

# Clothing Longevity and Circular Textiles in South Australia



**PRESENTED BY**  
**Dr Kate Sansome**

**Green Industries SA Women in Circular Economy  
Leadership Scholarship**

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<https://www.linkedin.com/in/kate-sansome/>

## **Acknowledgement of country**

We acknowledge and respect the Traditional Custodians whose ancestral lands we live and work upon and we pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge and respect their deep spiritual connection and the relationship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people have to Country. We extend our respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their nations in South Australia and across Australia.

# Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	5
Methodology	8
Key Findings	11
Clothing Longevity	21
Dormant Clothing	29
Circular Business Models	35
Recommendations	44
Conclusion	47
References	48
Appendix	50

# Executive Summary

This report explores opportunities to strengthen clothing longevity and accelerate circular textile practices in South Australia. Adapted from a study developed by the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) and applied in the South Australian context, the project was supported by the Green Industries SA Women in Circular Economy Leadership Scholarship and combined a large-scale survey of 591 residents with in-depth interviews involving consumers and industry stakeholders across the textile and clothing sector.

Findings indicate that while awareness of circular models such as resale, rental and repair is relatively high, participation remains limited. Most clothing items (89%) are purchased new, with only one in ten repaired during their lifespan. Garments that were repaired lasted an average of 2.5 years longer than those never repaired, highlighting the value of repair and care behaviours in extending product life and reducing textile waste.

Older participants reported stronger repair skills and longer clothing lifespans, while younger groups expressed strong interest in learning but lower confidence in practical skills. Many consumers were also interested in initiatives such as clothing swaps, repair sessions and upcycling events, but identified barriers including limited access, low awareness and unclear pathways to participate.

The study identifies five key opportunities to enhance circular textiles in South Australia:

- Strengthen practical knowledge and behaviour change campaigns that link everyday clothing care habits with personal, financial and environmental benefits.
- Use influencer marketing and targeted communications to normalise repair, second-hand and upcycling practices as fashionable, desirable and mainstream choices.
- Develop a digital platform or app to centralise information and connect users with local circular fashion services, events and opportunities.
- Support community circular initiatives through practical toolkits, resources and guidance that enable local events and activities.
- Build repair and upcycling skills through accessible, community-based initiatives and partnerships with grassroots organisations.

Together, these interventions provide a practical framework for government, industry and community partners to empower South Australians to extend garment lifespans, reduce textile waste and participate in a thriving circular fashion economy.

# Introduction

Australia faces a significant textile waste challenge, ranking as the second-largest consumer of clothing per capita globally, behind only the United States (Australian Fashion Council, 2023). The scale of this consumption is substantial: on average, Australians purchase 27 kilograms of new clothing each year while discarding 23 kilograms to landfill (Upparel, 2023). These figures highlight the urgent need for systemic change in how textiles are purchased, used and recovered to address growing waste pressures.

While much research has focused on design and production challenges, including how brands can design for circularity (e.g. Holm et al., 2025), a critical gap remains in understanding consumer behaviour and addressing overconsumption. In particular, there is a need to better understand how consumers wear, care for and dispose of clothing, as well as their responses to emerging circular business models aimed at reducing textile waste.

National and state-level research consistently identifies citizen behaviour change as central to reducing textile waste and supporting a circular economy transition (e.g. Allan et al., 2024; Green Industries SA, 2022).

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2021) emphasises that to maximise the economic and environmental potential of circular business models, businesses must design products that demonstrate both physical and emotional durability while remaining suitable for remanufacturing and recycling at their end-of-life.

**Physical durability** focuses on designing clothing that can withstand wear and tear without breaking down. It ensures the garment remains functional, wearable, and resilient over time (Bocken et al., 2016).

**Emotional durability** refers to designing clothing that builds trust, attachment, and personal connection between the user and the item. It relates to perceptions of style, comfort, and relevance, encouraging long-term affection and continued use (Bocken et al., 2016).

Industry initiatives have emerged to operationalise these durability concepts. For example, Primark in the UK has developed a framework that defines garments as circular if they meet specified performance criteria after 23 wash cycles, with aspirational targets of 45 washes (Primark, 2024).

However, such industry standards raise important questions about consumer behaviour beyond technical specifications. The challenge is not only whether garments can withstand repeated washing, but whether consumers remain emotionally attached with items over time and adopt the appropriate care practices needed to achieve these durability outcomes.

## Research Objectives

This project addresses a critical gap in understanding how to reduce textile waste through two complementary aims. First, it estimates the longevity of different clothing items and analyses the demographic, acquisition and usage factors, such as washing frequency and repair practices, that influence garment lifespans. These findings provide an evidence base for targeted interventions that support consumers to extend clothing use.

Second, the project examines citizen behaviours and receptivity toward circular business models for clothing, including rental, repair, resale and subscription services, by exploring awareness, experiences, motivations and barriers to participation. This analysis identifies opportunities to increase uptake of models that keep textiles in use for longer and divert waste from landfill.

Together, these aims generate actionable insights to inform policy, education campaigns and business practices that encourage more circular clothing behaviours and reduce textile waste in South Australia.

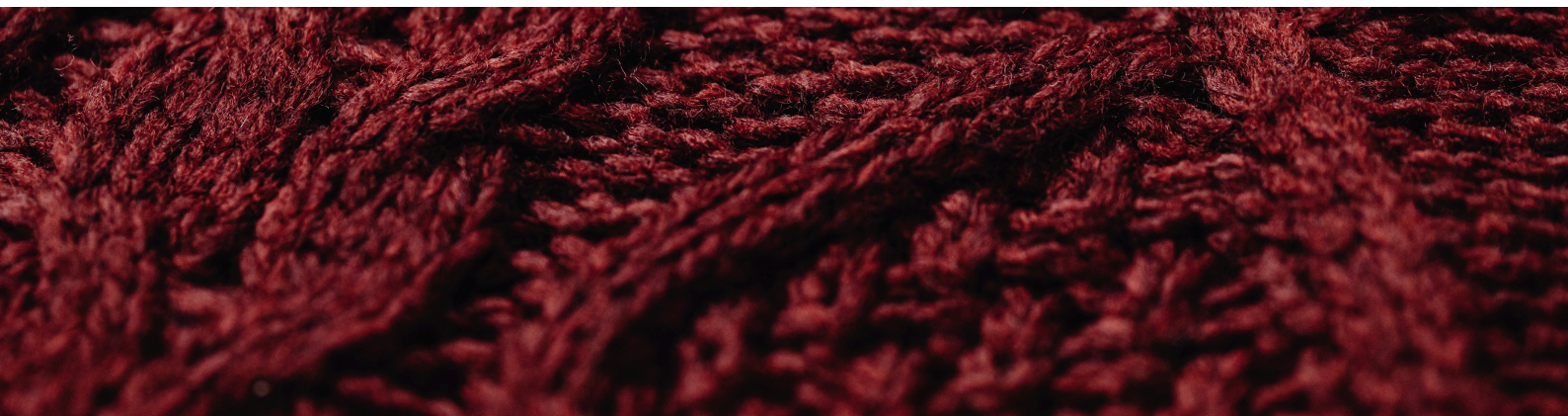


# Methodology

This study was undertaken to support efforts to reduce textile waste and advance more circular outcomes across the clothing sector in South Australia. It addresses two complementary objectives that together provide an evidence base for both policy development and industry action.

The first objective was to estimate the lifespan of a broad range of clothing items and identify the factors influencing garment longevity. These factors included demographic characteristics, acquisition channels, and use-phase behaviours such as frequency of wear, laundering practices, and repair activity. The methodology was based on an established framework developed by WRAP (UK) and adapted to reflect the South Australian context.

The quantitative component comprised an online survey of 591 South Australian residents who purchase clothing for personal use at least annually. Participants were recruited through a market research panel.



**Table 1: Overview of Participant Demographics - Age**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
18-24	4.6
25-34	13.7
35-44	17.9
45-54	18.3
55+	45.5

**Table 2: Overview of Participant Demographics - Gender**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Men	37.9
Women	62.1

While quotas for age and gender were applied to broadly align the sample with the state’s demographic profile, the final sample included a higher proportion of women than men. This outcome is consistent with broader research indicating higher levels of clothing purchasing engagement among women (e.g., YouGov, 2025), and may also reflect greater eligibility in undertaking the survey and interest in the topic among this group.

The second objective examined consumer behaviours, attitudes, and receptivity toward circular business models within the textile and clothing sector, alongside insights from industry practitioners. A qualitative approach was used to generate in-depth understanding. Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted, including 10 industry stakeholders with experience in circular textile systems and 20 consumers who purchase clothing at least annually. Industry participants represented a range of operating models, including rent-a-rack retail, second-hand stores, clothing swaps, and vintage markets.

This component explored awareness, prior experience, and perceived suitability of circular models across different use occasions and garment categories. It also examined the potential influence of these models on new purchasing behaviour, as well as the key motivations and barriers affecting participation. Participants shared experiences with second-hand purchasing, rental services, repair, and upcycling, and provided perspectives on emerging models such as digital resale platforms and community-based clothing exchanges.

By integrating quantitative and qualitative insights, the study captures both patterns at the broader level and lived experiences across the sector. The findings provide practical insights for businesses seeking to refine circular offerings and align with evolving consumer expectations, while also informing policy and program design aimed at extending garment lifespans, increasing resource efficiency, and reducing textile waste in South Australia.

# Key Findings

## Frequency of Purchase and Average Spend

Findings from the survey indicate that approximately two-thirds of respondents reported purchasing clothing at least once every three months, with 30% purchasing monthly or more frequently. In contrast, around 34% reported lower purchase frequency, including shopping every six months, once a year, or less often.

**Figure 1: Frquency of Purchase**



In terms of spending habits, the largest proportion of respondents (20%) reported spending between \$50 and \$99 per month on clothing.

