

Impact Case Study

Keeping clothes out of landfill

Introduction

Australians are among the highest consumers of clothing globally. As a nation, Australia imports over 1.4 billion units of new clothing annually, or over 383,000 tonnes.

Researchers at RMIT partnered with the Kmart Group and set out to better understand the clothing waste problem and tackle it head on.

The project was conducted by RMIT University and commissioned by the Kmart Group and the Queensland Government. The RMIT research team is interdisciplinary, coming from the Centre of Organisation and Social Change (Ninh Nguyen), College of Business and Law (Mark Leenders, Simon Pervan), and RMIT School of Fashion & Textiles (Alice Payne, Angie Jiang, Paige Street, Caroline Tan).



Background

Each year, over 200,000 tonnes of clothing are sent to landfill in Australia, representing a vast waste of resources and a high rate of clothing disposal.



There is a dire need to keep clothing in active use for as long as possible, and to ensure that at the end of its useful life, clothing material can be recycled.

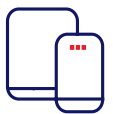
The move to a circular economy for requires changed consumer behaviour to:

- slow the overall rate of consumption
- keep clothing in active use as long as possible
- ensure that at the end of its useful life, clothing material can be recycled.

This nationwide project aimed to understand circular practices among Australian consumers, including better understanding how and why consumers dispose of their clothing, as well as how they acquire, care for, and repair their clothing.

The Research

A national survey was conducted with 3,080 participants, who were nationally representative across age, gender and location.



The survey included 40 questions about participants' clothing disposal, acquisition and usage habits, providing novel metrics on Australian consumer clothing practices. Consumer practices were categorised into two groups:

- disposal practices
- practices that support circularity.

The key findings include:

- **Lack of understanding:** Australians are confused about where and how to responsibly discard clothing – 32% will throw clothes into the general waste bins, and 24% will put them into home recycling bins at least half the time.
- **Australian donation behaviors are positive:** 87% of consumers indicating they would donate clothing they no longer want but could be worn again to charity. However, Australians tend to hold on to their clothing, donating one or two times a year.
- **Second-hand trending:** Australians buy more second-hand clothing than in comparable countries.
- **Washing and care:** Australians typically line dry, wash full loads, read the care labels, and wash at lower temperatures.
- **Age reflects behaviour:** Across all findings, age was the most significant factor in determining consumer clothing practices, surpassing gender, income bracket and location.
- **Unique behaviour:** Australians of all ages tend to engage in circular practices in their own, distinct ways.
- **National solution required:** There is a clear need for a nationally scaled collection system for unwearable clothing, alongside appropriate and trusted recycling pathways.



Overview of the impact

The project's findings inform decision makers in industry and government on how best to support Australian consumers to embrace practices that will support clothing circularity.



"This landmark study provides us with the vital data we need in order to develop and invest in evidence-based programs and initiatives that will directly and measurably reduce the amount of clothing that ends up in landfill."

Blake Lindley
Kmart Group's Head of Sustainability

The project was mentioned in the 'Climate and Circularity' section of 'Wesfarmers 2025 Annual Report' (p. 33).

The report was cited in the Productivity Commission's inquiry report on [Australia's circular economy: unlocking the opportunities](#) and in [Now+Future's Textiles paper](#).

Partnerships



Queensland Government

Funding support

The project was funded with \$54,405 jointly by Kmart Group and the Queensland Government Department of Environment, Science and Innovation. RMIT also provided media engagement support.

Project Outcomes

Publications

The report, "[Keeping clothes out of landfill: A landscape study of Australian consumer practices](#)", was launched in October 2025. The report provides nine recommendations to support responsible disposal and circular behaviours.

A video illustrating three Australian personas and their circular practices is [available on YouTube](#).

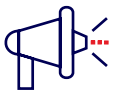
A paper on "[The influence of age, gender and income on Australians' expectations of clothing lifespan](#)" was presented at and published in the proceedings of PLATE Conference 2025.

Industry engagement

Professor Alice Payne and Dr Ninh Nguyen presented the findings and discussed with industry experts at the Global Sourcing Expo Melbourne in November 2024, which attracted suppliers and manufacturers from 15 countries and regions.

Media

The project attracted significant media interest, including The Guardian and ABC News, reaching an estimated 36.7 million people, about \$1.6 million worth of advertising.



Next Steps

Further analysis will examine the expected lifespan and the relationships among the factors affecting Australians' use and disposal of their clothing. More papers are being prepared and will be submitted to journals.

The research team plans to seek partnership and funding support from the industry and government to extend the project and measure Australia's progress towards clothing circularity.

