI (%)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

Comfort requirements when shopping online

Over a quarter of Australians and New Zealanders would not be comfortable with an AI assistant acting on their behalf when shopping online

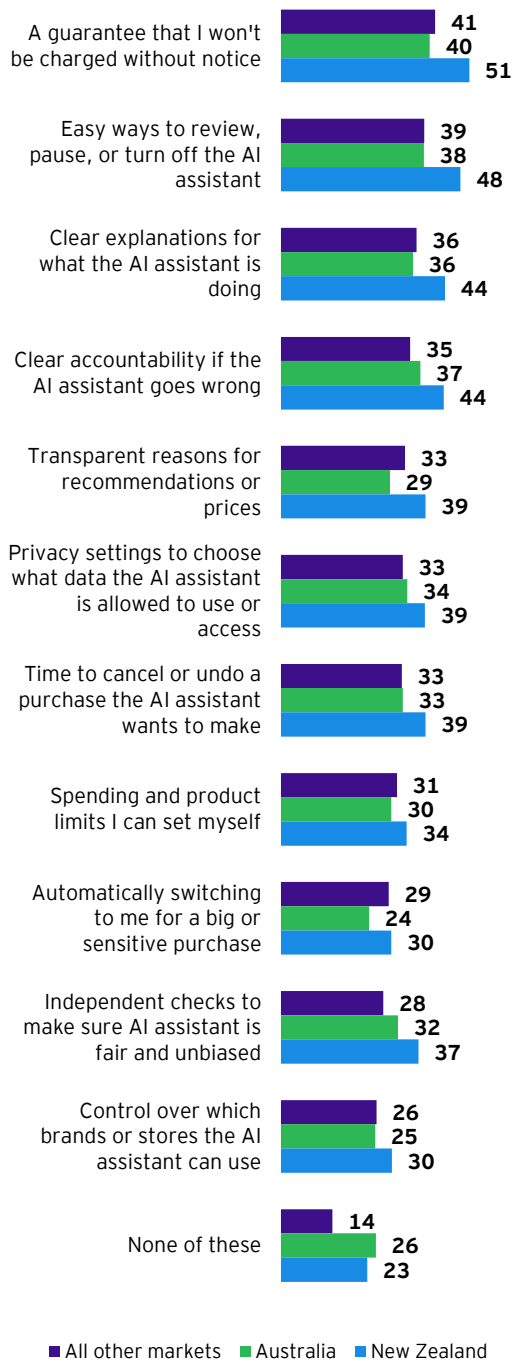
While many are open to AI assisting with online shopping, expectations for guardrails and assurances are high, particularly in New Zealand.

New Zealanders consistently express a stronger need for protections across every measure tested, often recording some of the highest levels of concern across all markets. For example, 51% of New Zealanders say a guarantee that they will not be charged without notice is essential, compared with 40% of Australians. Similarly, 48% of New Zealanders want easy ways to review, pause or turn off an AI assistant, versus 38% in Australia.

The same pattern holds for transparency and accountability. 44% of New Zealanders say clear explanations of what an AI assistant is doing are necessary, compared with 36% of Australians, and 44% want clear accountability if an AI assistant goes wrong, versus 37% in Australia.

For online shopping providers, this signals that autonomy must be introduced carefully. In Australia and especially New Zealand, consumers are open to AI assistance, but delegation depends on visible controls, clear safeguards and the ability to intervene.

When shopping online, what people would need to feel comfortable to let an AI assistant act on their behalf (%)

