Retail
Workforce Planning Update 2026

SaCSA
Service and Creative Skills Australia



About SaCSA

Service and Creative Skills Australia (SaCSA) is an industry-owned, industry-led Jobs and Skills Council funded by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. We offer workforce planning, guidance and advocacy for the arts, personal services, retail, tourism and hospitality industries.

Working within a tripartite approach, SaCSA is the critical link between industry stakeholders, government and unions to strengthen Australia's vocational education and training sector and deliver stronger outcomes for employers, workers, learners, trainers and educators.

As the leader in workforce development initiatives for our industries, SaCSA collaborates with industry to identify and articulate current and future employment trends and develops solutions that best serve those needs.

Acknowledgements

SaCSA extends its gratitude to the industry, union and government representatives who provided their help in formulating our Retail Workforce Planning Update, 2026.

We also acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Country, including lands and waters, where we work and live.

We acknowledge the valued partnership of the Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, whose funding supports SaCSA's role as a Jobs and Skills Council.

Disclaimer

While utmost care and diligence were applied during the creation of this report, SaCSA does not guarantee the complete accuracy of the information it contains. SaCSA is not liable for any harm or loss that may arise from the dependence on this information.

Copyright

© Commonwealth of Australia, 2026. This document should be attributed as: SaCSA, Retail Workforce Planning Update 2026.

Contents

CEO foreword 03
About the Workforce Planning Update 04
SaCSA's engagement across Australia 06
Defining the retail workforce 07
Executive summary 08
The forces shaping the retail workforce 10
Labour market and workforce conditions 11
Near-term conditions are more challenging 15
Recruitment conditions and online recruitment activity 15
Occupational shortages 17
Implications for workforce supply and training 19
Retail VET update 2025 20
Total VET activity 20
Traineeships and VET in schools 22
Workforce impacts of technology, artificial intelligence and robotics 26
Policy and regulatory landscape 30
Current workforce issues and priorities 32
Evolving skills and training needs 33
SaCSA's projects and activities 35
Strategic opportunities for the retail sector 35
Workforce attraction and retention 36
SaCSA's projects and activities 39
Strategic opportunities for the retail sector 39
Changing faces of retail 41
SaCSA's projects and activities 41
Strategic opportunities for the retail sector 41
Varying conditions and operating pressures 42
SaCSA's projects and activities 43
Strategic opportunities for the retail sector 43
From evidence to action 44
SaCSA's projects and activities 46
Active 47
Planned 49
Completed 49
Looking ahead in retail 50
Appendix A 52
Defining the scope of the retail sector 52
Appendix B 58
SIR qualifications Gen AI exposure 58
Appendix C 60
Reference list 60



CEO foreword

I am pleased to present SaCSA's Retail Workforce Planning Update 2026 (Workforce Plan). This report builds on our previous workforce planning and reflects a stronger evidence base about the workforce opportunities and challenges reshaping Australia's retail sector.

Retail continues to play a significant role in Australia's economy and labour market. It provides employment for millions of Australians over the course of a year and remains an important entry point into work, particularly for young people, migrants, women and people seeking flexible employment. At the same time, the sector is operating in a challenging environment, with recruitment pressures becoming more concentrated and business costs increasing. Alongside these pressures, workforce needs are changing.

The workforce outlook is therefore one of both continuity and change. Retail employment is expected to continue growing over the longer term, although at a slower rate than the broader Australian workforce. Employers continue to experience recruitment difficulties in selected occupations and locations, particularly in community pharmacy and regional labour markets, while demand for workers with prior experience remains strong. These pressures sit alongside a weakening training pipeline, with retail vocational education and training enrolments, traineeship commencements and regional participation all needing support.

Technology is adding another dimension to this change. Artificial intelligence, automation, robotics and digital tools are reshaping how products are sourced, stocked, sold and delivered. Larger retailers are increasingly using technology to improve efficiency and scale, while smaller and independent businesses continue to rely heavily on customer service, local knowledge and human-centred capability due to limited capacity to invest in new systems. Across the sector, digital capability, judgement, problem-solving, adaptability and leadership are becoming increasingly important.

Against this backdrop, these changes mean workforce planning cannot focus on occupational shortages alone. We need to understand how people enter retail, how they develop their skills and careers, what influences whether they stay or leave, how they move between occupations, and whether training and workforce development are keeping pace with changing business models and capability requirements.

SaCSA's work is increasingly focused on building this deeper understanding and translating evidence into targeted responses. Over the past year, our work on workforce shortages, career journey mapping, qualification reviews and workforce capability has helped us connect industry priorities with practical action across retail and community pharmacy.

We are also making workforce evidence more accessible. SaCSA's interactive Data Dashboard brings together data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Jobs and Skills Australia and industry reports. It provides insights into the industries, occupations and qualifications within our remit, supporting evidence-based decision-making by industry, educators, policymakers and researchers.

As the Jobs and Skills Council for retail, SaCSA continues to bring together industry, unions, training providers, learners and government to help ensure nationally recognised training reflects current and emerging industry practice. This collaboration supports training products that remain relevant, responsive and fit for purpose.

The evidence points to 4 interconnected priorities: ensuring training remains relevant to evolving retail capability needs; strengthening workforce attraction, retention and career pathways; supporting workforce needs across changing retail business models; and responding to differing business conditions, locations and operating environments.

Addressing these priorities will require coordinated action across industry, government and the training system. The evidence in this Plan will continue to inform SaCSA's workforce projects, training product development, industry stewardship and advice to government.

I thank the employers, workers, unions, industry associations, education and training providers, government representatives and other stakeholders who continue to share their expertise and experience with us. Their contribution ensures our work remains grounded in the realities of this diverse sector.

By continuing to work together, we can strengthen pathways into and through retail and build a skilled, adaptable and resilient workforce that supports people to enter, develop and progress in their careers.

Natalie Turmine
CEO

About the Workforce Planning Update

Workforce planning is a central part of SaCSA's role in understanding and responding to the workforce and skills needs of the sectors SaCSA serves. It brings together industry experience, stakeholder insights and data to build a clear picture of what is happening now, what is changing and where action can make a difference.

This Workforce Plan builds on SaCSA's previous workforce planning work and reflects what we have learned through ongoing engagement with employers, workers, unions, industry associations, education and training providers, government and other stakeholders. Their perspectives help us and our industry leaders understand workforce challenges in context and identify opportunities that are practical and grounded in the realities of the sector.

SaCSA combines these insights with economic, labour market and vocational education and training data to identify current and emerging trends, test what we are hearing from industry and highlight areas where further research, collaboration or action may be needed.
The Workforce Plan considers both immediate workforce pressures and the longer-term forces shaping the sector, including changing skills needs, technology, workforce participation and broader economic and policy settings.

SaCSA's engagement across Australia

SaCSA's workforce planning is grounded in extensive and ongoing engagement with stakeholders across Australia. Over the course of the past year, SaCSA engaged with more than 4,100 stakeholders across every state and territory, bringing together a broad range of voices, experiences and perspectives from across the industries we represent.

Our engagement reaches metropolitan, regional and remote communities and includes large, medium and small employers, workers, unions, industry associations and peak bodies, education and training providers, learners, government representatives and other Jobs and Skills Councils. SaCSA also seeks to ensure that perspectives that may be underrepresented in traditional consultation processes are heard, including First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people with disability, people in regional and remote Australia, and other priority cohorts relevant to our industries.

Engagement takes place throughout the year and through multiple channels, including industry events, roundtables, workshops, webinars, surveys and conferences, as well as SaCSA's Strategic Workforce Advisory Groups, technical committees and project reference groups. This combination of broad engagement and more focused consultation enables SaCSA to hear directly from industry, explore issues in depth and understand how workforce experiences and challenges differ across occupations, locations, business types and workforce cohorts.

Stakeholder voices, insights and perspectives are embedded throughout SaCSA's work and have directly shaped the development of this Workforce Plan. Workforce data and research have been tested against the experiences of industry, and the workforce challenges identified in this plan have been discussed and validated through stakeholder engagement. This process helps ensure that the issues presented are not considered through data alone, but reflect the experiences, priorities and concerns of the people and organisations working across the industry.

These insights have also shaped the priorities and actions identified in this Workforce Plan, helping SaCSA focus on the areas where industry has told us action is most needed and where workforce and skills responses can have the greatest impact.



Defining the retail workforce

Australia's retail workforce supports how goods and services are sourced, sold and delivered to businesses and consumers. It spans customer-facing roles, merchandising, management, digital operations, warehousing and logistics across independent businesses, franchise networks and large retailers.

SaCSA uses the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification, together with relevant occupation and training package classifications, to define the sector within our remit. The retail workforce encompasses workers who operate across a diverse range of industries including but not limited to: store and non-store retailing, community pharmacies, quick service restaurants, online retail, and wholesale trade, including grocery, pharmaceutical, and supply and logistics. Further information about the industries and occupations included in this Workforce Plan is provided in Appendix A.

Important data notes

Data currency

Unless otherwise stated, the data presented in this Workforce Plan reflects the latest available information as of September 2026.

2021 Census data

Census-based figures in this Workforce Plan should be interpreted with caution. COVID-19 significantly disrupted employment across retail at the time of the 2021 Census, meaning these figures may not reflect typical workforce conditions. This context should be considered when using Census data for analysis and decision-making.

Executive summary

Australia's retail sector remains a major contributor to employment and the economy. More than 2.4 million people worked in the sector at some point during 2022–23, whether as their main job or one of multiple jobs.[1] The sector also accounted for 8.3% of Australia's total gross value added.[2] Retail is also a critical entry point into work, particularly for young people, migrants, women and people seeking flexible employment.

Despite this scale and economic contribution, industry stakeholders continue to report that retail is still often perceived as short-term or entry-level work rather than a skilled career. This can make it harder to attract and retain workers, build experienced leadership capability and encourage progression into longer-term retail careers.

Recruitment conditions remain mixed. Overall pressures have eased as post-pandemic recruitment conditions have normalised, but this improvement has not been consistent across the sector. Challenges remain concentrated across particular occupations and locations, with persistent shortages in community pharmacy, smaller labour pools in regional areas and continued employer demand for experienced workers. Online recruitment activity remains above pre-COVID benchmark levels across many retail occupations, despite broadly stable overall employment. This reflects ongoing replacement demand and workforce turnover; employers are recruiting to fill existing roles rather than expanding overall headcount.

These workforce pressures are occurring within a challenging operating environment. Rising labour and operating costs, weaker business confidence and subdued household demand may constrain retailers' capacity to invest in recruitment, training and workforce development. These pressures may be particularly significant for smaller, independent and regional businesses, which may have less capacity to absorb cost increases or invest in new systems and specialist capability.

The training pipeline is a growing concern. Participation in retail vocational education and training (VET) continued to weaken in 2025. Enrolments fell to their lowest level in a decade, and completions and traineeship commencements declined from 2024.[3] Regional participation has also declined over the longer term. Industry feedback suggests this reflects increasing use of employer-led training and concerns that existing content does not always align with the changing needs of industry. At the same time, employers continue to report demand for prior experience, while stakeholders have identified uneven links between school-based VET, employment, recognised training and workplace learning. Strengthening these links could help support first jobs and progression into skilled roles.

The nature of retail work is also changing rapidly. Artificial intelligence, automation, digitisation and changing business models are reshaping tasks across frontline, operational, supply chain and management roles. Larger omni-channel retailers are increasingly competing through technology, automation and robotics, while smaller, independent retail businesses are still relying heavily on human-centric capabilities. The pace and impact of these changes vary across the sector, creating different workforce, skills and training needs.

These pressures point to 4 interconnected workforce priorities for the retail sector:

- Ensuring training remains relevant to evolving retail capability needs
- Strengthening workforce attraction, retention and career pathways
- Supporting workforce needs across changing retail business models
- Responding to differing business conditions, locations and operating environments.

These priorities call for coordinated workforce planning that connects skills, training and career progression with the changing business models, conditions and operating environments. SaCSA will continue to work with industry, government, unions and the education and training sector to strengthen the evidence base, support practical workforce responses and ensure training and workforce development remain aligned with the needs of the retail sector.

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Jobs in Australia 2022–23*, November 2025.

2 ABS, *Australian Industry*, 2024–25. Off-June estimates.

3 National Centre for Vocational Research (NCVER), *VOCSTATS Total VET Students and Courses* (2026), TVA program enrolments and TVA program completions, 2015–2025.

The forces shaping the retail workforce

Retail is a significant contributor to Australia's economy and labour market, employing more than 1.5 million people as a main job[4] and at least 2.4 million people worked in retail at some point during 2022–23, whether as their main job or one of multiple jobs.[5] It is also an important entry point into work; around one in 7 Australians start their career in retail.[6]

At the same time, changing technology, consumer expectations and business conditions are reshaping workforce needs across the sector. Investment in retail workforce capability can deliver productivity benefits.[7] These changes are influencing the skills workers need, how businesses organise work and their capacity to attract, develop and retain workers.

Labour market and workforce conditions

The retail labour market remains relatively stable overall, but workforce pressures are concentrated in particular occupations and locations. Recruitment and retention remain difficult for some employers, particularly in regional areas and community pharmacy, while challenging business conditions are constraining workforce investment. Table 1 summarises the key labour market indicators affecting the sector.

