

SALARY GUIDE - 2026

# Australian Tech Engineering Salary Guide.

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Senior, staff and principal compensation bands across AI, software, data, cyber, cloud and forward-deployed engineering. Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and remote-first benchmarks. Permanent and contractor day rates.

Re:Sourced - Specialist Tech Recruitment - Sydney, AU  
Edition: 2026 - Calibrated against active searches Q1 2026  
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# 1. Executive summary

AI engineering compensation continued to pull away from the broader engineering market in 2026. Senior AI engineers in Sydney now command base salaries 15-25% above senior software engineers in like-for-like roles, with the gap widening at staff and principal levels. The Sydney-Melbourne gap closed at senior IC and is now within 3-5%, and within 1-2% at staff and above.

The contractor market tightened as several large transformation programs began in Q1. Day rates for senior cloud and platform engineers rose 8-12% year over year. Cyber day rates rose more sharply (10-15%) on the back of clearance demand and AppSec spend at listed financial services.

Remote-first compensation now tracks Sydney bands within 3% at senior IC level, ending several years of "regional discount" pricing. Most remote-first AU employers no longer regional-discount; the few that do lose senior candidates at offer.

## Headline numbers

- Senior software engineer, Sydney: AUD 180-240k base (up roughly 4% YoY)
- Senior AI engineer, Sydney: AUD 220-340k base (up roughly 9% YoY)
- Staff software engineer, Sydney: AUD 230-320k base (up roughly 5% YoY)
- Senior software engineer day rate, Sydney: AUD 1,000-1,400 (up roughly 7% YoY)
- Senior AI engineer day rate, Sydney: AUD 1,200-1,800 (up roughly 10% YoY)

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## 2. Sydney - permanent salary bands

Sydney is Australia's deepest tech engineering market. Bands below cover the senior individual contributor through staff and principal levels for permanent placements. Base only.

DISCIPLINE	SENIOR IC BASE	STAFF BASE	PRINCIPAL BASE
<b>AI / ML engineer</b>	AUD 220-340k	AUD 320-420k	AUD 400-540k
<b>Software engineer</b>	AUD 180-240k	AUD 230-320k	AUD 300-450k
<b>Data engineer</b>	AUD 180-240k	AUD 220-300k	AUD 280-380k
<b>Cyber engineer</b>	AUD 190-280k	AUD 260-360k	AUD 330-440k
<b>Cloud / SRE / platform</b>	AUD 190-260k	AUD 250-340k	AUD 320-430k
<b>Forward deployed</b>	AUD 200-320k	AUD 280-400k	AUD 360-480k

Senior IC bands run consistent across most well-funded scale-ups and listed financial services. Frontier AI scale-ups (foundation model and platform-AI companies) often exceed the senior AI band by 30-50%, particularly on equity. Forward deployed engineers in AI-native scale-ups command top-of-band base plus structured equity.

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## 3. Melbourne - permanent salary bands

Melbourne bands run roughly 3-5% below Sydney for like-for-like senior IC roles, with parity at staff and above. Listed financial services and large scale-ups pay parity to Sydney.

DISCIPLINE	SENIOR IC BASE	STAFF BASE	PRINCIPAL BASE
<b>AI / ML engineer</b>	AUD 215-330k	AUD 310-410k	AUD 390-520k
<b>Software engineer</b>	AUD 175-235k	AUD 225-310k	AUD 290-440k
<b>Data engineer</b>	AUD 175-235k	AUD 215-290k	AUD 270-370k
<b>Cyber engineer</b>	AUD 185-270k	AUD 250-350k	AUD 320-430k
<b>Cloud / SRE / platform</b>	AUD 185-255k	AUD 245-330k	AUD 315-420k
<b>Forward deployed</b>	AUD 195-310k	AUD 275-390k	AUD 350-470k

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## 4. Brisbane - permanent salary bands

Brisbane bands run 8-12% below Sydney for like-for-like senior IC roles. Defence and government roles are typically pegged to APS classifications or contractor day rates rather than commercial bands.

