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04 August, 2016

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# Digital lives of older Australians

By the Research and Analysis section



If you were born before 1952, you join the estimated 3.6 million Australians (19 per cent of the adult population) who are aged 65 and over.<sup>1</sup>

To say that times have changed for this group of Australians would be an understatement. By way of context ... in 1952, the only screens most Australians could access were found in cinemas. The launch of mainstream television was still four years away, and this cohort of Australians would be in their 40s or older before consumer access to dial-up internet gained momentum in the mid-1990s.

Given that this older group's exposure to the internet began only in middle age, how engaged with the digital world are they today?

This research snapshot aims to explore the levels of online engagement of older Australians (those aged 65 and over). It examines various measures of digital engagement, including internet access, frequency and location of internet use, as well as the devices used to access the internet and the activities undertaken online. This snapshot also discusses differences in demographic profiles of older internet users and non-users.

The importance of the digital literacy of older Australians has been recognised by the Australian Government. The Government has committed to invest \$50 million to ensure that senior Australians will be equipped with the skills and knowledge to improve their safety online and allow them to participate in the modern digital economy.<sup>2</sup>

This research is undertaken as part of the ACMA's responsibilities under the Australian Communications and Media Authority Act 2005 to report on matters affecting consumers or proposed consumers of telecommunications carriage services (paragraphs 8(1)(c) and (d) of the ACMA Act). Unless otherwise stated, data used in this snapshot is sourced from Roy Morgan Research.<sup>3</sup>

## Older Australians and digital engagement

### Internet use

Older Australians are embracing the digital life. While their level of online engagement is lower when compared to other age groups, the vast majority of older Australians are participating online, and the proportions have grown over the past five years.

Seventy-nine per cent of older Australians have accessed the internet at some point in their lives, with seven in 10 (71 per cent) going online in the three months to June 2015.<sup>4</sup>

Comparable international 2015 data indicates that 58 per cent of adults aged 65 and over in the United States (US) reported using the internet.<sup>5</sup> In the United Kingdom (UK), 56 per cent of those aged 65 and over reported having access to the internet at home or elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> This places Australia ahead of the UK and US in terms of internet use among older users.

As Figure 1 shows, internet access among older Australians has increased over the past five years to June 2015, and the rise is evident across all older age sub-groups.

Figure 1: Accessing the internet, by age, 12 months to June (2011 and 2015)

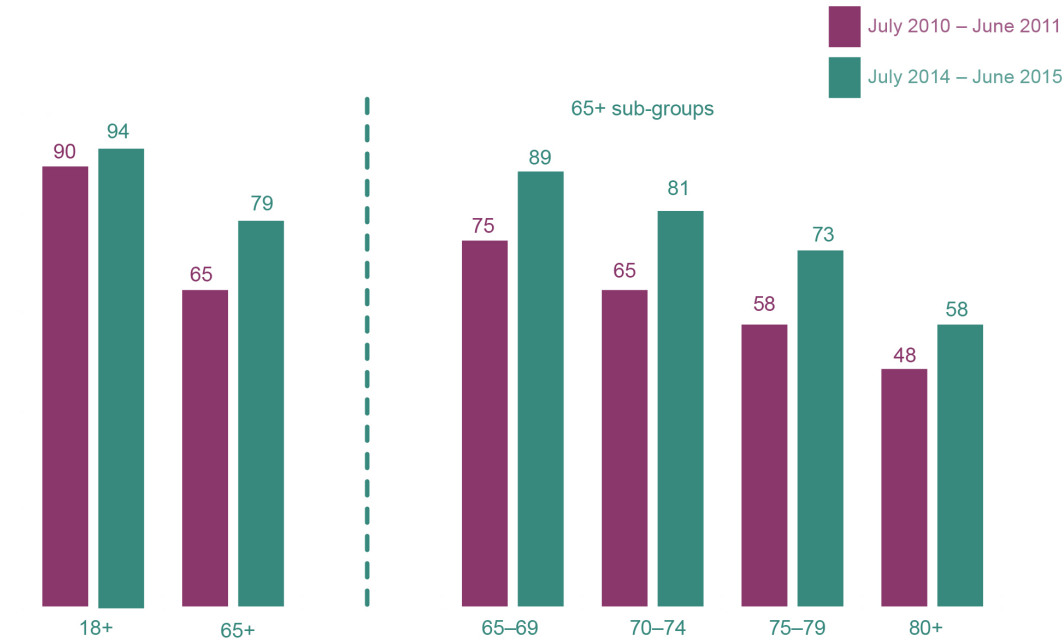


Figure 1: Accessing the internet, by age, 12 months to June (2011 and 2015) (/~/media/Research and Analysis/Research/Spreadsheet/Older Australians 2016/Fig1.csv.csv) (.csv)

Base: Australians aged 18 and over.  
Note: Relates to ever accessing the internet in the 12 months to June of each year.  
Source: Roy Morgan Single Source, June 2011 and 2015.

### Frequency of internet use

Older Australians use the internet less frequently than their younger counterparts do—with the frequency of internet use diminishing with age (Figure 2).

