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Academic Advisory Group Statement on the Social Media Minimum Age Act

We are pleased to issue this statement in response to the formal announcement of the establishment of the independent Academic Advisory Group (AAG) convened by the Australian eSafety Commissioner to support the evaluation of the Social Media Minimum Age (SMMA) obligation.

The relationship between social media and wellbeing in young people is one of the most important conversations of the moment that is taking place around the world. The SMMA legislation represents an unprecedented opportunity for scientific investigation at the whole population level to advance our collective understanding of the impacts of social media and to help frame the conversation. We also recognise the complexity in regulating online spaces with children's rights, safety, and wellbeing in mind. The AAG is committed to producing evidence that benefits young people, families and societies, in all their diversity. Our work will inform policymakers and the public by providing clear insights into what is working, what challenges arise, and what remains uncertain.

The evaluation of the SMMA will be a collaboration between the eSafety Commissioner, the Lead Academic Partner Stanford Social Media Lab, and the AAG. The eSafety Commissioner team and the Lead Academic Partner will work together to design the evaluation, organize the data collection and analyze the data. The AAG will advise and offer expertise on each stage of the evaluation, from design of research instruments to interpretation of the findings. This hybrid model for the evaluation will draw on the strengths and expertise of the eSafety researchers and evaluators coupled with the diverse expertise of the AAG. Additionally, the AAG will collaborate to co-author papers for publication and lead analyses and papers aligned with their research interests and specialties. The independent analysis by the AAG will enable diverse academics to interrogate the data, apply varied methodological lenses, and surface insights that may not emerge from internal review alone. It will also support the discoverability and uptake of the resultant evidence across sectors.

The primary objectives of the evaluation are 1) to assess both the intended and unintended impacts of the legislation on children, young people, and their caregivers; 2) to provide objective, robust evidence to inform the independent review of the legislation and any necessary adaptations; 3) to

contribute to the global evidence base on social media age restrictions; and 4) to advance knowledge in Australia on the relationship between social media use and youth wellbeing.

The AAG will provide independent advice in the evaluation. We do not represent the government, nor does our work constitute either endorsement or opposition to the legislation. Our responsibility is to ensure that the evaluation is robust, transparent, and scientifically sound, so that decision-making is grounded in evidence rather than opinion.

The AAG is made up of domestic and international experts with diverse and specialized knowledge relevant to the evaluation, including family dynamics related to digital media use; children and parents' lived experience of the digital environment; adolescent development and mental health; online risks of harm; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences of digital life; psychiatric epidemiology; digital parenting; children's rights in relation to the digital environment; new media education; and the relationship between social media and wellbeing. We will collectively endeavour to draw on these different perspectives, and part of our role will be to draw on our distinct expertise to interrogate the data deeply and to engage in rigorous debate, in order to provide robust, evidence-based guidance about the findings.

Transparency is central to our purpose. We will share our approach, methods, evaluation materials and findings in ways that allow the public, policymakers, and researchers to understand and scrutinize the process. To support transparency, we will pre-register the study design and evaluation framework on the Open Science Framework (OSF), which we will continue to update. We commit to communicating our findings clearly and publicly.

The evaluation of the SMMA will address core questions about the effects of the legislation, but it cannot answer every question or account for every risk of harm or every benefit. By clearly defining the scope and boundaries of the evaluation, we aim to set realistic expectations and uphold the integrity and credibility of its outputs.

Importantly, the evaluation approach has been designed such that it centres the experiences of young people as well as parents and caregivers. We recognize the immense diversity of Australian young people, and the families and communities around them. We are committed to remaining attentive to these dynamics to ensure that the findings of the evaluation are meaningful in the context of young people's needs, rights, and aspirations.

The AAG brings together a wide range of expertise and perspectives, united by a commitment to independence, evidence-based decision-making, and the public interest. We are dedicated to conducting a high-quality, transparent evaluation that will serve the Australian community and contribute to global understanding of how societies can best respond to the challenges and opportunities of social media. We recognize the responsibility we hold in safeguarding children and supporting families as they navigate digital life. We also recognize that the eyes of the world are on Australia. We are hopeful that the evidence generated can directly support and inform decision-making by other countries as they seek to promote the online safety of children in their jurisdictions.

Members of the Lead Academic Partner

- Professor Jeff Hancock, Stanford University Social Media Lab
- Dr Sunny Xun Liu, Stanford University Social Media Lab
- Dr Anja Stevic, Stanford University Social Media Lab
- Dr Angela Yuson Lee, Stanford University Social Media Lab
- Dr Y. Anthony Chen, Stanford University Social Media Lab
- Zacariah Smith-Russack, Stanford University Social Media Lab

Members of the Academic Advisory Group

- Distinguished Professor Bronwyn Carlson, Head of Critical Indigenous Studies, Macquarie University
- Professor Peter Etchells, School of Psychology, Bath Spa University
- Professor Katherine Keyes, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University
- Distinguished Professor Mitch Prinstein, Co-Director of the Winston Center for Technology and the Developing Mind, University of North Carolina, and Chief Science Officer, American Psychological Association.
- Professor Jo Robinson, Professorial Fellow and Director, Centre for Youth Mental Health, University of Melbourne
- Professor Susan Sawyer, Chair of Adolescent Health, University of Melbourne, and Director, Centre for Adolescent Health, Royal Children's Hospital
- Professor Julian Sefton-Green, School of Education, Deakin University
- Associate Professor Aliza Werner-Seidler, Black Dog Institute, University of New South Wales
- Professor Amanda Third, Professorial Research Fellow and Co-Director, Young and Resilient Research Centre, Western Sydney University
- Associate Professor, Munmun De Choudhury, Director of Social Dynamics and Well-Being Laboratory, and Co-Lead of Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Pediatric Technology Center, Georgia Institute of Technology
- Professor Amy Orben, Programme Leader Track Scientist at the MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit, University of Cambridge