

eSafety Youth Council



Interim report 2023



Acknowledgement of Country

eSafety acknowledges all First Nations people for their continuing care of everything Country encompasses – land, waters and community. We pay our respects to First Nations people, and to Elders past, present and future.

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Commissioner's foreword

Having reached the halfway mark of the inaugural eSafety Youth Council's 24-month tenure, I am pleased to present eSafety's interim Youth Council report. In its first year, the Council has achieved much and has been an example of the power of youth voice and vision, demonstrating the importance of including young people in decision-making processes.

The Council was appointed in 2022 and its formation informed by best practice principles for youth engagement. These principles were identified in a [youth engagement report](#) commissioned by eSafety in 2021, and produced by Professor Amanda Third and her team at the Young and Resilient Research Centre at Western Sydney University. We have listened to what young people told us – that engagement needs to be action-oriented, diverse and inclusive, collaborative, fun and engaging, rewarding, youth-led and supportive.

Twenty-four diverse, curious, and talented members from across Australia have contributed to, and led on, a range of important initiatives. These include the Age Verification roadmap and an open letter to Big Tech, which urged platforms to take more action when users abuse or harass others online. They have been making their voice heard by tech leaders through facilitated

dialogue and ongoing exchange. I look forward to this dialogue continuing over the coming year.

Their voice has also been heard at eSafety. We know that some young people are hesitant to report online abuse or seek support, so understanding the barriers to help-seeking behaviour from young people themselves assists immensely in developing more accessible support pathways for other young people, their parents and carers, educators, and communities. The unique perspectives of members have also helped calibrate eSafety's resources, such as [Scroll](#) (eSafety's social media channel designed with and for young people) and eSafety's [Young People](#) webpages.

I have been heartened by the way in which Council members have approached their work. Collaboration, consensus-building and a commitment to skills and leadership development have been on display at roundtable discussions and meetings throughout the Council's first year. I hope that the sharing of stories and experiences in navigating the online world has also shown that young people are not alone and that there is support available.

The Council members' excitement and enthusiasm for the digital landscapes of the

future is evident. They are digital natives and understand the challenges and risks that come with life online while exploring the many opportunities and benefits technology offers. Convening the inaugural Youth Council has allowed eSafety to harness the diverse and rich voice of Australia's young people. We would all do well to listen to their views and insights on how to foster safer and more positive online experiences for all Australians.

Thank you for your ongoing support for eSafety's Youth Council.



Julie Inman Grant
eSafety Commissioner



Summary of eSafety Youth Council events

All 2021

Research base

- Consultations with young people to inform the eSafety Commissioner’s Engagement Strategy for Young People are undertaken in collaboration with Western Sydney University’s Young and Resilient Research Centre.

December

Funding announcement

- The formation of an eSafety Youth Council to inform policy and programs for keeping young Australians safe online is announced.
[New advisory council to give young Australians a voice in online safety](#)

January

NGO roundtable

- Best practice strategies in youth engagement are discussed with a wide range of youth-focused non-government organisations (NGOs) in Australia: Alannah & Madeline Foundation, Plan International Australia, Your Town, headspace, Youth Action, ReachOut, Youth Affairs Council Victoria, Butterfly Foundation, Twenty10, Project RockIt, YMCA, Australian Youth Affairs Coalition.

January (continued)

Research results, working group

- eSafety/Western Sydney University Youth Engagement report is released.
- Youth Council expression of interest is shared.
- eSafety internal working group is formed with cross-office representation from Research, Data and Evaluation, Marketing, Events and Strategic Partnerships, Legal, Investigations, and Digital and Technology teams.

February - March

eSafety Youth Council recruitment

- Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) is engaged for meeting facilitation and administration.

April

eSafety Youth Council announcement

- 25 members are announced to form the inaugural eSafety Youth Council for a two-year term.

2021

2022

NGO Roundtable

A roundtable consultation is held with a range of social, community and mental health-based non-government organisations (NGOs) with a strong interest in the wellbeing and advocacy of young people to seek advice, opinions and recommendations on best practice strategies to support eSafety’s Youth Council.

Key takeaways from NGO roundtable

- Provide flexible options during recruitment and through modes of participation.
- Genuinely shift the power to young people by ensuring the Council is led by young people, with adults providing support.
- Set clear expectations to manage expectations related to decision-making processes and recommendations they provide.
- Create a safe space through safeguarding measures and meeting guidelines.
- Provide flexibility within agendas to empower young people to guide discussions.
- Ensure members can participate and contribute to the group equally, particularly managing group dynamics across the 13-24 age range.
- Provide young people with remuneration for their time and expertise.