## Clothing Item Audit

Respondents were asked to answer questions about three specific clothing items they had most recently worn. For each item, participants classified it into one of the following categories:

- Casual clothing for everyday wear inside the home or for informal occasions
- Smart clothing for everyday use, including workwear
- Smart clothing for social occasions, such as dining out, parties, and formal events
- Functional clothing for work purposes, including self-purchased uniforms or safety garments
- Sportswear or activewear (e.g. gym, swimming, running, team sports, or outdoor activities)
- Merchandise (e.g. apparel related to sports teams, music, or film)

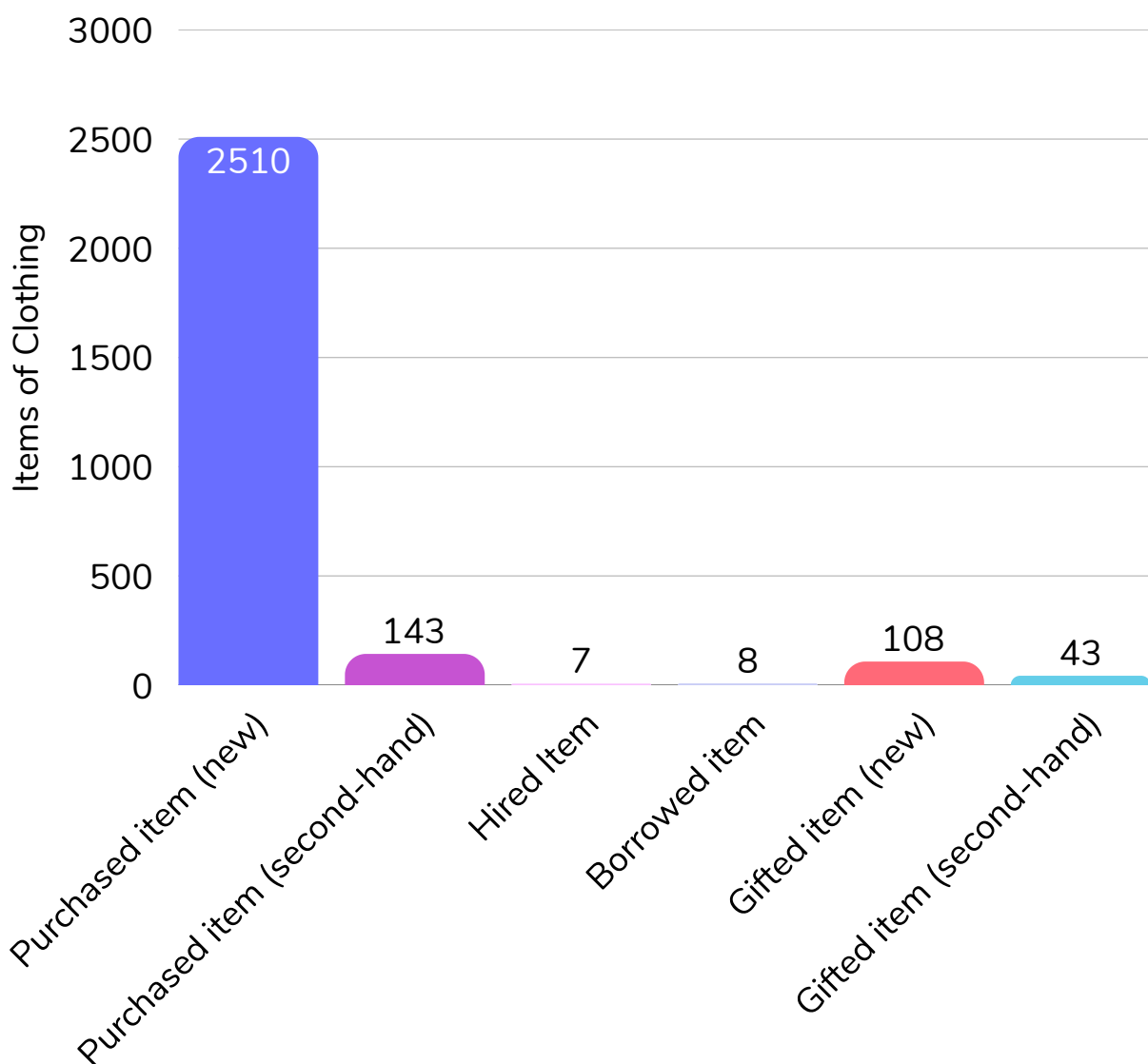
For each garment, respondents also provided further context about the item, including where the item was purchased, its price, and associated care practices such as washing frequency. This line of questioning was repeated for the respondent's oldest item of clothing. Participants were also asked whether they owned any items that had not been worn in the previous 12 months; where applicable, the same set of questions was applied to one such item to capture information on clothing classified as "dormant."

In total, data were collected on 2,819 individual garments, comprising 2,364 items in active use and 455 classified as dormant.

## Acquisition Type

The majority of items were purchased new, accounting for 89 per cent of all reported acquisitions. In contrast, second-hand purchases and other forms of acquisition, such as gifted, borrowed, or hired items, represented only a small proportion of the total. This pattern aligns with findings from the WRAP UK (2022) study, in which almost nine in ten items (87%) were purchased new, compared with one in ten (10%) acquired second-hand.

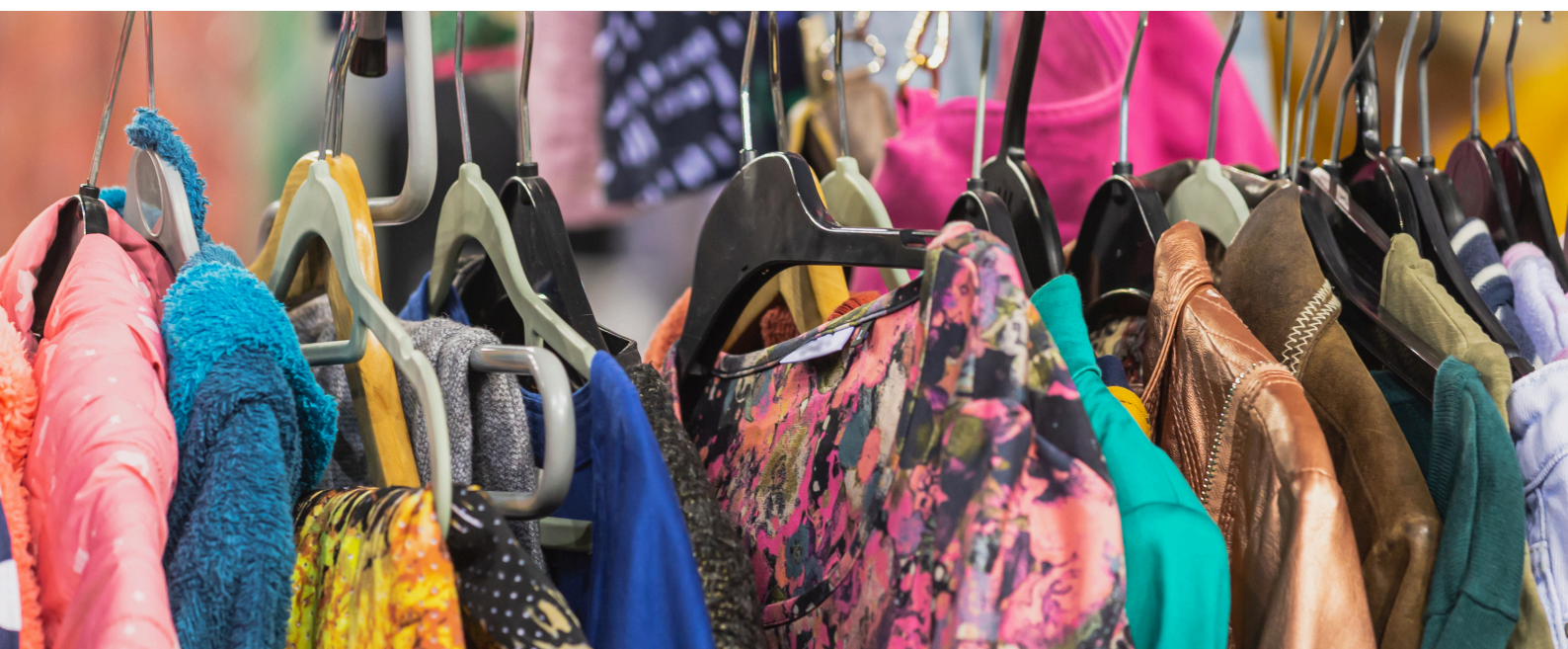
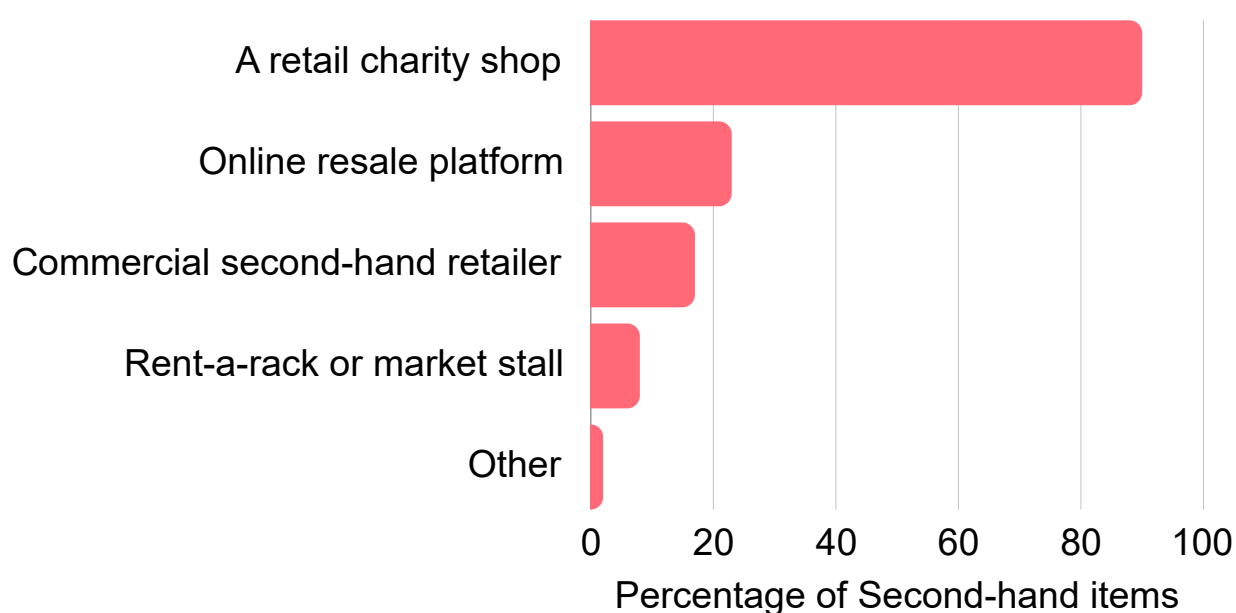
Figure 2: How Items Were Acquired



## Second-hand Acquisitions

Most second-hand items were obtained from retail charity shops (64%), with smaller numbers coming from online resale platforms (16%) and commercial retailers or businesses (12%). Only a few items were sourced through rent-a-rack stores or other outlets.

Figure 3: How Second-Hand Items Were Acquired



## Retailer/Brand Mix

The most frequently mentioned brands were purchased from low-cost retailers such as Kmart (6%) and Target (5%), followed by clothing brands including Bonds (3%), Nike (3%), and Uniqlo (2%). South Australian brand RM Williams (2%) also appeared among the top ten listed brands. Most brands were low- to mid-priced products, with only a small number of designer labels, such as Burberry and Zimmermann, represented.

