NAB Consumer Spend Trend
March 2026

NAB Economics & Markets Research

Total spending	+2.1% mom	+8.4% yoy
Total spending (ex. fuel)	+0.7% mom	+7.5% yoy

Over the last month

+2.1%
Consumer spending
Essential items, particularly fuel, drove spending growth.

+3.7%
Goods spending
Gains across all goods categories, with fuel spending surging.

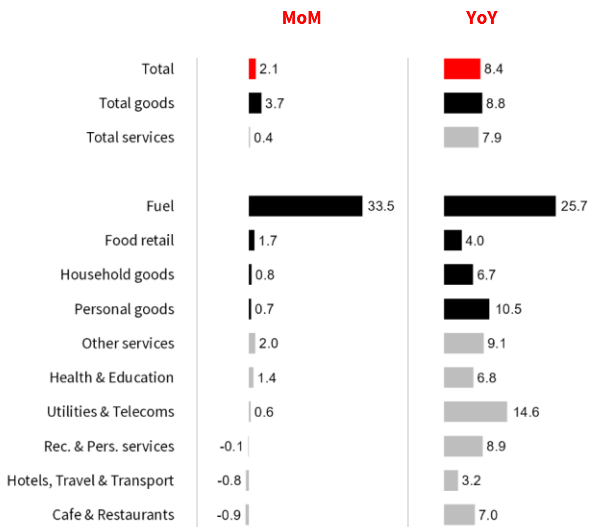
+0.4%
Services spending
Higher services spending masked pullbacks in discretionary activities.

- Consumer spending rose 2.1% in March, driven by a sharp 33.5% increase in fuel spending linked to the Middle East conflict.
- Excluding fuel, spending still rose a solid 0.7%, supported by higher food spending (+1.7%), likely reflecting some stockpiling, and rising construction costs that lifted other services spending by 2.0%
- While spending on discretionary goods remained resilient in March, consumers began to scale back discretionary activities.

Over the last year

- Fuel spending surged 25.7% over the past year, driving much of the growth in goods spending.
- In services, growth was led by utilities & telecoms and other services. Travel and hospitality spending rose more modestly.

NAB consumer spending by category

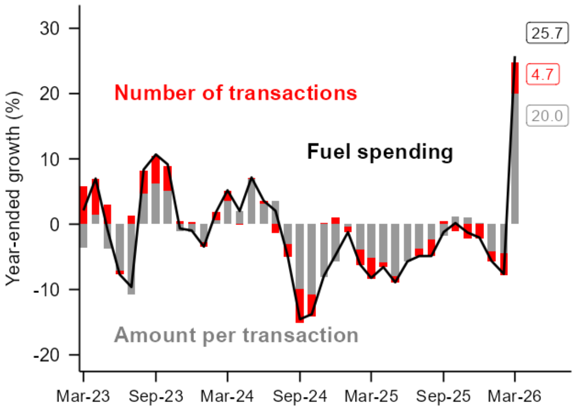


15 April 2026 | Authors: Sally Auld, Gareth Spence, Brien McDonald, Thao Nguyen, Rocky Facciolo

Fuel price surge drives headline spending growth

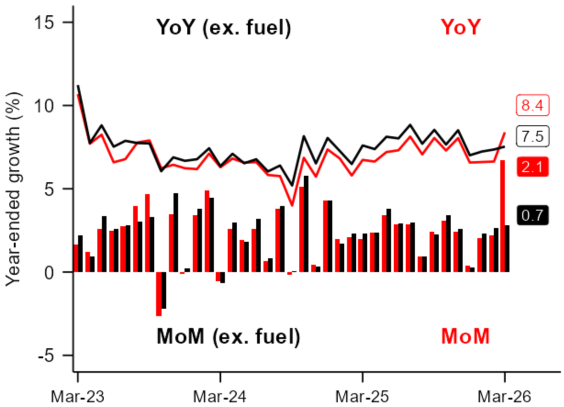
Fuel price shock drives spike in fuel spending

