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TECHNOLOGY GUIDE · CYBER FRAMEWORKS

Essential Eight & ASD Essentials

Australia's cyber security baseline, what changed in October 2026, and where your business stands

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A guide for business owners and boards: what the Essential Eight is, how maturity levels work, what changed with ASD Essentials in October 2026, how SMB1001 fits, and how whedo.it takes a business from assessment to evidence.

1. What the Essential Eight is

The Australian Signals Directorate (ASD) publishes strategies to mitigate cyber security incidents. The most effective of these are the Essential Eight. The Essential Eight maturity model, first published in June 2017 and last updated in November 2023, sets out how to implement them in graduated maturity levels.



Maturity is measured strategy by strategy, then improved in order.

Strategy	What it stops
Patch applications	Attackers exploiting known flaws in apps, especially internet-facing ones.
Patch operating systems	Attackers exploiting known flaws in Windows and unsupported systems.
Multi-factor authentication	Stolen passwords alone being enough to get in.
Restrict administrative privileges	One compromised account taking over the whole system.
Application control	Malicious or unapproved programs running.
Restrict Microsoft Office macros	Malware delivered in documents.
User application hardening	Attacks through browsers and Office features.
Regular backups	Losing data you can't get back.

2. Maturity levels

Each strategy is measured from Maturity Level 0 to Level 3. ASD's advice is to choose a target maturity level that suits your environment, then reach it across all eight strategies before moving to a higher level.

The November 2023 update tightened two things that matter for small businesses: exploited vulnerabilities in internet-facing systems should be patched or mitigated within 48 hours (from Maturity Level 1 up), and phishing-resistant MFA is now required at lower maturity levels than before.

3. ASD Essentials: what changed in October 2026

ASD published ASD Essentials on 15 October 2026. It launched with three chapters: enterprise IT, operational technology (OT) and cloud. ASD describes it as an evolution of the Essential Eight into a broader, principles-based approach with technology-specific guidance.

- **Not a fresh start.** ASD says the Essentials for enterprise IT doesn't discard Essential Eight work, and that investment carries forward.
- **Both stay available.** The Essential Eight and ASD Essentials stay on cyber.gov.au during the transition.
- **Transition continues into 2027.** ASD is working through transitional arrangements with stakeholders.
- **Keep meeting current obligations.** If a contract or insurer asks for Essential Eight, keep meeting it until they change their requirement.

4. Where SMB1001 fits

SMB1001 is a multi-tier cyber security certification standard for small and medium businesses, published by Dynamic Standards International (formerly Cyber Security Certification Australia) and updated annually. Where a business wants a certificate it can show clients, SMB1001 gives a tiered path. whedo.it assesses against both the Essential Eight and SMB1001.



Assessment results become a phased plan, not a list of problems.

5. How whedo.it takes you from assessment to evidence

Step	What happens
1. Assess	Essential Eight and SMB1001 assessment of your environment, with a maturity level per strategy.
2. Report	A plain-English report card for owners and directors, with the technical detail behind it.
3. Roadmap	A phased plan that fixes the controls stopping the most common attacks first.
4. Implement	Controls delivered with Business Premium, Intune, Defender, Acronis and our monitoring and patching.
5. Evidence	Settings, reports and test results kept so you can answer insurers, clients and auditors truthfully.
6. Transition	Work mapped across to ASD Essentials as ASD's transition arrangements firm up.

6. Common questions

Is the Essential Eight mandatory for small businesses? Not by law for private businesses. It's commonly required in government contracts, by larger clients and in cyber insurance questionnaires.

What level should we aim for? Maturity Level 1 across all eight strategies is a sensible first target; many insurers and larger clients now look for Level 2.

Do we need to start again for ASD Essentials? No. ASD says Essential Eight investment carries forward into the Essentials.

SOURCES

ASD: Essential Eight maturity model (November 2023) (cyber.gov.au/resources-business-and-government/essential-cyber-security/essential-eight/essential-eight-maturity-model) · ASD: Essential Eight maturity model changes (November 2023) (cyber.gov.au/resources-business-and-government/essential-cyber-security/essential-eight/essential-eight-maturity-model-changes) · ASD: Annual Cyber Threat Report 2025–26, ASD's Essentials series (cyber.gov.au/publication/annual-cyber-threat-report-2025-26/resilience/asds-essentials-series) · ASD: ASD Essentials and Transitioning from the Essential Eight (15 October 2026) (cyber.gov.au) · Dynamic Standards International: SMB1001 (dsi.org/smb1001)

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