However, the majority of older internet users go online at least once a day (85 per cent), with half accessing the internet three or more times a day (50 per cent).

Figure 2: Frequency of internet use, by age, January–June 2015

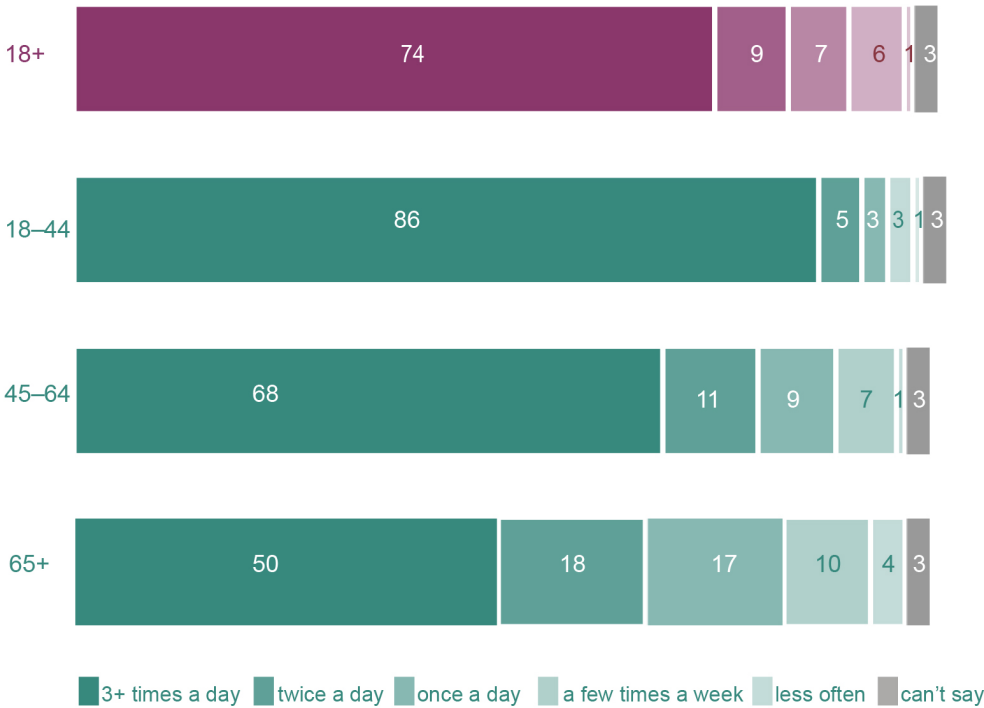


Figure 2: Frequency of internet use, by age, January–June 2015 (/~/media/Research and Analysis/Research /Spreadsheet/Older Australians 2016/Fig2 csv.csv) (.csv)

Base: Australians aged 18 and over who have done one or more internet activities online in the past four weeks (January to June 2015).  
Note: Relates to ‘How often do you use the internet (computer, mobile phone, tablet, other)’.  
Percentages may not add up due to rounding. Data available for January to

June 2015.  
Source: Roy Morgan Single Source, June 2015.

According to the ABS, as at June 2015 Australians aged 65 and over spent seven hours online, on average, in any given week. This compares to 9.9 hours for the national average of Australians aged 15 and over, and 16.5 hours for people aged 18–24.<sup>7</sup>

Location of internet use

Australians generally go online in the comfort of their homes. Nearly all older internet users (98 per cent) accessed the internet from home (data here refers to three months to June 2015). Notably, the same proportion of all adult internet users also accessed the internet from home during the same period (Figure 3).

Among older Australians, other locations of internet use were much less preferred, with significantly lower proportions of older Australians using the internet at a friend’s place (11 per cent), wireless hotspots (10 per cent) and a workplace (nine per cent), in comparison to other age groups. When considering the workplace as a location for internet use, it is worth noting that 15 per cent of older online Australians were in the workforce (working either full-time or part-time) at June 2015.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 3: Locations of internet use, July 2014 to June 2015