- Fuel spending rose 25.7% over the year to March 2026, reflecting increases in both the number of transactions (up 4.7%) and the average spend per transaction (up 20%).
- The sharp increase in fuel spending in March was driven by higher fuel prices following the escalation in the Middle East conflict. In Australia, average fuel prices rose 37% over the month and 28% over the past year.[1]
- While fuel transaction volumes have declined over the past two years as households shift toward more fuel-efficient vehicles such as EVs and hybrids,[2] the pickup in transactions in March, alongside a smaller rise in spend per transaction than fuel prices, points to precautionary purchases and smaller refuelling amounts as prices rose.



Fuel boosts headline spending, but underlying momentum is easing

- Fuel spending was the dominant driver of consumer spending growth in March, lifting total spending by 2.1% mom and 8.4% over the year.
- Excluding fuel, spending still increased by a solid 0.7% in the month and 7.5% over the year. However, the growth was largely driven by stronger spending on foods and construction services, which likely reflects some stockpiling activities and higher construction costs.
- Annual spending growth has eased since peaking in November, with recent gains driven mainly by essential categories such as food and utilities, while spending on hospitality and travel eased, pointing to softer discretionary demand amid ongoing inflationary pressure on household budgets.

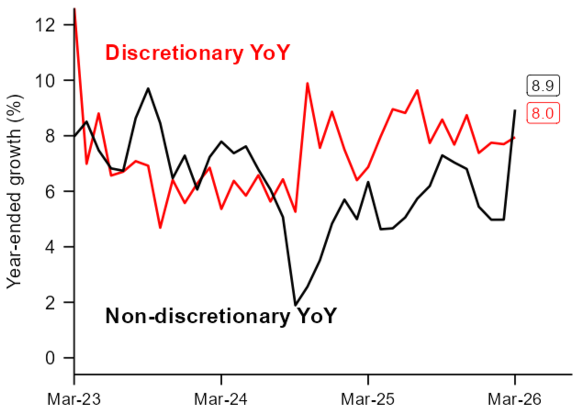


[1] Source: Daily terminal gate price data from the Australian Institute of Petroleum.
[2] The share of Australian EV fleet doubled from 1% in 2023 to 2 % in 2025. Source: State of Electric Vehicles 2025

Fuel price shock shifts spending toward essentials

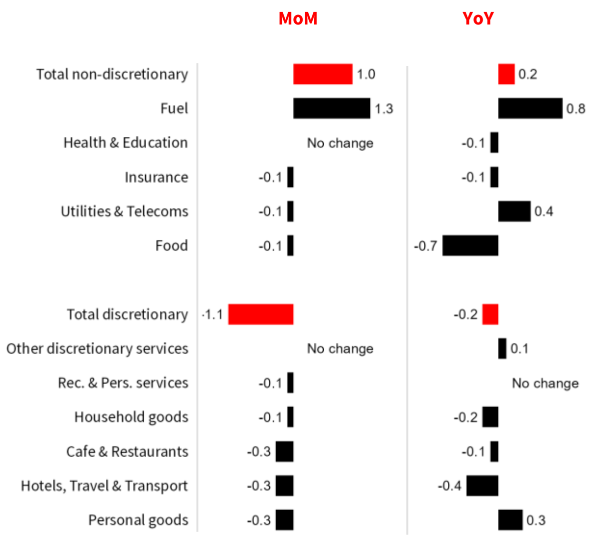
Fuel prices lift essential spending while discretionary spending softens

- The surge in fuel prices has lifted non-discretionary spending growth above discretionary spending, reshaping the composition of overall consumption.
- Discretionary spending has remained positive over the past year at around 8%, but growth has eased from earlier highs even before the fuel price shock, signalling a gradual moderation in momentum.
- While consumers appear relatively resilient in the immediate aftermath of the fuel price shock following the Middle East conflict, a more pronounced pull-back in discretionary spending may emerge in coming months if fuel prices remain elevated and cost pressures continue to flow through to other essential items.