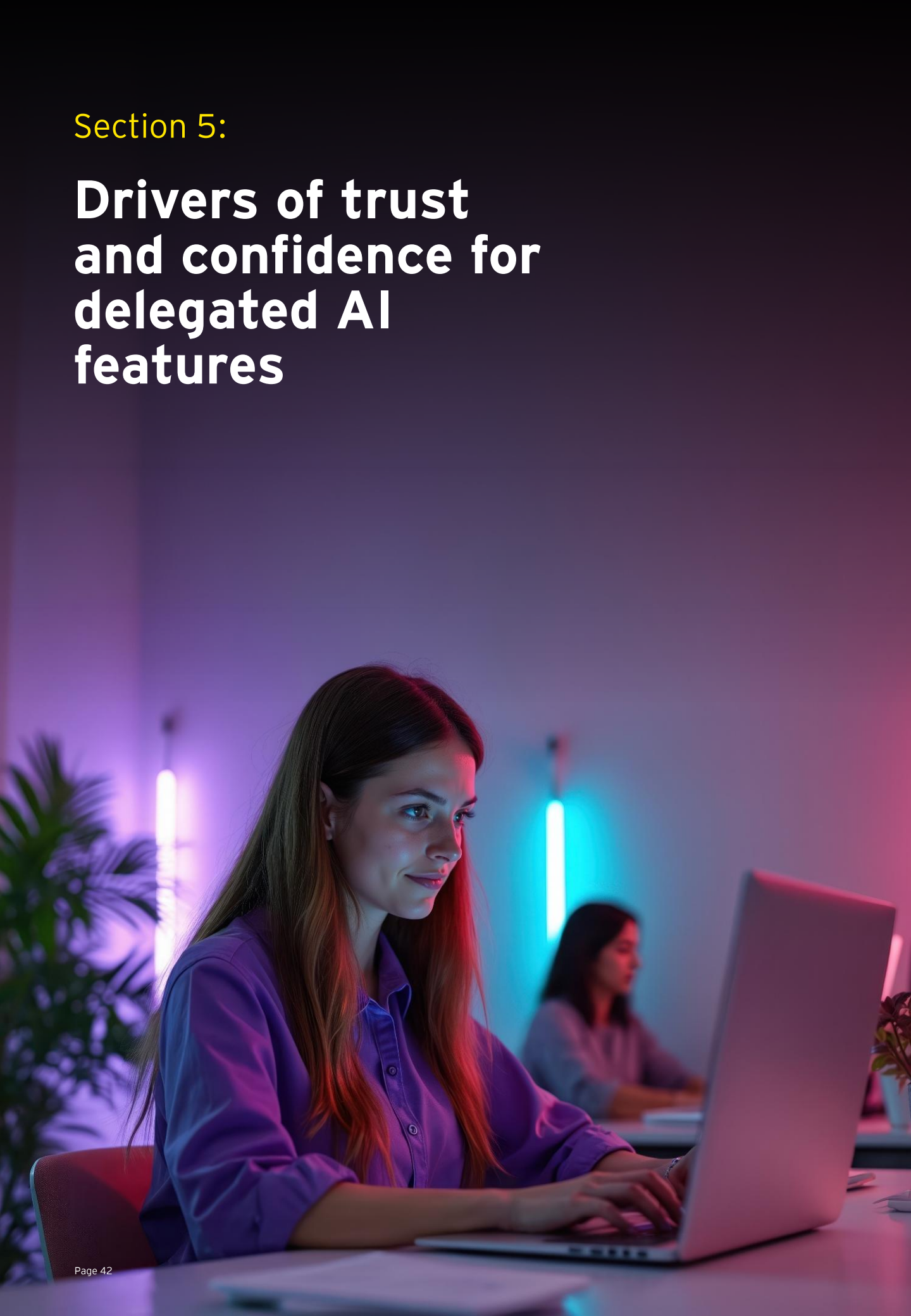


Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

In New Zealand, AI adoption comes with a clear value exchange, and control is the price of entry

Section 5:

Drivers of trust and confidence for delegated AI features



5 Attitudes towards and trust in AI

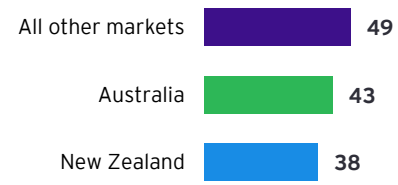
Trust in delegated AI is emerging, but confidence remains conditional on control, transparency and safeguards.

As AI becomes more embedded across services and daily life, trust is essential. Australians and New Zealanders report relatively low trust in both governments and companies to safeguard data used by AI systems, with trust levels broadly aligned to Western European markets.

In Australia, trust is marginally higher in governments than in companies (43% vs 39%), suggesting a modest preference for public-sector stewardship of AI-enabled data. In New Zealand, trust levels are the same, with 38% trusting both governments and companies, indicating a more generalised scepticism regardless of who is using AI.

Attitudes about AI and the potential impact on trust (% agree/strongly agree)

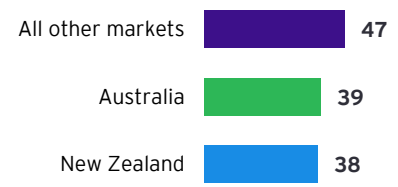
I trust governments to protect my data used by their AI systems



Top markets:

KSA (78%), India (77%), UAE (75%), China (72%), Singapore (72%)

I trust companies to protect my data used by their AI systems



Top markets:

India (76%), KSA (63%), China (61%), UAE (60%), Mexico (58%)

Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

Enthusiasm for AI

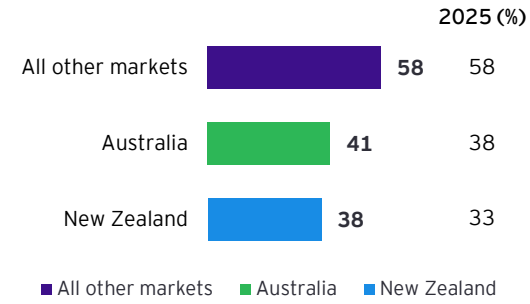
Excitement about AI is growing, though agreement is more measured about the balance of positive and negatives compared to 2025

Excitement about AI is growing across Australia and New Zealand, with optimism continuing to build as exposure increases. 41% of Australians and 38% of New Zealanders now say they are excited about the future of AI and what it means for them – with a small increase from 2025. This increase is most pronounced among those who have undertaken formal training or education related to AI, where excitement levels in both markets approach those seen globally.

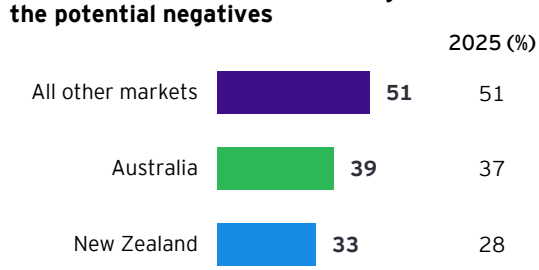
This rising optimism sits alongside a more measured assessment of AI's overall impact, with fewer people believe the benefits of AI outweigh the potential negatives (39% in Australia, 33% in New Zealand, compared with 51% globally) though agreement has increased in both Australia and New Zealand since 2025. This indicates that confidence is formed gradually, but is uneven across society, where older people are less likely to see the benefits of AI.

Attitudes about AI (% agree/strongly agree)

I am excited about the future of AI and what it means for me



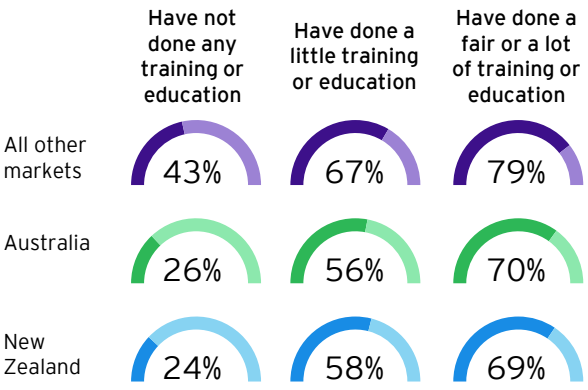
Believe the benefits of AI outweigh the potential negatives



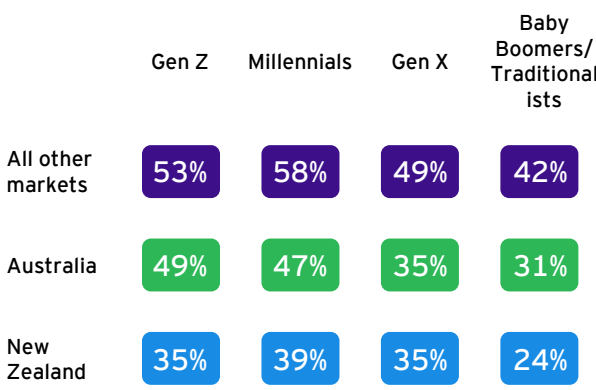
Source: AI Sentiment Report, January 2025 and March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

Key differences by AI training experience and Generation

Who agree/strongly agree they are excited about the future of AI and what it means for me