Best Practice Principles for youth engagement activities

Diverse and inclusive	Youth-led and supportive	Action-oriented
Youth engagement should be inclusive of young people from diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences.	Youth engagement should empower young people to take on leadership roles, and adults should provide minimal support.	Youth engagement should genuinely listen to young people and turn their ideas into meaningful outcomes.
Collaborative	Rewarding	Fun and engaging
Young people should co-design, co-deliver and co-evaluate youth-centred programs and policies.	Initiatives should benefit young people’s learning, growth, and development, and they should be compensated.	Youth engagement activities should be fun, age-appropriate, and easily accessible for young people to participate in.

Source: [Consultations with young people to inform the eSafety Commissioner’s Engagement Strategy for Young People](#)

Summary of eSafety Youth Council events (continued)

June

Meeting 1 (online)

Council meets online to discuss their idea of what the perfect internet looks like and their understanding of online safety.

July

eSafety resource review

Council members review eSafety’s Rewrite Your Story resource.

August

Video statement

Council contributes to a video statement for the Youth, Tech and Wellbeing event, co-hosted by All Tech is Human and the US-Australian Embassy.

September

Meeting 2 (online)

Aspirations for the Council and achievement outcomes are sought on how eSafety can help young people seek support and engage with reporting systems.

November

Adolescent Health Conference

A Council member presents at the 2022 Australian Association for Adolescent Health Conference, Melbourne.

December

Meeting 3 (online)

Council discusses eSafety’s Age Verification Roadmap and provides advice on how age verification systems impact young people.

February

Open letter to Big Tech

Open letter video created by Council addressed to Big Tech industry is released for Safer Internet Day.

April

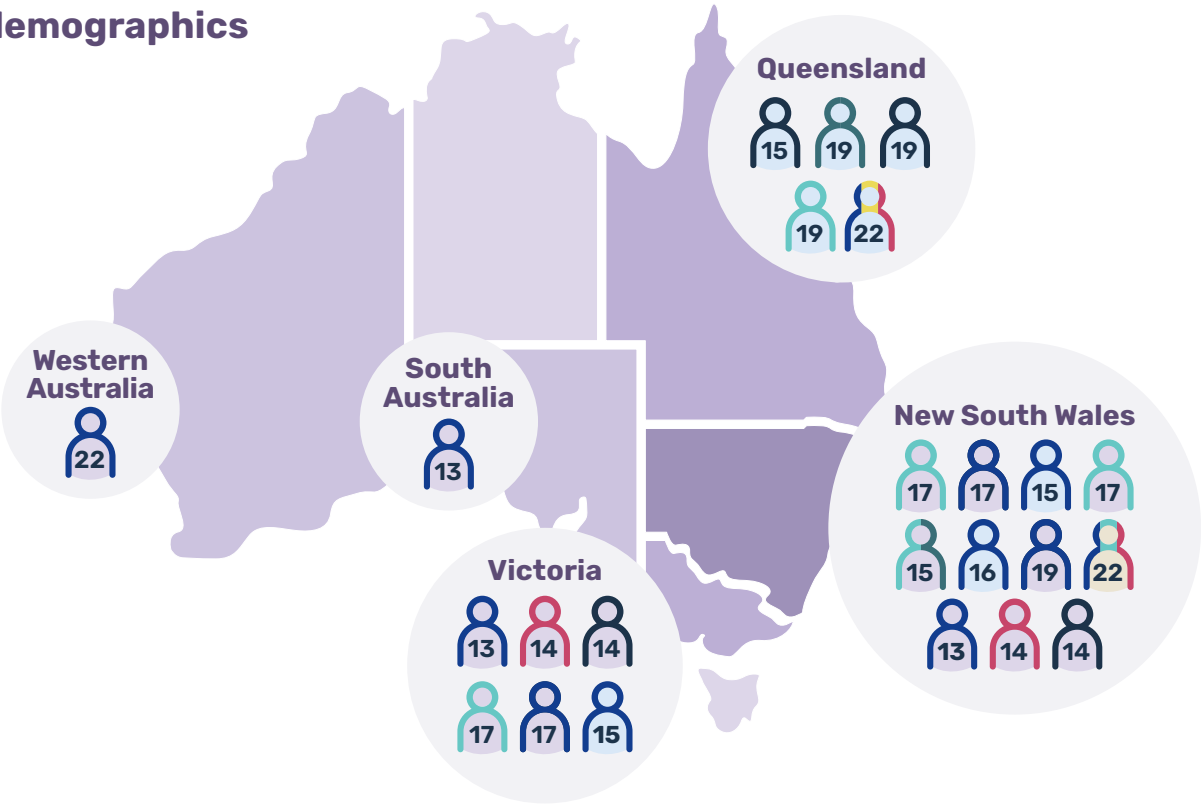
Meeting 4 (in person)

- First in-person meeting with guided facilitation is held in Sydney.
- Council meets with key technology industry leaders from Amazon, Google, Meta, Microsoft, Pinterest, TikTok and Twitter.
- Council discusses updating the Aspirational Statement, their expectations for 2023 and their contributions to the development of eSafety’s Age Verification Roadmap.