Higher fuel costs reshape the spending mix[3]

- In March, the spending mix shifted toward non-discretionary items, with fuel driving the largest month-on-month increase in spending share (up 1.3%), while discretionary categories, particularly hospitality, hotels, travel & transport and personal goods, saw declines.
- Over the past year, fuel and utilities have taken a larger share of consumer spending, while food's share has eased and several discretionary categories, including travel and household goods, have seen sustained declines.
- This pattern highlights how higher essential costs, especially fuel and electricity, are crowding out discretionary spending, signalling ongoing pressure on household budgets and a more cautious consumer spending profile.



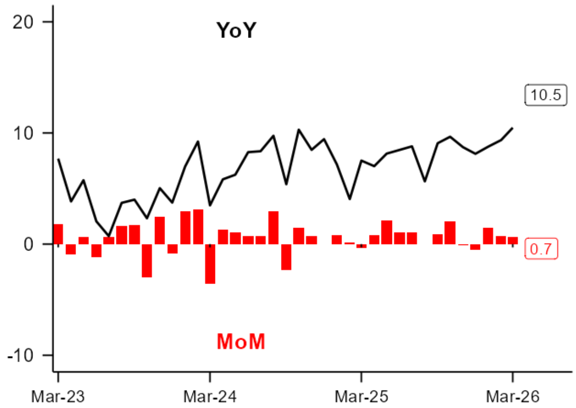
[3] This chart shows changes in the composition of consumer spending across categories. Number may not add up due to rounding errors.

Spending by category

Personal goods

18% Share | +0.7% MoM
+1.7% 3Mo3M | +10.5% YoY

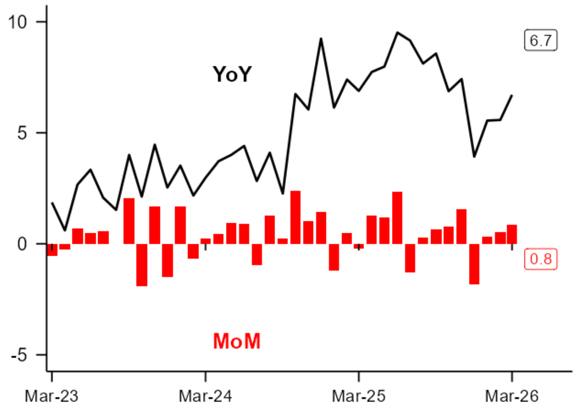
- Personal goods spending rose for the third consecutive month, increasing 0.7% in March.
- Over the past 12 months, the strongest growth was recorded in toys and game retailing, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, department stores and clothing.
- In contrast, spending on footwear and entertainment media declined over the past year.



Household goods

11% Share | +0.8% MoM
+0.2% 3Mo3M | +6.7% YoY

- Despite higher fuel spending, consumers continued to spend more on household goods. Spending on household goods increased 0.8% in March and 6.7% over the past year.
- Motor vehicle parts, tyres and motor vehicle retailing were the main contributors to household goods spending growth over the year, with year-on-year growth in motor vehicle retailing accelerating sharply from February, potentially reflecting a lift in electric vehicle purchases following the fuel price shock.
- Meanwhile, spending on marine equipment and non-store retailing decreased.