Who believe the benefits of AI outweigh the potential negatives



Fears around AI

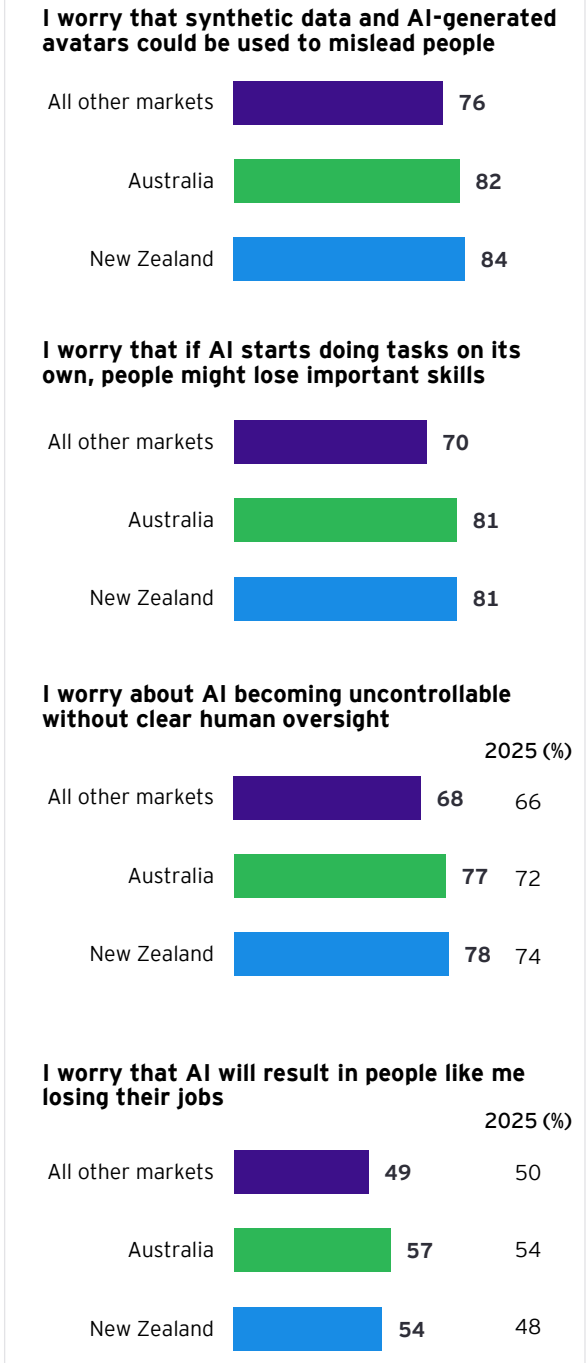
As enthusiasm for AI grows, Australians and New Zealanders are also expressing stronger and consistent concerns about how AI is used, governed and controlled

Concerns for people in these two countries are notably higher than in many other global markets. This reinforces the idea that excitement and unease are developing in parallel rather than in opposition, with the most prominent concern relating to misuse and deception. Over four in five worry that AI-generated avatars and content could be used to mislead people (Australia 82% and New Zealand 84%), compared with 76% across other markets. This may reveal heightened anxiety about authenticity and the blurring of what is real as generative AI becomes more widespread.

Concerns about the impact of AI on jobs sit within this broader context. More than half of people in Australia (57%) and New Zealand (54%) worry that AI will result in people like them losing their jobs vs 49% in other markets, with scores increasing from 2025.

Importantly, this concern is not evenly distributed by training or education, suggesting that job anxiety may relate to uncertainty about how work and expertise may change, rather than just job loss. In Australia, concern is highest among those with a little training or education around AI (62%), compared to those with no training (54%) and those with a fair amount of, or a lot of training (56%). In New Zealand, however, it is reversed, where concern is strongest among those with a fair amount of, or a lot of training (59%), then those with no training (55%), and those with a little training are the least likely to worry about job loss (50%).

Attitudes about AI (% agree/strongly agree)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, January 2025 and March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

AI and the importance of safety features

Support for built-in AI safeguards is high in Australia and New Zealand, particularly for children

Australians and New Zealanders express very strong agreement that AI tools should include built-in safety features, particularly where children and younger users are concerned. Over four in five Australians (80%) and New Zealanders (85%) agree that AI tools should include parental controls to manage how children use them, broadly in line with or above global markets.

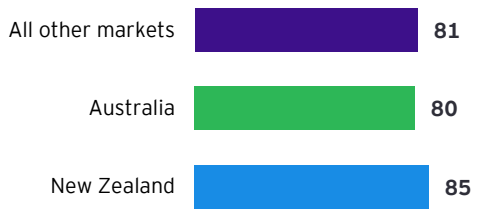
Similarly, over three quarters support age limits to restrict access for younger users, with 76% agreeing in Australia and 79% in New Zealand compared with 74% globally. Safeguards for younger audiences are seen not as optional, but as a baseline requirement for acceptable AI use.

There is also support for independent oversight, with around two thirds (64% Australia, 67% New Zealand) saying they would trust AI more if it were reviewed for safety and fairness by an independent group.

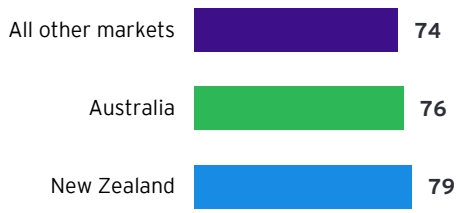
For AI to be accepted, safety must be built in – especially where AI can be accessed by children

Attitudes about AI (% agree/strongly agree)

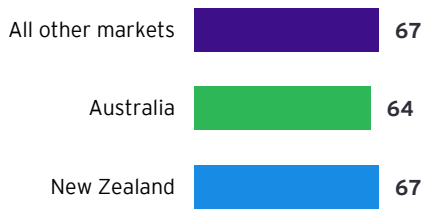
AI tools should include parental controls to manage how children use them



AI tools should have age limits to restrict access for younger users



I would trust AI more if it was reviewed for safety and fairness by an independent group



Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

Growth of AI tools and pace of change

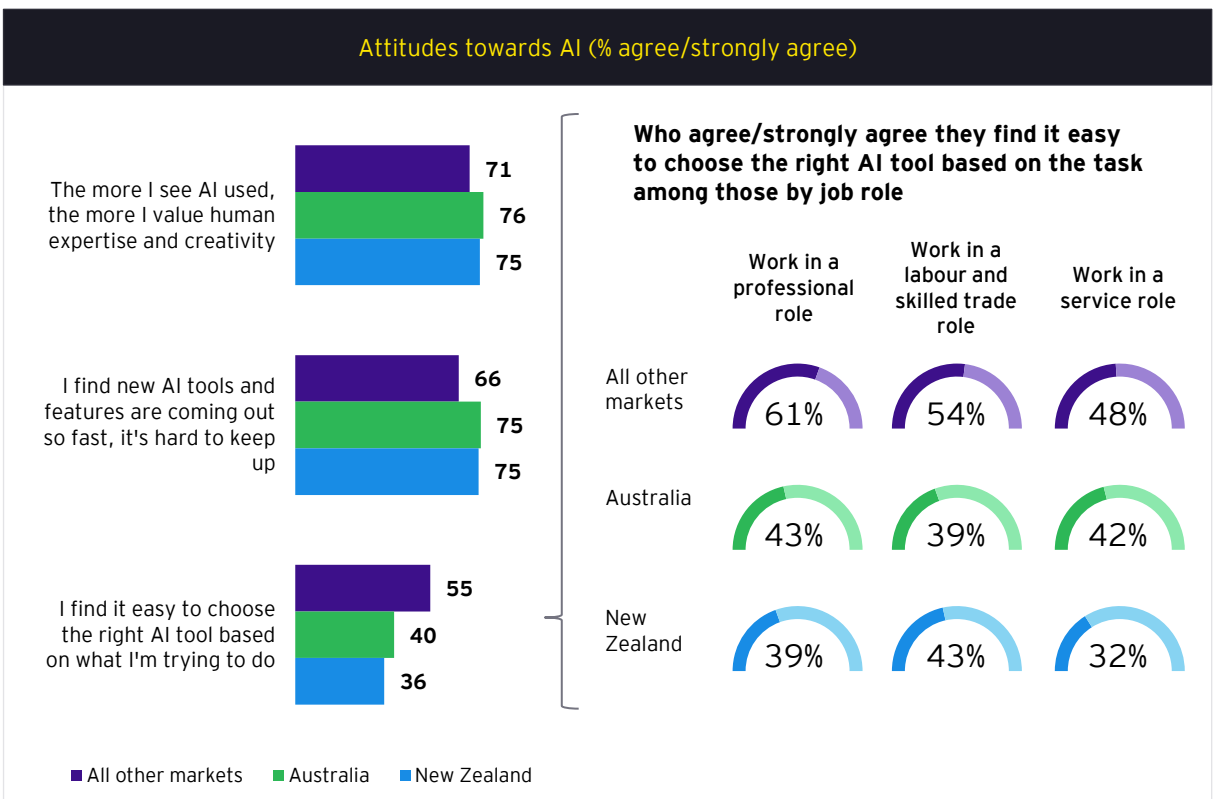
Growth in AI tools is creating pressure for Australians and New Zealanders, while reinforcing the value of human expertise

As AI becomes more embedded in everyday work, Australians and New Zealanders report mixed experiences of its impact. Three quarters in Australia and New Zealand agree that new AI tools and features are emerging so quickly that it is hard to keep up (75% Australia, 75% New Zealand), compared with two thirds (66%) in other markets.

At the same time, people recognise the value of human creativity and expertise, with over seven in ten globally, and three quarters in Australia (76%) and in New Zealand (75%) agreeing that the more they have seen AI used, the more they value human expertise and creativity.

There is growing concern about cognitive overload. Globally, over half of people say they find it easy to choose the right AI tool based on what they are trying to do. However, this is notably lower in Australia (40%) and New Zealand (36%).

This pattern is also evident when looking at confidence in selecting AI tools in the workplace. Those working in professional and service roles in Australia and New Zealand are more likely to agree that it is easy to choose the right AI tool for the task at hand.



Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

Influence of training on AI tool choice

People who report having undertaken AI training in the past six months are more likely to agree that they find it easy to choose the right AI tool based on what they are trying to do

Across markets, everyday people who report having undertaken AI training in the past six months are more likely to say they find it easy to choose the right AI tool for what they are trying to do, highlighting how confidence in navigating AI appears to vary with training experience.

In Australia, fewer than a quarter of people (24%) with no recent AI training agree or strongly agree that selecting the right AI tool is easy. This rises to 52% among those who report a small amount of training and increases further to 74% among those who report having undertaken a fair amount or a lot of training in the past six months. In the absence of training, people may struggle to confidently navigate an expanding and increasingly complex AI tool landscape.

As is evident in New Zealand, where agreement increases from 24% among those with no training to 48% among those with a small amount of training, and to 68% among those reporting more substantial training.

It is important to note that these results do not demonstrate that training directly leads to greater capability. However, the results may indicate that training can enable people to feel more confident in the selection of tools.

Australians and New Zealanders are open to AI – but trust, control and skills need to keep pace with the technology if everyone is to benefit and not be left behind

Proportion of people within each self-reported training group who agree or strongly agree they find it easy to choose the right AI tool based on what they are trying to do

Training or education in the last 6 months	All other markets	Australia	New Zealand
% of those with 'a fair amount of, or a lot of training or education' who agree that they find it easy to choose the right AI tool based on what they are trying to do	81%	74%	68%
% of those with 'a little training or education' who agree that they find it easy to choose the right AI tool based on what they are trying to do	62%	52%	48%
% of those with 'No training or education' who agree that they find it easy to choose the right AI tool based on what they are trying to do	38%	24%	24%

Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

Section 6:

Responsibility and accountability

6

Responsibility and accountability

As AI becomes more embedded in everyday decisions, questions of responsibility and accountability are becoming more visible.

As AI systems become more widely deployed, responsibility for the decisions and outcomes is increasingly distributed.

For everyday people, this creates a complex landscape. AI decisions are rarely attributable to a single party; responsibility is shaped by where systems are designed and trained, how and where they are deployed, and the regulatory and institutional contexts in which they operate.

As a result, accountability is not always immediately visible or easy to trace – particularly when AI systems are developed in one jurisdiction, deployed in another, and embedded into everyday services at scale.

