

AI Impact Areas

A working list for the Datascales community of practice · prepared July 2026 · drawn from the Datascales project (2024–2026) and current reporting. Figures are as reported at the time of writing; this field moves quickly, so treat the table as a snapshot for discussion, not a settled account.

Impact area	Why it matters — to society generally	Relevance to older Australians — and what we can do
Misinformation and 'hallucination'	Generative AI produces fluent, confident text that can be partly or wholly invented, degrading the shared factual ground that public debate, journalism and everyday decisions rely on.	Older adults are heavy consumers of news and health information, and fabricated content is often aimed at them. Datascales practice: check provenance, run the same question through two or three systems, and treat polish as a reason for more suspicion, not less — habits worth teaching onward through U3A.
Scams, deepfakes and voice cloning	A few seconds of audio can now clone a voice; synthetic video and personalised phishing make fraud cheaper, more convincing and industrial in scale.	Reported losses to AI voice-cloning scams in Australia reached about \$25.8m in the first half of 2025, and 'grandparent scams' deliberately target older people. What we can do: family code words, callback rules, slowing the moment down — and older adults teaching these defences to each other, and to their families, rather than being lectured about them.
Privacy and data ownership	Every prompt, photo and document fed to an AI system may be retained, used for training, or sold; ownership and consent rules lag far behind practice.	Health records, family photos and personal writing are exactly what many of us feed these tools. What we can do: read the terms (someone in the group usually has), prefer tools with clear data controls, and refuse the bargain when the price is too high — as one Datascales member did in walking away from a companion app that demanded too much.
Concentration of power	Frontier AI is controlled by a handful of US corporations and, increasingly, Chinese firms and the Chinese state; open-source releases such as Kimi K3 (July 2026) complicate but do not resolve the question of who holds the levers.	Older Australians vote, hold assets, and sit on boards and committees; they are not spectators. What we can do: follow the geopolitics as citizens, ask who profits from each 'free' tool, and bring an informed older voice to public consultation — a voice currently under-represented.
Regulation and governance in Australia	Governments everywhere are deciding how much to regulate; Australia relied on existing laws and voluntary standards until July 2026, when it announced mandatory Australian AI Standards, an Office of AI, and an AI Safety Institute.	One Datascales member judged the voluntary-standards era as 'coming at it from entirely the wrong point — it's too bloody late'. The new mandatory standards are being designed now. What we can do: make submissions, attend National AI Centre webinars, and press seniors' organisations (COTA, National Seniors, U3A) to speak up during design.
Health care and diagnostics	AI is entering diagnosis, imaging, triage and drug discovery, with real promise and documented problems of bias, error and opaque reasoning.	Older people are the health system's biggest users, so AI-assisted medicine reaches them first and most. What we can do: know that AI may sit behind a diagnosis, ask clinicians about it, and insist on the right to a human decision — while acknowledging genuine benefits such as earlier detection.

Impact area	Why it matters — to society generally	Relevance to older Australians — and what we can do
Aged care and monitoring technology	Falls detection, sensor monitoring, predictive analytics and 'care robots' are being rolled into care settings, often framed as answers to workforce shortage.	Roughly a third to nearly half of Australian residential facilities now use at least one AI tool, and consent, dignity and data questions remain unsettled. What we can do: demand that older people co-design these systems (as some Australian pilots now do), and distinguish technology that supports independence from surveillance that merely manages us.
Companionship and social AI	Chatbots and AI companions are marketed against loneliness; the evidence on benefit is thin and the emotional and privacy risks are real.	Loneliness among older people is genuine, which makes the sales pitch effective. Datascares' experience suggests the better answer is often the social learning group itself — real people arguing about AI beats an AI pretending to be a friend. Where companion tools are used, informed, sceptical use matters.
Education and lifelong learning	AI is upending what and how everyone learns — from school essays to professional retraining — and the tools change faster than curricula can.	U3A is a lifelong-learning movement, so this is home ground. What we can do: build live, updateable learning (monthly conversation rather than fixed courses), keep making 'What is AI?' material for newcomers, and share the peer-teaching model — in Datascares, the person who needed help in March was teaching by June.
Work, retirement and the economy	AI is reshaping jobs, professions and productivity, with contested forecasts ranging from augmentation to large-scale displacement.	Older adults are affected as workers staying on later, as grandparents watching younger family deal with the upheaval, and as retirees whose superannuation is invested in the AI boom. What we can do: stay literate enough to hold informed views — and to advise, invest and vote accordingly.
Digital ageism and design exclusion	AI systems are trained mostly on data from, and designed mostly by, younger people; ageist assumptions get built in, from interfaces to insurance algorithms.	Research (e.g. Stypinska; Berridge and Grigorovich) shows older adults are often treated as targets of digital ageism even when they are among its most informed critics. What we can do: refuse the deficit story in practice — the Datascares group produced governance documents, courses and policy advice, not requests for help — and call out exclusionary design when we meet it.
AI agents and humans in the loop	The next wave is 'agents' — AI that acts on your behalf across email, calendars, payments and services — raising sharp questions about delegation, error and accountability.	As one Datascares member put it of agents: the worry is 'not knowing where the thing sent it'. What we can do: adopt agents slowly and deliberately, keep humans in decisions that matter (money, health, consent), and test permissions together before granting them alone.
Creativity, culture and copyright	Generative AI is trained on human creative work, mostly without permission or payment, and now floods the culture with synthetic text, image and music.	Many U3A members are writers, artists and musicians whose work is in the training data; Australia has so far ruled out a text-and-data-mining exemption, keeping creators' rights in play. What we can do: use AI as a creative collaborator on our own terms, label AI-assisted work honestly, and support fair-payment arguments as the copyright rules are settled.

Impact area	Why it matters — to society generally	Relevance to older Australians — and what we can do
Environment and energy	Training and running large models consumes serious electricity and water; data centre growth is now a national infrastructure and environmental issue.	Australia's new AI standards will include obligations on large data centres covering power, grid support and water efficiency — decisions made now will shape bills, land use and emissions for decades. What we can do: follow local data centre proposals, and weigh AI's usefulness against its footprint in our own use.
Existential and long-term risk	Serious researchers disagree about whether advanced AI poses catastrophic risks; the pace of capability growth makes the question harder to dismiss each year.	Older adults bring something scarce to this debate: long memory of previous technological promises and panics, and a stake in the world their grandchildren inherit. What we can do: engage with the arguments rather than the headlines, tolerate uncertainty, and keep asking the better question — which, as Datascares learned, is the whole game.

Sources consulted include: ACCC Scamwatch guidance on AI scams; Swinburne University reporting on voice-cloning losses (2025–26); the National AI Plan (Department of Industry, Science and Resources, December 2025); the Australian Government announcement of mandatory AI Standards and an Office of AI (July 2026); Department of Health and Aged Care AI pilot reporting (2026); and scholarship on digital ageism (Stypinska 2023; Berridge and Grigorovich 2022). Quotations attributed to Datascares members come from project fieldwork, anonymised.