Table 1: Key labour market indicators for the retail sector

Labour market indicator	Current position	Implication
Employment	Employment in the retail sector[8] decreased slightly (1.99%) over the year. Around 1,545,000 workers were employed in February 2026, compared with 1,576,400 employed a year earlier.[9]	The relatively small change indicates broadly stable employment levels rather than a substantial downturn in workforce demand.
Future employment growth	Employment is projected to grow by roughly 8% between May 2025 and May 2035, reaching nearly 1.72 million workers.[10] (Figure 1) This is below the 13.3% growth projected for national employment over the same period.	Employment is projected to grow, but more slowly than the broader Australian workforce.
Economic contribution	Gross value added (GVA) for the retail sector increased from $206.2 billion in 2023–24 to $215.9 billion in 2024–25, accounting for 8.3% of Australia's GVA.[11]	The sector's economic contribution remains significant, reinforcing the importance of ensuring retail has access to the skills and workforce needed to support future growth.
Labour demand	Recruitment activity in the retail industry remained relatively strong. The 4-quarter average of job vacancies increased by 6.9% over the year to May 2026, compared with a 1% decline across all industries.[12] In the June quarter 2026, 46% of retail trade and 39% of wholesale trade employers were recruiting or had recruited in the previous month, slightly below the national average of 48%.[13] Employers also demonstrated a strong preference for experienced workers. In the 12 months to July 2026, 19 in 20 retail industry job postings specified prior experience, and more than half required at least 3 years of experience.[14]	Recruitment demand remains relatively strong despite broadly stable employment, suggesting that replacement demand, workforce turnover and difficulty filling vacancies continue to influence hiring.
Labour costs	Award wages increased by 4.75% from 1 July 2026.[15] Further cost pressures are expected from changes to junior pay rates under the Retail, Fast Food and Pharmacy Award for workers aged 18 to 20.[16]	Rising labour costs are adding further pressure to already constrained business margins.



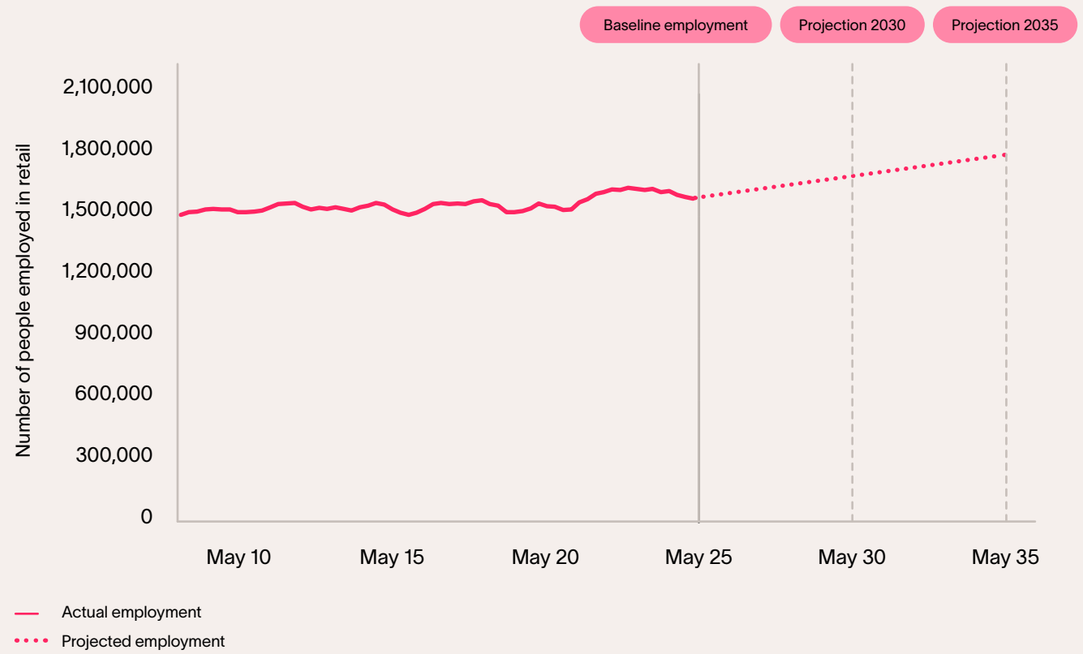
Explore more workforce data and detailed industry, occupation and qualification insights online

SaCSA's interactive Data Dashboard brings together data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) and industry reports. Explore workforce trends, occupations, qualifications and skills data across SaCSA's sectors to support evidence-based workforce planning and decision-making.

Scan the QR code to explore the SaCSA Data Dashboard.

Figure 1 shows the longer-term employment outlook for retail, while Table 2 highlights considerable variation in projected growth across selected occupations.

Figure 1: Employment growth in the retail sector 2010–2035



Source: ABS, Labour Force Survey, February quarter 2026, 4-quarter average. JSA, Employment Projections (May 2025 to May 2035).

Note: The retail sector workforce is estimated by aggregating employment in the Retail and Wholesale Trade industry division and excluding Motor Vehicle Retail and Wholesale Industry subdivision.

4 ABS, *Labour Force Survey*, February 2026 (4-quarter average).
5 ABS, *Jobs in Australia 2022–23*, November 2025.
6 ABS, *Job Mobility*, February 2026. A weighted average was applied for the Retail Trade and Wholesale Trade industries.
7 Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA), *Learning curve: why Australia needs a training boost*, November 2024.
8 The retail sector workforce is estimated by aggregating employment in the retail trade and wholesale trade industry divisions, excluding the motor vehicle retailing and wholesaling industry subdivisions.
9 ABS, *Labour Force Survey*, February quarter 2026 (4-quarter average).
10 Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA), *Employment Projections*, May 2025 to May 2035.
11 ABS, *Australian Industry*, 2024–25. Off-June estimates.
12 ABS, *Job Vacancies, Australia*, June 2026 (4-quarter average). A weighted average was applied for the Retail Trade and Wholesale Trade industries based on their respective employment shares.
13 JSA, *Recruitment Experience and Outlook Survey (REOS)*, June Quarter 2026.
14 Lightcast, *Labour Insights, job postings for retail and wholesale trade (excluding motor vehicle subdivision)*, July 2026. Based on approximately 13,000 job postings.
15 Fair Work Ombudsman, *Minimum Wages Increase from 1 July 2026*, July 2026.
16 Fair Work Ombudsman, *Junior wage changes to Retail, Fast Food and Pharmacy Awards*, 2026.

Table 2: Employment and projected growth in selected retail occupations, 2025–35

Occupation	Employment (May 2025)	Current employment (Feb 2026)	Projected employment (May 2035)	Projected growth (2025–35)
Sales assistant (general)	569,400	564,500	609,200	7.0%
Retail managers	237,400	234,050	253,500	6.8%
Sales and marketing manager	145,800	145,400	171,300	17.5%
Shelf filler	72,020	72,030	72,080	0.1%
Community pharmacy sales assistants	42,500	38,800	45,300	6.6%
Other retail occupations	518,280	490,220	564,620	8.9%
Total retail workforce	**1,585,400**	**1,545,000**	**1,716,000**	**8.2%**
Total workforce	**14,701,000**	**14,672,600**	**16,655,500**	**13.3%**

Source: JSA, Employment Projections (May 2025 to May 2035).

Note: Employment for each unit group was weighted by the proportion of employment that is within SaCSA's occupation scope at the 6-digit occupation level for each sector using data from Census 2021.

Near-term conditions are more challenging

Business confidence deteriorated sharply in the June quarter 2026, while expectations for business conditions over the following 12 months also weakened.[17, 18] This contrasts with the sector's positive longer-term outlook.

Business pressures

- In June 2026, 37% of retail trade and 46% of wholesale trade businesses expected operating expenses to increase over the following 4 weeks.[19]
- More than a quarter (27%) of businesses expected revenue to decrease, while 49% expected revenue to remain unchanged.[20]
- More than one in 10 businesses (13%) reported reducing their workforce in response to fuel prices or availability over the preceding 4 weeks, highlighting the tight margins that many operate within.[21]

Consumer pressures

- Household spending is expected to be constrained by weak consumer sentiment and ongoing cost pressures.[22]
- Consumer sentiment fell 11.6% over the year, from 95.4 in September 2025 to 84.4 in September 2026, remaining in pessimistic territory and below its long-run average of 100.2.[23] This may constrain discretionary spending and place further pressure on retail sales and workforce investment.
- Consumer inflation expectations remained elevated at 4.9% in August 2026, signalling continued cost-of-living pressures that may constrain household consumption and discretionary retail spending.[24, 25]

Together, these pressures may constrain hiring and workforce investment in the near term, particularly where subdued household spending and rising operating costs place additional pressure on margins.

Recruitment conditions and online recruitment activity

Recruitment challenges in the retail sector have improved since the post-pandemic recruitment disruption,[26] although employers continue to report challenges in attracting and retaining suitably experienced workers, particularly in regional areas.

Employer-reported recruitment difficulty has also eased considerably. The proportion of employers reporting recruitment difficulty in retail trade fell from a peak of 76% in late 2022 to 38% in March 2026. On a 4-quarter average basis, recruitment difficulty declined from 44% in the year to June 2025 to 38% in the year to June 2026.[27] However, this improvement is not uniform. Retail managers continue to show stronger recruitment demand,[28] while industry stakeholders identify leadership and middle-management capability and retention as persistent workforce gaps.

17 National Australia Bank (NAB), *Quarterly Business Survey*, Q2 2026.

18 Note: The NAB Quarterly Business Survey reported business confidence of +1 in Q2 2025 and –19 in Q2 2026, while business conditions remained at +2 over the same period. Expectations for business conditions over the following 12 months also weakened, falling from +17 in Q1 2026 to +5 in Q2 2026.

19 ABS, *Business Conditions and Sentiments*, June 2026.

20 ABS, *Business Conditions and Sentiments*, June 2026. Retail industry figures are calculated as a weighted average of Retail Trade and Wholesale Trade values, using ABS business counts for businesses operating at the end of the 2025–26 financial year.

21 ABS, *Business Conditions and Sentiments*, June 2026. Retail industry figures are calculated as a weighted average of Retail Trade and Wholesale Trade values, using ABS business counts for businesses operating at the end of the 2025–26 financial year.

22 RBA, *Statement on Monetary Policy*, August 2026.

23 Westpac, *Westpac-MI Consumer sentiment bulletin*, September 2026.

24 Melbourne Institute, *Survey of Consumer Inflationary and Wage Expectations*, accessed via Trading Economics.

25 RBA, *Statement on Monetary Policy*, August 2026.

26 ABS, *Job vacancies by industry, Australia*, May 2026.

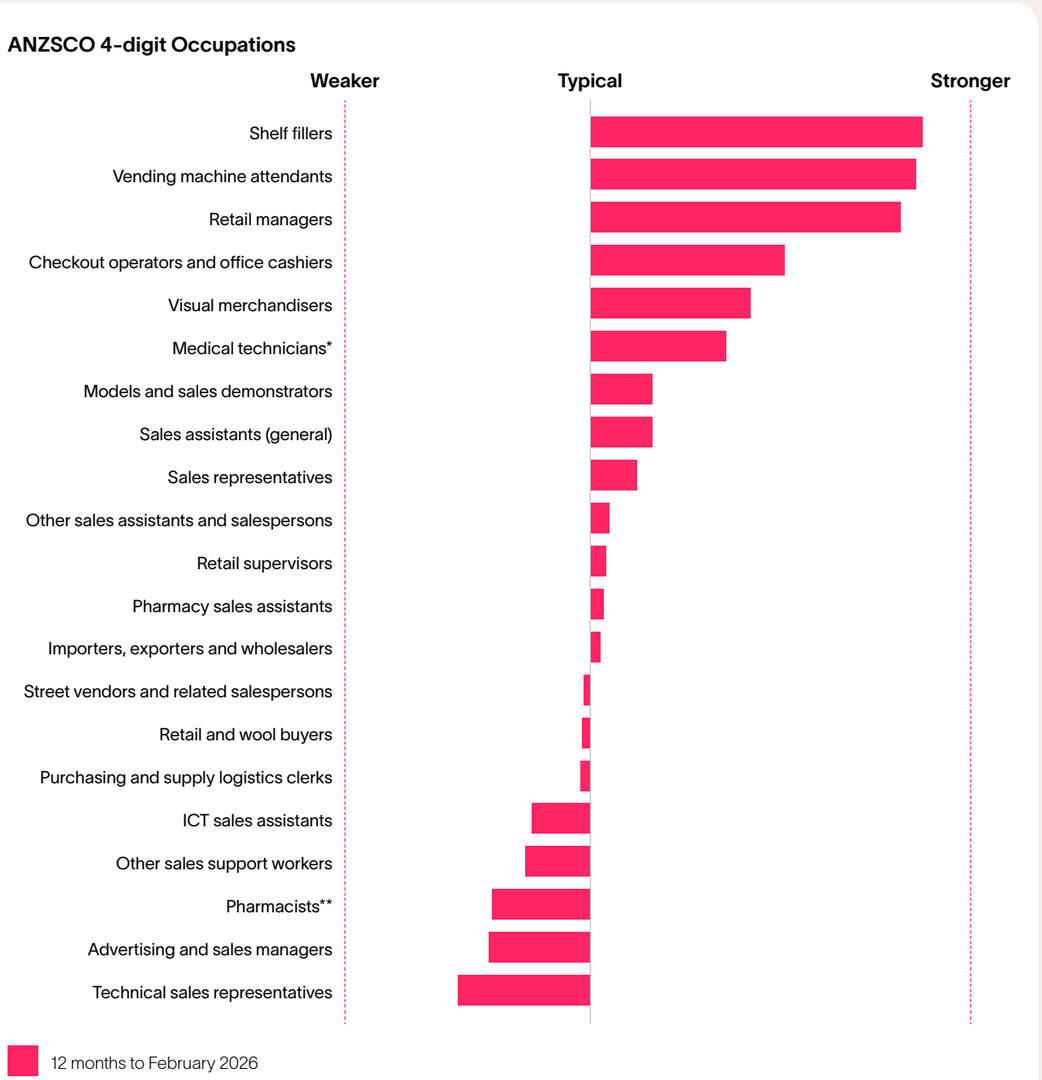
27 JSA, *Recruitment Experience and Outlook Survey (REOS)*, June Quarter 2026 (4-quarter average without weightage).

