

The Future Impact of Artificial Intelligence on First Nations Communities: Opportunities and Risks



Dr Kyle Turner
Paul Ramsay Foundation Fellowship

1. Context

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping how Australia learns, heals, governs, and connects. For First Nations People, historically one of the last to benefit from advancements in technology, healthcare, and education, AI represents both a new frontier and a familiar tension.

Thus, my Fellowship asked a simple question: What will AI mean for First Nations People in Australia?

The answer was not straightforward, but a set of tensions between opportunity and risk, equity and exclusion, autonomy and automation.

2. The promise and the risk

AI's promise is unquestionably real. A chance to:

- connect families to care more quickly
- make learning travel across distance
- support rangers on Country
- strengthen languages at risk

Yet its dangers are also just as real:

- predictive policing trained on biased data
- child-protection systems confusing surveillance with safety
- housing tools that exclude as easily as they repair

3. Framework

My Fellowship analysed AI through the 17 Closing the Gap Targets, asking three questions for each:

- What opportunities can AI unlock?
- What risks can it deepen?
- What interventions shift the balance toward benefit?

From this analysis came a national roadmap and a list of recommendations.



ACCELERATE

Focus areas: Health, education, languages, environment

Action: Scale proven community-controlled models; invest in bilingual datasets and digital infrastructure



ADAPT

Focus areas: Employment, housing, economic participation

Action: Embed transparency, accountability, and cultural governance in all design and procurement



PAUSE

Focus areas: Justice, policing, child protection

Action: Halt deployment until First Nations consent and redress frameworks exist

4. Key takeaways from my research

The challenge of AI is not just a technical one, but also ethical. AI will move in the direction of whoever holds power to shape it.

What does cultural safety look like when an algorithm is making inferences? What does self-determination mean when data itself can be colonised, centralised, and monetised?

Three key takeaways:

1. The most promising AI projects — from telehealth to ranger monitoring — are those taken up on community terms, not imposed.
2. Cross-cutting challenges remain:
 - a. The Digital Divide, still widest in remote regions
 - b. Algorithmic bias, where systems inherit inequality
 - c. Data colonialism, extraction without consent or benefit
3. Indigenous Data Sovereignty is a non-negotiable. It defines who collects, owns, and benefits from data, and underpins every ethical pathway.

5. Recommendations

1

Mandate Indigenous Data Sovereignty in all government, community, and philanthropic AI programs.

2

Fund First Nations-led AI hubs to scope and co-design tools, ethics, and training.

3

Close the Digital Divide through targeted infrastructure, affordability, and digital-skills programs.

4

Shift power from consultation to co-ownership and IP participation for First Nations organisations.

6. The choices ahead

AI will not carry us forward on its own. The question is whether it deepens dependence on systems that have failed us, or strengthens the authority of communities to govern their own futures.

The future of AI in Australia will not be written by code, but by whether we choose to listen — and share control — with the communities who've long known how to care for systems of life older than any machines.