Perceived accountability for AI decisions and actions

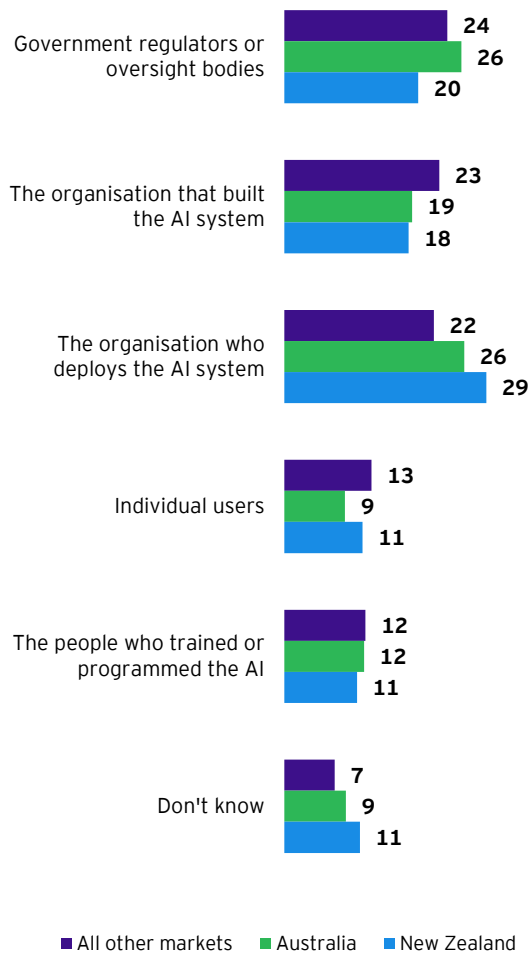
Accountability for AI decisions is dispersed, with people believing responsibility is concentrated on organisations rather than individuals

Across both markets, government regulators or an oversight body are most commonly identified as accountable, particularly among Australians (26%), who nominate this more often than the global average (24%), and New Zealanders (20%).

Both Australians and New Zealanders also stand out against the global average in their belief that organisations that deploy AI systems are accountable for AI decisions or actions, nominated by 26% of Australians and 29% of New Zealanders, compared to 22% globally. This highlights a strong expectation by people in these countries that responsibility should sit with organisations directly applying AI in real-world contexts and is an important consideration for organisations in the implementation of AI.

Around 1 in 10 people place primary accountability on individual users, or on those who trained or programmed the AI. A similar proportion say they do not know who should be accountable, highlighting the need for clearer governance responsibilities and safeguards as AI becomes more embedded in everyday life.

Who people find accountable for AI decisions or actions (%)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

Top concerns about AI

Concerns about AI are broadly in the same priority order, but concern has intensified between 2025 and 2026

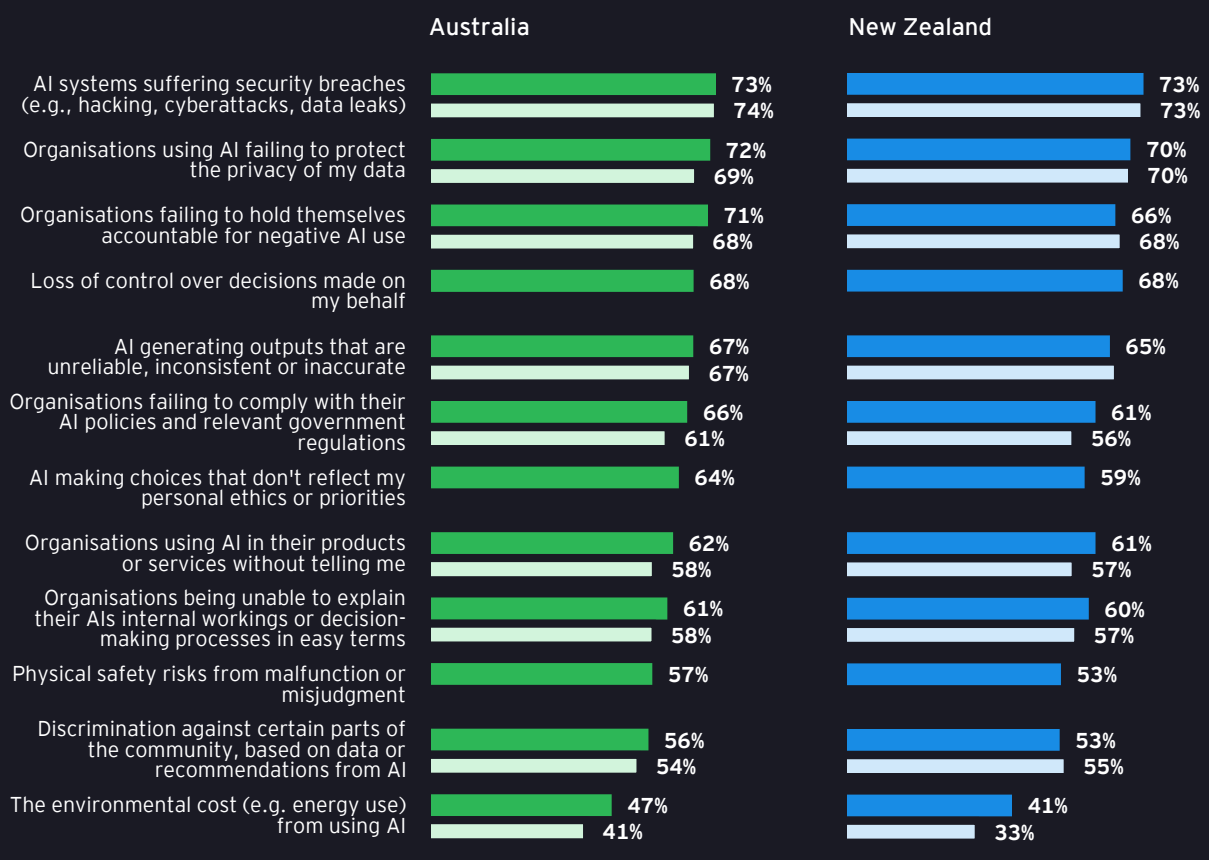
Across both markets, concerns remain most acute around security, privacy and organisational accountability, with New Zealanders expressing similar levels of concern as Australians.

In Australia, almost three-quarters (73%) identify AI systems suffering security breaches as a key concern, mirroring the level seen in New Zealand (73%). Security breaches were the top concern for both Australians and New Zealanders in 2026, with concern levels staying relatively stable year-on-year in both countries.

The second most common concern is organisations using AI failing to protect the privacy of personal data. This is reported as a large concern by 72% of Australians and 70% of New Zealanders, again broadly aligned with 2025 results. The data also highlights the central role of trust in shaping everyday people's attitudes, with 71% of Australians and 66% of New Zealanders concerned about organisations failing to hold themselves accountable for negative AI use.