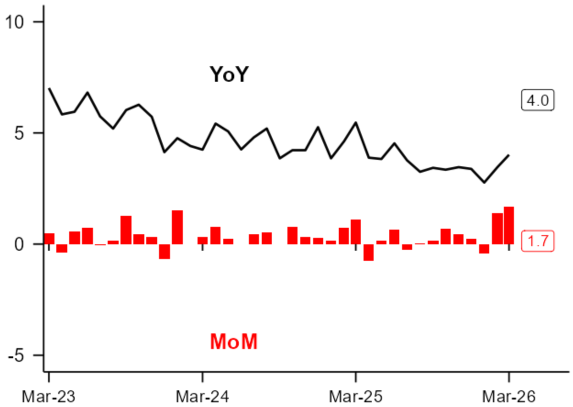


Spending by category

Food retail

17% Share | +1.7% MoM
+1.3% 3Mo3M | +4.0% YoY

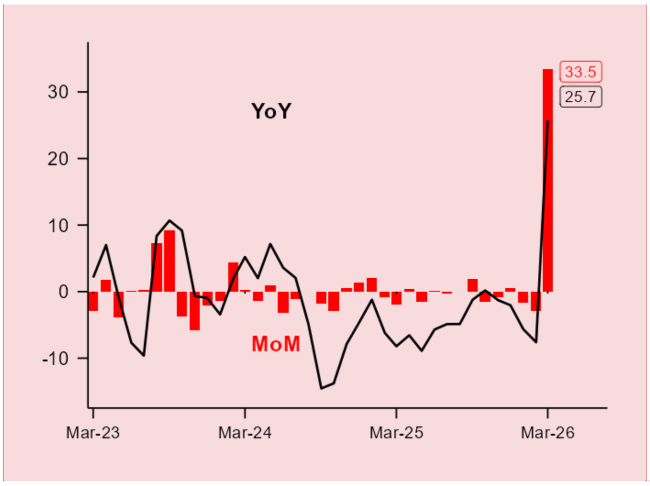
- Food spending increased 1.7% in March and was up 4.0% over the past year. The recent acceleration points to rising inflationary pressures, which could be intensify if fuel prices remain elevated.
- Over the past 12 months, spending at supermarkets and grocery stores drove the growth in food spending, which was partially offset by a decrease in spending on liquor.



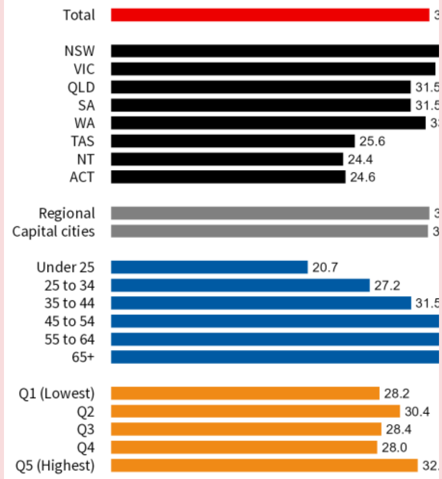
Fuel

6% Share | +33.5% MoM
+7.1% 3Mo3M | +25.7% YoY

- Fuel prices surged following the Middle East conflict, which drove fuel spending up 33.5% in March and 25.7% over the past year.
- March data show that the increase in fuel spending was broadly similar across capital cities and regional areas.
- However, larger states such as NSW and VIC, along with older age groups (55 – 64 and 65+), recorded stronger fuel spending growth during the month.



Commented [TN1]: Shall we replace this chart with the MoM fuel spending growth by demographics



Spending by category

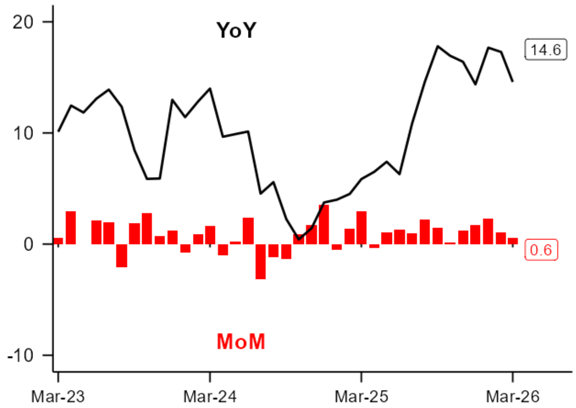
Utilities & Telecoms

7% Share

+0.6% MoM

+4.9% 3Mo3M

+14.6% YoY



- Utilities & telecoms spending lifted 0.6% in March, a slower pace of growth than in February.
- Over the past 12 months, growth in utilities & telecoms spending was largely driven by an increase in electricity spending following the end of energy bill rebates, alongside strong increases in internet publishing and broadcasting and software publishing.
- In contrast, spending on newspapers, books and other information services declined over the same period.