Table 3: Percentage of Brands of Clothing Items

Brand	Percentage
Kmart	6%
Target	5%
Bonds	3%
Nike	3%
Levi's	3%
Uniqlo	2%
Peter Alexander	1%
R.M. Williams	1%
H&M	1%
Adidas	1%

## Price of Clothing Items

Most clothing items were concentrated in the lower price ranges. Everyday garments such as T-shirts, polo shirts, and jersey tops typically fell within the \$20–49 range, while shirts and blouses, knitwear, sweatshirts and hoodies, jeans, trousers, dresses, skirts, leggings, and pyjamas were most frequently reported in the \$50–99 bracket. Shorts and cropped trousers were somewhat cheaper, averaging between \$20 and \$49.

Underwear and basic items were generally the least expensive, with knickers and briefs, bras, socks, and hosiery commonly falling below \$20 or within the \$20–49 range.

Outerwear items tended to be more costly. Non-padded and padded jackets and coats were most often purchased in the \$100–199 range, placing them among the most expensive items overall.

Footwear was typically mid-range in price. Sandals and flats were most commonly priced at \$50–99, whereas heels and boots were more often purchased in the \$100–199 bracket, making them the costliest categories alongside outerwear.

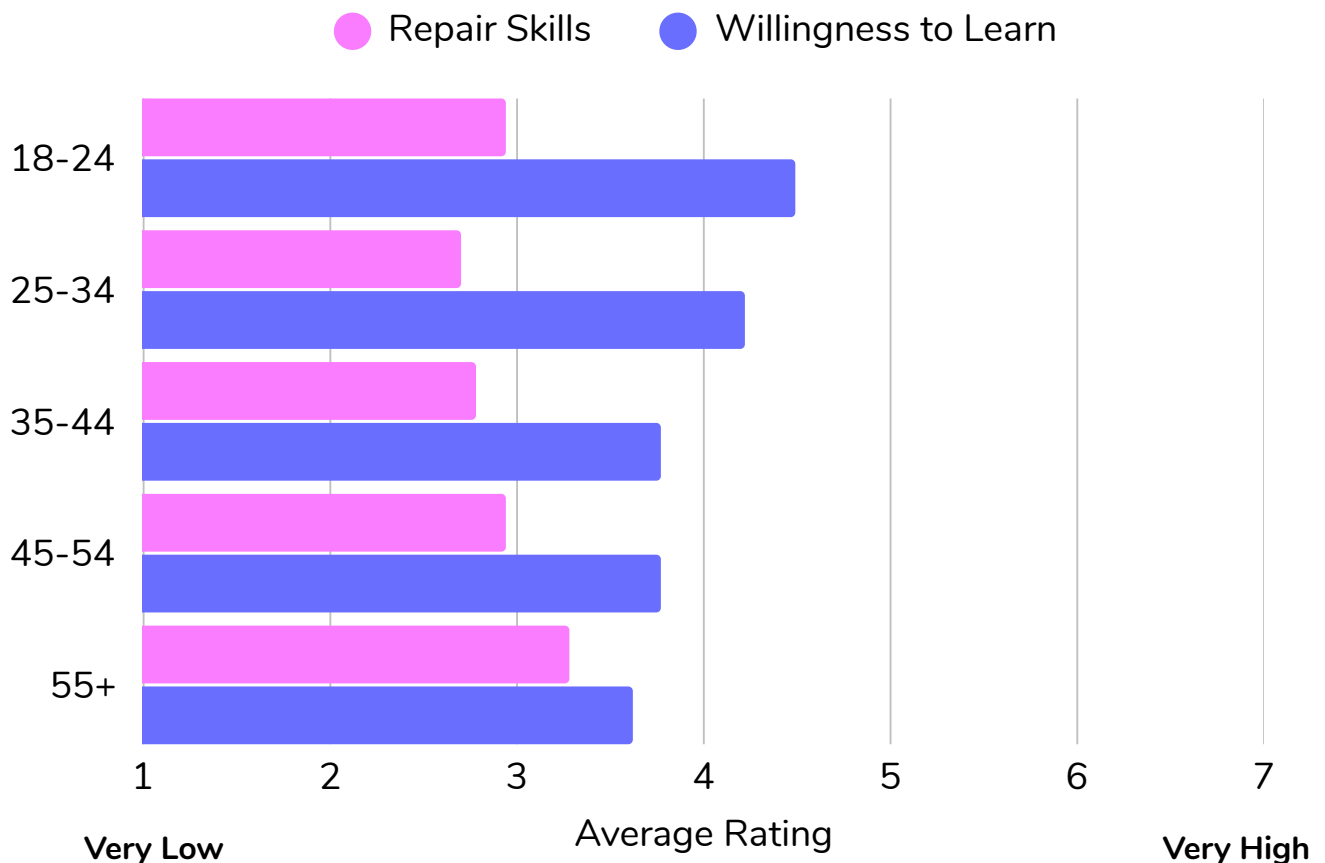


## Repair of Clothing Items

Only one in ten items (11%) had been repaired, either by the owner themselves (7%) or through a paid service (4%). This leaves 88% of items that were in active use never repaired. While this may indicate that these items are of high quality and do not requiring repair, it may also indicate that consumers typically acquire new clothing rather than getting their clothing repaired. Evidently, there are opportunities to increase clothing repair rates.

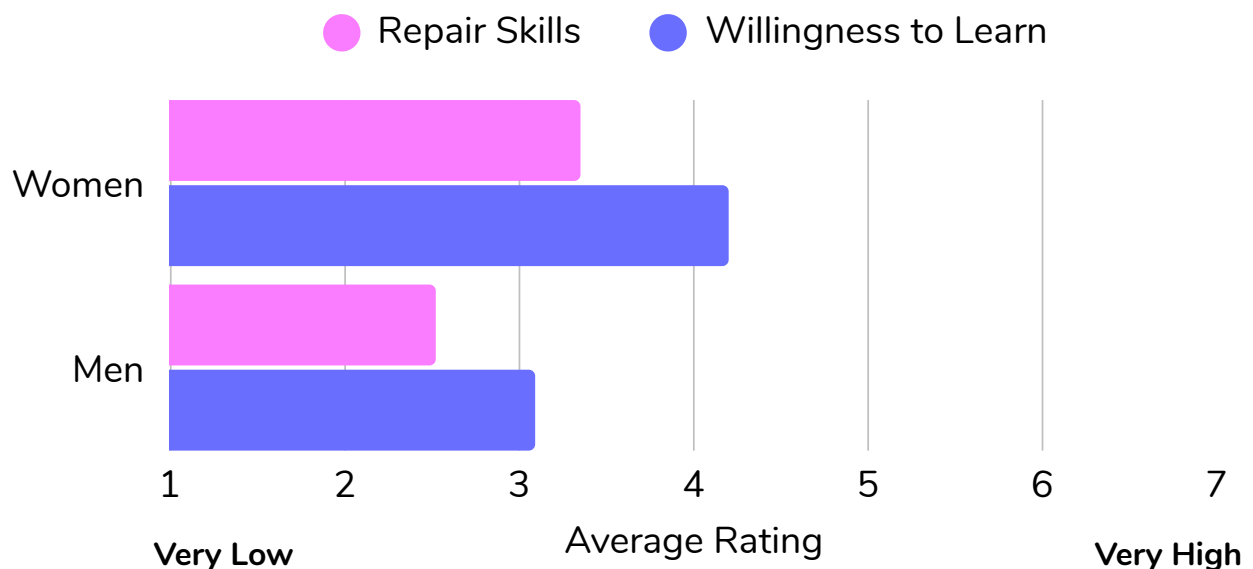
When looking at differences among different age groups, older groups generally reported higher perceived repair skills, while younger groups showed greater willingness to learn.

Figure 4: Differences in Age Groups and Repair Skills



Women, on average, report stronger repair skills and greater willingness to learn compared with men.

Figure 5: Differences in Gender and Repair Skills



Many interview participants described relying on a female parent or grandparent figure to repair clothing. Older participants reported repairing their own items and their children’s clothing.

In contrast, despite often repairing or maintaining household items such as furniture, participants (particularly men) were much less likely to sew or alter clothing.

***“When my mum was alive, she would take it and repair it but now I don’t repair anything. I don’t take it to get mended. I don’t do anything.”***

**- Consumer 1**

Gen Z and millennial participants noted they had been taught basic repair skills in high school but did not use these skills regularly, instead relying on parents to mend clothing. One new mother expressed a desire to develop repair skills in order to hem school uniforms for her children in the future. Another participant reported repairing their army uniform but not applying the same practice to their casual or social clothing.

Some participants belonged to knitting or sewing clubs but noted these groups were largely attended by older members and struggled to attract younger people. At the same time, younger consumers expressed interest in social sewing or upcycling events, primarily for the sense of community.

This suggests that while interest in repair exists, it is more likely to be expressed through informal social contexts than formal training pathways. The tendency of existing community groups to attract older members may present a barrier to sustaining and transferring repair skills across generations. This points to a need for more diverse avenues that speak to what younger audiences are looking for, not just the skill, but the social experience around it, as well as accessible online resources, with some participants noting they turned to search engines when needing to repair clothing.



## Frequency of Wear

Fifty-seven per cent of participants reported wearing casual clothing (everyday wear inside the home or for informal outings) on a daily basis. Smart clothing was worn a few times a week by 25.4% of the sample, while 21.5% wore smart clothing for social occasions several times per month. Functional clothing, such as uniforms and safety overalls, was never worn by 46% of respondents, while 12.7% wore it on most days.

26.6% of participants wore sportswear and activewear a few times per week. Merchandise (e.g., sports, music, fandom) was worn several times a month by 10% of participants, whereas 32% reported never wearing it.

The most frequently worn garments are daily wear items. Bras (75.2%) and underwear (73.7%) are reported as part of daily wear. Pyjamas and nightwear (66.1%), socks and hosiery (59.5%), and sandals and flats (54.2%) are also frequently worn.

Some categories are rarely worn. Heels (37.6%) are worn only once a year or less by more than a third of respondents. Dresses (14.7%), non-padded jackets (6.4%), padded jackets or coats (6.3%), and shirts and blouses (5.0%) were also reported as worn infrequently, suggesting that these items are reserved for specific events or seasonal conditions. This may also reflect shifts in clothing preferences post-COVID, whereby workplaces have moved toward more casual dress, while younger consumers may be more likely to wear sneakers on nights out rather than heels (e.g., Bond, 2024; Washington, 2024).