28 JSA, *Internet Vacancy Index (IVI)*, September 2026.

29 The Online Recruitment Activity Index is a standardised measure of relative labour demand based on the ratio of online job advertisements to employment at the occupational level. Scores for the 12 months to February 2026 are benchmarked against non-overlapping annual ratios for 2017–2019 (pre-COVID period).

The Online Recruitment Activity Index provides a measure of relative recruitment demand across occupations, showing where online recruitment is stronger or weaker than historical averages (Figure 2).[29] Positive index scores indicate stronger-than-typical demand and negative index scores indicate weaker demand.

Figure 2: Online recruitment activity index, retail occupations, Australia, 12 months to February 2026



Source: JSA (2026), Internet Vacancy Index (IVI), ANZSCO 4-digit occupations; ABS (2026), Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Table EQ08.

* Note: Pharmacy technicians is represented using the broader medical technicians occupation group (3112). IVI and employment data were weighted to reflect SaCSA's occupation scope using Census 2021 data.

** Note: Retail pharmacists is represented using the broader pharmacists occupation group (2515). IVI and employment data were weighted to reflect SaCSA's occupation scope using Census 2021 data.

Recent job posting data also indicates increased recruitment activity. Over the 12 months to July 2026, job postings increased by approximately 50% for shelf fillers (approx. 1,600 job postings), 7% for retail managers (approx. 49,600 job postings) and 6% for checkout operators (approx. 2,350 job postings).[30]

Online recruitment activity remained above pre-COVID benchmark levels for most retail occupation groups over the year to February 2026, although the strength of recruitment demand varied considerably across occupations.

- Recruitment activity was strongest for shelf fillers, followed by vending machine attendants, retail managers, checkout operators and office cashiers.
- Activity was also above benchmark levels for visual merchandisers and medical technicians (used as a proxy for pharmacy technicians), while retail supervisors and community pharmacy sales assistants were just above typical benchmark levels.[31]
- In contrast, activity was below benchmark levels for technical sales representatives, advertising and sales managers and ICT sales assistants.

Stakeholder feedback indicates that online job advertising does not capture all retail recruitment activity, particularly for entry-level and frontline roles where retailers of all sizes recruit through walk-ins, referrals, window advertising, job seeker placements and/or other informal channels. Online recruitment data should therefore be treated as an indicator of labour demand rather than a complete measure of retail hiring activity.

Occupational shortages

Recruitment pressures remain uneven across the sector, with shortages persisting in a number of retail occupations across Australia in 2026, as shown in Table 3.

Changes in recorded shortages should also be considered alongside broader workforce movement. SaCSA's analysis shows that, 3 years after entering an occupation, roughly 48% of people working in selected retail occupations remain in the same role.[32] Some of those move, progress or transition into other roles (such as corporate and retail management, store person, sales and marketing and administrative occupations), while others simply leave the workforce or move into occupations outside these commonly identified retail pathways. This movement can ease workforce pressure in some roles while creating replacement demand in others. Shortage data should therefore be considered alongside workforce mobility and recruitment trends to provide a fuller picture of workforce pressures.

Overall, the results below highlight that retail workforce shortages remained concentrated in community pharmacy roles in both 2025 and 2026, with no change in shortage ratings across the selected occupations that had been identified as being in shortage nationally, at state or territory level, or regionally in 2024.

30 Lightcast, *Time Series Analysis*, 2017–2026. Data filtered by ANZSCO occupations.

31 Note: medical technician is used as a proxy, as pharmacy technicians sit within this 4-digit occupation group.

32 SaCSA, *Early Career Mobility Project*, 2026 (The average is provided as an unweighted).

Table 3: Occupation Shortage List (OSL), retail occupations, 2025 to 2026

Occupation code	Occupation title	2025	2026
112133	Sales and marketing manager	–	–
162131	Retail manager (general)	–	–
221633	Sales representative (industrial products)	–	–
221699	Technical sales representatives nec	–	–
263431	Community pharmacist	AUS	AUS
311331	Community pharmacy technician	R	R
571431	Stock clerk	–	–
571231	Order clerk	–	–
621232	Sales representative (business services)	–	–
621234	Sales representative (personal and household goods)	–	–
631531	Retail supervisor	–	–
619135	Visual merchandiser	–	–
619999	Sales support workers nec	–	–

Source: Jobs and Skills Australia, Occupation Shortage List, 2024, 2025 and 2026

Note: Occupation titles and codes are based on Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA) 2024. 'nec' means 'not elsewhere classified'. The following selected retail occupations were assessed as not in shortage in 2024, 2025 and 2026: antique dealer, checkout operator, clerical and administrative workers nec, community pharmacy sales assistant, door-to-door salesperson, ICT sales assistant, importer or exporter, retail buyer, retail loss prevention officer, sales assistant (general), sales assistants and salespersons nec, sales demonstrator, sales representative (building and plumbing supplies), sales representative (medical and pharmaceutical products), sales representatives nec, shelf filler, street vendor, trolley collector, vending machine attendant, wholesaler.

Legend:

- AUS indicates that the occupation was assessed as being in shortage nationally
- R indicates regional shortage only
- – indicates no shortage

For the most up-to-date occupation shortage information, refer to SaCSA's Data Dashboard. The dashboard brings together workforce, occupation and training data across SaCSA's remit, including retail, and provides current insights into employment, workforce characteristics, occupation shortages and vocational education and training (VET) participation to support evidence-based workforce planning.

Implications for workforce supply and training

Overall, retail employment remains broadly stable, despite underlying workforce change. Workforce pressures are concentrated in particular occupations, experience levels and locations. While recruitment difficulty has eased, employers continue to report demand for experienced workers and shortages in community pharmacy, skills gaps in retail management and recruitment challenges in some regional labour markets. Strengthening retention and entry pathways therefore remains important.



Retail VET update 2025

Total VET activity

Retail services enrolments are at their lowest level in a decade

2025 Enrolment profile

61% Female

56% Aged under 25

2025 Enrolments snapshot

49% in private training providers, followed by 22% in enterprise providers and 20% in schools.

29% in regional and remote areas, while 66% were in major cities.

65% Certificate III in Retail, which was the most enrolled qualification.

Across the 2016–2020 commencing cohorts, 4-year completion rates averaged approximately 49% for Retail Services, slightly above the national VET average of around 47%. Around half of students therefore completed within 4 years, although the outcomes of non-completers are not captured.

Source: NCVER, Total VET Activity program enrolments, 2025; NCVER, Total VET Activity program completions, 2025. VET Qualification Completion Rates 2024: Observed completion rates DataBuilder: 4-year rates.

Changes in VET activity, 2024 to 2025

Total enrolments

19,600

25,100 in 2024 | **-22%**

Domestic	19,550	**-22%**
International	50	**-40%**

99.7% Domestic

0.3% International

Total completions

7,700

8,600 in 2024 | **-10%**

Domestic	7,675	**-10%**
International	25	**-38%**

99.5% Domestic

0.5% International

Qualifications driving the change

Qualification	Enrolments (percentage) 2024–2025	Completions (percentage) 2024–2025
Certificate IV in Retail Management	-40%	-20%
Diploma of Visual Merchandising	-33%*	-40%*
Certificate III in Community Pharmacy	-28%	-27%
Certificate III in Retail	-22%	-6%
Certificate IV in Community Pharmacy Dispensary	+14%	-20%

What drove the change?

Retail training participation continues to decline

Retail training enrolments fell by 22% to 19,600 in 2025, their lowest level in a decade. Declines were concentrated among enterprise and private training providers, while regional and remote participation also fell. Several key qualifications, including retail management, visual merchandising and community pharmacy, also recorded declines. Together, these trends point to a weakening formal training pipeline.

An asterisk (*) indicates a percentage has been generated on fewer than 100 commencements and is prone to large fluctuations based on small actual shifts. Note: Averages calculated as weighted average. Figures are rounded.

Traineeships and VET in schools

VET in schools, excluding school-based apprenticeships and traineeships (SBATs), remained broadly stable, while retail traineeship commencements declined

Traineeships, 2025

2,100
commencements
-51% from 2024

2,980
completions
-24% from 2024

Where activity was concentrated in 2025

Top qualifications	
Qualification	**Share of retail commencements**
Certificate III in Retail	44%
Certificate III in Community Pharmacy	24%

Top occupations	
Occupation	**Share of retail commencements**
Sales assistant (general)	55%
Pharmacy sales assistant	26%



VET in schools (VETiS), 2025

VETiS participation weakened alongside falling retail traineeship commencements

Retail VETiS participation declined in 2025, and the sharpest reduction occurred in SBATs. Retail-related traineeship commencements fell by 51% in 2025 to 2,100, their lowest level in 2 decades. Within schools, SBAT commencements fell sharply, declining by 38% to 1,600, their lowest level since 2006.

Stakeholder feedback suggests this may partly reflect the limited recognition of retail as a career and growing concerns that training products are not keeping pace with current workforce needs. This reinforces the need to strengthen the connection between school-based learning, recognised training and employment pathways. Rebuilding participation in retail training will also require clearer connections between recognised skills and qualifications, including how qualifications and skills translate into workplace recognition, pay and career progression.

Source: NCVER, VET in Schools School Program Enrolments, 2025; NCVER, VET in School Program Completions, 2025; NCVER, Apprentices and Trainees, December 2025; NCVER, Apprentices and trainees – apprenticeship-level completion rates, December 2025.

Note: Averages calculated as weighted average. Figures are rounded.

6,230

commencements

-13% from 2024

2,680

completions

+7% from 2024

2025 VETiS qualification profile

Top VETiS qualifications in retail		
Qualification	**Share of retail enrolments**	**Share of retail completions**
Certificate III in Retail	76%	76%
Certificate II in Retail Services	17%	17%

Together, these 2 qualifications accounted for **93%** of both retail commencements and completions.

School-Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SBATs)

1,600

commencements

-38% from 2024; lowest since 2006

965

completions

+0% from 2024

26%

share of total VETiS commencements

36%

share of total VETiS completions



Workforce impacts of technology, artificial intelligence and robotics

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a workforce issue that extends across industries and the Jobs and Skills Council (JSC) network. SaCSA is working with the Future Skills Organisation and other JSCs to contribute industry insights to national work on AI skills and workforce capability. This collaboration recognises that many of the capabilities required to work effectively with AI are transferable across sectors, while workforce impacts will differ by industry and occupation.

In retail, technology, AI, automation and robotics are increasingly influencing how retail businesses operate and how work is performed. JSA's research suggests that generative AI (Gen AI) is more likely to augment work than replace whole occupations, and that automation potential is greatest in routine and repeatable tasks.[33]

Four key areas of workforce change are emerging:

- First, **routine and repeatable tasks are being automated**. E-shelf labels update prices instantly,[34] mobile applications check stock availability in real time,[35] and automated fulfilment systems are improving back-of-house efficiency.[36] For example, Coles' Kemps Creek Automated Distribution Centre can process up to 4 million cartons per week, reducing manual handling.[37] These changes are shifting some retail work from manual tasks towards systems monitoring, exception handling and troubleshooting. However, automation may also change how remaining tasks are organised and distributed, affecting the pace and intensity of work.
- Second, **customer expectations are changing**. AI shopping assistants, virtual fitting tools and self-checkout stations can reduce some routine customer interactions, while agentic AI is beginning to search, compare and transact on behalf of customers. This is increasing expectations for faster, more personalised and accurate service, while changing how retailers structure product, service and business information for both people and AI systems. At the same time, recent examples from major retailers reinforce the continuing importance of human interaction in frontline service.[38, 39]
- Third, **digital capability is becoming a core retail skill**. Technology is no longer limited to office-based roles and is increasingly part of the everyday work of frontline staff.[40] Workers increasingly need digital confidence, human-centred skills and problem-solving capability to use technology-enabled systems in their everyday work, support customers through digital processes and respond when automated systems do not work as expected.[41] JSA's analysis also points to the need for both digital and non-digital capabilities, including foundational digital and AI skills, which highlights the evolving essential skills required in retail.[42]
- Fourth, **entry pathways and career progression need to evolve**. Checkout, shelf-filling and basic warehousing roles have traditionally provided entry points into work, particularly for young people, and remain common entry pathways into retail, store operations and logistics.[43, 44, 45, 46] Stakeholder feedback indicates these pathways are already changing, and in some areas, potentially narrowing , as retailers adopt AI, robotics and digital tools across inventory management, warehousing, rostering and e-commerce, therefore more roles require digital and technology capability. This reinforces the need for clear pathways into digitally enabled roles and progression options in store technology, supervision and operations.