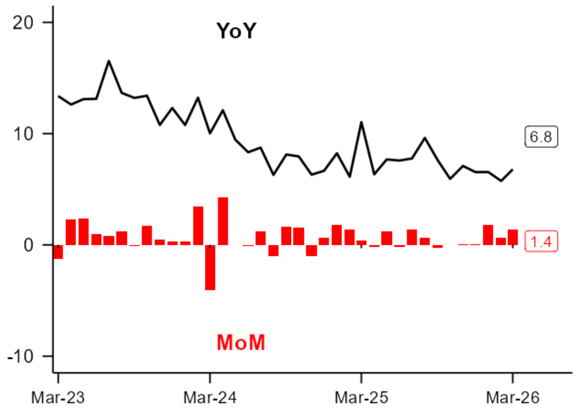
Health & Education

7% Share

+1.4% MoM

+2.8% 3Mo3M

+6.8% YoY

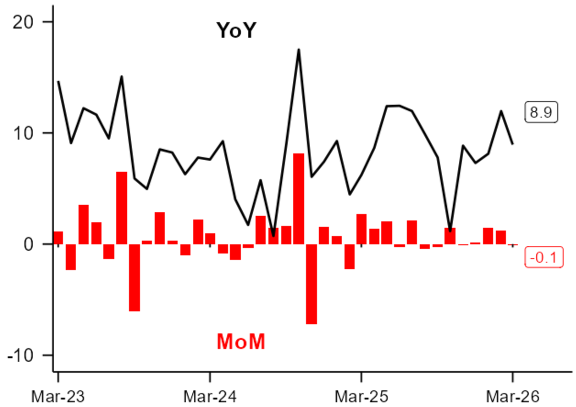


- Health & education spending rose 1.4% in March, an acceleration from the more subdued growth last month.
- Over the past year, spending growth was strongest in preschool education, pathology and diagnostic imaging services.
- Meanwhile, spending on tertiary education, residential care services and hospitals experienced slower growth.
- Earlier impacts of higher bulk-billing rates might have faded as medical services spending, particularly for GP services, picked up in March after several months of subdued growth.

Spending by category

Recreation & Personal services

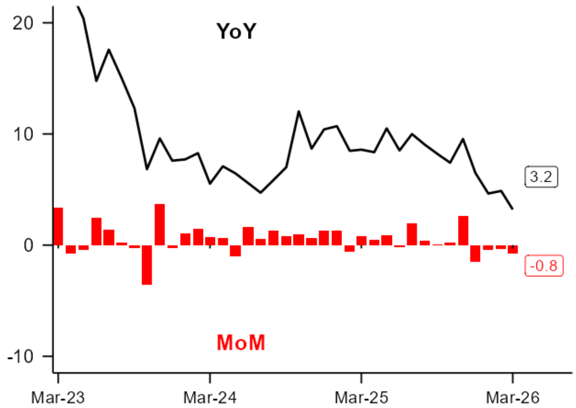
4% Share | -0.1% MoM
+2.3% 3Mo3M | +8.9% YoY



- Recreation & personal services spending was broadly unchanged in March, with growth easing to 8.9% over the year to March.
- Over the past year, strong spending growth was recorded in performing arts, sports and physical recreation activities.
- However, consumers cut back on gambling activities and trips to museums.

Hotels, Travel & Transport

9% Share | -0.8% MoM
-1.2% 3Mo3M | +3.2% YoY



- Hotels, travel and transport spending declined by 0.8% in March.
- The sharpest fall was in air and space transport, reflecting a rise in air ticket refunds following travel disruptions linked to the Middle East conflict. Notably, spending on accommodation and travel agency services held up, suggesting consumers largely proceeded with planned travel.
- The decline was partly offset by a strong increase in rail passenger transport as more consumers shifted to public transport amid higher fuel prices. With states such as Victoria and Tasmania introducing free public transport from April, spending in this category is expected to moderate next month.