# Clothing Longevity

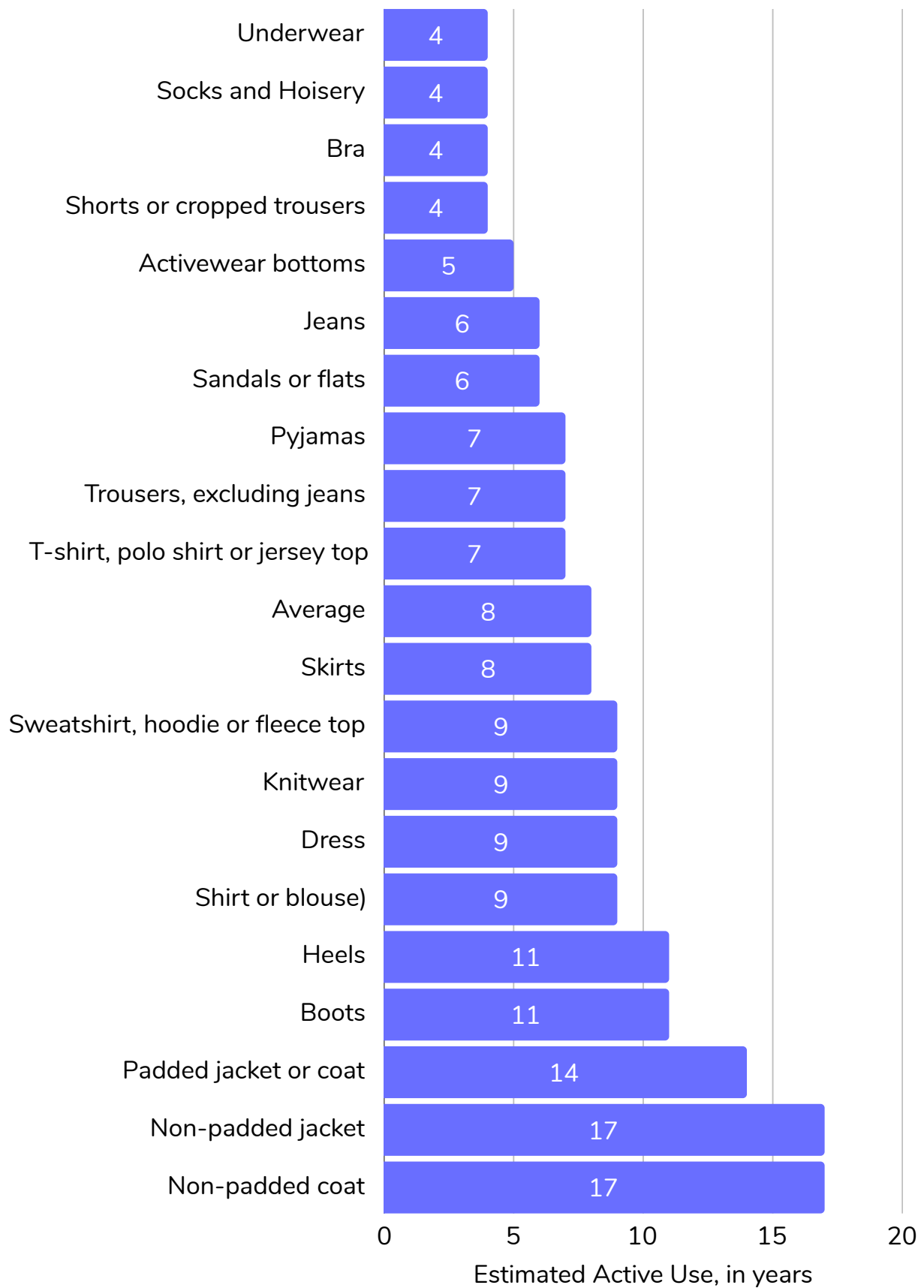
Estimated clothing longevity is calculated as the sum of the time since respondents acquired a clothing item and the anticipated amount of time they think they will continue to wear it. The combined overall longevity estimate is 7.7 years, although this masks a wide variation across individual clothing items, ranging from non-padded coats and jackets (17.1 and 16.7 years, respectively) to socks and underwear (3.8 and 3.5 years, respectively).

When looking at the length of time participants had owned the clothes in comparison, the average timeframe was 3.8 years, with non-padded jackets at 9.4 years and underwear sitting at around 15 months. This indicates that participants estimated they were going to keep these clothes for a decent amount of time.

Estimated longevity differs depending on the purpose for which clothes are worn. Collectively, merchandise (e.g., sports, music, movies, etc.) had an average active use of 13.6 years, and smart clothing for social occasions such as parties and formal functions had an active use of 12.03 years. On the other hand, sportswear and activewear had an active use of 5.75 years, while functional clothing for work was 6.23 years.

When looking at specific categories of clothes, such as a T-shirt, this had variable longevity depending on the purpose, with much longer longevity for merchandise (7.14 years) and smart clothing for social occasions (7.14 years). In contrast, functional work T-shirts lasted just over one year.

Figure 6: Estimated Active Use for different items

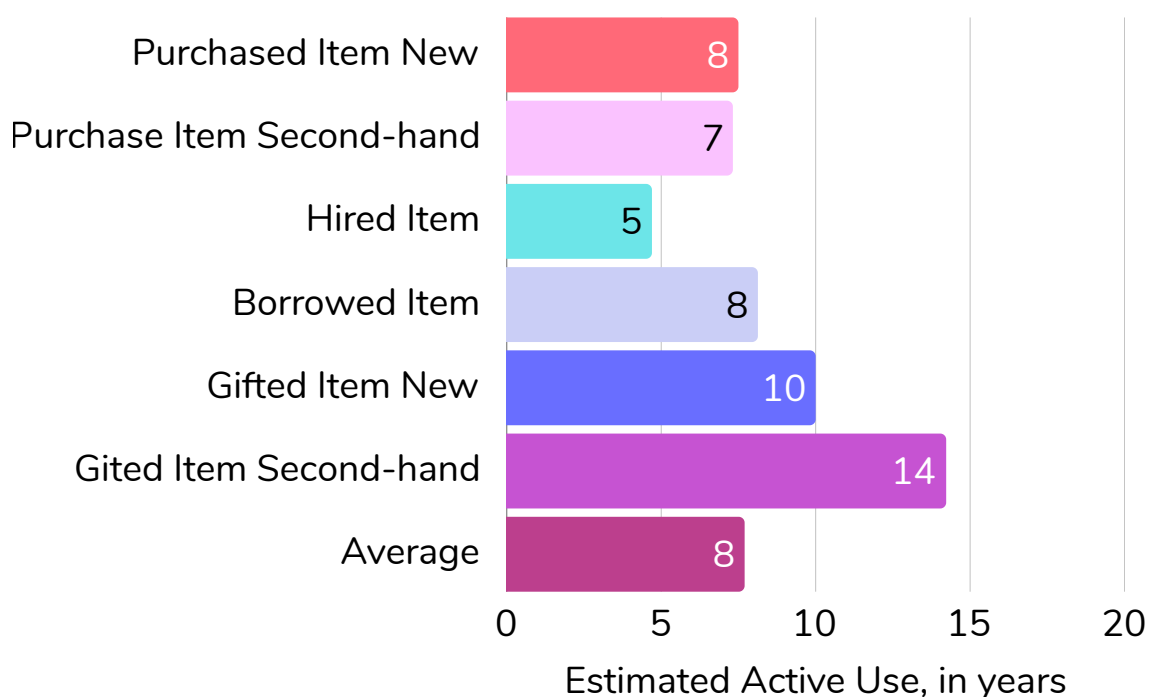


## Acquisition and Active Use

Items that were gifted, whether new or second-hand, showed markedly longer active use, averaging 10.0 and 14.2 years respectively. This extended longevity likely reflects a stronger emotional or symbolic attachment to gifted items, which can increase their perceived value and encourage ongoing use. In contrast, hired items showed the shortest periods of active use, which is intuitive given their context. However, this finding should be interpreted with caution due to the very small sample size of only five items.

Second-hand purchased items had the second-shortest lifespan, averaging 7.32 years, which may indicate weaker personal attachment compared to gifted items. Interestingly, newly purchased items exhibited the same average active use of 7.32 years, suggesting that without the context of gifting, even new items may not inspire significantly greater longevity in use than their second-hand counterparts.

Figure 7: Estimated Active Use for different acquisition types

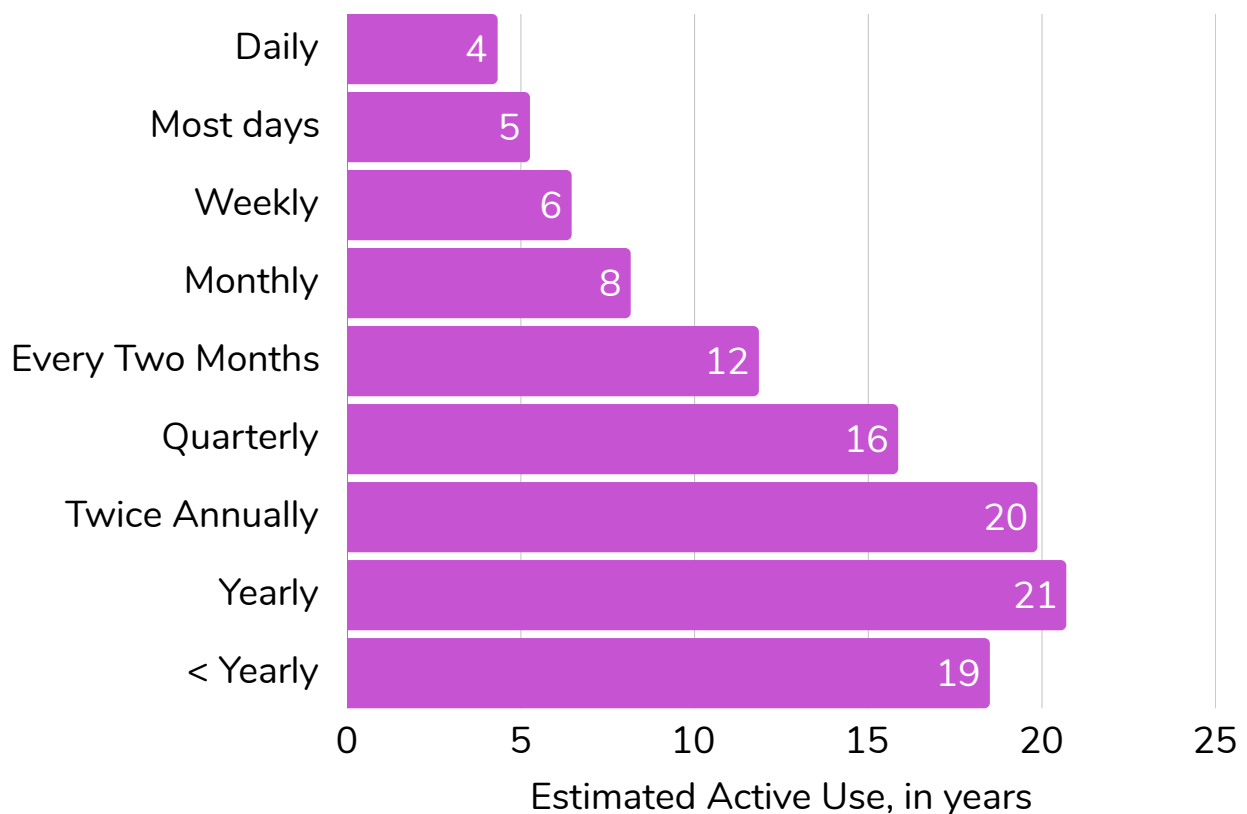


## Wear Frequency and Active Use

How often clothes were worn was strongly linked to their overall lifespan. As expected, garments worn most frequently, such as weekly or more often, had the shortest average lifespan of around 5.3 years. Regular use naturally leads to more wear and tear, reducing how long items last.