The scale and nature of these changes varies considerably across the retail landscape. The Australian Retail Council (ARC) highlights a gap between experimenting with AI and embedding it in everyday operations, pointing to the need to adapt work process, management practices and workforce skills.[47] Adoption remains uneven. Large retailers are more likely to use advanced automation and integrated digital systems, while small to medium enterprises (SMEs) may need greater support to build digital capability and adopt affordable technologies, although small retailers can also be highly agile adopters.[48] Regional retailers may face additional barriers associated with infrastructure, labour availability and access to specialist technology support.

Effective adoption of AI, automation and digital technologies also requires meaningful consultation with workers and their representatives. Early engagement can help identify implications for job design, staffing, workloads, workplace safety and career pathways, and help ensure affected workers have access to appropriate training and development as technologies are introduced.

AI exposure also varies by occupation and task. Table 4 draws on SaCSA's analysis of JSA's Gen AI Capacity Study, which assesses that some retail occupations have greater potential for augmentation or automation than others, reinforcing that technology is likely to reshape roles in different ways across the workforce.

33 JSA, *Australia's AI Transition: Jobs, Skills and the Future of Work*, August 2025.
34 Inside FMCG, *Coles, Woolworths refuse to rule out dynamic pricing*, March 2026.
35 iTnews, *Kmart Group to expand RFID tagging to more products and to Target*, June 2026.
36 Inside FMCG, *Woolworths opens its first-ever automated customer fulfilment centre*, May 2025.
37 Coles Group, *Coles unveils state-of-the-art distribution centre in Western Sydney*, August 2024.
38 CNN Business, *Amazon's cashier-less technology was supposed to revolutionize grocery shopping*, April 2024.
39 CX Dive, *Klarna changes its AI tune and again recruits humans for customer service*, May 2025.
40 World Economic Forum, *Beyond the Desk: How AI Is Transforming the Frontline Workforce*, October 2026.
41 Zirar, Araz, Syed Imran Ali, and Nazrul Islam. *Worker and workplace Artificial Intelligence (AI) coexistence: Emerging themes and research agenda, Technovation 124*, 2023.
42 JSA, *Our Gen AI Transition – Skills*, 2026.
43 JSA, *Checkout Operators and Office Cashiers – Occupation and Industry Profiles*, April 2026.
44 JSA, *Shelf Fillers – Occupation and Industry Profiles*, April 2026.
45 Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), *Retail – Jobs Hub*, April 2026.
46 DEWR, *Logistics, Warehousing and Transport – Jobs Hub*, December 2024.
47 Australian Retail Council (ARC), *Submission to the Joint Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence*, September 2026.
48 Seppänen, Sami, Juhani Ukko, and Minna Saunila. *Understanding determinants of digital transformation and digitizing management functions in incumbent SMEs, Digital Business 5*, no. 1, 2025.

Table 4: AI exposure across key retail occupations

Occupation (4-digit ANZSCO)	Augmentation likelihood	Automation likelihood	Tasks with highest Gen AI exposure scores shown as augmentation / automation	What it could mean
Sales representative	72% **High** *Higher than 81% of all occupations assessed*	63% **Medium** *Higher than 93% of all occupations assessed*	• Preparing sales reports: 80% / 80% • Maintaining and submitting records of business expenses incurred: 80% / 80%	AI may help in automating sales reports and compiling lists of prospective business clients, allowing greater focus on client engagement and relationship building.
Retail managers	73% **High** *Higher than 82% of all occupations assessed*	48% **Low** *Higher than 81% of all occupations assessed*	• Maintaining records of stock levels and financial transactions: 80% / 70% • Promoting and advertising the establishment's goods and services: 80% / 60%	AI may augment tasks such as maintaining stock and financial records, potentially allowing retail managers to spend more time on team leadership, staff supervision, compliance and decision-making responsibilities.
Sales assistant (general)	63% **Medium** *Higher than 43% of all occupations assessed*	42% **Low** *Higher than 70% of all occupations assessed*	• Determining customer requirements and advising on product range, price, delivery, warranties, and product use and care: 70% / 50% • Accepting payment for goods and services by a variety of payment methods and preparing sales invoices: 60% / 60%	AI is currently more likely to support the process of payment and preparing invoices, freeing workers to focus on tasks such as stacking and displaying goods.
Storepersons	60% **Medium** *Higher than 34% of all occupations assessed*	34% **Low** *Higher than 52% of all occupations assessed*	• Operating computers to obtain details of location and quantity of items in stock: 70% / 80% • Labelling goods with details of storage location: 70% / 60%	AI may support tasks such as identifying the location and quantity of stock, potentially reducing time spent on stock checks and allowing workers to focus on operating machinery and materials-handling equipment.
Shelf filler	47% **Low** *Higher than 11% of all occupations assessed*	22% **Very low** *Higher than 22% of all occupations assessed*	• May help customers find goods they need: 60% / 30% • May price goods: 60% / 30%	AI may assist with locating and pricing goods, reducing manual work and allowing more time on shelf presentation and maintaining product availability.

Source: SaCSA analysis of JSA, Gen AI Capacity Study Bespoke Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4, 2025. Augmentation and automation exposure scores are JSA estimates; occupation-specific interpretations are SaCSA analysis.

Note 1: Augmentation likelihood reflects AI's potential to enhance how occupational tasks are performed, while automation likelihood reflects the potential for AI to perform those tasks with little or no human involvement.

Note 2: 'Higher/Lower than x% of occupations' indicates how an occupation's Gen AI exposure score compares with all occupations assessed by JSA.

Note 3: Exposure levels follow JSA's classification: High (0.70 and above), Medium (0.50 to below 0.70), Low (0.25 to below 0.50), and Very Low (below 0.25).

For retail, the workforce implication is therefore less about preparing for widespread job replacement and more about ensuring workers can build the digital and human-centred capabilities needed as tasks and roles change. Entry and progression pathways will also need to evolve alongside these changes.[49]

To strengthen the evidence base in this area, SaCSA is undertaking research into how AI, automation and robotics are reshaping jobs, skills and workforce pathways across the service and creative sectors. The findings are expected to be released in late 2026.

49 BDO Australia, *Upskilling the retail workforce*, October 2025.



Policy and regulatory landscape

During 2025–26, policy and regulatory changes continued to reshape workforce and workplace settings across retail. The Australian Government released the National AI Plan in December 2025, with a focus on supporting AI adoption, building worker capability and ensuring technology is used safely and responsibly.[50] For retail, this reinforces the importance of building digital and AI capability as technology becomes more embedded in workplace tasks and business operations.

SaCSA is collaborating with other Jobs and Skills Councils to provide industry-specific insights into the Future Skills Organisation's work supporting the Australian Government's National AI Plan. This collaboration will help identify emerging AI skills needs, workforce impacts and training priorities across the personal services sectors, ensuring that industry perspectives inform national approaches to AI capability development.

For retail, several changes have more direct workforce implications. From December 2026, employees aged 18 to 20 employed under the Retail Award, Fast Food Award and Pharmacy Award will progressively become entitled to the full adult rate for their classification after more than 6 months with the same employer. Final increases are scheduled by 2029.[51] For employers with a high proportion of younger workers, these changes may improve the attractiveness of retail employment by increasing earnings for young people. However, higher wage costs and a narrowing difference between junior and adult wage rates may also influence employers' recruitment decisions and capacity to offer entry-level opportunities. This could create opportunities for mature-age workers and people seeking a career change or re-entering the workforce, as employers consider applicants across different age groups. These competing effects highlight the importance of monitoring how changes to junior wage rates influence workforce participation, recruitment and entry pathways across the retail sector.

Policy attention has also extended to worker safety. South Australia's Workplace Protection Order (WPO) scheme commenced on 4 May 2026, allowing eligible businesses, employer bodies, unions and other applicants to seek orders restricting individuals who have engaged in personal violence or intimidation from accessing workplaces.[52] Victoria introduced WPO legislation, commencing from 26 July 2027, while New South Wales announced its proposed WPO scheme on 1 September 2026, with legislation introduced in October 2026.[53, 54] For retail, stronger protections against customer aggression support worker retention and make frontline roles safer and more attractive. This has direct relevance to SaCSA's work on customer aggression and frontline retail worker safety.

Regulatory change is also extending beyond employment conditions into how retail businesses operate and deliver services. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's 2026–27 priorities include competition issues in the supermarket and retail sectors; consumers and fair-trading concerns, including misleading pricing, and manipulative and false practices; and unsafe consumer goods in digital markets.[55] As e-commerce and marketplace retail continue to expand, these priorities reinforce the importance of workforce capability in consumer law, pricing compliance, product safety and responsible digital retailing.

Community pharmacy operates within an additional layer of policy and regulatory settings. Furthermore, there are continuing expansions to the community pharmacy scope of practice across all jurisdictions. All states and territories allow community pharmacists to prescribe medications to treat a range of conditions.[56] While these scope of practice expansions apply only to the pharmacist, the increase in role responsibilities has meant that pharmacy assistants and technicians have started to play a larger role within the community pharmacy. These changes have been considered in SaCSA's update of the community pharmacy qualifications to account for changes in workforce design, role boundaries and workflow within the pharmacy.

These developments highlight the changing workforce and capability requirements across retail. Changes to employment conditions and workplace protections may influence workforce attraction, retention and safety, while AI, digital-market regulation and subsector-specific policy settings are broadening the knowledge and capabilities expected of workers and managers. For SaCSA, the workforce planning priority is to understand how these changes affect recruitment, entry pathways, frontline safety and emerging capability needs, and to support responsive training and workforce development approaches as industry adapts.

50 DISR, *National AI Plan*, December 2025.
51 Fair Work Ombudsman, *Junior wage changes to Retail, Fast Food and Pharmacy Awards*, April 2026.
52 Attorney-General's Department | Government of South Australia, *Workplace Protection Laws*, May 2026.
53 Victoria Legislation, *Workplace Protection Orders Bill 2026*, July 2026.
54 Ministerial Releases | NSW Government, *Minns Labor Government to legislate stronger protections for workers*, September 2026.
55 Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), *Compliance and enforcement priorities*, 2026.
56 Pharmaceutical Society of Australia, *Expanded Scope of Practice*, 2026.

Current workforce issues and priorities

The following priorities bring together the key workforce issues identified across retail and highlight areas requiring further action or investigation. While many of these issues are shared across the sector, their drivers and impacts vary by business model, occupation and location.

Evolving skills and training needs

The relevance and accessibility of training remain important workforce issues across retail. Technology and changing business models are increasing demand for digital, problem-solving and customer-facing capabilities, while stakeholders continue to identify gaps in leadership, supervision, operational expertise and specialist skills. Retailers' capacity to invest in and deliver workforce development also varies considerably by business size and location. with access to training particularly uneven in some regional and remote areas.

Broader Australian research reinforces the value of continued workforce development. A survey found that every dollar invested in learning and development per employee was associated with $4.70 in additional business revenue per employee.[57] However, the Committee for Economic Development of Australia reports that participation in work-related training across Australia has declined by 14% since 2007.[58]

Despite the benefits, access to development is also uneven. Part-time and casual work, limited time and funding, and reliance on workplace-based learning can constrain participation, particularly for smaller and regional employers.[59] Stakeholder feedback highlights that regional employers face additional barriers, including fewer training providers, limited delivery options and greater difficulty releasing staff for training. Beyond access, stakeholders report that short conflict management courses do not deliver the depth of learning outcomes required to address complex workplace challenges. This reinforces the need for training that reflects real workplace scenarios and builds practical capability, rather than training undertaken primarily for compliance purposes.

Training relevance is also influencing how retailers build workforce capability. Stakeholders report that existing training does not always address the combinations of digital and technological skills, people leadership, time management, creativity and rapid decision-making capabilities required in modern retail. In response, some large retailers are developing internal training programs and academies that allow learning to respond quickly to business needs. However, skills developed through employer-specific programs may not always be formally recognised or readily transferable between employers. This highlights, and ARC's submission on AI reinforces,[60] the need for short, targeted and flexible workplace learning that complements nationally recognised training and supports the development and recognition of transferable skills.

Together, these findings point to a growing need to align retail workforce development with changing capability requirements and improve access across businesses and locations. This includes ensuring qualifications remain relevant to evolving retail roles, while recognising the role of flexible delivery, targeted skill sets and clearer career pathways. Employer-led academies, short-form training and other workplace learning should complement, rather than displace, nationally recognised training and support the recognition and portability of workers skills where possible. These approaches can support workers to build transferable skills and progress into more experienced roles, while helping retailers maintain the capability needed to adapt to changing technology, customer expectations and business models.