Spending by category

Cafe & Restaurants

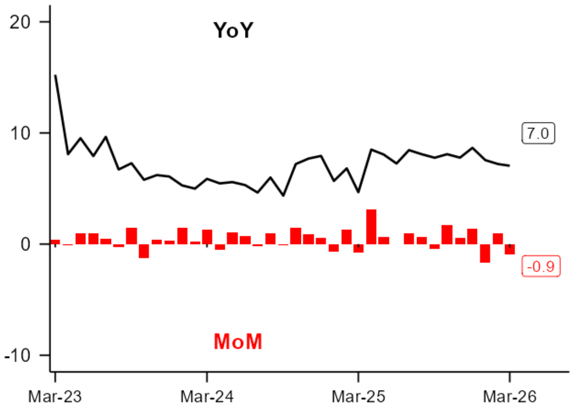
10% Share

-0.9% MoM

-0.3% 3Mo3M

+7.0% YoY

- Hospitality spending fell 0.9% in March though it remained 7.0% higher over the past year. The growth has eased since the peak in December.
- In March, consumers reduced spending on eating out while takeaway spending was broadly unchanged.
- Over the past year, the strongest spending growth was recorded in catering services and clubs while growth in takeaway food services and pubs was more moderate.



Other services

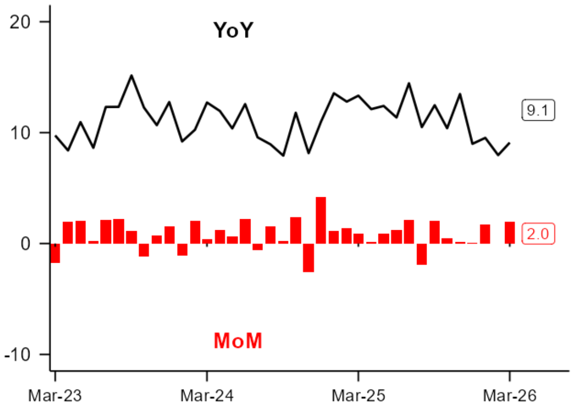
12% Share

+2.0% MoM

+2.4% 3Mo3M

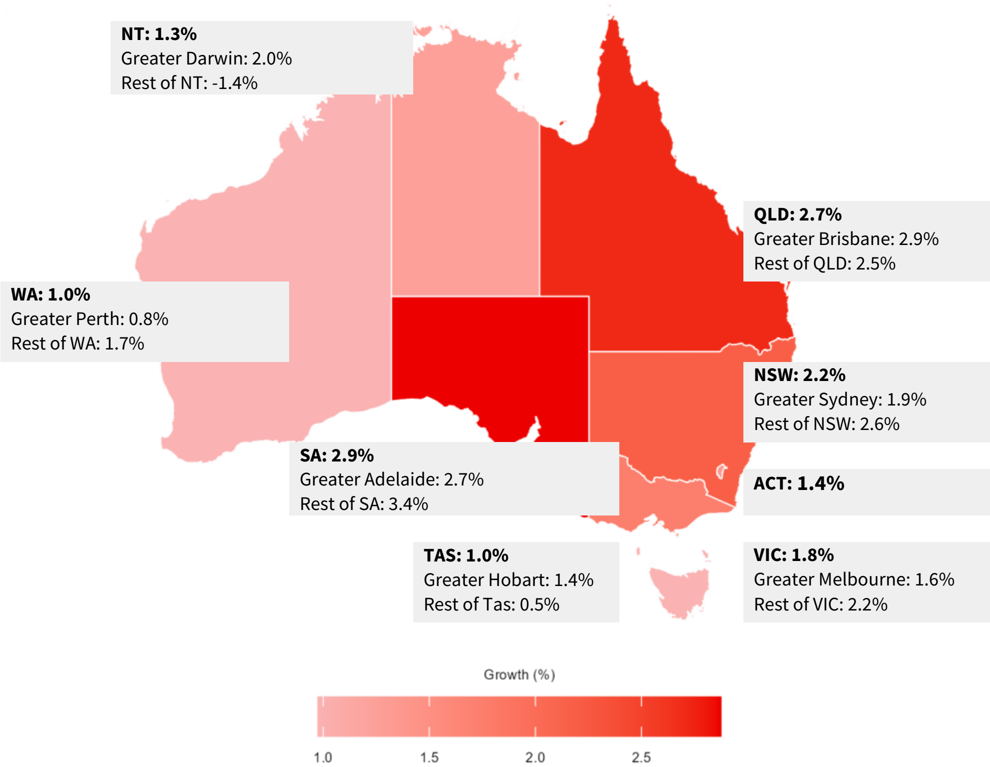
+9.1% YoY

- Other services spending grew 2.0% in March, driven largely by increases in construction spending.
- Over the year to March, the strongest growth was recorded in spending on construction and maintenance activities. The recent pick-up potentially reflects higher cost of construction materials and expectations of further increased prices as a result of the Middle East conflict.
- Spending on general insurance including car insurance and house insurance also showed signs of acceleration over the past year, while spending on religious services and professional services declined.



Spending by region

Spending growth by region (MoM, %)



SA & QLD
Leading growth regions

+2.9%
Largest increase (SA)

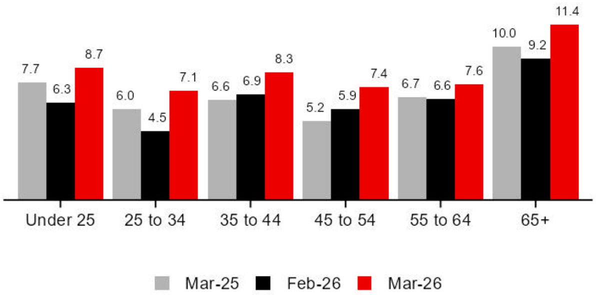
+1.0%