2022

2023

Member demographics



- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- Culturally and linguistically diverse
- LGBTIQA+
- Living with disability
- Living in a regional/remote community
- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Numbers = age

In-person meeting April 17, 2023

Meeting 4 was hosted at eSafety’s Pyrmont offices. It was the first opportunity for members and eSafety staff to meet in person. The day was structured in three main parts:

- a session facilitated by eSafety’s Research team to help improve messaging and user safety when gaming
- a forum with Council members and industry leaders in response to the letter to Big Tech
- a formal meeting, focusing on business-as-usual for the eSafety Youth Council, facilitated by AYAC.

Summary of eSafety Youth Council events (continued)

June

Meeting 5 (online)

- Council discusses its self-governance strategy, including roles and responsibilities.
- Two members judge ChildNet’s International Film Competition.
- Members consulted on eSafety’s International Strategy and Futures work on immersive technology.

September

Meeting 6 (online)

- Refine Aspirational Statement.

October

New Council recruitment

- eSafety Youth Council 2024 recruitment begins.

December

Meeting 7 (online)

- Launch updated Aspirational Statement.

2023

2024

Meeting 8 (in person)

- Final meeting for 2022-2023 eSafety Youth Council.
- New eSafety Youth Council announcement.

April



eSafety Youth Council and Industry Leaders Forum



We need your urgent action to make the online world safer for us and future generations.

In February 2023, to coincide with Safer Internet Day, the Council sent an open letter to Big Tech outlining their concerns and requesting action to ensure online platforms are safe for young people to use. Following the receipt of this letter, representatives of the technology industry were invited to meet the Council in person, to discuss their concerns and ideas for change and collaboration.

The forum enabled representatives of the technology industry to share their work to create safe online spaces. Participants also discussed ideas for future engagement between the Council and industry leaders. Participants included the 24 Council members and industry leaders representing Meta, Amazon, Google, Snap, Microsoft, TikTok, Twitter, and Pinterest. The eSafety Commissioner and the Hon Michelle Rowland MP, Minister for Communications, as well as a number of eSafety staff, were also involved in the delivery of the forum. The Council developed the panel direction, themes, and agenda.

Discussion 1 Summary

The first discussion involved three Council members taking part in a panel to share their experiences around issues and opportunities for online spaces. Industry leaders and Council members were invited to ask questions of the panel and share observations. Outlined below are the key themes discussed and questions asked by industry representatives.

These themes were discussed by panellists:

- Online addiction and harms
- Harassment and abuse and the mental health impacts of these experiences
- Gender-based violence on social media
- Calls to action regarding:
 - changes to online abuse reporting processes and management of complaints
 - further support for victims of online harassment and abuse
 - increased engagement with parents and young people about safety online and reporting
 - inviting young people to the table to co-design solutions

Industry leaders posed questions around these themes:

- Ideas for educating parents and carers to support and enhance online safety for young people
- Ideas for updates or changes to reporting online abuse
- Feedback on what current safety measures are effective

This discussion led into the second part of the forum where industry leaders and Council members shared their ideas for change and collaboration.

Discussion 2 Summary



The second discussion at the eSafety Youth Council and Industry Leaders Forum involved participants having a focused conversation at the break-out tables, responding to the question 'How can Industry leaders and Australia’s young people have an ongoing and constructive dialogue?'

Idea: Meetings between young people and tech companies

What’s needed?	Who would be involved?	What would success look like?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active communication between Council members and technology companies A safe environment to have productive and respectful discussions - meetings could move between eSafety offices and technology company offices Conveners to host, facilitate and report on the meetings Specific budget for coordination and delivering the meetings Management of logistics including where, when, and hybrid options A clear agenda, possibly including an ‘issues audit’ for clarity around themes for discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> eSafety Youth Council eSafety's Youth Council liaison team Independent facilitator Youth peak bodies (such as Multicultural Youth Advisory Network, Children and Young People with Disability Australia, Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care) Office for Youth Technology companies Federal Government Schools Broader engagement of young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Future collaboration including Council suggesting ideas and technology companies implementing these changes More community forums led by technology companies Creation of a plan to target specific issues for children and young people which includes evaluation and reporting of success Long-term dialogue between the Council, young people and technology companies