Australians and New Zealanders trust in AI hinges on how well security and privacy concerns are addressed

The twelve major concerns with AI (% a large concern/a major concern)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, January 2025 and March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

Trust in domestic and foreign-made AI

Australia and New Zealand emerge as two of six markets where people are more likely to disagree that foreign-made AI is just as trustworthy as domestic-made AI

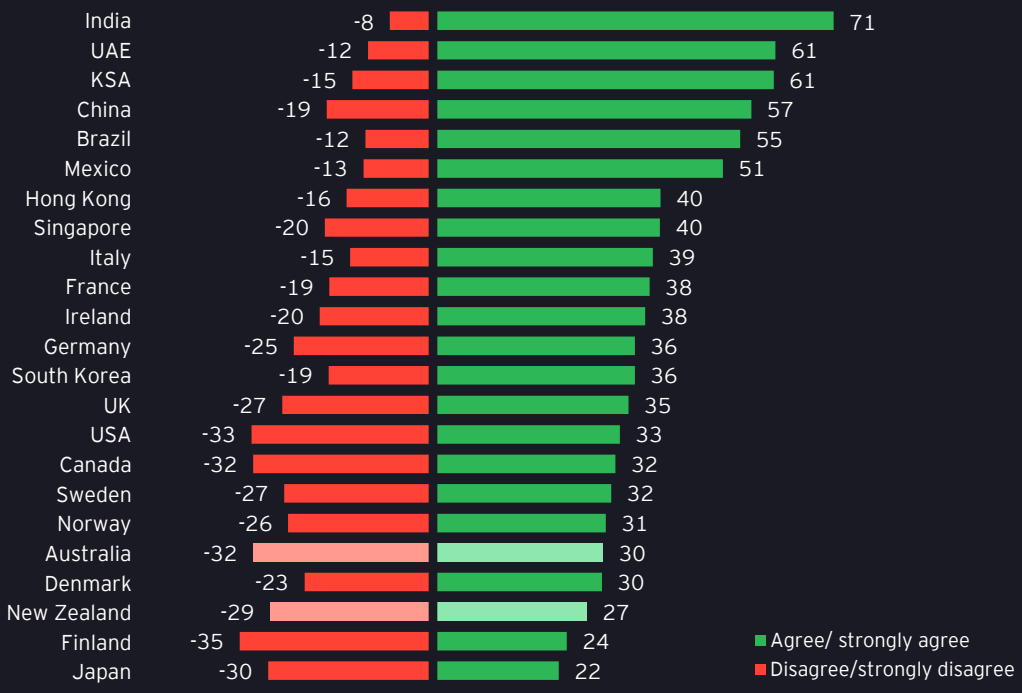
Across most markets in the study, people broadly accept that AI developed overseas is just as trustworthy as AI developed locally. In many countries, agreement with this statement outweighs disagreement, indicating that national origin alone is not a primary driver of trust in AI.

However, this global pattern is not uniform. Only six markets show higher or equal levels of disagreement compared with agreement, signalling clear scepticism towards foreign-built AI. Finland, the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan and New Zealand emerge as the most cautious globally when it comes to trusting foreign-made AI. Finland stands out as a European outlier, while the United States and Canada sit at parity, with equal proportions agreeing and disagreeing. This is notable given the United States' position as one of the world's leading AI developers and regulatory setters, alongside China, and its central role in shaping global AI platforms and standards.

Australia and New Zealand are also more sceptical, with disagreement marginally outweighing agreement, reflecting heightened sensitivity to sovereignty, control and accountability. Trust in these markets is closely tied to public confidence that governments and organisations can set and enforce the rules, protect data, and intervene when systems fail. This scepticism underscores that sovereignty is exercised through strong domestic regulation, governance and the ability to hold AI systems accountable within national frameworks, regardless of where the AI was made.

Australians and New Zealanders are cautious about foreign-made AI, sharpening demands for strong local rules and accountability

Agreement that AI made in other countries is just as trustworthy as AI made in mine (%)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

Who people trust with their data

Delivering AI at scale requires a licence from the people. This licence is grounded in trust: trust that data will be protected, used appropriately and governed in line with community expectations

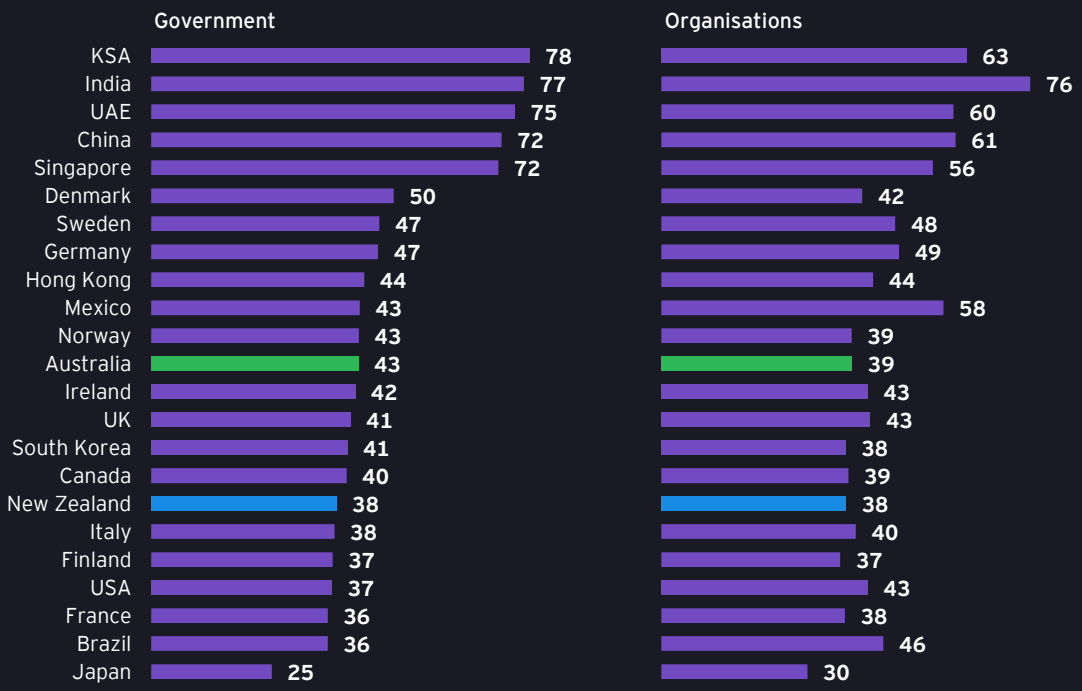
Across the 23 countries, trust in who protects personal data used by AI systems varies markedly. In Australia, trust in government to protect data used by AI is higher than trust in organisations (43% vs 39%), suggesting that government retains a modest but important trust advantage when it comes to data stewardship. In New Zealand, trust in government and organisations sits on equal footing, indicating a more neutral baseline where neither holds a clear trust premium.