Lowest increase (TAS & WA)

- Consumer spending grew across all states and territories, driven by a sharp lift in fuel spending following the fuel price surge.
- SA (2.9%) and QLD (2.7%) led the spending growth in March. Beyond fuel, spending growth in SA was supported by higher spending on hotels, travel and transport and household goods while QLD and larger states including NSW and VIC saw the highest growth in health & education and other services.
- Over the past year, spending growth across all states and territories has been driven primarily by essential categories, particularly utilities and fuel.

Spending by demographics

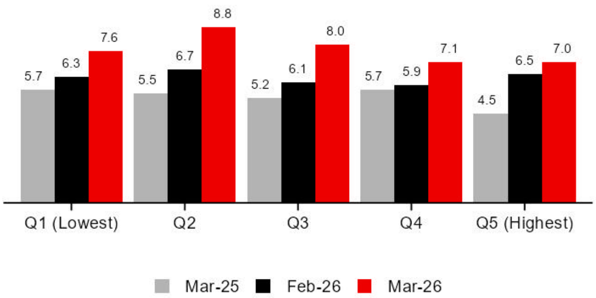
Spending by age (YoY, %)

- Higher fuel prices lifted spending growth across all age groups.
- Consumers aged over 65 experienced the strongest spending growth across most categories, particularly fuel, utilities and food, which may reflect stronger precautionary spending behaviour in response to the price shock compared to younger age groups.



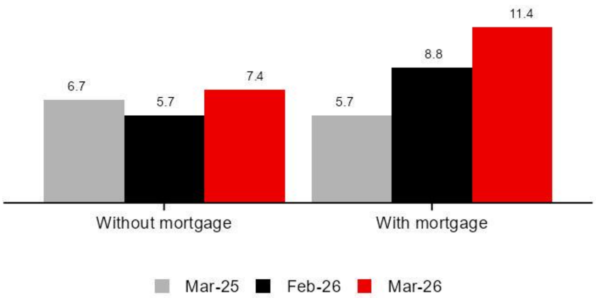
Spending by income (YoY, %)

- Over the year to March, people in lower income groups (Q1 – Q3) experienced stronger spending growth than people with higher income.
- While people with lower income saw stronger growth in spending on food, eating out and other services, people in top income quintiles spend more on recreation & personal services and hotels, travel & transport.