57 Deloitte Access Economics, *The Business Return on Learning and Development*, March 2022.
58 CEDA, *Australia losing out on wage, productivity gains as workplace training declines*, November 2024.
59 SaCSA Data Dashboard, *Employment by Working Arrangements*, 2026.
60 ARC, *Submission to the Joint Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence*, September 2026.



SaCSA's projects and activities

The following SaCSA projects and activities are designed to investigate and respond to key workforce and skills issues identified in this section:

- Retail Customer Aggression Implications (completed)
- Retail Qualification Continuum Review and Update
- Review and Update of Community Pharmacy Qualifications
- Customer Aggression: Designing Learning Resources to Support Service Industries
- Explore the Drivers of Shortages for Community Pharmacy Workforce
- Service Skills Portability & Pathways (Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Level 2)
- VET Workforce Project
- Scoping Service Sector Futures: Career Journey Mapping
- Report: The Impact of AI, Automation and Robotics on our Industries
- Early Career Mobility Analysis and Dashboard.

Strategic opportunities for the retail sector

The following strategic opportunities highlight areas where further consideration or action could help address the workforce and skills issues identified in this Workforce Plan:

- Support the implementation, promotion and monitoring of updated retail qualifications and new skill sets, and help employers and workers understand how these products can support evolving capability needs, career progression, upskilling, reskilling and workforce retention.
- Identify where AI, automation, robotics and technology-driven task changes are creating specific gaps in existing retail qualifications, skill sets or employer training, as retail roles evolve as businesses move further into omni-channel retailing.
- Explore opportunities for modular skill sets, short-form training and blended delivery approaches that allow SMEs, regional employers and workers in part-time or casual roles to access development.
- Consider deepening our analysis of declining regional participation in retail training, including the influence of training availability, delivery models, demand and employers' capacity to support training.
- Consider how transferable skills developed through employer-led training could be better recognised across the sector.
- Consider deepening our analysis of how retail leadership development can improve productivity, while also attracting and supporting diverse groups to progress into supervisory and management roles.
- Examine the need to modernise visual merchandising and merchandise management training products, reflecting industry feedback that existing content is not keeping pace with digitisation and contemporary retail practice.



Workforce attraction and retention

Retail remains an important entry point into employment, but converting entry-level work into longer-term careers remains a challenge. Employer feedback reinforces that unclear progression, workplace experience and perceptions of retail as temporary work can all affect attraction and retention. These pressures are being amplified by demographic change, relatively low pay in some roles, customer aggression and broader workplace safety concerns. Together, these factors influence whether workers choose to enter, remain and progress within retail.

Retail's reliance on younger workers makes it particularly exposed to increasing competition for this workforce, especially in regional areas where employers draw from smaller labour pools.[61] Regional employers report particular difficulty competing with industries that offer higher wages and more established career pathways. This is reflected in a 2026 wage comparison: average wages in aged care and disability support are around 30% higher than in retail, highlighting the competitive challenge for regional retailers seeking to attract and retain workers.[62]

At the same time, flexible work arrangements may provide opportunities to broaden workforce participation, including among mature-age workers and people re-entering the workforce.

Career progression remains a key retention challenge across retail. Industry feedback indicates that, in small and medium sized retailers, limited visibility of progression from frontline work into specialist, supervisory and management roles can make it harder to retain workers and build an experienced leadership pipeline. Leadership and middle management are particular pressure points. Experienced leaders are difficult to retain in some parts of the sector and younger workers sometimes progress too quickly into supervisory positions with limited preparation or support. This can weaken retention at both supervisory and frontline levels and reduce the pipeline of experienced workers progressing through the sector.

These pressures are also reflected in SaCSA's early career retention analysis (Table 5), which tracks the proportion of new workers who remain in the same occupation over 4 years. Retention rates across the 5 selected occupations ranged between 40% and 58% over the 4-year period. The relatively low 4-year retention of retail supervisors (39.7%) and retail managers (47.1%) also reinforces the challenge of sustaining experienced leadership capability across the sector.

Table 5: Early career retention across selected retail occupations

Occupation	Number of new workers	Year 2 retention	Year 3 retention	Year 4 retention
Sales assistant (general)	160,300	72.7%	55.5%	41.6%
Retail manager (general)	38,400	77.8%	60.3%	47.1%
Sales and marketing manager	37,600	79.6%	67.0%	58.1%
Community pharmacy sales assistant	14,120	77.8%	59.2%	42.9%
Retail supervisor	9,890	72.8%	53.5%	39.7%

Source: SaCSA Early Career Mobility project

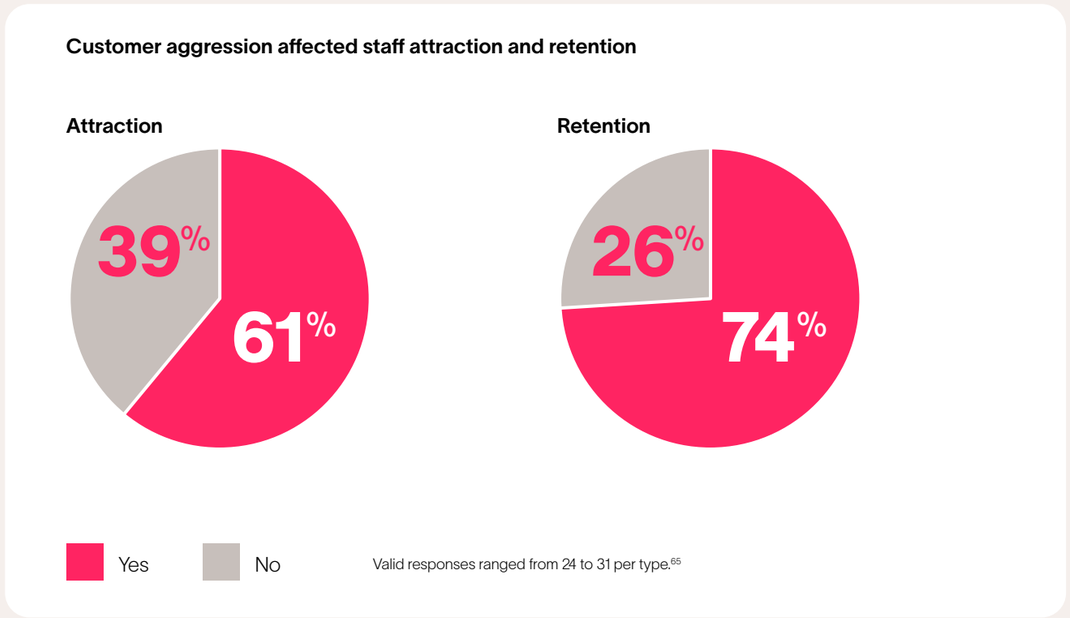
Note: For this analysis, 'new workers' are individuals employed in a given occupation in 2018 or 2019 who had no recorded employment in that same occupation during the preceding 8 financial years.

Working conditions and employee wellbeing are significant retention challenges for the retail workforce. Seventy-two per cent of surveyed retail workers reported burnout and 58% reported very low wellbeing. Inadequate staffing, excessive workloads, low supervisor support and customer aggression were among the key psychosocial hazards identified.[63] SaCSA's Customer Aggression in Retail report further found that 61% of businesses said customer aggression made attraction more difficult, while 74% of businesses reported that aggression contributed to retention challenges (Figure 3).[64]

These findings align with employer feedback and reinforce that job quality, including safe workplaces, adequate staffing, manageable workloads and supportive supervision, is central to retail attraction and retention, with training employees to prevent, respond to and manage customer aggression forming part of a broader approach focused on preventing and minimising risks through workplace controls.

61 ABS, *Labour Force Survey*, February 2026 (4-quarter average).
62 Fair Work Ombudsman, *Retail Industry Award; Aged Care Award; Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award.*
63 Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees Association (SDA), *Under Pressure: The Hidden Cost of Retail*, August 2025.
64 SaCSA, *Customer Aggression in Retail: Understanding the Nature, Drivers and Impacts on Australia's Retail Workforce*, April 2026.

Figure 3: Proportion of businesses reporting that customer aggression affected staff attraction and retention



Source: SaCSA's 2025 Customer Aggression Survey

Broadening workforce participation represents an important opportunity for retail as competition for labour increases. In 2021, 56% of First Nations peoples aged 25–64 were employed, compared with 78% of non-Indigenous Australians.[66] People with disability remain underrepresented in the labour market, with a participation rate of 60.5% in 2022 compared with 84.9% for people without disability.[67] Neurodiverse cohorts also remain underrepresented in employment. JobAccess notes that neurodivergent job seekers continue to face significant barriers where workplaces are not designed or adjusted to support different needs.[68] For retail, reducing barriers to employment and progression could help broaden the available labour pool and support longer-term workforce supply.

Cultural diversity also represents a significant opportunity. Around 31% of the retail workforce was born overseas in 2026,[69] bringing diverse language, cultural and customer service capabilities. However, they were identified as some of the most vulnerable cohorts for workplace exploitation. The retail trade is among the top 3 industries recording migrant-worker disputes with the Fair Work Ombudsman.[70] Industry bodies with broad representation across the franchise sector also indicate that many new franchise owners are migrants or relatively new to Australia and may require additional support with customer aggression and the challenging retail business environment more generally. This can be particularly important where franchise businesses employ younger and first-job workers. This creates an additional workforce challenge for retail, as poor employment experiences can reduce participation, retention and the sector's ability to attract workers from an increasingly diverse labour market.

Sustaining retail's workforce supply will require greater focus on retaining experience, strengthening career and leadership pathways. Improving how retail careers are perceived must also be matched by the quality of employment that workers experience.

65 SaCSA, *Customer Aggression Survey 2025,* April.
66 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), *Closing the Gap targets: key findings and implications*, March 2025.
67 ABS, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings 2022*, 2024.
68 Job Access, *How to support a neurodivergent workforce*, 2025.
69 SaCSA Data Dashboard, *People born Overseas*, 2026.
70 Fair Work Ombudsman, *Annual Report 2022-23*, September 2023.

SaCSA's projects and activities

The following SaCSA projects and activities are designed to investigate and respond to key workforce and skills issues identified in this section:

- Retail Customer Aggression Implications (completed)
- Customer Aggression: Designing Learning Resources to Support Service Industries
- Scoping Service Sector Futures: Career Journey Mapping
- Explore the Drivers of Shortages for Community Pharmacy Workforce
- Early Career Mobility Analysis and Dashboard.

Strategic opportunities for the retail sector

The following strategic opportunities highlight areas where further consideration or action could help address the workforce and skills issues identified in this Workforce Plan:

- Build on the findings from the Customer Aggression in Retail report to explore the development of a best-practice scorecard or similar resource to support retailers.
- Explore opportunities to support industry partners to reposition retail as a skilled career and improve recognition of skills, judgement and the contribution of retail workers.
- Explore opportunities to strengthen early career pathways in retail, particularly for younger workers, by helping new entrants build the workplace experience and transferable skills needed to progress into longer-term roles.
- Further investigation of the barriers and enabling factors affecting participation and progression for First Nations peoples, neurodiverse cohorts, people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and mature-age workers.



Changing faces of retail

Retail encompasses an increasingly diverse range of operating models, including omni-channel, marketplace, franchise, resale and high-volume retail. These models involve different combinations of customer service, fulfilment, digital and operational work, creating varied workforce structures, roles and capability needs across the sector.

Changing consumer behaviour is a major driver of this shift. Australia Post reported that total online spending in Australia reached $82.6 billion in 2025, accounting for 24% of total retail spending, while online marketplaces alone attracted $18.9 billion in spending.[71] At the same time, physical retail remains important, but the role of stores is changing. KPMG's *Australian Retail Outlook 2026* highlights that customers increasingly expect seamless movement between online and in-store channels, while human connection and distinctive in-store experience remain important.[72]

This is changing the mix of work and responsibilities across fulfilment, customer service and store operations, while increasing the importance of product knowledge, communication and personalised service in frontline roles.

Other retail models are also changing workforce requirements. Resale, repair and circular retail models can require capability in areas such as product assessment, repair and sustainable product practices, while wholesale and high-volume retail models place greater emphasis on inventory, logistics and operational capability.
As previously highlighted, digital ordering, automation and changing supply chain practices are also reshaping some of these roles. The key workforce implication is that skills and role requirements are becoming more specialised and increasingly dependent on the operating model of the business.

SaCSA's projects and activities

The following SaCSA projects and activities are designed to investigate and respond to key workforce and skills issues identified in this section:

- Retail Qualification Continuum Review and Update
- Report: The Impact of AI, Automation and Robotics on our Industries.

Strategic opportunities for the retail sector

The following strategic opportunities highlight areas where further consideration or action could help address the workforce and skills issues identified in this Workforce Plan:

- Compare workforce needs across large, highly automated retailers and independent, franchise and specialist SMEs to identify differences in roles, skills and progression pathways.
- Consider the workforce implications of growing resale, repair and circular retail models, including emerging capability needs in product assessment, repair and sustainable retail practices.
- Explore how high volume, wholesale and membership-based retail models are changing the mix of operational, inventory, logistics and customer service capabilities required across the workforce.
- Explore retail employment and progression pathways in regional and remote Australia, where retail remains an important source of employment.