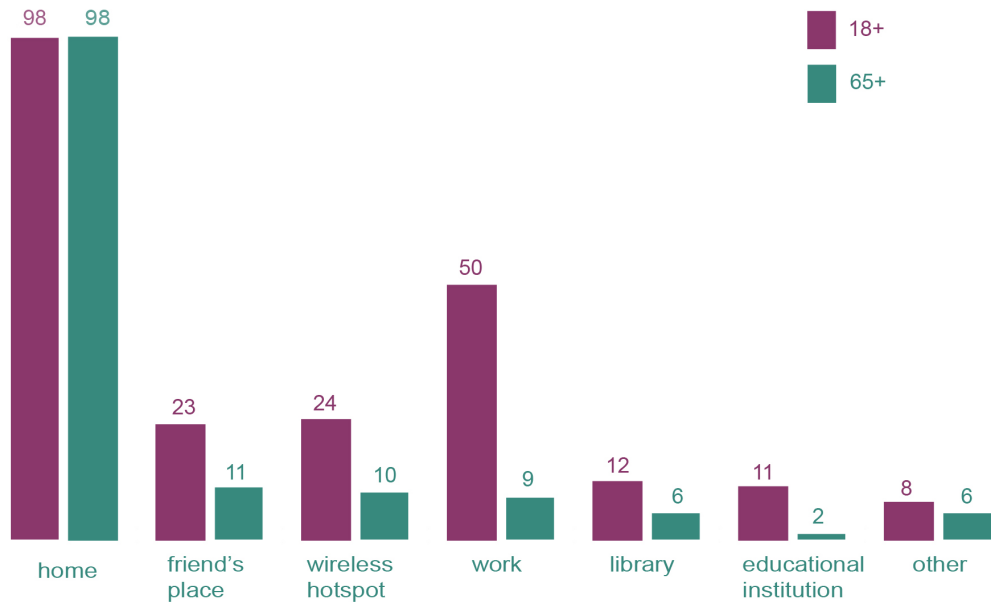


Figure 3: Locations of internet use, July 2014 to June 2015 (/~/media/Research and Analysis/Research/Spreadsheet/Older Australians 2016/Fig3.csv.csv) (.csv)

Base: Australians (aged 18 and over, and 65 and over) who accessed the internet in the last three months (July 2014 to June 2015). Source: Roy Morgan Single Source, June 2015.

Devices used to access the internet

While internet use for older Australians is largely tied to a single location (home), the same cannot be said about how they access the internet. ACMA research shows that older Australians use a range of devices to go online, and it appears location and the size of the device both play a part in the choice of device that is used most often.

This preference for accessing the internet from home means that the desktop computer was the most popular device among older internet users (41 per cent in the six months to May 2015). This was followed by laptops (27 per cent), tablets (18 per cent) and mobile phone devices (12 per cent) (Figure 4).<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly, the use of tablets was higher among older internet users (18 per cent) compared to the adult population (16 per cent).<sup>10</sup> A similar situation was also observed in the UK, where the number of people aged 65 and over accessing the internet rose by more than a quarter in 2013, driven by a three-fold increase in the use of tablet computers to go online.<sup>11</sup> In the US, tablet ownership has risen tenfold since 2010.<sup>12</sup> In 2015, 32 per cent of Americans aged 65 and over owned a tablet, compared to 45 per cent of all US adults.<sup>13</sup>

Figure 4 illustrates the popularity of portable smart devices in Australia. While desktop and laptop computers are still the most often used internet access devices for older Australians, there was a decline in the use of these devices and an increase in the use of tablets and mobile phones between May 2014 and May 2015).

In the six months to May 2014, tablets were the most often used internet access device for 10 per cent of older internet users. A year later, this number had increased to 18 per cent. Similarly, the mobile phone is the most often used device to go online for 12 per cent of older users—up eight percentage points from 2014.

Figure 4: Devices used most often to go online, six months to May (2014 and 2015)

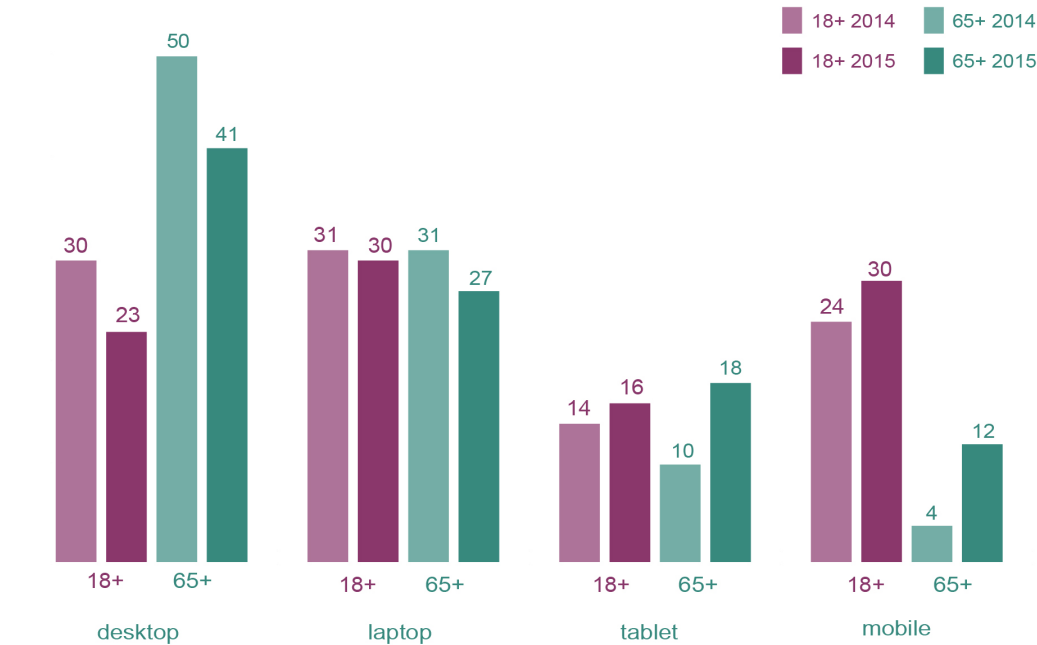


Figure 4: Devices used most often to go online, six months to May (2014 and 2015) (/~/media/Research and Analysis/Research/Spreadsheet/Older Australians 2016/Fig4.csv.csv) (.csv)

Base: Australians (aged 18 and over, and 65 and over) who are internet users.  
Note: Relates to the most often used device to access the internet in the six months to May of each

year.  
Source: ACMA-commissioned survey, May 2014 and 2015.