In contrast, pieces worn less often, such as monthly or every few months, lasted significantly longer, averaging 14 years. The most durable items were those worn only once or twice a year, or even less frequently, with an average longevity of 19.7 years. This longer lifespan is likely because the garments are worn less often, resulting in less physical wear and deterioration over time.

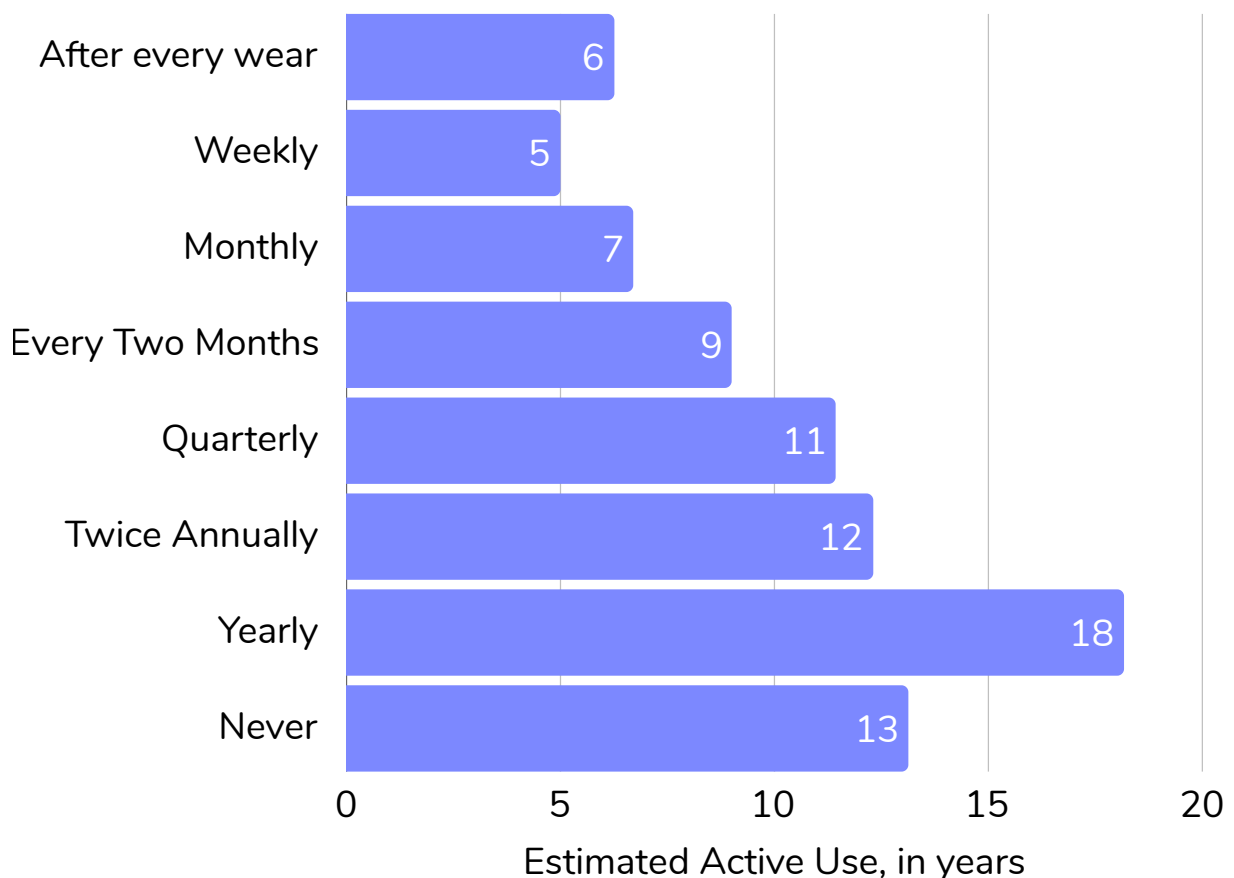
Figure 8: Estimated Active Use based on frequency of wear



## Wash Frequency and Active Use

Estimated clothing longevity increased as washing frequency decreased. Garments washed weekly had the shortest average lifespan of 5.0 years. Longevity increased progressively with less frequent washing, with 6.7 years for monthly washing, 9.0 years when washed every two months, and 11.4 years for seasonal washing. Items washed twice per year lasted an average of 12.3 years, while those washed only once a year had the longest estimated lifespan at 18.2 years.

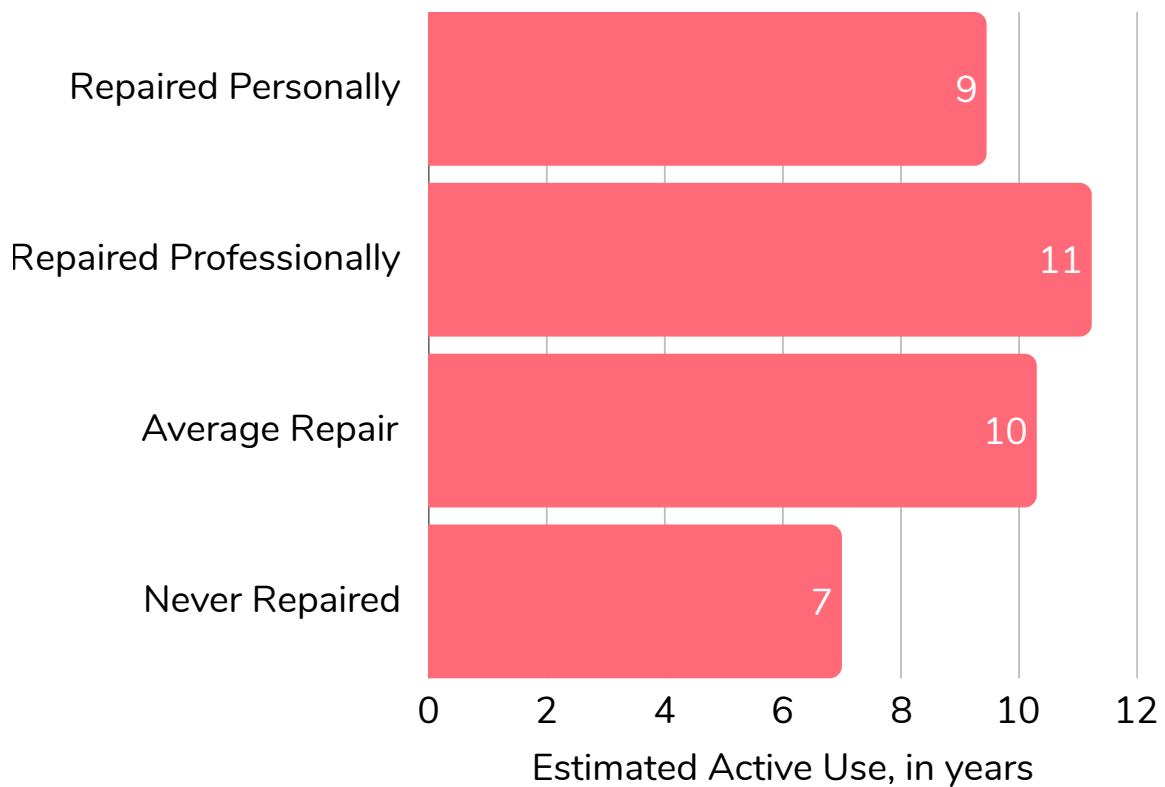
Figure 9: Estimated Active Use based on wash frequency



## Repair and Active Use

There was a clear difference in longevity between items that had been repaired and those that had not. Repaired garments lasted an average of 10 years, compared with 7.4 years for items that were never repaired, indicating that repair can extend an item's lifespan by approximately 2.5 years. Garments repaired professionally had a slightly longer average lifespan of 11 years, while those repaired personally lasted an average of 9 years.

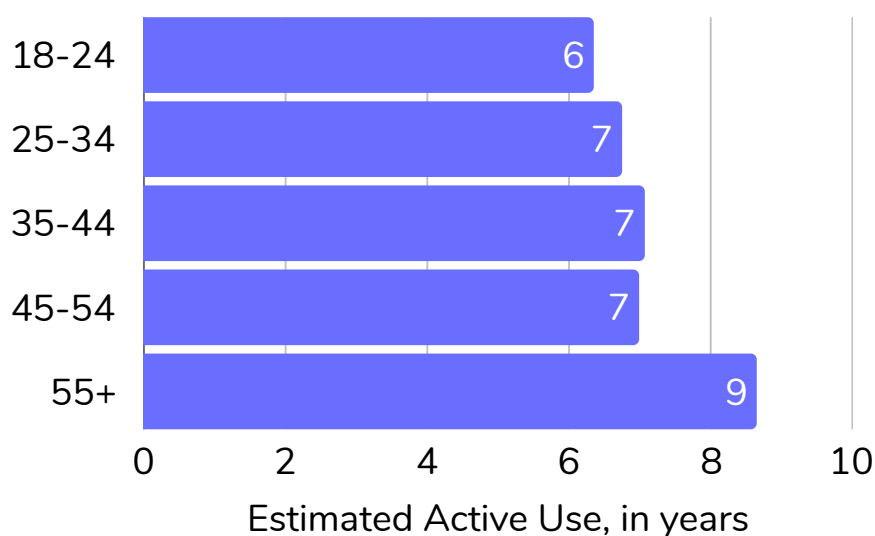
Figure 10: Estimated Active Use based on repair history



## Demographics and Active Use

Significant differences emerged across age groups in estimated clothing longevity. Participants aged 55 and above reported the highest average longevity at 9.04 years, compared to 7.61 years among those aged 25–54 and 5.19 years among the 18–24 age group

Figure 11: Estimated Active Use based on age groups



Active use was similar across both gender and income groups. Men reported an average of 7.6 years of active use and women reported 7.8 years.