Contrasts are far more pronounced globally. Latin America shows the largest trust gap in favour of organisations, with people in Mexico far more likely to trust organisations than government to protect data used by AI systems (58% vs 43%), with a similar, and less extreme, pattern in Brazil (46% vs 36%). In these markets, private sector actors are perceived as more capable or reliable custodians of data than public institutions.

Conversely, China and Singapore show double-digit differences in favour of government, with trust in government significantly exceeding trust in organisations (China: 72% vs 61%; Singapore: 72% vs 56%).

AI trust is filtered through how government and organisations are viewed locally

Trust in [government/organisations] to protect my data used by AI systems (agree/strongly agree %)



Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

Regulation and government oversight

There is strong and widespread support for stronger rules on how organisations use AI

In most countries, more than three quarters agree that organisations should be subject to stronger regulation – including Australia and New Zealand, where over four in five (81%) support this. However, this appetite for regulation does not translate uniformly into expectations that governments should build or run AI themselves. People want governments to oversee compliance and hold organisations accountable, rather than act as primary AI developers or service providers.

This distinction is particularly visible in countries with Westminster-style legal systems, including the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Ireland. Here, over four in five support stronger rules for organisations, whilst support for governments focusing on oversight is also strong, with around three in five agreeing.

In contrast, markets such as China, Singapore, the UAE and Saudi Arabia show high support for both stronger rules and a more active role for government in the development of AI. In these contexts, trust in central authority and state capability appears to support a model where governments are expected to both govern and deliver AI-enabled services.

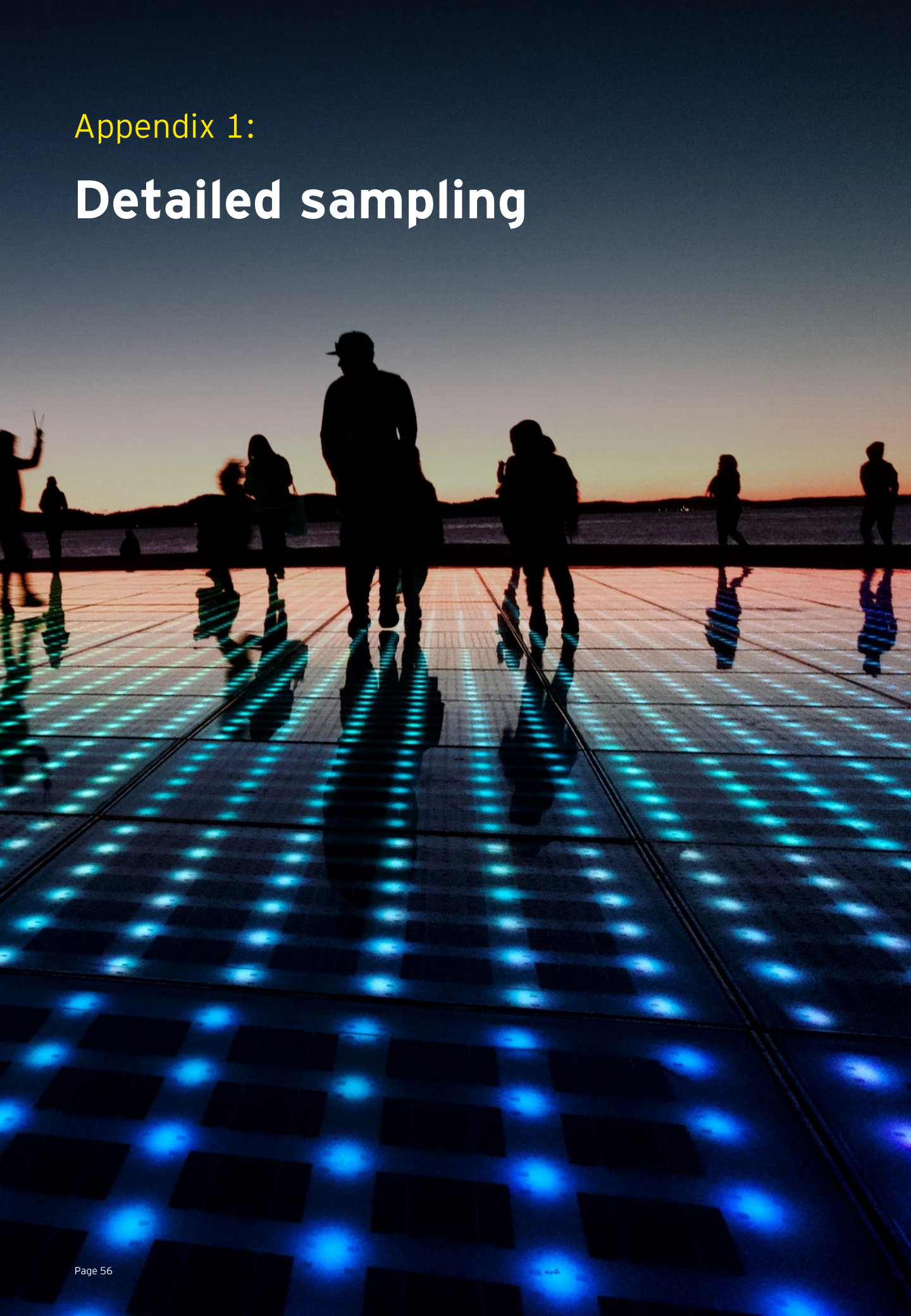
For Australia and New Zealand, the findings suggest a preference for a model where governments play a strong role in setting guardrails, enforcing standards and protecting citizens, rather than being seen primarily as competitors to the private sector in AI development.

In Australia and New Zealand, foreign-made AI firms may need to work harder to earn trust given stronger local expectations for clear rules and oversight

Source: AI Sentiment Report, March 2026
Base: All respondents; see appendix for detailed sampling

Appendix 1:

Detailed sampling



Detailed sampling (1/3)

Numbers of respondents for country and key demographic breakdowns.