## Older Australians are active online

### Activities undertaken online

Older Australians engage in a variety of online activities. While the level of take-up is lower in comparison to all adult internet users, the pattern of engagement is similar (Figure 5).

Email is the most common online activity for all adult internet users, including older Australians. Seventy-six per cent of older Australians used email to stay in touch in the four-week period to June 2015. This compares to 84 per cent of all adult internet users. More than half of older internet users performed banking transactions online (53 per cent) and just under a half (48 per cent) paid bills online. Four in 10 bought or sold something online.

According to ABS data, older internet users performed fewer transactions online on average than other age groups. Older Australians performed eight transactions online in the three months to June 2015, compared to 11 transactions by Australians aged 15 and over, nationally.<sup>14</sup>

Figure 5: Main online activities, by age, July 2014 to June 2015

Figure 5: Main online activities, by age, July 2014 to June 2015 ([/~media/Research and Analysis/Research/Spreadsheet/Older Australians 2016/Fig5 csv.csv](#)) (.csv)

Base: Australians (aged 18 and over, and 65 and over) who are internet users.

Note: Relates to undertaking one or more internet activities online in the last four weeks (July 2014 to June 2015).

Source: Roy Morgan Single Source, June 2015.

## Social networking and communication trends in users aged 65 and over

According to the latest Pew Research, social media usage among Americans aged 65 and over has more than tripled since 2010, reaching

35 per cent in the first half of 2015.<sup>15</sup>

So how does Australia compare?

According to the ABS, 43 per cent of internet users aged 65 and over accessed the internet to engage with social media in the three months to June 2015. This compares to 72 per cent for the national population aged 15 and over.<sup>16</sup>

The Sensis 2015 Yellow Social Media Report<sup>17</sup> indicates that Australians aged 65 and over who use social media accessed the following social media sites:

- > Facebook: 88 per cent
- > Google+: 16 per cent
- > LinkedIn: 12 per cent
- > Pinterest: eight per cent
- > Twitter: four per cent
- > Instagram: two per cent.

ACMA research has shown that older internet users also use communication apps such as Skype or Facebook Messenger to stay in touch with others online. An estimated half-a-million older internet users (23 per cent) used communication apps in the six months to May 2015 to either make voice or video calls, or send messages. This compares to 54 per cent of all online adults.<sup>18</sup>

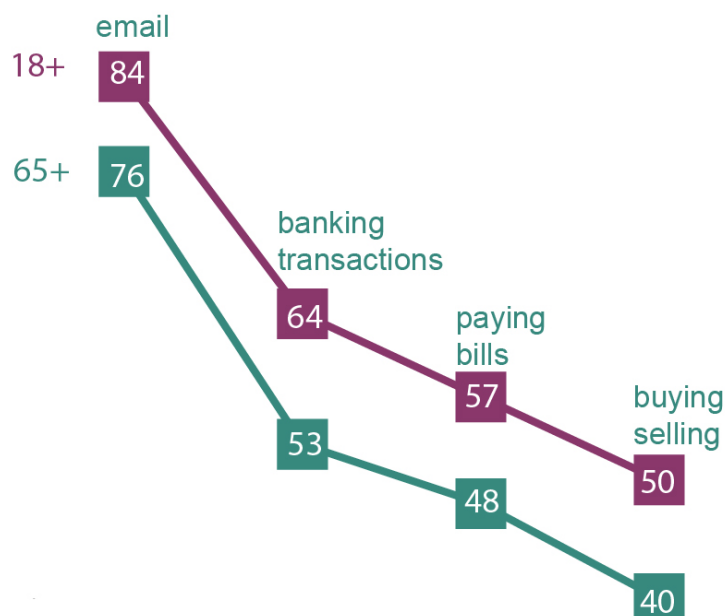
The most popular communications apps for older internet users included Skype (19 per cent), Facebook Messenger (13 per cent), FaceTime (eight per cent), Apple iMessage (seven per cent) and Viber (seven per cent). Further information on Australians' use of apps can be found in the ACMA's [Communications report 2014–15](#) ([/theACMA/Library/Corporate-library/Corporate-publications/communications-report-2014-15](#)).

## Media and entertainment activities—online and traditional media

Older internet users engage strongly with traditional media, particularly broadcast television—almost all older internet users (99 per cent) watched free-to-air television in the last seven days to June 2015. This compared to 91 per cent of all adult internet users (Figure 6).

Older Australians were also much more likely to read a newspaper (75 per cent) when compared to all adults (51 per cent). Radio listening was equally popular with both groups (around 88 per cent).

One in four (26 per cent) older internet users sourced news online in the last four weeks to June 2015, compared to 33 per cent of all adult internet users.