71 Australia Post, *Australia Post eCommerce Report*, 2026.
72 KPMG, *Australian Retail Outlook*, 2026.

Varying conditions and operating pressures

Retailers differ considerably in their capacity to respond to workforce change. Business size, financial capacity, location and regulatory requirements influence their ability to invest in workers, training and new technology.

Current cost and demand pressures amplify these differences. Industry feedback identifies tight margins, limited funding and access to digital capability as barriers to workforce investment, particularly for smaller retailers. ARC similarly reported that fuel and supply chain pressures were affecting margins, staffing and business viability, especially for smaller retailers who have less capability to absorb rising costs.[73] These pressures build on longer-standing differences in business conditions. The Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) found that business conditions and confidence remained weaker for small businesses than for large businesses in 2025, and small retailers had experienced more subdued sales growth than large retailers since late 2022.[74] The RBA also reported that around one in 5 SMEs had experienced challenges when seeking finance, despite some improvement in financing conditions. For smaller retailers, these conditions can limit the resources available for workforce development, additional staffing, technology adoption and specialist capability while immediate operating pressures are managed.

Regulatory variation creates another layer of complexity, particularly in more regulated retail subsectors. Community pharmacy provides a clear example. Pharmacist scope of practice is expanding across Australia, but authorised services and implementation arrangements continue to vary between states and territories. The Pharmacy Guild of Australia's scope-of-practice information, updated on 12 May 2026, outlines different combinations of permanent and planned services across jurisdictions, and Pharmaceutical Society of Australia guidance provides further details on the national and jurisdiction-specific legislation, regulation and professional requirements.[75, 76] As community pharmacies expand their role in primary health care, stakeholder feedback indicates that responsibilities are also expanding across the community pharmacy support roles. Pharmacy sales assistants and pharmacy technicians are taking on greater administrative, customer-facing and technical support responsibilities, increasing the need for stronger product knowledge, and communication and coordination skills. These changes can affect workforce planning, training and workflows, while jurisdictional differences add further complexity for businesses operating across multiple states and territories.

Location can further shape the conditions in which businesses operate. Broader evidence from the Regional Australia Institute identifies significant variation in economic conditions across regional Australia. Some communities face infrastructure gaps, limited access to capital, housing constraints and reduced access to skills and support networks.[77] While these challenges are not unique to retail, they can affect retailers' ability to attract workers, invest in workforce capability and expand operations. As a result, otherwise similar retail businesses can face very different workforce constraints depending on their location.

Sustainability expectations are also influencing capability requirements in parts of retail. KPMG's Australian Retail Outlook 2026 found that nearly half of Australians (48%) were likely or very likely to support retailers actively pursuing sustainability initiatives. At the same time, 47% indicated they would seek to balance sustainability with affordability as prices rise, while 39% would prioritise cost over sustainability.[78] For the workforce, these changes can broaden capability requirements across both operational and customer-facing roles. Workers may increasingly require knowledge of products, sourcing, waste and re-use practices, alongside the communication skills needed to explain these practices to customers. How these capabilities are developed is likely to vary by business size, model and type. Larger organisations are more able to establish specialist functions and smaller retailers are more likely to incorporate additional responsibilities into existing roles.

SaCSA's projects and activities

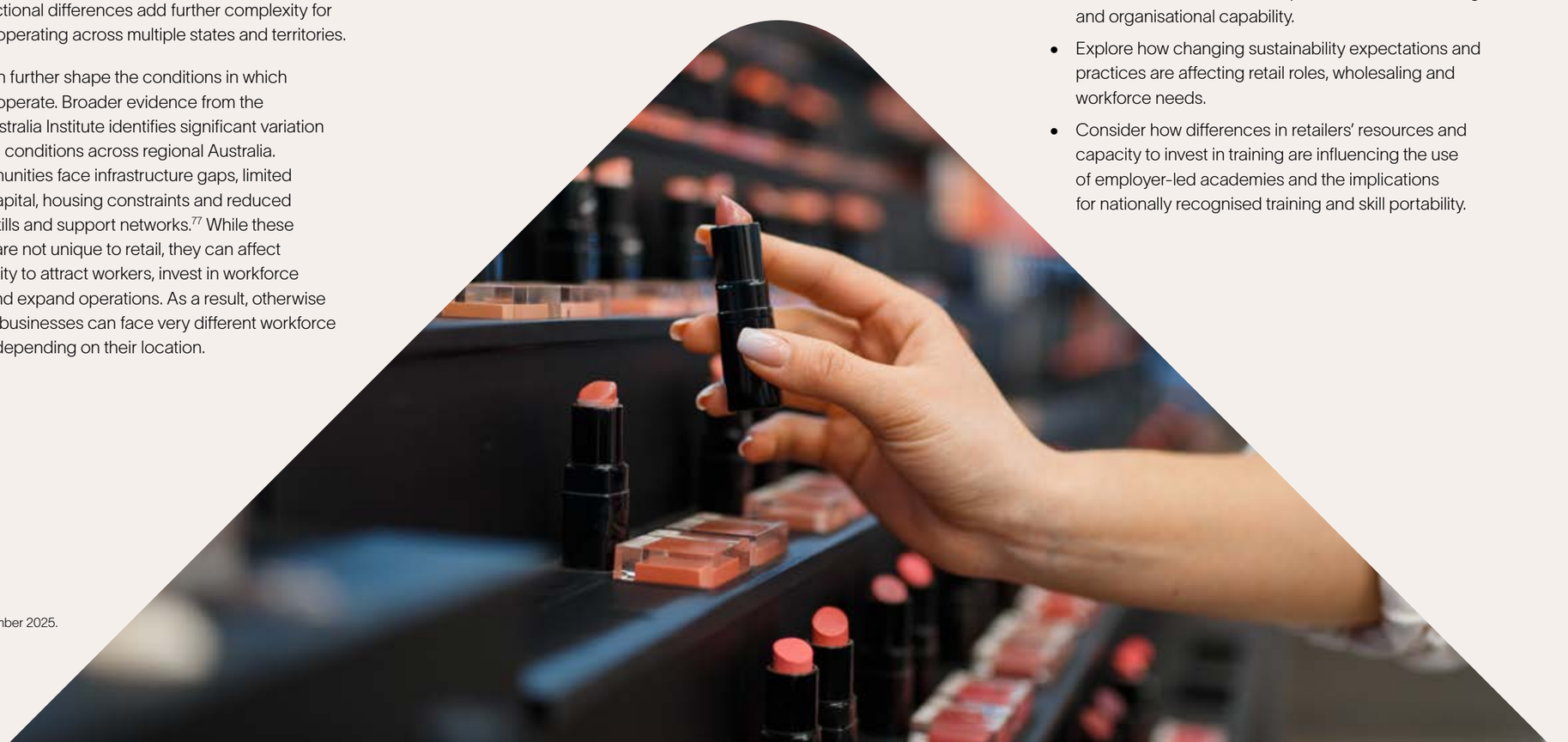
The following SaCSA projects and activities are designed to investigate and respond to key workforce and skills issues identified in this section:

- Explore the Drivers of Shortages for Community Pharmacy Workforce
- Review and Update of Community Pharmacy Qualifications
- Retail Qualification Continuum Review and Update.

Strategic opportunities for the retail sector

The following strategic opportunities highlight areas where further consideration or action could help address the workforce and skills issues identified in this Workforce Plan:

- Consider further analysis of how operating, financial and regional conditions influence retailers' capacity to invest in workforce development, additional staffing and organisational capability.
- Explore how changing sustainability expectations and practices are affecting retail roles, wholesaling and workforce needs.
- Consider how differences in retailers' resources and capacity to invest in training are influencing the use of employer-led academies and the implications for nationally recognised training and skill portability.



73 ARC, *ABS confirms rising pressure on retailers as ARC calls for practical relief*, May 2026.
74 RBA, *Small Business Economic and Financial Conditions*, October 2025.
75 The Pharmacy Guild of Australia, *Scope of Practice of Community Pharmacists in Australia*, September 2025.
76 Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA), *Expanded Scope of Practice*, 2026.
77 Regional Australia Institute, *Regional Productivity Solution*, August 2026.
78 KPMG, *Australian Retail Outlook*, 2026.

From evidence to action

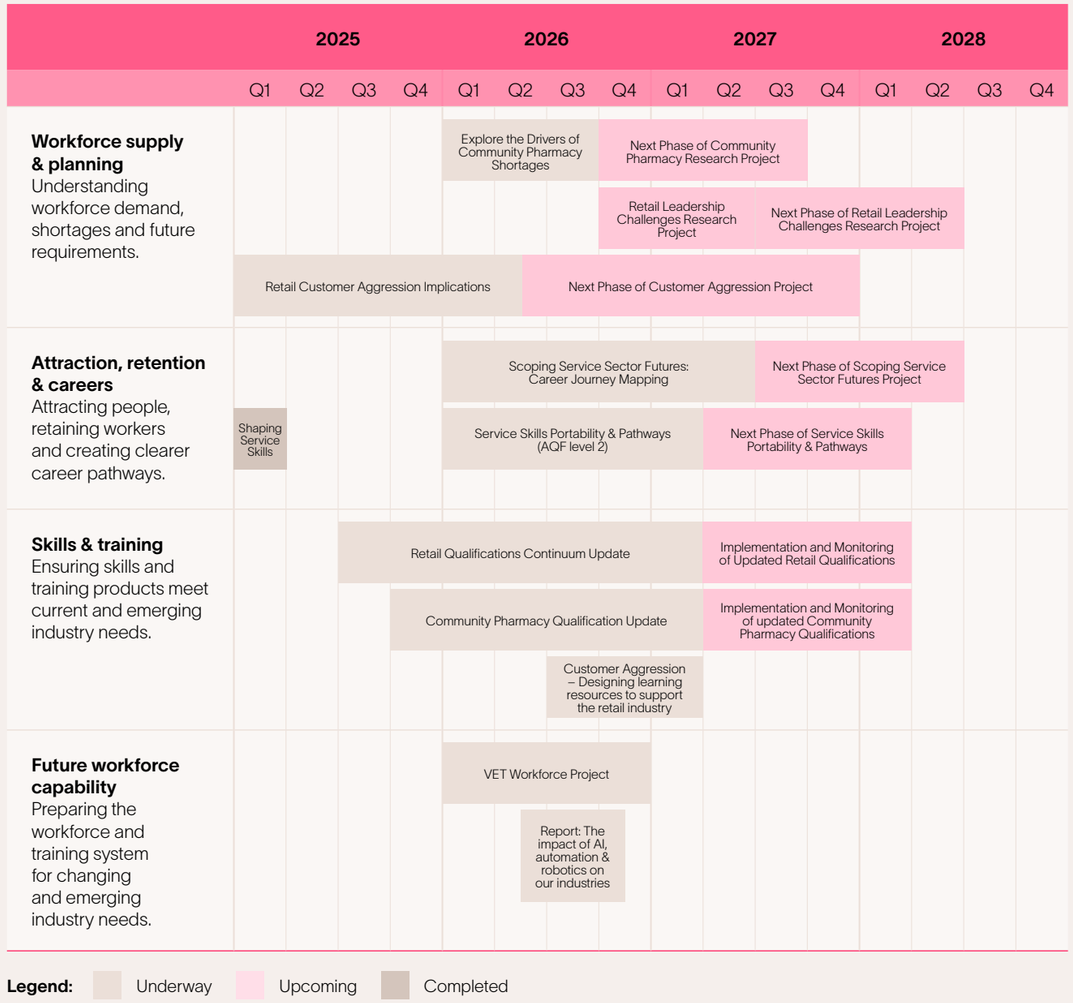
SaCSA's Retail Work Plan (Figure 4) sets out how SaCSA is responding to the workforce challenges, priorities and opportunities identified through our research, data analysis and industry engagement.

It brings together the key projects and activities underway and planned across the life of this Workforce Plan, showing how our work will contribute to addressing current workforce needs while preparing for emerging and longer-term challenges.

The Work Plan is organised around 4 areas of focus: workforce supply and planning; attraction, retention and careers; skills and training; and future workforce capability. Together, these activities demonstrate how the evidence and stakeholder insights presented throughout this Workforce Plan translate into practical action.

The Retail Work Plan will evolve as industry needs change, new evidence emerges and projects progress. It will be reviewed regularly to ensure SaCSA's work remains responsive to industry priorities and continues to address the workforce challenges identified in this workforce plan.

Figure 4: Retail work plan



SaCSA's projects and activities

This section provides further detail about the projects and activities SaCSA is undertaking in response to the workforce priorities and challenges identified in this Workforce Plan. They reflect our ongoing work with industry to build the evidence base, address workforce and skills needs, and support longer-term workforce development.

Projects are grouped as **active**, **planned** or **completed**. They provide a snapshot of SaCSA's current and recent work and a short overview of the purpose and focus of each project. SaCSA's program of work will continue to evolve as projects progress, new evidence emerges and industry priorities change.

