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BALLARAT REGION ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE NETWORK

The Social Licence to use AI

Research Findings Report - 2025

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Key Findings

At the Ballarat Region Artificial Intelligence Network, and working with Federation University Australia, we conducted a survey of businesses, government, and community in the Ballarat Region. We found concerns about the impact of AI, but there are opportunities to take advantage of. Our key findings were:

1. **Existing infrastructure and skills are inadequate** to properly adopt AI within businesses, making it harder to experiment and prosper.
2. Communities have **major concerns about ethical impacts, data privacy, and bias** within AI systems, undermining trust in AI and its applications.
3. **Job displacement and the impact on creativity and innovation** are front of mind for both businesses and community leaders.

Recommendations

Based on our findings and continued discussions with community leaders, businesses, governments, and the education sector, our recommendations for the short and medium term are:

Mitigation Strategies

- **Data Privacy:** Ensure that data privacy is forefront in training models, with clear rules and regulations about when and how data can be collected and used.
- **Bias Reduction:** Conduct regular audits, use diverse datasets, and maintain human oversight for critical AI decisions to ensure a fair and equitable impact on the community.
- **Job Displacement:** Focus on reskilling and upskilling workers, support job transition programs, and emphasize AI-human collaborative roles.
- **Ethical Governance:** Establish regulatory oversight bodies, routine compliance audits, and user rights management systems.

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Educational and Awareness Initiatives

- **Develop targeted AI training programs** to bridge skill gaps.
- **Promote AI literacy** through community outreach and workshops.

Infrastructure Development

- Advocate for government-funded **AI infrastructure projects** and financial incentives to support SMEs.

The Ballarat region faces multifaceted barriers to AI adoption, influenced by social, economic, and ethical dimensions. Notably, 64% of healthcare professionals and 61% of educators highlighted data privacy as a significant concern, reflecting broader apprehensions about trust and transparency in AI systems. Similarly, a significant portion of respondents (64% in healthcare) feared job displacement, emphasizing the need for targeted reskilling initiatives and job transition programs.

The study also identified strong concerns around ethical governance, with 71% of healthcare respondents raising issues about fairness and accountability. Addressing these ethical concerns through regulatory oversight and compliance audits will be critical for fostering public trust.

Despite these challenges, opportunities exist for proactive engagement. Developing community-focused AI literacy programs and enhancing infrastructure can bridge skill gaps and enable equitable AI integration. By prioritizing collaborative efforts and adopting the recommended mitigation strategies, the Ballarat region can harness the transformative potential of AI while safeguarding societal values and economic growth.

Acknowledgements

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