There are some online activities where there are greater differences between older internet users and Australians aged 18 and over. As expected, these differences relate to listening to and viewing content online. Older internet users are less likely to access video (22 per cent) or audio (11 per cent) content online, when compared to all adult internet users at 47 and 34 per cent, respectively.<sup>19</sup>

Streaming video (12 per cent) or TV (11 per cent), followed by streaming of music or radio (five and four per cent, respectively) were the most common ways older internet users engaged with video and audio content online.<sup>20</sup>

Figure 6: Media and entertainment activities, July 2014 to June 2015

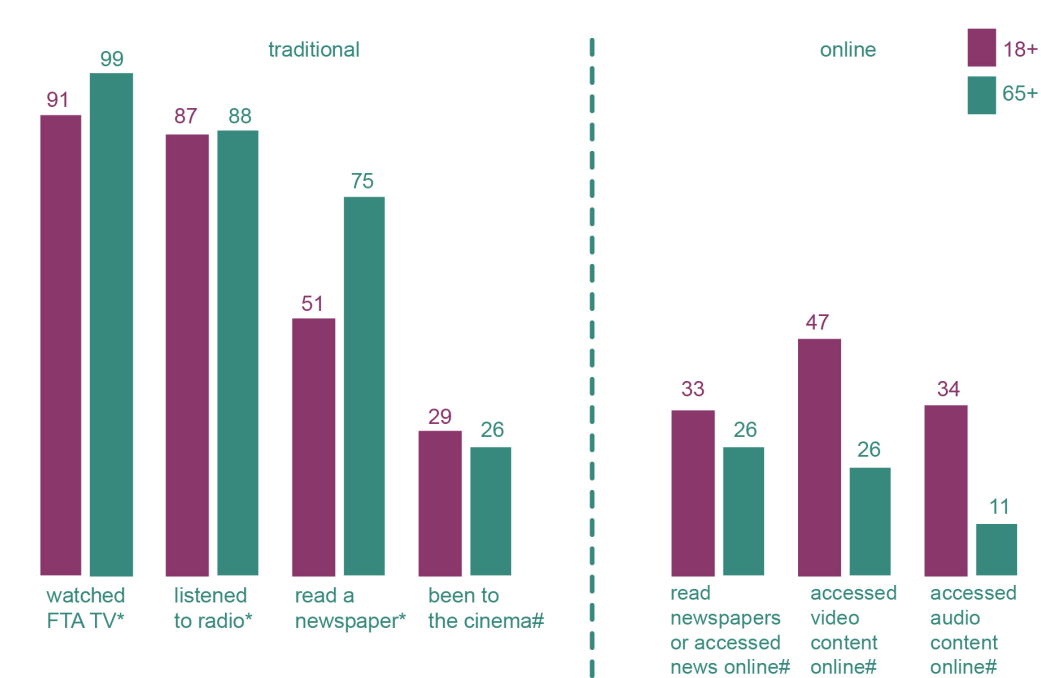


Figure 6: Media and entertainment activities, July 2014 to June 2015  
[\(/~/media/Research and Analysis/Research /Spreadsheet/Older Australians 2016/Fig6 csv.csv\)](#) (.csv)

Base: Australians (aged 18 and over, and 65 and over) who are internet users.  
Note: ‘Internet users’ described as those undertaking one or more internet activities online in the last four weeks (July 2014 to June 2015).  
\* represents in the last seven days.

# represents in the last four weeks.  
Source: Roy Morgan Single Source, June 2015.

### Government and health information online

In Australia, 15 per cent of older internet users accessed government services, and health and medical information online. These proportions were closely aligned with the adult Australian online population as a whole (Figure 7).

A review of international data showed that the number of older online Australians who access health and government information is significantly lower than their UK and US counterparts.

In 2015, 30 per cent of older UK internet users looked up information and services on government or council websites, and 35 per cent accessed information on health-related issues.<sup>21</sup>

The proportion of older users of government services online was even higher in the US, where 74 per cent of US internet users aged 65 and over had used a government website for transactions or information in 2010.<sup>22</sup> In comparison, 2013 data on use of health information online indicated that only 30 per cent of US adults aged 65 and over had gone online for health information in the past year.<sup>23</sup>