Active

Project title	Project description	Relevant issues being addressed	Project details
Customer Aggression: Designing Learning Resources to Support Service Industries	SaCSA is developing a suite of learning resources to support the delivery of 4 new customer aggression units of competency spanning Certificate II through to Diploma level. The resources will support Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to equip learners across the service industries with the knowledge and skills to prevent, respond to and manage customer aggression in the workplace.	Evolving skills and training needs; workforce attraction and retention	Click to view project details
Early Career Mobility Analysis	SaCSA is using linked ABS data to track how people move from education and training into employment and progress through their early careers across its sectors, including retail. The findings help address evidence gaps around career pathways, progression and retention, and underpin SaCSA's Early Career Mobility Dashboard, an interactive dashboard that will be launched in 2026 to help industry explore the findings and support career guidance, workforce planning and training initiatives.	Evolving skills and training needs; workforce attraction and retention	Click to view project details
Explore the Drivers of Shortages for Community Pharmacy Workforce	SaCSA is examining the drivers of persistent workforce shortages across community pharmacy using qualitative and quantitative analysis. The project is in the final stages of report development. The findings are planned for public release. The research will inform future workforce planning, training design and policy priorities.	Evolving skills and training needs; workforce attraction and retention; varying conditions and operating pressures	Click to view project details
Report: The Impact of AI, Automation and Robotics on our Industries	SaCSA is examining the current and potential future impacts of AI, automation and robotics across its industries. The project will provide an understanding of the challenges and opportunities posed by technological advancements.	Evolving skills and training needs; changing faces of retail	
Retail Qualification Continuum Review and Update	SaCSA is reviewing and updating SIR20216 Certificate II in Retail Services, SIR30216 Certificate III in Retail, SIR30316 Certificate III in Business-to-Business Sales, SIR40316 Certificate IV in Retail Management and SIR50116 Diploma of Retail Leadership. The review aligns these retail qualifications with current industry practice and creates a streamlined approach to foundational practical skills to support graduate job readiness.	Evolving skills and training needs; changing faces of retail; varying conditions and operating pressures	Click to view project details

Project title	Project description	Relevant issues being addressed	Project details
Review and Update of Community Pharmacy Qualifications	SaCSA is reviewing and updating SIR30116 Certificate III in Community Pharmacy, SIR40116 Certificate IV in Community Pharmacy and SIR40216 Certificate IV in Community Pharmacy Dispensary, taking into account the regulatory landscape, including current government programs and pilots. The review ensures the qualifications are aligned with contemporary industry practice, regulatory requirements and evolving workforce capability needs.	Evolving skills and training needs; varying conditions and operating pressures	Click to view project details
Scoping Service Sector Futures: Career Journey Mapping	SaCSA is mapping how workers enter, progress through and leave careers across its service sectors, including retail. It will identify key career transitions and progression and exit points, examine how qualifications support career mobility, and explore the barriers and enablers affecting specific career stages.	Evolving skills and training needs; workforce attraction and retention	Click to view project details
Service Skills Portability & Pathways (AQF Level 2)	Building on SaCSA's *Shaping Service Skills* project, this project will develop a conceptual Certificate II framework that recognises shared foundation skills across service industries. It aims to support movement between industries, recognition of existing skills and access to new opportunities. Work to date has included research into existing Certificate II qualifications and a review of training products to identify common skills, duplication and industry-specific requirements. SaCSA has also consulted with industry, training providers, schools and VET stakeholders. Consultation has tested views on transferable skills, entry-level capability, industry identity and learner pathways. Findings are now being consolidated to refine the framework and inform final recommendations.	Evolving skills and training needs	Click to view project details
VET Workforce Project	As part of a national program aligned with the Australian Government's VET Workforce Blueprint, SaCSA examined key challenges affecting the VET workforce, and opportunities to strengthen pathways into teaching, training and assessment roles. The work supported the broader aim of building a strong, sustainable VET workforce capable of meeting industry skills and training needs.	Evolving skills and training needs	Click to view project details

Planned

Project title	Project description	Relevant issues being addressed
Explore the Drivers of Shortages for Retail Leaders	To better understand the ongoing occupational shortages in the retail workforce, specifically in leadership and management roles, SaCSA is undertaking a research project that includes qualitative and quantitative analysis. This analysis will inform evidence-based approaches to the overall business sustainability in the retail industry. The project will support future workforce planning, training design and policy development by aligning insights with employer needs and sector priorities, and guide the identification of priority areas for future initiatives and projects.	Evolving skills and training needs, workforce attraction and retention
Next Phase of Customer Aggression Projects	SaCSA is consolidating findings and recommendations from its customer aggression research and industry roundtable to identify practical next steps within its remit. This work will help inform future workforce, skills, training and industry responses to customer aggression in retail.	Evolving skills and training needs; workforce attraction and retention; varying conditions and operation pressures

Completed

Project title	Project description	Relevant issues being addressed	Project details
Retail Customer Aggression Implications	The *Customer Aggression in Retail* report was launched in April 2026 alongside an industry roundtable to discuss the findings and potential responses. It examined the nature, drivers and impacts of customer aggression across the retail sector. It identified 5 key root causes and provided recommendations.	Evolving skills and training needs; workforce attraction and retention	Click to view project details

Looking ahead in retail

Australia's retail sector is expected to continue growing over the coming decade, but meeting future workforce needs will require more than maintaining workforce numbers. The evidence in this Workforce Plan points to a broader challenge: retaining experience, strengthening career pathways and ensuring workers and businesses can build the capabilities needed as retail work continues to change.

Retention and progression will be particularly important. Retail remains a major entry point into employment, but relatively low early career retention across several occupations means that attracting workers does not always translate into a sustained pool of experienced staff. This is particularly important in supervisory and management roles, where industry continues to report challenges developing and retaining experienced leaders. Clearer pathways from frontline work into specialist, supervisory and management roles could help strengthen retention and build the sector's future leadership capability.

The future training pipeline will also require attention. Retail VET enrolments have fallen to their lowest level in a decade, while traineeship and school-based apprenticeship commencements declined sharply in 2025. At the same time, employers continue to place a strong premium on prior experience, and industry has raised concerns about the relevance, accessibility and flexibility of some formal training. Strengthening the connections between school-based learning, recognised training, workplace development and employment will therefore be important to supporting both entry and progression.

Technology will add another dimension to workforce change. AI, automation, robotics and digital systems are reshaping tasks across frontline, operational, supply chain and management roles, although the pace and scale of adoption will differ considerably across the sector. Larger retailers may increasingly adopt advanced automation and integrated systems, while smaller and independent businesses may rely more heavily on customer service, local knowledge and human-centred capability. Workforce and training responses will need to support digital and AI capability while continuing to build judgement, problem-solving, and communication and leadership skills.

The diversity of retail will also require different responses. Workforce needs vary across large omni-channel retailers, community pharmacies, independent and franchise businesses, wholesale operations and regional employers. Business size, location, operating margins, regulation and access to training all influence employers' capacity to recruit, develop and retain workers. This reinforces the need for workforce responses that reflect different operating environments rather than relying on a single sector-wide approach.

SaCSA will continue to translate this evidence into practical responses through workforce research, qualification reviews, career pathway development and targeted initiatives across retail and community pharmacy. Ongoing collaboration with industry, governments, unions, training providers and other stakeholders will remain important to ensure workforce and training responses keep pace with changing technology, business models and operating conditions.

The longer-term opportunity is to strengthen entry and progression pathways, improve employers' capacity to retain and develop experienced workers, and equip the retail workforce with the skills and adaptability needed to respond to changing customer expectations, technology and business conditions.

Appendix A

Defining the scope of the retail sector

SaCSA's remit covers a set of industries and occupations. These are defined using 2 national classification frameworks: ANZSIC, the classification framework for industries, and OSCA, the classification framework for occupations and jobs. Table A1 lists SaCSA's remit in terms of industries (ANZSIC), and Table A2 lists SaCSA's remit in terms of occupations (OSCA).

Table A1: SaCSA's retail industries (ANZSIC)

1-digit ANZSIC division	2-digit ANZSIC subdivision	3-digit ANZSIC group	4-digit ANZSIC class
F – Wholesale trade			F000 Wholesale trade, nfd
	33 Basic material wholesaling	330 Basic material wholesaling, nfd	3300 Basic material wholesaling, nfd
		331 Agricultural product wholesaling	3310 Agricultural product wholesaling, nfd 3311 Wool wholesaling 3312 Cereal grain wholesaling 3319 Other agricultural product wholesaling
		332 Mineral, metal and chemical wholesaling	3320 Mineral, metal and chemical wholesaling, nfd 3321 Petroleum product wholesaling 3322 Metal and mineral wholesaling 3323 Industrial and agricultural chemical product wholesaling
		333 Timber and hardware goods wholesaling	3330 Timber and hardware goods wholesaling, nfd 3331 Timber wholesaling 3332 Plumbing goods wholesaling 3333 Other hardware goods wholesaling
	34 Machinery and equipment wholesaling	340 Machinery and equipment wholesaling, nfd	3400 Machinery and equipment wholesaling, nfd
		341 Specialised industrial machinery and equipment wholesaling	3410 Specialised industrial machinery and equipment wholesaling, nfd 3411 Agricultural and construction machinery wholesaling 3419 Other specialised industrial machinery and equipment wholesaling
		349 Other machinery and equipment wholesaling	3490 Other machinery and equipment wholesaling, nfd 3491 Professional and scientific goods wholesaling 3492 Computer and computer peripheral wholesaling 3493 Telecommunication goods wholesaling 3494 Other electrical and electronic goods wholesaling 3499 Other machinery and equipment wholesaling nec
	36 Grocery, liquor and tobacco product wholesaling	360 Grocery, liquor and tobacco product wholesaling	3600 Grocery, liquor and tobacco product wholesaling, nfd 3601 General line grocery wholesaling 3602 Meat, poultry and smallgoods wholesaling 3603 Dairy produce wholesaling 3604 Fish and seafood wholesaling 3605 Fruit and vegetable wholesaling 3606 Liquor and tobacco product wholesaling 3609 Other grocery wholesaling
	37 Other goods wholesaling	370 Other goods wholesaling, nfd	3700 Other goods wholesaling, nfd
		371 Textile, clothing and footwear wholesaling	3711 Textile product wholesaling 3712 Clothing and footwear wholesaling
		372 Pharmaceutical and toiletry goods wholesaling	3720 Pharmaceutical and toiletry goods wholesaling
		373 Furniture, floor covering and other goods wholesaling	3730 Furniture, floor covering and other goods wholesaling, nfd 3731 Furniture and floor covering wholesaling 3732 Jewellery and watch wholesaling 3733 Kitchen and diningware wholesaling 3734 Toy and sporting goods wholesaling 3735 Book and magazine wholesaling 3736 Paper product wholesaling 3739 Other goods wholesaling nec
	38 Commission-based wholesaling	380 Commission-based wholesaling	3800 Commission-based wholesaling

1-digit ANZSIC division	2-digit ANZSIC subdivision	3-digit ANZSIC group	4-digit ANZSIC class
G – Retail trade			G000 Retail trade, nfd
	40 Fuel retailing	400 Fuel retailing	4000 Fuel retailing
	41 Food retailing	410 Food retailing, nfd	4100 Food retailing, nfd
		411 Supermarket and grocery stores	4110 Supermarket and grocery stores
		412 Specialised food retailing	4120 Specialised food retailing, nfd 4121 Fresh meat, fish and poultry retailing 4122 Fruit and vegetable retailing 4123 Liquor retailing 4129 Other specialised food retailing
	42 Other store-based retailing	420 Other store-based retailing, nfd	4200 Other store-based retailing, nfd
		421 Furniture, floor coverings, houseware and textile goods retailing	4210 Furniture, floor coverings, houseware and textile goods retailing, nfd 4211 Furniture retailing 4212 Floor coverings retailing 4213 Houseware retailing 4214 Manchester and other textile goods retailing
		422 Electrical and electronic goods retailing	4220 Electrical and electronic goods retailing, nfd 4221 Electrical, electronic and gas appliance retailing 4222 Computer and computer peripheral retailing 4229 Other electrical and electronic goods retailing
		423 Hardware, building and garden supplies retailing	4230 Hardware, building and garden supplies retailing, nfd 4231 Hardware and building supplies retailing 4232 Garden supplies retailing
		424 Recreational goods retailing	4240 Recreational goods retailing, nfd 4241 Sport and camping equipment retailing 4242 Entertainment media retailing 4243 Toy and game retailing 4244 Newspaper and book retailing 4245 Marine equipment retailing
		425 Clothing, footwear and personal accessory retailing	4250 Clothing, footwear and personal accessory retailing, nfd 4251 Clothing retailing 4252 Footwear retailing 4253 Watch and jewellery retailing 4259 Other personal accessory retailing
		426 Department stores	4260 Department stores
		427 Pharmaceutical and other store-based retailing	4270 Pharmaceutical and other store-based retailing, nfd 4271 Pharmaceutical, cosmetic and toiletry goods retailing 4272 Stationery goods retailing 4273 Antique and used goods retailing 4274 Flower retailing 4279 Other store-based retailing nec
	43 Non-store retailing and retail commission-based buying and/or selling	430 Non-store retailing and retail commission-based buying and/or selling, nfd	4300 Non-store retailing and retail commission-based buying and/or selling, nfd
		431 Non-store retailing	4310 Non-store retailing
		432 Retail commission-based buying and/or selling	4320 Retail commission-based buying and/or selling

Note: nfd (not further defined) refers to occupation categories used when the ABS cannot precisely classify an industry at a given level. Instead, a broader industry group code is created.