DISCIPLINE	SENIOR IC BASE	STAFF BASE	PRINCIPAL BASE
<b>AI / ML engineer</b>	AUD 200-310k	AUD 290-380k	AUD 360-480k
<b>Software engineer</b>	AUD 165-220k	AUD 210-285k	AUD 270-400k
<b>Data engineer</b>	AUD 165-220k	AUD 200-275k	AUD 255-345k
<b>Cyber engineer</b>	AUD 175-260k	AUD 235-330k	AUD 300-410k
<b>Cloud / SRE / platform</b>	AUD 175-240k	AUD 225-310k	AUD 295-390k
<b>Forward deployed</b>	AUD 185-290k	AUD 260-365k	AUD 330-440k

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## 5. Remote-first Australia

Remote-first base salary now tracks Sydney bands within 3% at senior IC level. Staff and above run at parity. Travel allowance for in-person quarters and home-office allowance should be in the offer at signing.

Most remote-first employers settle into a quarterly in-person cadence (one to two days, often Sydney or Melbourne). The few employers that still regional-discount lose senior candidates at offer stage.

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## 6. Contractor day rates 2026

Sydney day rates listed below. Melbourne tracks Sydney within 5%; Brisbane runs 10-15% lower. Day rates exclude GST.

DISCIPLINE	SENIOR	STAFF	PRINCIPAL
<b>AI / ML engineer</b>	AUD 1,200-1,800	AUD 1,600-2,200	AUD 1,900-2,800
<b>Software engineer</b>	AUD 1,000-1,400	AUD 1,300-1,800	AUD 1,600-2,400
<b>Data engineer</b>	AUD 1,000-1,400	AUD 1,200-1,700	AUD 1,500-2,200
<b>Cyber engineer</b>	AUD 1,100-1,600	AUD 1,400-2,000	AUD 1,700-2,500
<b>Cloud / SRE / platform</b>	AUD 1,100-1,500	AUD 1,300-1,900	AUD 1,600-2,400

Cleared (NV1, NV2, TS) day rates run 15-25% above the bands above for cyber and cloud roles in defence-adjacent contexts. Strict-onsite mandates compress the candidate pool and command a premium.

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## 7. Total compensation context

Bands above are base only. Total compensation typically runs:

- Listed companies (CBA, Macquarie, Atlassian): base + 10-25% bonus + equity (RSU). Total comp 25-50% above base for staff and above.
- Series C-D scale-ups: base + small bonus + equity (options). Total comp commonly 20-50% above base; equity outcome highly company-dependent.
- Frontier AI / AI-native scale-ups: base + meaningful equity (often RSU at later stage, options earlier). Total comp commonly 50-100% above base; some equity packages exceed total comp 200%+.
- Public service / government: APS classifications, no equity, base + super (typically 15.4% PSSAP).

Superannuation is currently 11.5% of base (rising to 12% on 1 July 2026 per the SG step-up schedule). Most permanent offers state base "plus super" rather than including it.

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## 8. Methodology

This guide is calibrated against Re:Sourced active and recent search briefs in the 12 months ending Q1 2026, supplemented with public salary data points from Glassdoor AU, Levels.fyi (Australia filter), Robert Half AU 2026 Salary Guide, Hays 2026 Salary Guide, and Talent International "More Than Money" 2026.

Bands represent the 25th to 75th percentile of accepted offers for like-for-like senior IC roles. Outliers (top 10% AI engineering at frontier labs, bottom 10% at low-stage early-startup) are excluded from the band but discussed in the total compensation section.

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## 9. What to do with this

- If you are pricing a 2026 brief, anchor on the 50th to 75th percentile of the relevant band. The 25th-50th percentile drives offer-acceptance issues at final stage.
- If you are renewing a 2025 retention package, expect senior IC base to be 4-10% above last cycle for software roles, 8-12% above for AI/ML, 10-15% above for cyber and senior cloud.
- If you are competing with frontier AI scale-ups for ML talent, plan equity structure into the offer at signing rather than as a retention lever 12 months later.
- If you are positioning a remote-first role, do not regional-discount AU candidates against your Sydney band. The 2026 candidate market closed that arbitrage.

For a full brief read with named-employer comp data, contact Re:Sourced. Submit a brief at [www.resourced.com.au/contact](http://www.resourced.com.au/contact) or read the live online version at [www.resourced.com.au/tools/salary-guide-2026](http://www.resourced.com.au/tools/salary-guide-2026).

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