Figure 7: Health and government information online, July 2014 to June 2015



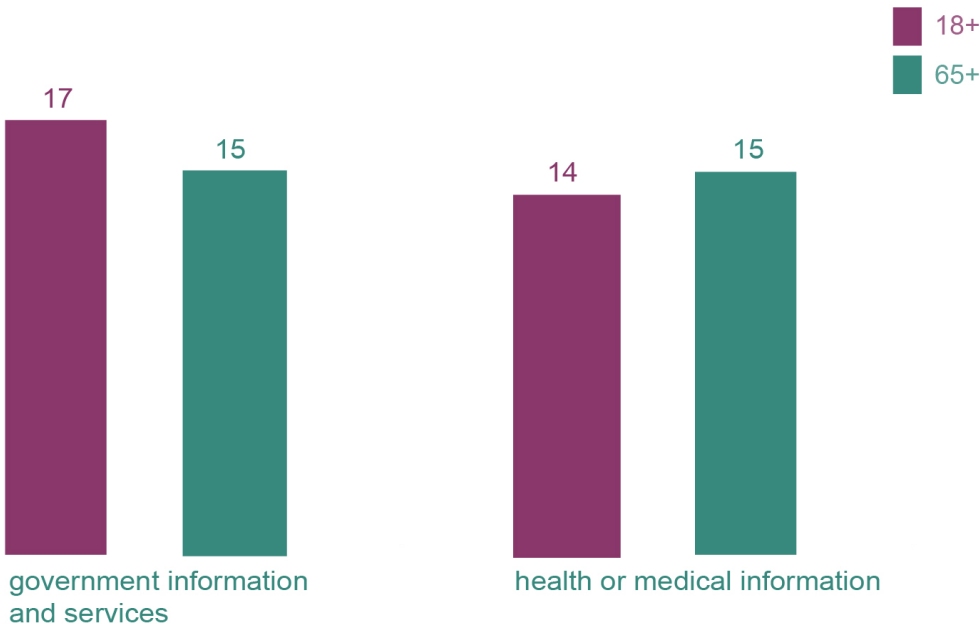


Figure 7: Health and government information online, July 2014 to June 2015 ([/~media/Research and Analysis/Research /Spreadsheet/Older Australians 2016/Fig7 csv.csv](#)) (.csv)

Base: Australians (aged 18 and over, and 65 and over) who are internet users.

Note: Relates to undertaking one or more internet activities online in the last four weeks (July 2014 to June 2015).

Source: Roy Morgan Single Source, June 2015.

According to the ABS, Australian internet users aged 25 to 34 are twice as likely to access health services online (32 per cent) than older Australians aged 65 and over (16 per cent).<sup>24</sup> The latest Australian digital inclusion index research observed that these figures suggested that older Australians who use the internet are not deriving benefits to the same extent as younger people.<sup>25</sup>

Our offline older Australians

An estimated one million adult Australians (six per cent) have never accessed the internet (at June 2015). Older Australians account for the majority of this group—71 per cent of offline adults fall into the age group of 65 and over.

As Figure 8 shows, the older the person is, the less likely they are to use the internet. This was clearly demonstrated by looking at different age groups within the 65 and over cohort. For Australians in the 65 to 69 age range, 11 per cent had never accessed the internet, and this proportion increased to 42 per cent for those aged 80 and over.

Figure 8: Australians who have never accessed the internet, by age, July 2014 to June 2015

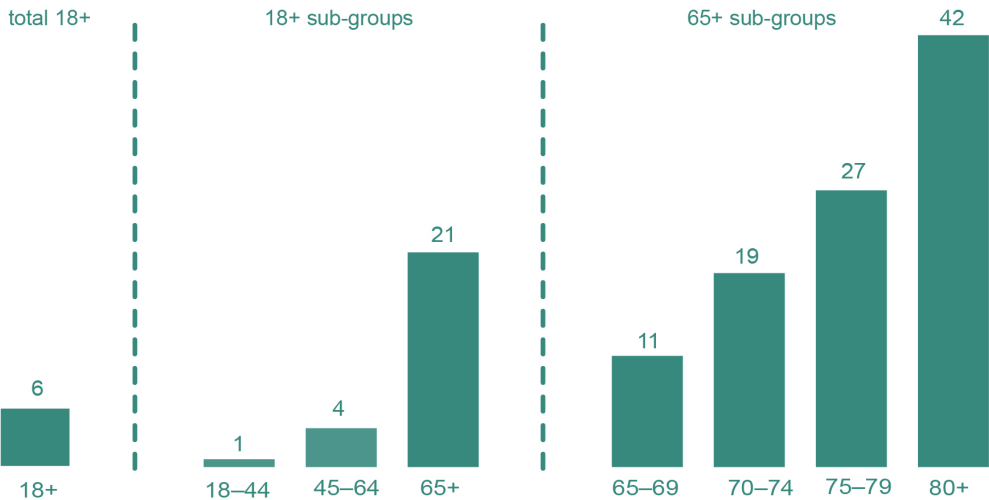


Figure 8: Australians who have never accessed the internet, by age, July 2014 to June 2015 ([/~media/Research and Analysis/Research /Spreadsheet/Older Australians 2016/Fig8 csv.csv](#)) (.csv)

Base: Adult Australians who have never accessed the internet (July 2014 to June 2015).

Source: Roy Morgan Single Source, June 2015.

Demographic differences observed within the older age group itself (65 and over) reveal factors associated with internet use.

As Figure 9 shows, in comparison to older internet users, older non-users are more likely to:



- > be out of employment
- > have no tertiary education
- > have lower income
- > live in country areas (outside of major capital cities)
- > be single/not married.