Similarly, no clear pattern emerged across income levels, with averages ranging from 6.4 to 8.8 years and no consistent relationship between income and length of active use.

Education, however, showed a notable effect. Participants with doctorates reported the longest estimated clothing longevity at 12.6 years, while those with all other levels of education reported an average of 7 years.

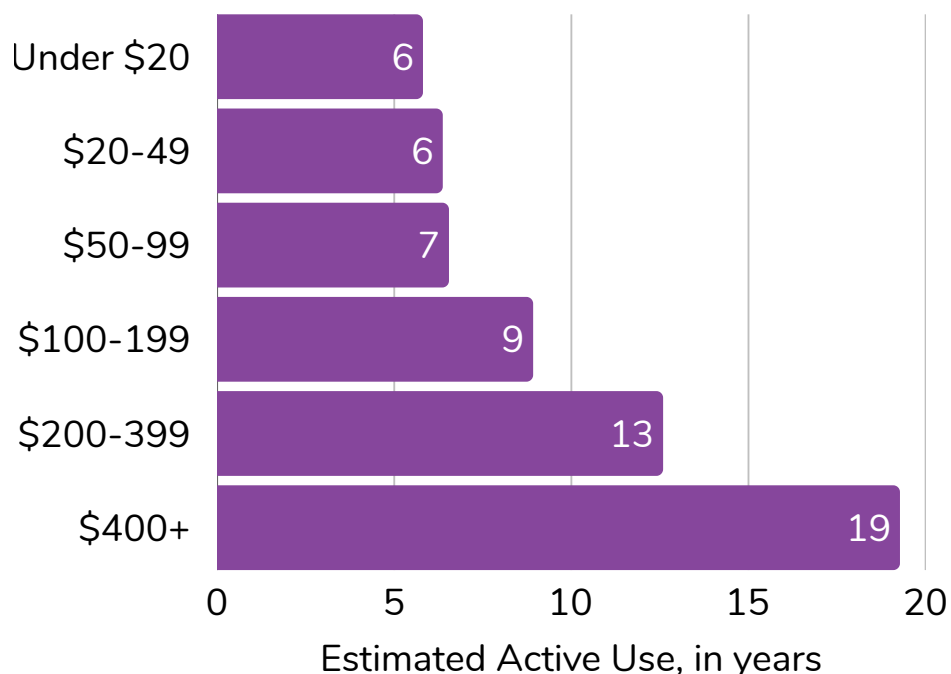
Work status also revealed differences. Retirees estimated their clothing longevity at 9 years on average, compared with 7 years for those employed either full-time or part-time.

## Price and Active Use

Clothing longevity varied markedly by purchase price. Items bought at lower price points had the shortest estimated lifespans, whereas more expensive garments lasted substantially longer. Clothes purchased for under \$20 averaged 5.8 years of use, increasing modestly to 6.4 years for items in the \$20–49 range and 6.5 years for those costing \$50–99.

A clearer upward trend emerged in the higher price brackets: items priced at \$100–199 averaged 8.9 years of longevity and those at \$200–399 averaged 12.6 years. At the highest price tier (\$400+), estimated longevity rose sharply to 19.3 years.

Figure 12: Estimated Active Use based on price

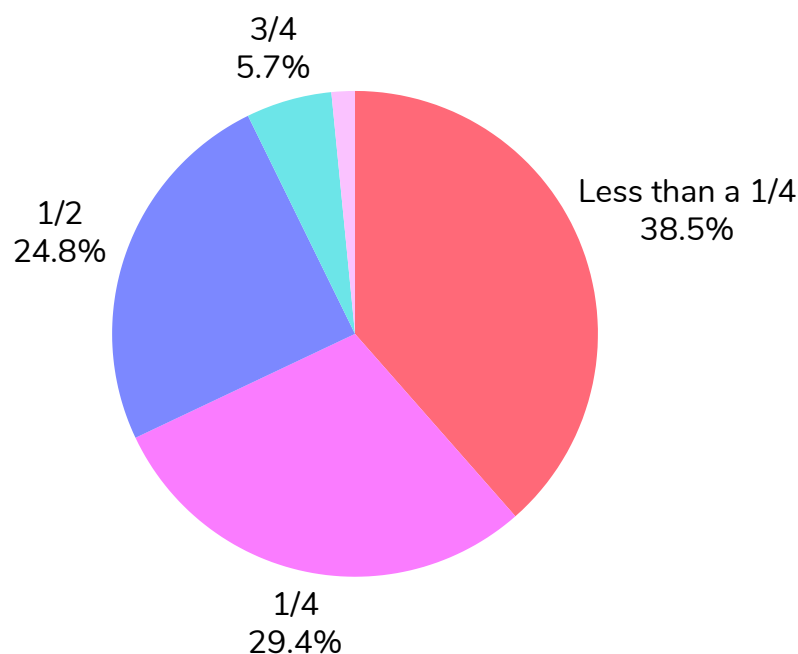


# Dormant Clothing

Seventy-seven percent of respondents reported owning at least some garments that had not been worn during the previous twelve months. When asked to estimate the proportion of unworn items in their wardrobes, 38.5% indicated that fewer than one quarter of their clothes had remained unused. Nearly one third said that roughly a quarter of their wardrobe was unworn, a figure broadly consistent with previous studies (e.g. Payne et al., 2024; WRAP, 2022).

Industry experts interviewed for this study frequently echoed a related rule of thumb: around 20% of a typical wardrobe accounts for 80% of actual wear. This shows there is value sitting unused in people's wardrobes, a value that could potentially be realised through resale, donation, or other forms of recirculation.

Figure 13: Proportion of Unworn Clothing in Wardrobes



Unused clothing can also be understood as a form of latent waste. While garments remain stored but unworn, they are prevented from meeting potential demand elsewhere through second-hand markets or charitable channels. Delayed donation may further reduce their reuse potential, as items passed on only after many years can become outdated, damaged, or otherwise unsuitable for resale, limiting their value to charities and reuse organisations (Australian Fashion Council, 2022).

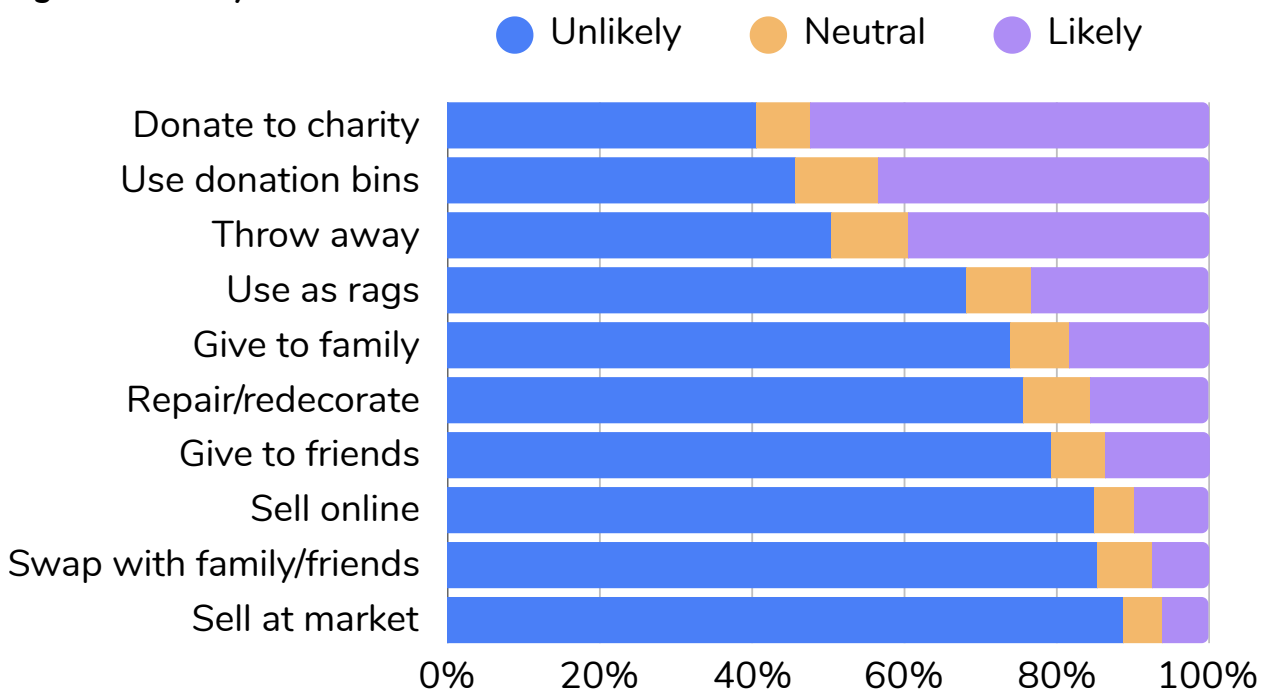
<b>Reasons for unworn clothing (most to least applicable)</b>
1. The garment doesn't fit me or is uncomfortable
2. The garment no longer suits my style
3. The garment is no longer 'in fashion'
4. I'm bored with it
5. The garment is showing signs of wear (fading, loss of shape, pilling, smell, stains)
6. I need more space in my wardrobe
7. The garment is damaged (holes, tears)
8. The garment needs repairs or alterations
9. I've already worn this item multiple times
10. I've already posted this item on social media and don't want to repeat it

## Post-use behaviour

Respondents were asked to report on their likelihood to use different pathways following the use of garments. Analysis of clothing disposal behaviour showed that donation was the most common pathway for unwanted clothing. More than half of respondents (52.4%) reported that they were likely to donate clothing to charity shops or humanitarian organisations, and 43.4% indicated they were likely to use donation collection bins. Disposal through general waste was also common, with 39.5% likely to throw clothing in the bin, although 50.4% reported being unlikely to do so.

Other practices were less common. Around one-quarter of respondents (23.2%) reported repurposing clothing as cleaning rags, while 18.3% gave items to family members. 75% reported unlikely to repair or redecorate garments. Social redistribution methods, such as giving clothing to friends (13.7%) or swapping with family or friends (7.4%), were relatively uncommon. Resale was the least preferred option, with only 9.7% likely to sell clothing online and 6.1% at markets.

Figure 14: Likely Post-Use Behaviour



## Wearable Clothing and Post-Use Pathways

Data was also collected to examine whether disposal behaviours differed depending on whether clothing was perceived as wearable or unwearable.

For wearable clothing, donation emerged as the dominant pathway. Only 3.6% of respondents reported never donating wearable items, while the majority indicated frequent participation. This suggests that respondents largely prioritise extending the life of wearable garments through charitable donation.