Spending by mortgage status(YoY, %)

- Spending growth among mortgage holders over the 12 months was around double that recorded over the same period last year.
- Except for utilities & telecoms, where spending growth was broadly similar, mortgage holders experienced stronger spending growth than non-mortgage holders across all other categories.



About this report

NAB publishes aggregated customer transaction data with the view to providing real-time insights into economic activity in Australia. NAB takes data privacy very seriously. All customer transaction data has been aggregated and no individual's data is specifically identified or analysed as part of this process. The underlying data used in this report are not sold or made publicly available. This monthly report replaces the fortnightly *Data Insights* report and the monthly *NAB Cashless Retail Sales Index*, which were discontinued in October 2022.

Consumer Spending Methodology

Data on consumer spending are derived from NAB electronic transactions data, encompassing more than 4 million transactions per day. The data include transactions made by EFTPOS, Credit Card, BPAY, Bank Transfers, Direct Debits and Paypal services where available, and include transactions with Australian and international merchants. Spending includes both online and offline transactions. The data excludes cash withdrawals made during a purchase and purchases made offline in an overseas location. As the data only capture electronic transactions, results can be affected by changes in the take-up rate of electronic payment methods relative to cash. State splits of spending are based on where the customer lives, which may or may not be where the actual spending activity occurs. Customers without an Australian residential address are excluded. Transactions attributable to non-consumer sectors including Manufacturing, Mining, and Wholesale are excluded, as are Financial & Insurance Services (excluding General Insurance, Health Insurance, Life Insurance and Auxiliary Insurance Services) transactions and Public Administration transactions (largely tax payments). Gambling spending and rental and mortgage payments are also excluded. Opportunities to expand coverage to include spending in these areas will be explored in the future. Individual industry and state series are seasonally adjusted using the X-11 method.

Spending categories

Personal goods	Pharmaceutical, cosmetic and toiletry goods, clothing, footwear, watches and jewellery, recreation goods including toys, games, newspapers, books, stationery, flowers
Household goods	Hardware, building and garden supplies, computers, electrical and electronic goods, furniture, vehicles and vehicle parts
Food retail	Supermarket and grocery stores, fresh fruit and vegetables, fresh meat, fish and poultry, liquor, other specialised food
Utilities & Telecoms	Electricity, water, waste collection, mobile phone services, internet, publishing and broadcasting services, data and other information services
Health & Education	Health services including GP, specialist, allied health, hospital, ambulance Childcare, school education, tertiary education, aged care, tutoring, arts and sports instruction
Recreation & Personal services	Sports, arts and recreation activities including event tickets, casino and lottery, personal care including hairdressing, parking, funeral and cemetery services
Hotels, Travel & Transport	Accommodation (hotels, short-term stays), transportation, rental vehicles, travel agent and tour arrangement services
Café & Restaurants	Cafes, restaurants, takeaways, pubs and clubs
Other services	Construction and home repairing/maintenance services, insurance, property management, professional services including accounting and legal services, vet, vehicle maintenance and repairing, other admin services and religious and interest group services

Spending by demographics

Spending analyses by age, income and mortgage status were conducted using restricted samples based on available customer data. Income includes earnings from wages, government allowances, rental income, interest and dividends. The sample excludes outliers and is segmented into 5 income quintiles with quintile 1 representing the lowest 20% of income earners and quintile 5 representing the highest 20%. Due to variations in sample composition, the results for spending by demographic groups may not correspond exactly to the overall totals.

Mortgage status

We have applied a cohort methodology to identify and track mortgage customers, matching to their spending over the analysis period. We may make changes to future iterations of the cohort, which may affect the timeseries series.

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