Figure 9: Profiles of older internet users vs older non-internet users, July 2014 to June 2015

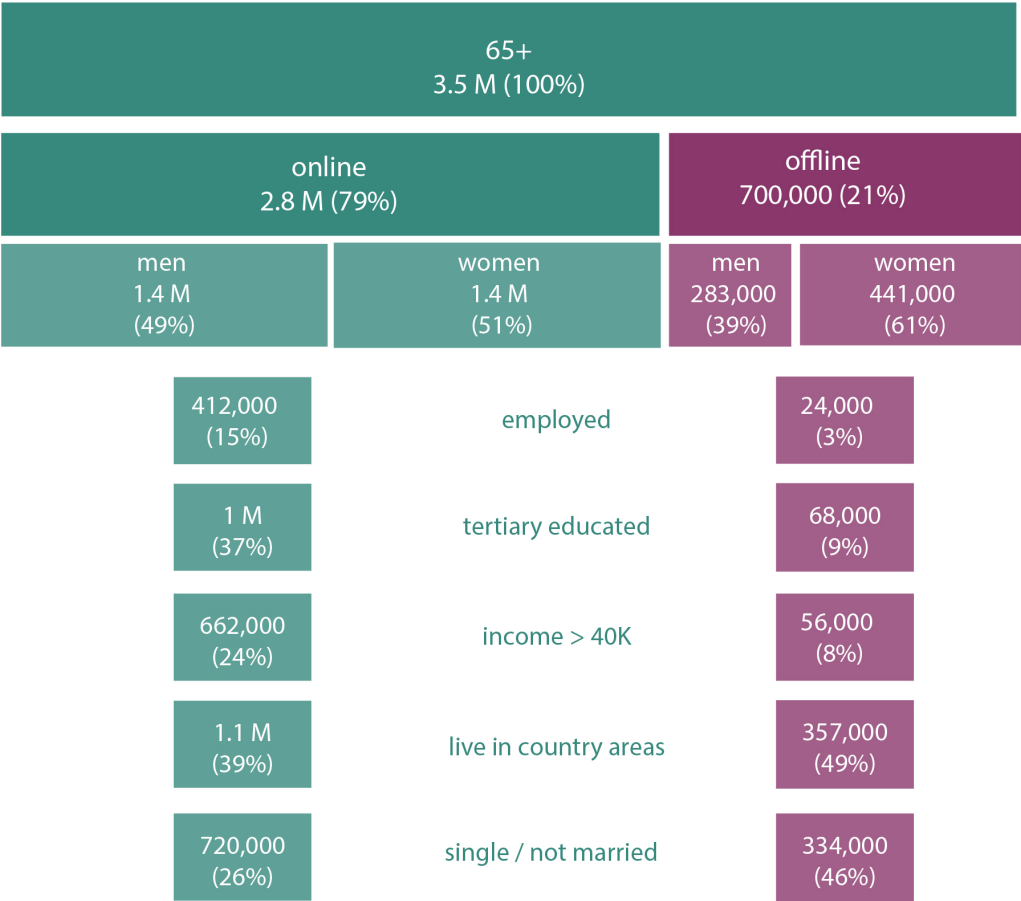


Figure 9: Profiles of older internet users vs older non-internet users, July 2014 to June 2015  
(/~/media/Research and Analysis/Research /Spreadsheet/Older Australians 2016/Fig9 csv.csv) (.csv)

Base: Australians aged 65 and over.

Notes: 'Offline' refers to those who have never accessed the internet.

'Online' refer to those who have accessed the internet at some point in their lives. July 2014 to June 2015.

Visual representation not to scale.

Source: Roy Morgan Single Source, June 2015.

Recent ACMA research provides further insights into some of the reasons why older Australians do not have internet access at home. The majority of older Australians (69 per cent) who did not have a home internet access reported that they had no need for internet or that they were not interested in using it in the six months to May 2015. Other reasons included that the internet was 'too complicated' (15 per cent) or that they 'do not have a computer at home' (nine per cent).<sup>26</sup>

Comparable international data reflects these Australian trends. For example, the main reason cited by older UK residents for not intending to get the internet connected at home was a 'perceived lack of interest' (60 per cent). Cost was the main reason for five per cent of cases.<sup>27</sup> In the US, approximately four in 10 adults aged 65 and older (39 per cent) do not use the internet<sup>28</sup>, compared to two in 10 (21 per cent) of older Australians.<sup>29</sup>

Gender gap

When reviewing the data for all adult Australians, a gender gap is evident in the over-65 age group. There is a nine per cent difference in the proportion of older men (76 per cent) who used the internet in the three months to June 2015, compared to older women (67 per cent).

The gender gap widens even further within the older age sub-groups.

