

Top children's officials call for a rethink of social media ban

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Australia's top officials for children and young people hold grave concerns about the rushed process and lack of clarity surrounding the Federal Government's social media legislation, which will place significant restrictions on social media use for under 16s.

Meeting today, Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates (ANZCCGA) raised concerns about the announcement having left insufficient time for thorough consideration and consultation, and the potential unintended consequences for the rights, safety, and wellbeing of children and young people.

Promoting the importance of respecting and protecting children's rights, safety, and wellbeing in the digital environment is crucial to empowering our future generations.

Speaking on behalf of ANZCCGA members, Ms Jodie Griffiths-Cook, ACT Public Advocate and Children and Young People Commissioner said, "Despite the extensive media coverage and public debate surrounding the social media ban for children under 16 years, a significant oversight prevails: the rights and views of children and young people have often been marginalised in this discussion.

"While we commend efforts that seek to protect the rights of Australian children and young people, there has not been enough consideration for the adverse impacts this decision could have on already marginalised groups such as LGBTQIA+ children and young people and those living in regional and remote areas, many of whom rely on social media for support, social connection, and learning."

Adding to this, Ms Zoë Robinson, NSW Advocate for Children and Young People said, "Children and young people have expressed their concerns to us about how these restrictions will affect them and have also offered their thoughts about how to keep them safe online. We need to acknowledge their solutions and ideas and then respond accordingly.

"By working together, we can help our children stay safe in the digital world and ensure it is an inclusive space that empowers them and supports their development."

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ANZCCGA joint statement on the social media ban for children and young people

Promoting the importance of respecting, protecting, and fulfilling children's rights, safety, and wellbeing in the digital environment is crucial for fostering a secure and empowering online space for our future generations.

Despite the extensive media coverage and public debate surrounding the social media ban for individuals under 16 years old, a significant oversight remains: the rights and voices of children and young people have often been marginalised in this discussion.

As Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates for children and young people across Australia and New Zealand, we feel compelled to issue this joint statement to ensure that their rights and perspectives are fully considered in this critical conversation.

We fully support and endorse the open letter from the Australian Child Rights Taskforce,¹ which highlights crucial concerns and advocates for a balanced, rights-based approach to the social media ban.

The rapid pace at which this new legislation has been introduced is concerning as it has left insufficient time for thorough consideration and consultation, particularly regarding the impacts and potential for unintended consequences in respect of children's rights, safety, and wellbeing.

We are deeply concerned about the lack of clarity surrounding the federal legislation, which further complicates our ability to assess and address its potential consequences effectively.

The ban on social media for individuals under 16 years old has sparked significant debate. While the intention to protect children and young people from potential online harms is commendable, we must consider the broader implications of such a measure.

Children and young people have shared their concerns and offered solutions to more effectively respond to the opportunities and risks surrounding social media use. These include creating a legislative framework that holds companies accountable for filtering out hate speech and discriminatory content, and education for children and young people and their parents (including education around misinformation and disinformation).

¹ [Open letter about 'social media bans' – Reset Tech Australia](#)

We need to address the issues children and young people are facing on social media, acknowledge their solutions and ideas, and respond accordingly.

Social media plays a pivotal role in the lives of children and young people today. It is a platform for learning, social interaction, and personal development. Banning access could inadvertently hinder these positive aspects, particularly in remote and regional areas where digital connectivity is vital for maintaining social ties and accessing educational resources.

We also know that children and young people in regional areas and those who identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ community utilise social media to maintain connections and community.

Importantly, the implementation of such a ban poses practical challenges. Effective age verification methods are still lacking, and there is a very real risk that children and young people will find ways to bypass restrictions, potentially exposing them to greater risks without the safety nets provided by regulated platforms.

A more nuanced approach is needed – one that includes robust safety standards for digital platforms and empowers parents and guardians with the tools and knowledge to guide their children’s online activities. This approach should also involve regular reviews of the legislation to ensure it meets its intended goals without causing unintended harm.

Incorporating safety by design principles is essential to ensure that digital platforms are inherently safe for children and young people. These principles mandate that safety features are integrated into the design and development of digital products from the outset, rather than being added as an afterthought, thereby providing a safer online environment for all users.

While the goal of protecting children and young people online is an important one, it needs to be balanced with their rights to access information and participate in the digital world.² A collaborative effort between governments, digital platforms, and communities will be key to achieving a safe and supportive online environment for all children and young people.

We urge all policymakers to engage in a rights-based approach to the issue of social media use. This must include comprehensive dialogue with children, young people, parents, educators, and technology experts to develop a balanced and effective approach.

Any legislation should prioritise safety while also respecting the rights of children and young people to participate, connect, and learn in the digital age. By working together, we can create a safer, more inclusive online environment that empowers children and young people and supports their development.

² [General comment No. 25 \(2021\) on children’s rights in relation to the digital environment | OHCHR](#)



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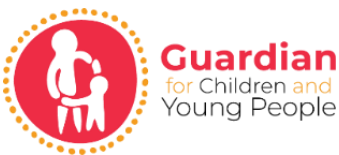
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