Table A2: SaCSA's retail occupations (OSCA)

6-digit OSCA code	Title	Is this occupation directly linked to a SIR – retail services qualification?
112133	Sales and marketing manager	Part of general retail sector remit
133131	Importer or exporter	Part of general retail sector remit
133132	Wholesaler	Part of general retail sector remit
162131	Retail manager (general)	SIR-linked
162132	Antique dealer	Part of general retail sector remit
221633	Sales representative (industrial products)	Part of general retail sector remit
221634	Sales representative (medical and pharmaceutical products)	Part of general retail sector remit
221699	Technical sales representatives nec	Part of general retail sector remit
263431	Community pharmacist	Part of general retail sector remit
311331	Pharmacy technician	SIR-linked
452236	Retail loss prevention officer	Part of general retail sector remit
571231	Order clerk	Part of general retail sector remit
571431	Stock clerk	Part of general retail sector remit
599999	Clerical and administrative workers nec	Part of general retail sector remit
611131	Checkout operator	Part of general retail sector remit
619133	Sales demonstrator	Part of general retail sector remit
619135	Visual merchandiser	SIR-linked
619935	Retail buyer	Part of general retail sector remit
619999	Sales support workers nec	Part of general retail sector remit
621231	Sales representative (building and plumbing supplies)	SIR-linked
621232	Sales representative (business services)	SIR-linked
621234	Sales representative (personal and household goods)	SIR-linked
621299	Sales representatives nec	SIR-linked
631131	Sales assistant (general)	SIR-linked
631231	Community pharmacy sales assistant	SIR-linked
631331	ICT sales assistant	Part of general retail sector remit
631531	Retail supervisor	SIR-linked
631931	Door-to-door salesperson	Part of general retail sector remit
631934	Street vendor	Part of general retail sector remit
631999	Sales assistants and salespersons nec	Part of general retail sector remit
891231	Shelf filler	Part of general retail sector remit
899941	Vending machine attendant	Part of general retail sector remit
899938	Trolley collector	Part of general retail sector remit

Note: nec (not elsewhere classified) refers to occupation categories used by the ABS for occupations that can be identified but are too small or uncommon to have their own dedicated classification. These smaller occupations are combined into a single category.

Appendix B

SIR qualifications Gen AI exposure

Table A3: SIR – retail services training package qualifications AI exposure

Program ID	Program title	Augmentation exposure	Automation exposure
SIR10116	Certificate I in Retail Services	0.56	0.31
SIR20216	Certificate II in Retail Services	0.58	0.35
SIR30116	Certificate III in Community Pharmacy	0.64	0.44
SIR30216	Certificate III in Retail	0.61	0.38
SIR30316	Certificate III in Business-to-Business Sales	0.68	0.52
SIR40216	Certificate IV in Community Pharmacy Dispensary	0.68	0.36
SIR40316	Certificate IV in Retail Management	0.69	0.47
SIR50116	Diploma of Retail Leadership	0.71	0.46
SIR50217	Diploma of Visual Merchandising	0.68	0.39

Source: JSA, Gen AI Capacity Study Interactive Tables (2025), VET table. Exposure measures the potential for tasks to be augmented or automated and does not represent the proportion of jobs expected to disappear.



Appendix C

Reference list

Attorney-General's Department, Government of South Australia. *Workplace Protection Laws*. 2026. https://www.agd.sa.gov.au/law-and-justice/legislation/workplace-protection-laws

Australia Post. *Australia Post eCommerce Report 2026*. 2026. https://auspost.com.au/content/dam/auspost_corp/media/documents/ecommerce-reports/annual-ecommerce-reports/ecommerce-report-2026.pdf

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). *Australian Industry, 2024–25*. 2026. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/industry/industry-overview/australian-industry/latest-release

ABS. *Business Conditions and Sentiments, June 2026*. 2026. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/business-indicators/business-conditions-and-sentiments/jun-2026

ABS *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022*. 2024. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release

ABS. *Job Mobility, February 2026*. 2026. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/jobs/job-mobility/latest-release

ABS. *Job Vacancies, Australia, May 2026*. 2026. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/jobs/job-vacancies-australia/may-2026

ABS. *Jobs in Australia, 2022–23*. 2025. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/jobs/jobs-australia/latest-release

ABS. *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, February 2026*. 2026. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed/feb-2026

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC). *Compliance and Enforcement Priorities*. 2026. https://www.accc.gov.au/about-us/accc-strategy-and-priorities/compliance-and-enforcement-priorities

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). *Closing the Gap Targets: Key Findings and Implications*. 2025. https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/indigenous-australians/closing-the-gap-targets-key-findings-implications/contents/economic-participation

Australian Retail Council (ARC). *ABS Confirms Rising Pressure on Retailers as ARC Calls for Practical Relief*. 2026. https://www.retail.org.au/media/abs-confirms-rising-pressure-on-retailers-as-arc-calls-for-practical-relief

ARC. *Submission to the Joint Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence*. 2026.

Australian Taxation Office (ATO). *Payday Superannuation Announcements*. 2026. https://www.ato.gov.au/about-ato/new-legislation/in-detail/superannuation/payday-superannuation

BDO Australia. *Upskilling the Retail Workforce*. 2025. https://www.bdo.com.au/en-au/insights/retail/upskilling-the-retail-workforce

CNN Business. *Amazon's Cashier-less Technology Was Supposed to Revolutionize Grocery Shopping*. 2024. https://edition.cnn.com/2024/04/03/business/amazons-self-checkout-technology-grocery-flop

Coles Group. Coles *Unveils State-of-the-Art Distribution Centre in Western Sydney*. 2024. https://www.colesgroup.com.au/news/2024/media-releases/?page=coles-unveils-state-of-the-art-distribution--centre-in-western-sydney-

Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA). *Australia Losing Out on Wage, Productivity Gains as Workplace Training Declines*. 2024. https://www.ceda.com.au/news-and-resources/media-releases/workforce-skills/australia-losing-out-on-wage-productivity-gains-as-workplace-training-declines

CX Dive. *Klarna Changes Its AI Tune and Again Recruits Humans for Customer Service*. 2025. https://www.customerexperiencedive.com/news/klarna-reinvests-human-talent-customer-service-AI-chatbot/747586/

Deloitte Access Economics. *The Business Return on Learning and Development*. 2022. https://www.deloitte.com/au/en/services/economics/analysis/business-return-learning-development.html

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR). *Logistics, Warehousing and Transport: Jobs Hub*. 2024. https://www.dewr.gov.au/jobs-hub/logistics-warehousing-and-transport

DEWR. *Retail: Jobs Hub*. 2026. https://www.dewr.gov.au/jobs-hub/retail

Department of Industry, Science and Resources (DISR). *National AI Plan*. 2025. https://www.industry.gov.au/publications/national-ai-plan

Fair Work Commission. *Aged Care Award 2010*. n.d. https://awards.fairwork.gov.au/MA000018.html

Fair Work Commission. *General Retail Industry Award 2020*. n.d. https://awards.fairwork.gov.au/MA000004.html

Fair Work Commission. *Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award 2010*. n.d. https://awards.fairwork.gov.au/MA000100.html

Fair Work Ombudsman. *Annual Report 2022–23*. 2023. https://www.fairwork.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-10/office-of-the-fair-work-ombudsman-annual-report-2022-23.pdf

Fair Work Ombudsman. *Junior Wage Changes to Retail, Fast Food and Pharmacy Awards*. 2026. https://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/workplace-laws/award-changes/major-award-changes/junior-wage-changes-to-retail-fast-food-and-pharmacy-awards

Fair Work Ombudsman. *Minimum Wages Increase from 1 July 2026*. 2026. https://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/workplace-laws/annual-wage-review/annual-wage-review-2026

Inside FMCG. Coles, *Woolworths Refuse to Rule Out Dynamic Pricing*. 2026. https://insidefmcg.com.au/2026/03/05/coles-woolworths-refuse-to-rule-out-dynamic-pricing/

Inside FMCG. *Woolworths Opens Its First-ever Automated Customer Fulfilment Centre*. 2025. https://insidefmcg.com.au/2025/05/20/woolworths-opens-its-first-ever-automated-customer-fulfilment-centre/

iTnews. *Kmart Group to Expand RFID Tagging to More Products and to Target*. 2026. https://www.itnews.com.au/news/kmart-group-to-expand-rfid-tagging-to-more-products-and-to-target-626540

JobAccess. *How to Support a Neurodivergent Workforce*. 2025. https://jobaccess.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2025-10/8271-how-support-neurodivergent.pdf

Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA). *Australia's AI Transition: Jobs, Skills and the Future of Work*. 2025. https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/studies/generative-artificial-intelligence-capacity-study

JSA. *Checkout Operators and Office Cashiers: Occupation and Industry Profiles*. 2026. https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/occupation-and-industry-profiles/occupations/6311-checkout-operators-and-office-cashiers

JSA. *Employment Projections, May 2025 to May 2035*. 2025. https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/employment-projections

JSA. *Internet Vacancy Index (IVI)*. 2026. https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/internet-vacancy-index

JSA. *Our Gen AI Transition: Skills*. 2026. https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/studies/generative-artificial-intelligence-capacity-study/our-gen-ai-transition-skills

JSA. *Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey (REOS), June Quarter 2026*. 2026. https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/recruitment-experiences-and-outlook-survey/spotlight-articles

JSA. *Shelf Fillers: Occupation and Industry Profiles*. 2026. https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/occupation-and-industry-profiles/occupations/8912-shelf-fillers

KPMG. *Australian Retail Outlook 2026*. 2026. https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmgsites/au/pdf/2026/australian-retail-outlook-2026.pdf.coredownload.inline.pdf

Lightcast. *Labour Insights, July 2026*. 2026.

Lightcast. *Time Series Analysis, 2017–2026*. 2026.

Melbourne Institute. *Survey of Consumer Inflationary and Wage Expectations*. n.d. https://tradingeconomics.com/australia/inflation-expectations

National Australia Bank (NAB). *Quarterly Business Survey, Q2 2026*. 2026. https://www.nab.com.au/content/dam/nab/documents/news/2026q2-nab-qtly-business-survey-m3.pdf

New South Wales Government. *Minns Labor Government to Legislate Stronger Protections for Workers*. 2026.

Parliament of Australia. *Treasury Laws Amendment (Tax Reform No. 1) Bill 2026*. 2026. https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r7493

Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA). *Expanded Scope of Practice*. 2026. https://www.psa.org.au/career-and-support/pharmacist-prescribing-training/

Pharmacy Guild of Australia. *Scope of Practice of Community Pharmacists in Australia*. 2025. https://issuu.com/pharmacyguildaus/docs/scope_of_practice_of_community_pharmacists_in_aust

Regional Australia Institute. *Regional Productivity Solutions*. 2026. https://regionalaustralia.org.au/Web/Web/Research-Policy/Research-Paper/Regional_Productivity_Solutions.aspx

Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA). *Frequently Asked Questions: Removal of Card Payment Surcharges from 1 October 2026*. 2026. https://www.rba.gov.au/payments-and-infrastructure/review-of-retail-payments-regulation/2026-03/conclusions-paper/faqs

RBA. *Small Business Economic and Financial Conditions*. 2025. https://www.rba.gov.au/publications/bulletin/2025/oct/small-business-economic-and-financial-conditions.html

RBA. *Statement on Monetary Policy, August 2026*. 2026. https://www.rba.gov.au/publications/smp/2026/aug/

Seppänen, Sami, Juhani Ukko, and Minna Saunila. "Understanding determinants of digital transformation and digitizing management functions in incumbent SMEs." *Digital Business 5*, no. 1 (2025). https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666954425000018

Service and Creative Skills Australia (SaCSA). *Customer Aggression in Retail: Understanding the Nature, Drivers and Impacts on Australia's Retail Workforce*. 2026. https://cms.sacsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/SaCSA-Retail-Customer-Aggression-Report_.pdf

SaCSA. *Customer Aggression Survey 2025*. n.d.

SaCSA. *Early Career Mobility Project*. 2026.

SaCSA. *SaCSA Data Dashboard*. 2026. https://sacsa.org.au/data-dashboard

Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees Association (SDA). *Under Pressure: The Hidden Cost of Retail*. 2025. https://www.sda.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/SDA-Under-Pressure-Report-V8-DIGITAL.pdf

Treasury, Australian Government. *Minimum Tax on Discretionary Trusts*. 2026. https://consult.treasury.gov.au/c2026-784079

Victorian Government. *Workplace Protection Orders Bill 2026*. 2026. https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/bills/workplace-protection-orders-bill-2026

Westpac. *Westpac-MI Consumer Sentiment Bulletin, September 2026*. 2026. https://library.westpaciq.com.au/content/dam/public/westpaciq/secure/economics/documents/aus/2026/09/er20260908BullConsumerSentiment.pdf

World Economic Forum. *Beyond the Desk: How AI Is Transforming the Frontline Workforce*. 2025. https://www.weforum.org/stories/emerging-technologies/ai-frontline-workforce

Zirar, Araz, Syed Imran Ali, and Nazrul Islam. "Worker and workplace Artificial Intelligence (AI) coexistence: Emerging themes and research agenda." *Technovation 124* (2023). https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0166497223000585



SaCSA

Service and Creative
Skills Australia