



ARACY Submission

Senate Select Committee on the
Social Media Ban for under 16



Submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications Regarding the Proposed Ban on Social Media for Children Under 16 Years of Age.

Submitted by ARACY 22 November 2024

ARACY strongly opposes the proposed ban on social media for children under 16. This submission highlights the importance of evidence-based, inclusive approaches that protect young people while upholding their rights. Social media is a critical part of young people's lives, providing opportunities for connection, creativity, and community, particularly for vulnerable groups. A ban risks isolating young people, ignoring key mental health challenges, and removing a platform that can be protective.

This submission addresses:

- 1. Youth Participation in Policy Decisions:** Decisions about social media must actively engage young people, recognising their perspectives as key stakeholders. Consulting them ensures solutions are fit for purpose and aligned with their needs.
- 2. Mental Health and Social Media:** Blaming social media for the youth mental health crisis oversimplifies the issue. Factors like family violence, poverty, and climate anxiety must be prioritised. Social media can have protective effects, particularly for LGBTQIA+ and neurodivergent youth, and those in regional areas. Restricting access risks removing crucial supports and connections.
- 3. Evidence-Based Regulation:** There is no established evidence showing age-based bans improve mental health outcomes. Instead, age-appropriate safeguards, education, and co-designed solutions are more effective at ensuring safety without compromising opportunity.
- 4. Unintended Consequences:** Bans may drive young people to less regulated, unsafe spaces, or deprive them of critical access to mental health information and community support.



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Recommendations

1. Engage children and young people in defining the problems and co-designing solutions to ensure digital safety.
2. Prioritise research and investment in evidence-based online safety measures, including digital literacy programmes and parental supports.
3. Collaborate with mental health organisations, social media platforms, and young people to strengthen protective measures while addressing risks.
4. Address broader contributors to youth mental health challenges, such as family violence and economic insecurity, as part of a holistic strategy.

Conclusion

We urge policymakers to move beyond prohibition and toward collaborative, inclusive, and evidence-based approaches that protect young people while empowering them. By engaging young people and leveraging the insights of experts and organisations, Australia can set a global example for balanced, effective digital policy.

Yours sincerely,



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