Country	Self-reported gender		Generation				
	A man or male	A woman or female	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers	Silent Generation
Total	8,967	9,185	2,173	6,048	5,034	4,563	334
Australia	513	506	111	340	253	282	33
Brazil	471	529	129	347	346	172	6
Canada	525	493	87	308	256	338	29
China	492	510	80	437	272	212	1
Denmark	272	238	55	127	145	169	14
Finland	237	268	45	118	142	191	9
France	475	525	81	224	302	380	13
Germany	496	511	85	238	270	393	21
Hong Kong	244	265	46	201	169	93	0
India	539	464	260	453	194	95	1
Ireland	223	287	68	179	157	100	6
Italy	252	255	37	143	164	156	7
Japan	494	516	79	326	327	269	9
Mexico	232	278	78	224	143	65	0
New Zealand	466	537	108	298	244	291	62
Norway	261	243	40	168	167	112	17
Singapore	257	245	51	203	175	72	1
South Korea	504	501	93	315	359	230	8
Sweden	228	272	34	153	127	173	13
KSA	256	254	100	321	84	5	0
UAE	338	162	81	307	103	9	0
UK	498	515	122	294	263	299	35
USA	694	811	303	324	372	457	49

Country	Education level		
	Degree	High School or equivalent	Did not finish high school
Total	11,564	5,580	773
Australia	699	284	34
Brazil	640	327	29
Canada	721	258	26
China	738	249	15
Denmark	268	166	40
Finland	232	222	20
France	551	381	63
Germany	415	302	172
Hong Kong	359	115	34
India	909	87	6
Ireland	321	176	12

Country	Education level		
	Degree	High School or equivalent	Did not finish high school
Italy	201	257	44
Japan	636	340	23
Mexico	381	116	7
New Zealand	664	285	51
Norway	292	179	27
Singapore	385	105	9
South Korea	753	238	10
Sweden	220	246	33
KSA	419	84	7
UAE	413	77	10
UK	594	386	23

Detailed sampling (2/3)

Numbers of respondents for country and key demographic breakdowns.

Country	Working status					Nature of job role		
	Working full or part-time	Student	Retired	Currently looking for work	Not employed and not looking for work	Professional roles	Labour and skilled trade roles	Service roles
Total	12,776	544	3,060	801	912	9,462	3,175	2,266
Australia	737	15	193	22	50	541	186	147
Brazil	778	25	105	53	30	536	155	107
Canada	649	24	243	52	47	497	187	142
China	830	13	150	5	4	621	238	86
Denmark	300	28	146	15	19	235	99	73
Finland	252	17	182	37	17	209	128	75
France	577	18	323	48	33	408	193	145
Germany	603	23	289	43	43	425	200	168
Hong Kong	460	11	25	8	5	380	45	46
India	865	66	22	19	31	700	143	66
Ireland	388	14	53	25	28	250	103	95
Italy	324	17	108	37	19	261	90	51
Japan	717	34	93	45	120	431	123	96
Mexico	409	18	28	31	19	281	99	49
New Zealand	686	23	186	47	56	513	161	167
Norway	328	15	113	14	30	200	104	91
Singapore	447	11	20	15	8	359	60	50
South Korea	715	56	86	50	97	615	141	79
Sweden	313	12	134	26	14	182	119	110
KSA	415	17	8	46	21	351	60	33
UAE	428	16	3	35	17	329	82	49
UK	699	23	210	16	62	580	144	121
USA	856	48	340	112	142	558	315	220

Ethnicity in New Zealand	
Total	1,003
New Zealand European	726
Māori and Cook Islands Māori	93
Chinese	62
Indian	52
Pacific Islander (Samoan, Tongan, Niuean)	32
Other	137

Detailed sampling (3/3)

Numbers of respondents for country and the deliberate use of AI in different use cases in Section 2.

Country	Deliberate usage of AI across different life scenarios					
	Consumer and Retail	Health	Financial Services	Energy and mobility	Tech and Entertainment	Government
Total	12,542	11,161	8,799	10,399	11,947	9,995
Australia	619	524	332	481	495	382
Brazil	799	789	707	696	848	736
Canada	672	542	384	529	606	437
China	924	903	815	837	947	871
Denmark	303	263	161	242	268	247
Finland	343	272	153	231	296	250
France	537	507	367	484	479	453
Germany	624	521	365	469	585	467
Hong Kong	372	325	280	309	377	341
India	934	908	870	870	959	913
Ireland	357	296	217	287	317	259
Italy	338	289	239	277	309	255
Japan	516	423	339	387	533	360
Mexico	411	404	327	373	433	378
New Zealand	617	497	281	477	487	327
Norway	325	270	183	246	273	254
Singapore	383	357	275	330	363	322
South Korea	727	612	557	613	713	576
Sweden	306	254	196	225	281	253
KSA	447	439	381	388	465	431
UAE	432	437	372	376	451	421
UK	596	497	351	512	554	392
USA	960	832	647	760	908	670

Detailed sampling – Australia

The methodology between the three waves was similar. In October 2024 a 15-minute quantitative survey was conducted online with an Australian general population sample of n=1,016 Australians on the topic of AI.

Following this, in January 2025, a global study across 15 markets surveyed 15,000 everyday people, including n=1,027 in Australia. A second wave of the global study was run in March 2026, with fieldwork conducted in December 2025 - January 2026.

Sample profile - Australia	
Wave	Total Sample
October 2024	1,016
January 2025	1,027
March 2026	1,019

Detailed sampling – New Zealand

Following this, in January 2025, a global study across 15 markets surveyed 15,000 everyday people, including n=1,009 in New Zealand.

A second wave of the global study was run in March 2026, with fieldwork conducted in December 2025 - January 2026, in which n=1,003 people in New Zealand were surveyed.

Sample profile - New Zealand	
Wave	Total Sample
January 2025	1,009
March 2026	1,003

EY | Building a better working world

EY is building a better working world by creating new value for clients, people, society and the planet, while building trust in capital markets.

Enabled by data, AI and advanced technology, EY teams help clients shape the future with confidence and develop answers for the most pressing issues of today and tomorrow.

EY teams work across a full spectrum of services in assurance, consulting, tax, strategy and transactions. Fuelled by sector insights, a globally connected, multi-disciplinary network and diverse ecosystem partners, EY teams can provide services in more than 150 countries and territories.

All in to shape the future with confidence.

EYSCORE 002915-25-AUNZ

ED None

ey.com