Figure 10: Used the internet, by gender and age, July 2014 to June 2015

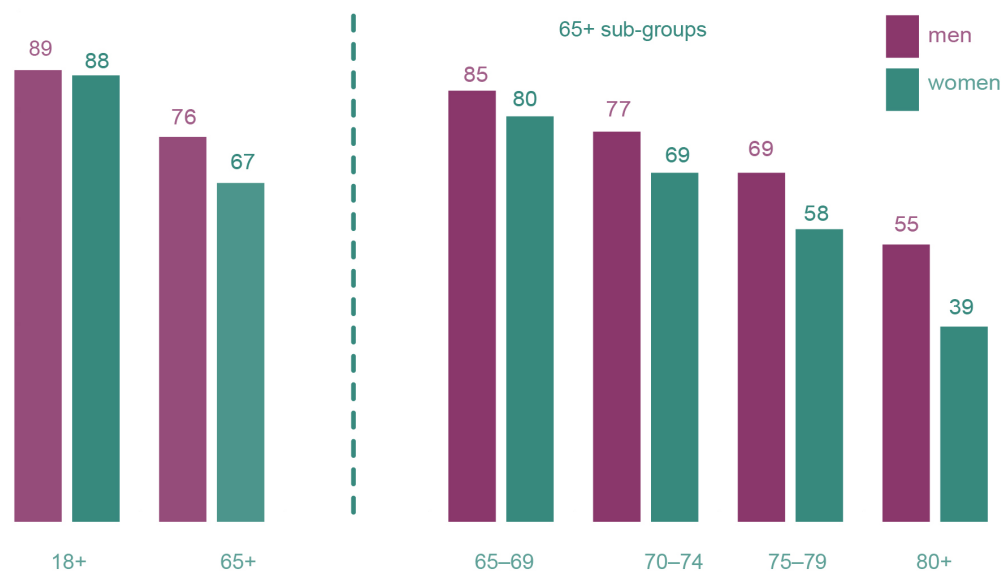


Figure 10: Used the internet, by gender and age, July 2014 to June 2015 ([/~media/Research and Analysis/Research /Spreadsheet/Older Australians 2016/Fig10 csv.csv](#)) (.csv)

Base: Australians aged 18 and over.  
Note: Relates to using the internet in the last three months (July 2014 to June 2015).  
Source: Roy Morgan Single Source, June 2015

Digital inclusion and digital transformation

There is a global trend across all governments to ensure that their services are available online. Digitalising government customer transactions has benefits for government, as digital transactions are cheaper, faster, convenient, and allow mobile access. Benefits to the consumer include time savings (through reduced travelling and waiting times) and avoiding out-of-pocket costs associated with transportation and postage.<sup>30</sup>

While the internet is the most frequently used method for contacting government for those aged 64 and under, older Australians are most likely to make contact in person.<sup>31</sup> According to the Digital Transformation Office<sup>32</sup>, the number of those who ‘prefer not to’ or ‘will not use’ digital channels to interact with government was as high as 54 per cent in people aged over 65. This compares to 66 per cent overall for individuals surveyed who supported a model where most interactions with federal government are digital. People in remote or rural areas were also less likely to support a digital transformation of government services, which is partly explained by the relative quality of internet access and speeds outside metropolitan areas.<sup>33</sup>

A significant challenge for government services and agencies will be to work effectively with those sectors of the Australian society, including older Australians, who are not currently using digital services and are wary of shifting to government digital services.<sup>34</sup>

Sample sizes

Table 1: Sample sizes

Two primary data sources were used to produce this report. Roy Morgan Single Source and the 2015 annual consumer survey commissioned by the ACMA. Sample sizes are provided below.

Roy Morgan Single Source	Sample size July 2014 to June 2015
Total sample—Australians aged 18 and over	<b>15,241</b>
Australians aged 65 and over	5,558
Australians aged 65 and over who accessed the internet in the last 3 months	3,798
Australians aged 65 and over who did one (or more) internet activity in last 4 weeks	3,236
ACMA-commissioned survey	Sample size May 2015
Total sample—Australians aged 18 and over	<b>1,810</b>
Australians aged 18 and over who have accessed the internet in the last 6 months	1,675
Australians aged 65 and over	364
ACMA-commissioned survey	Sample size May 2014
Total sample—Australians aged 18 and over	<b>1,800</b>
Australians aged 18 and over who have accessed the internet in the last 6 months	1,673
Australians aged 65 and over	332

Sources: Roy Morgan Single Source, June 2015; ACMA-commissioned survey, May 2014 and 2015.

Table 2: Age contribution to total 18+ population

Age breakdowns	Estimated population July 2014 to June 2015	Share (%)
18–44 years	8.52 million	46.6
45–64 years	6.24 million	34.1
65–69 years	1.35 million	7.4
70–74 years	1.06 million	5.8
75–79 years	0.63 million	3.5
80+ years	0.48 million	2.6

Source: Roy Morgan Single Source, June 2015.

## ACMA research program

Our research program—research**acma**—underpins our work and decisions as an evidence-informed regulator. It contributes to our strategic policy development, regulatory reviews and investigations, and helps us to make media and communications work for all Australians.

This snapshot is part of the ACMA's research program research**acma**, which has five broad areas of interest:

- > market developments
- > media content and culture
- > social and economic participation
- > citizen and consumer safeguards
- > regulatory best practice and development.

This research contributes to the ACMA's social and economic participation research theme.

## Further information

- > Take a look at research **acma** (</theACMA/Library/researchacma>) for ACMA's research publications and snapshots.
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## End notes

The full list of end notes for this snapshot — *Digital lives of older Australians* — is [available here \(/theACMA/end-notes---digital-lives-of-older-australians\)](/theACMA/end-notes---digital-lives-of-older-australians).