Informal redistribution was also relatively common, with many respondents passing wearable items to friends or family. Around 27.6% reported doing this sometimes and 11.5% often, although nearly one-quarter (23.9%) said they never used this option.

By contrast, more formal reuse pathways were far less popular. Resale or rental was rarely used, with 63.3% reporting they never engaged in this behaviour, while clothing swaps or exchange events were even less common, with 79.4% never participating.

Repurposing showed mixed patterns. Practical repurposing, such as using old clothing as cleaning rags or pet bedding, was moderately common, with 25.5% reporting they sometimes used this option. However, creative upcycling remained niche, with 72.4% never engaging in DIY reuse. In addition, many respondents reported storing wearable clothing rather than immediately disposing of it, with 32% sometimes and 18.6% often keeping unwanted items in wardrobes.

A very different pattern emerged for clothing that was no longer wearable, where respondents turned to disposal behaviours rather than reuse. This suggests that respondents recognised the need to adopt different strategies depending on garment condition. Items in poor condition are often unsuitable for donation or resale, and second-hand systems are increasingly overwhelmed by low-quality garments that cannot be effectively redistributed. In this context, lower donation rates may reflect more appropriate disposal decisions rather than a lack of sustainable behaviour.

Donation and redistribution were uncommon for garments in poor condition. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64.1%) never donated these items, while 76.8% never passed them on to friends or family. Resale (86.8% never) and clothing swaps (88.5% never) were also rarely used. Instead, respondents were more likely to repurpose these garments. Over half reported some level of engagement with practical reuse, whereas creative upcycling was less common, with 72.6% never engaging in it.

Although storing damaged clothing was less common than storing wearable items, with around a quarter of respondents reporting doing so. Overall, the findings suggest that garment condition strongly influences disposal decisions: wearable items are more likely to be donated or redistributed, whereas damaged garments are more often repurposed, stored, or ultimately discarded.



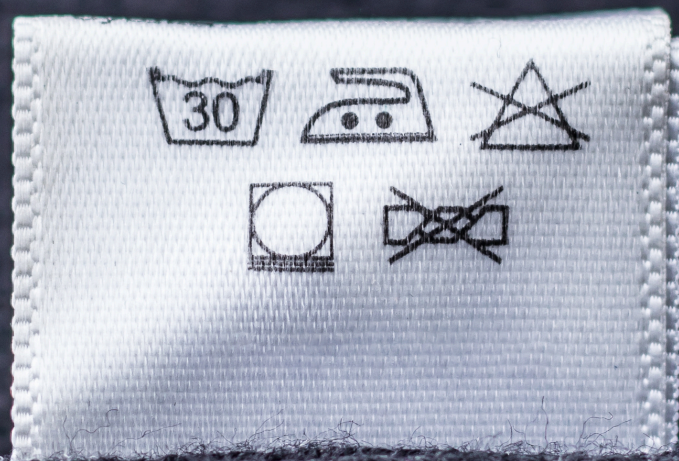
## Information about Clothing Care

Consumers overwhelmingly rely on clothing care labels as their primary source of guidance, with 86.8% reporting that they use the labels provided on garments.

Other sources were far less common. About one in five respondents (22.3%) turned to friends or family for advice, while only a small minority sought help from retailers or brands, whether through in-store staff (13.0%) or brand and retailer websites (12.2%).

Use of digital platforms and media was limited. Just 6.8% reported using social media such as Instagram or TikTok, and 6.6% used YouTube or other video tutorials. Professional services, such as dry cleaners, were similarly low at 6.1%. Sustainability advocates (2.4%) and influencers (1.0%) had very little reach in this area, while online articles or blogs (0.01%) and other sources (0.02%) were almost negligible.

Notably, nearly one in ten respondents (9.8%) reported that they do not actively seek out any information on clothing care, suggesting that many consumers either rely solely on their routine practices without additional guidance.



# Circular Business Models

## Second-hand Clothing

Clothing can be recirculated through a range of business models, including traditional charity or opportunity shops, digital resale platforms, online community marketplaces, local markets, and newer innovations such as rent-a-rack. Brands are also increasingly adopting take-back programs and resale platforms to retain ownership and control over their branded second-hand items.

Most interview participants reported having purchased second-hand clothing and highlighted a variety of motivations for doing so. Environmental sustainability was frequently cited as a primary reason, with participants framing purchasing second-hand clothes as a way to reduce waste and extend the life of garments. Socially oriented factors were also important, particularly for those who preferred charity shops where proceeds support a social cause.

Another driver was the novelty and uniqueness of the items available, as second-hand outlets were perceived to offer styles and pieces not typically found in mainstream retail. For some participants, this sense of discovery and individuality was a key part of the appeal. However, those motivated primarily by style often continued to purchase brand-new clothing, including from fast-fashion brands, suggesting that second-hand shopping functioned as an additional acquisition channel rather than a complete substitute for new clothing.

Some participants expressed hesitations to purchasing second-hand clothing, citing a preference for being the sole owner of their clothing and raising concerns about hygiene. As one participant explained:

***“I just feel like the feeling of being the only person to have worn it is really important to me. It’s not that I think second-hand clothing is ‘dirty,’ but it doesn’t feel like it’s mine — I don’t know where it’s been or what it’s touched.”***

**— Consumer 18**

Even among those comfortable buying pre-owned garments, there were limits. Several participants noted that they would not consider purchasing more intimate items such as hosiery, socks, or bras second-hand. Others, while generally positive about preloved fashion, described the process as overwhelming or inconvenient. To overcome this, some had turned to curated services. One participant described using an Instagram-based stylist who sourced second-hand clothing on their behalf:

***“I bought a box from a woman who had a small business on Instagram. I sent her Pinterest pictures of clothes I liked and my style, and she created a box of second-hand clothes. She went out and found them, put them in a box, and sent them to me.”***

**— Consumer 14**

## Digital Resale

There was a variety of practices when it came to digital resale. Some participants had never used these platforms, while others primarily purchased second-hand clothing from sites such as eBay or Facebook Marketplace. Others were much more active users, both buying and selling items online.

Participants who had purchased clothing on digital platforms appreciated the ease and convenience of being able to search for specific items, such as a leather jacket or a particular style of jeans. As one participant explained:

***“I also think because of the searchability of shopping online, you can search by size or by brand or by, you know, fibre content. It’s easier to find something that you’re looking for on digital platforms, versus going out into the wild and looking through a second-hand shop.”***

**— Consumer 11**

***“I’d been wanting to buy a leather jacket for a while, but I was adamant that I didn’t want real leather. I also had a particular style in mind—I wanted it oversized, not cropped. I’d been looking on Depop, and earlier in the week I’d even checked out some brand-new ones, but nothing really stood out. Then one just happened to pop up—it was the right size, I liked the cut and everything, and the price was good.”***

**— Consumer 14**

## Rent-a-Rack

Rent-a-rack is a retail model where individuals rent space (a rack or shelf) in a shop to sell their second-hand clothing. The shop provides the venue, display, and transaction support, while sellers earn proceeds from their items.

Participant experiences with rent-a-rack revealed distinct motivations and barriers for both sellers and buyers. For sellers, the model appealed as an alternative to slower online resale platforms, providing a physical space to clear inventory and reach different customers. Some participants also valued low-cost entry opportunities such as racks offered free in exchange for social media promotion, and even when sales were unsuccessful they expressed appreciation for the concept and its potential.

However, significant barriers emerged. Sellers described mismatches between their stock and customer expectations, such as “vintage” styles not aligning with local demand for 1990s sportswear. Logistical challenges, including transporting large volumes of clothing without a car, combined with high commissions or flat fees, created financial risk when sales were not guaranteed.

***“I’ve been looking for years to do it. But it’s a big commitment. I don’t drive, so I’d have to bus all my clothes in, and they take up a lot of space. Plus, many racks take a big commission or charge high flat fees, which feels risky if sales aren’t guaranteed. And unlike Depop, you can’t adjust prices easily.”***

**— Consumer 16**

For buyers, Rent-a-Rack offered the convenience of curated second-hand goods, often items from popular labels or trendy items, for a cheaper price. In comparison to purchasing from digital resale platforms, participants liked that they could try on items in-store.

Yet other participants preferred to purchase from charity shops rather than from rent-a-rack outlets, seeing the charitable connection as more meaningful and liked that some of their money was going to a good cause.

***“I'd rather buy something from a charity-style shop than from racks where people rent space to sell clothes. I'd rather shop from the charity ones, so theoretically some of the money is going to charity.”***

**— Consumer 6**



## Clothes Swaps

There was a mix of perspectives on clothes swaps, with participants highlighting both their appeal and the challenges associated with participation. While many appreciated the social and community aspects, others felt that such events could be difficult to access or limited by size inclusivity.

One participant noted that they would be more likely to attend if the event catered specifically to plus-size clothing:

***“I suppose the one limiting factor is being plus sized. If it was like a plus size specific event, I would definitely consider [going]”***

**— Consumer 11**

Preferences varied between in-person and digital models. Some participants valued the ability to attend local events, where they could physically see and feel the garments before swapping.

***“I like to see the things in person and like, feel the materials and things like that, and try it on if that’s an option... I struggle with online stuff sometimes, because you’ll get it and you’re like, well, that’s not what I thought that would fit like.”***

**— Consumer 12**

For those who had participated in local swaps, events tended to be informal and community-based. One participant described being part of a local mums' group that hosted swaps several times a year, allowing members to exchange children's clothing in a relaxed environment.

Another described a neighbourhood event run out of a friend's front yard, with a \$5 donation used to cover basic costs such as tables and water for volunteers:

***“You bring your own bag, and you take as much as you like... I can appreciate that I'm paying five bucks and I get to take as many clothes [as] I like... I'll take a risk purely because of how cheap it has been, knowing that I can also take it back.”***

**— Consumer 14**

Overall, clothes swaps were valued for their social element and as a low-cost alternative to acquiring clothing. However, participation often relied on local networks, inclusivity, and a sense of safety and trust, which were key factors influencing whether individuals felt comfortable attending.

A few participants had also attempted to organise their own clothes swaps, recognising the potential community and sustainability benefits, but found it challenging to do so without access to clear guidelines, resources, or support. This highlights the need for practical frameworks and accessible information to help individuals or community groups establish and sustain these initiatives effectively.

## Rental and Hire Models

Most participants were aware of clothing hire and rental services, and several had used them in the past, primarily for special occasions such as weddings, 21st birthdays, or formal events. These services were generally viewed as practical for one-off situations rather than an ongoing part of everyday consumption. Renting was also not generally viewed as a sustainable act but as a pragmatic choice driven by price and convenience.

