

Smartphone sharing with intimate partners: Fact sheet¹

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29 May 2025

This fact sheet presents key findings from the first study of how Australian couples share smartphone access, based on an online survey of 967 Australian adults who use a smartphone and have been in an intimate relationship.²

We found that sharing access to smartphones was common in couples, even though most Australian adults own their own phones. Convenience and trust were the most common reasons for sharing with partners. However, most Australians had never discussed expectations for shared phone access.

While this study did not focus on abuse, some participants discussed technology-facilitated abuse and other potentially problematic aspects of phone access. Given that intimate partners are the perpetrators in a sizeable portion of identity crime, financial abuse, and technology-facilitated abuse, and about 40% of marriages end in divorce, separation and abuse are key considerations for cybersecurity design and policy.

The prevalence of access sharing points to the need for cybersecurity policies and designs that go beyond one-user/one-device models to accommodate how Australians use their phones in real life. They also indicate a need for conversation about phone access sharing and its implications.

Key findings

- 98% of participants own their own phone.
- 82% of Participants have their own phone plan. 17% share a plan with their partner.
- Participants use their mobile phones for essential functions on a weekly basis. Most participants text (98%), look up information (97%), use social media (96%), make calls (91%), and play music (83%) at least once a

¹ Recommended citation: Dragiewicz, M., Ackerman, J. & Haaland, M. (2025). Smartphone sharing with intimate partners: Fact sheet. Griffith University & Australian Communications Consumer Action Network.

² For full study details, see Dragiewicz, M., Ackerman, J. & Haaland, M. (2025). *Smartphone sharing with intimate partners: Implications for telecommunications consumer cybersecurity*. Griffith University & Australian Communications Consumer Action Network.

week. More than half of participants do banking (70%), get directions (70%), use their phones for work (65%) or shopping (51%) and at least once a week.

- 95% of Participants lock their phone.
- Seventy per cent of Australians share access to their smartphones with their partners, either by sharing authentication credentials or leaving the phone unlocked.
- 74% of participants who used a lock screen said their partner could unlock their phone.
- 85% said their partner had used their phone at least once in the last year.
- Many participants also reported sharing with others. About 34% reported sharing their phone with one of their children, and about 31% reported sharing with a friend. Around 17% to 18% reported sharing with another family member, parent or in-law. About three percent reported sharing with a roommate, housemate, or an acquaintance in the past year.
- There were no significant demographic differences in phone sharing except for age. The overall trend was for sharing to decrease with age, but this is complicated by interrelationships with relationship status and duration. People in their twenties and over seventy years of age were most likely to share access to their phone with a partner.
- Married people were most likely to share access to their phone (78%), followed by those who were engaged (74%) or in a de facto relationship (70%). However, 59% of never-married people also reported sharing their phone with a partner.
- Relationship duration was associated with sharing, with 74% of those in relationships over 3 years sharing access compared to 59% of those in relationships under one year.
- Most participants (91%) said they started sharing access to their phone when they willingly offered to do so, with 7% reporting their partner asked for access.
- The most common reasons reported for sharing access to a phone with a partner were trust and convenience. The most common reasons participants gave for sharing access were “I have nothing to hide” (53%) and “It’s convenient” (50%).
- Despite high levels of shared access, Participants used a variety of privacy behaviours on their phones. Deleting something so the partner wouldn’t see it was most common (40%). Hiding something so the partner wouldn’t see it was the second most common (36%). Turning off location services was used by 28% of participants. Locking apps (13%), hiding the phone (8%), and changing the password to lock out the partner (6%) were less common.

- Only 11% of participants reported discussing their expectations for sharing. Eighty-seven percent of participants had not discussed any rules or expectations for partners when using their phone. One percent were unsure whether they had or not.