There were notable gender differences in rental practices. For men, hiring suits was described as a routine and socially accepted norm, particularly for formal occasions such as weddings and events. In contrast, women reported occasionally hiring dresses, but this was framed as situational rather than habitual, reflecting the more recent and less normalised nature of dress rental aligning with current research (ABC, 2023).

The main barriers to engaging in rental services were concerns about damaging an item and uncertainty about the value for money. Participants often noted that the cost of hiring a dress could be comparable to purchasing one outright:

***“If I was gonna spend \$150 to hire a dress,  
I prefer to spend \$150 to buy a dress.”***  
— Consumer 13

One participant, however, reflected positively on using rental services for specific life stages, describing how they had hired a dress for their baby shower. In this case, renting offered a cost-effective and practical solution for an event where the item would likely not be worn again.

## Subscription Models

There was limited awareness and engagement with clothing subscription models among participants. While some had heard of such services, none had personally used them. A subscription model, such as Inro, where customers receive a curated selection of second-hand items for a set period and can either return or purchase the pieces, was viewed by some as an interesting circular business model, but not necessarily practical for their own lifestyles.

For several participants, the main barrier was perceived effort and inconvenience. They felt that managing returns or dealing with recurring deliveries would be “too much of a headache,” particularly when trying to reduce clothing consumption. However, some participants recognised potential benefits, especially for specific clothing categories or occasions. One participant described how such a service could be useful for professional or corporate attire, allowing them to experiment with styles without commitment:

***“If I was to just get a box and I could try it alone at home, try them all out at work, see how I felt, and then if I like them, keep them. The rest sent back—that sounds quite appealing”***

**— Consumer 14**

Another participant expressed enthusiasm for the concept as a sustainable alternative to fast fashion:

***“That sounds really fun... you have the rotation of new clothes, but without the guilty feeling of like, oh my gosh, it’s fast fashion”***

**— Consumer 12**

# Recommendations

Findings from this study highlight opportunities to strengthen circular textile practices in South Australia by increasing participation and practical knowledge. While awareness of models such as resale, rental, and repair was relatively high, engagement remains limited. Targeted initiatives that make sustainable clothing behaviours visible and easy to adopt in everyday life will be key to shifting both perception and practice.

## **Strengthen Practical Knowledge and Behaviour Change Campaigns**

While many people are aware of sustainable fashion, there is limited understanding of how everyday clothing care habits affect garment longevity and environmental impact. Although clothing labels were commonly cited as a source of information, few participants reported using them to guide how they wash or care for their clothes. As many consumers still prefer to purchase new clothing rather than buy second-hand or use access-based alternatives, promoting simple at-home behaviours that extend garment life could have a strong impact. Campaigns could explore messaging that goes beyond environmental framing — for example, highlighting how proper care increases the resale value of clothing. Social media and influencers could also play a role in normalising these behaviours by making practices more visible and aspirational, particularly for younger audiences. Linking these actions to personal benefits, such as saving money and keeping clothes looking newer for longer, may resonate with a wider audience and support lasting behaviour change.

## **Use Influencer Marketing to Normalise Second-Hand and Repair Culture**

Partnering with local influencers, stylists, and sustainability advocates presents an effective opportunity to make second-hand shopping, clothing repair, and upcycling more mainstream. By framing these behaviours as fashionable, affordable, and aspirational, influencer campaigns can help shift perceptions and engage audiences who may not typically identify with sustainability messaging. Collaborations on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok could showcase how to style second-hand items, and tutorials for visible mending and repair. Featuring diverse voices and local personalities would further connect with younger audiences, helping to embed sustainable clothing practices into everyday culture.

## **Develop a Digital Platform or App to Build Participation**

There is strong potential to create a South Australia-specific platform that helps people easily find local circular initiatives such as swap events, repair workshops, textile drop-off points, tailoring services, and second-hand stores. While many participants expressed interest in these activities, most were unsure where to find them. A central, engaging, and accessible resource could bridge this gap by featuring searchable maps, event listings, and simple how-to content. By bringing together information in one place, the platform could turn interest into action and strengthen participation in South Australia's circular fashion economy.

## **Support Community Circular Initiatives**

Many participants expressed enthusiasm for taking part in or hosting local clothing swaps, repair sessions, and other textile-focused circular events but often lacked the confidence, resources, or know-how to organise them.

Developing a publicly available toolkit with clear steps for planning, promoting, and running these types of events would empower local groups and councils to take action. Providing small grants or access to venues could further reduce barriers, encouraging regular, inclusive gatherings that celebrate creativity, sharing, and sustainability. The Green Industries SA Community Circular Hub Guide is a valuable reference for organisations committed to supporting community-led circular economy initiatives and could be promoted as a key resource to guide the development of these local textile activities.

## **Build Repair and Upcycling Skills**

Given that repaired items remained in active use for an average of 2.5 years longer, efforts should focus on expanding opportunities to build and apply clothing repair and upcycling skills, particularly among younger age groups and men. While younger demographics show a strong willingness to learn, their reported knowledge tends to be lower than that of older groups.

Embedding repair skills in school curricula could help preserve these skills long term, while community initiatives such as local sewing events could support current adults. However, respondents emphasised that social connection is key, suggesting that formal training programs may be less desirable for younger audiences. Partnering with grassroots organisations, such as second-hand stores to offer repair or upcycling classes, may provide a more appealing way to engage them.

# Conclusion

This study highlights clear opportunities to embed circularity into South Australia's fashion and textiles landscape through education, participation, and accessibility. While awareness of sustainable practices is growing, many consumers still rely on new clothing purchases and lack confidence or visibility in alternative pathways.

Encouraging repair, reuse, and responsible care behaviours will require targeted initiatives that meet people where they are — in local communities, online spaces, and social networks. Building practical repair and upcycling skills, improving access to community events, and leveraging digital tools and influencer partnerships can together create the social momentum needed for change.

By connecting individual actions to shared environmental and economic outcomes, South Australia can position itself as a national leader in circular textiles — demonstrating how grassroots community innovation, supported by strategic policy and industry collaboration, can extend clothing lifespans and reduce waste for a more sustainable future.



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# Appendix 1

## Interview Guide Themes - Consumers

### Current Clothing Behaviours

Explored participants' existing clothing consumption habits, including:

- How they purchase and acquire clothing
- Frequency of clothing care (e.g., washing, ironing, dry-cleaning)
- Use of clothing care labels
- Attitudes toward clothing maintenance and repair
- Typical clothing lifespan
- Reasons for keeping clothing longer
- Disposal methods for unwanted clothing

### Sustainability Attitudes and Behaviours

Examined perceptions of sustainable fashion practices, including:

- Motivations for extending clothing lifespan
- Key influences on clothing purchases
- Barriers to sustainable clothing choices
- Awareness of circular fashion concepts
- Attitudes toward reuse, resale, repair, and clothing swaps
- Preferred donation or resale platforms

### Consumer Perceptions of Circular Business Models

For each circular business model (subscription, rental, second-hand/pre-loved, rent-a-rack, and repair models), participants were asked about:

- Awareness and prior use of the model
- Situations in which the model may be useful
- Preferred clothing types
- Motivators for adoption
- Barriers or concerns preventing adoption
- Impact on purchasing new clothing

# Appendix 2

## **Interview Guide Themes - Experts**

### **Background Information**

This section explored participants' professional background and involvement in the textile industry, including:

- Current role and organisation
- Involvement in South Australia's textile industry
- Career journey and industry experience

### **Involvement in Circular Textiles**

This section examined participants' understanding and involvement in circular textile practices, including:

- Definitions and perceptions of circular textiles
- Personal or professional involvement in circular initiatives
- Business practices related to repair, resale, rental, or upcycling
- Consumer interactions with circular business models

### **Consumer Behaviour, Barriers, and Opportunities**

This section explored expert perspectives on consumer engagement with circular fashion, including:

- Changes in consumer demand and attitudes toward circular fashion
- Common consumer feedback on circular initiatives
- Barriers preventing adoption of circular practices
- Industry challenges in promoting circular fashion
- Regulatory or policy barriers
- Consumer groups facing greater barriers
- Opportunities to increase participation and engagement
- Key consumer motivations for adopting circular fashion practices

## **Education and Awareness**

This section examined the role of education in improving consumer participation, including:

- Importance of consumer education
- Effective campaigns and awareness strategies
- Changes needed to improve engagement with circular models

## **Business Perspectives**

This section explored organisational experiences with circular business models, including:

- Benefits of adopting circular practices
- Financial and logistical challenges
- Industry collaboration and partnerships
- Future opportunities for partnerships and sector growth

# Appendix 3

## Survey Summary

### Block A: Consent and Eligibility

Eligibility criteria: Participants must reside in South Australia and have acquired clothing within the past 12 months.

- Age
- Acquisition in the past 12 months
- State of residence
- Gender

### Block B: Initial Demographics

- Postcode
- Wear frequency of classification of clothing
  - Casual clothing for everyday wear
  - Smart clothing for everyday wear / work
  - Smart clothing for social occasions (meals out, parties, formal functions)
  - Functional / work clothing (uniforms, safety overalls) — self-purchased
  - Sportswear / activewear
  - Merchandise (sports, music, movies, etc.)

### Block C: Clothing Items 1-4 (recently worn)

Each of the four clothing items repeated the same sequence of questions. Items 1-3 ask participants to select a recently worn item. Item 4 asks for their oldest item in their wardrobe.

- Clothing item
- Classification of clothing
- Acquisition of clothing (new, second-hand, gifted, etc.)
- Price
- Brand Name
- Second-hand acquisition (if applicable)

- Ownership duration (estimate)
- Expected ownership duration (estimate)
- Wear frequency
- Wash frequency
- Washing method
- Item Repair history
- Factors that would contribute to stopping wear
- Likelihood of disposal methods

### **Block D: Dormant Clothing (Item not worn in the past 12 months)**

Participants were asked to identify one item they have not worn in the past year and to answer the following questions about it.

- Do they have unworn clothing in their wardrobe
- Proportion of wardrobe not worn in the past 12 months
- Clothing item
- Classification of clothing
- Acquisition of clothing (new, second-hand, gifted, etc.)
- Price
- Brand Name
- Second-hand acquisition (if applicable)
- Ownership duration (estimate)
- Expected ownership duration (estimate)
- Repair history
- Reasons for not wearing
- Likelihood of disposal methods

### **Block E: Clothing Behaviours**

- Wearable clothing disposal methods
- Unwearable clothing disposal methods
- Information sources for clothing care
- Perception of skill for clothing repair
- Perception of willingness to learn clothing repair skills

## **Block F: Closing demographics**

- Certainty of estimates
- Frequency of purchase clothing
- Average monthly spend on clothing
- Education levels
- Current work status
- Income