Idea: Improve safety online

What’s needed?	Who would be involved?	What would success look like?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age separation on platforms using the age of the user to filter what they can access Victim-survivors are compensated for sharing their stories with technology companies and industry leaders Developing links with schools and eSafety Commissioner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technology companies eSafety Youth Council Broader engagement of young people Parents and carers eSafety's Youth Council liaison team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age-appropriate content being accessed by children and young people Linked accounts with children so parents are notified if content is inappropriate

Idea: Improve reporting process

What’s needed?	Who would be involved?	What would success look like?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved process for the reporting of online abuse Increased consequences for perpetrators of online harassment and abuse, including providing feedback to victims on actions taken Education for children, young people, parents and carers on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reporting, including the process why it is important to report staying safe online digital literacy skills (particularly for parents and carers) understanding and awareness of community guidelines and code of conduct on various platforms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> eSafety Youth Council eSafety's Youth Council liaison team Technology companies Policy makers The education sector, for example curriculum to include information about online safety and reporting Parents and carers Organisations and researchers, to create resources to target parents and carers Media companies (for example a campaign to include TV, news, radio for messages around reporting, communicated in different languages and formats) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes to the reporting process to make it more effective and easier to understand and use Increase in young people’s understanding of the reporting system and increase in comfort to report abuse Increase in parents’ understanding of how to respond to issues raised by children Regular review of user feedback on reporting More action being taken on reported content and changes being more widely shared

Evaluating the success of the inaugural eSafety Youth Council

As this is eSafety’s first Youth Council, and the first time eSafety has worked with young people in a formalised way, the eSafety Research, Data and Evaluation team has undertaken ongoing evaluation of the Council and its short-term impacts.

The evaluation includes the following data sources:

- Brief online surveys of Council members at regular time points
- Interviews with Council members, facilitators, and key eSafety staff
- Analysis of documents and meeting outputs (such as minutes, chat records)
- Workshops with Council members

The following objectives are guiding the evaluation:

- Understand the impact of providing a direct voice to eSafety and the Australian Government on young people’s perspectives about online safety, and gather lessons learned about the Council as a vehicle for this.
- Understand the impact of participating in the Council for the members.

Evaluation highlights will include key achievements and enablers, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.

Those interviewed so far have highlighted two main achievements: getting the Council operational, particularly within a short

timeframe; and sending a strong signal to young people, as well as internal and external stakeholders, that the voices of young people are taken seriously at eSafety.

Council members believe the voices of young people are essential to creating safe, positive online experiences. They are grateful that eSafety has created the Council so some of these voices are heard. They see this as just the start of a meaningful dialogue.



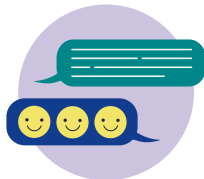
I think the consultative process involved in a lot of these issues that eSafety has been bringing to the Youth Council is really really positive because it shows that youth voice is something that the agency really cares about and it's very much informed the work and overall created a better policy for it.

– Council member



One of the really great projects that young people have been involved with is the age verification roadmap... I really liked the way that that team went about. That there was an initial framing of what the input would be, a bit of a general presentation, and then over a series of weeks and questions were posed on Discord and drilled down upon. That was a really nice it helped to work around members commitments, they were able to contribute where they had capacity. It was sensibly broken up into age groups.

– eSafety staff member



While eSafety staff and Council members noted that there is more work to do in maximising the impact of the Council, they expressed appreciation that eSafety had set up the initiative, and reiterated the importance of the continuation of a formal means of consultation with young people into the future.



I just think eSafety should continue to do what they're doing because this is really a big step forward. They have mentioned that they haven't really done much stuff like this before, so I think they should just continue it.

– Council member

Next steps for eSafety's Youth Council

- As this is the first initiative of this kind that eSafety has undertaken, there has been considerable learning in the first 12 months. All those involved have expressed ideas and opportunities to enhance existing processes and to ensure a meaningful, reciprocally beneficial exchange. Before the tenure of the first Council ends, the following items are a priority for eSafety and the Youth Council:

 - Shaping a model of self-governance with the eSafety Youth Council members
 - Finalising the Aspirational Statement by December 2023
- Developing a list of priorities and areas of influence
 - Further formalising the process for internal and external engagement with the Council
 - Aligning and formalising engagement with the Australian Government's Office for Youth
 - Continuing to determine appropriate and best practice honorariums and benefits for members
 - Continuing active evaluation of the Council
 - Ensuring this Council and future Youth Councils are adequately resourced



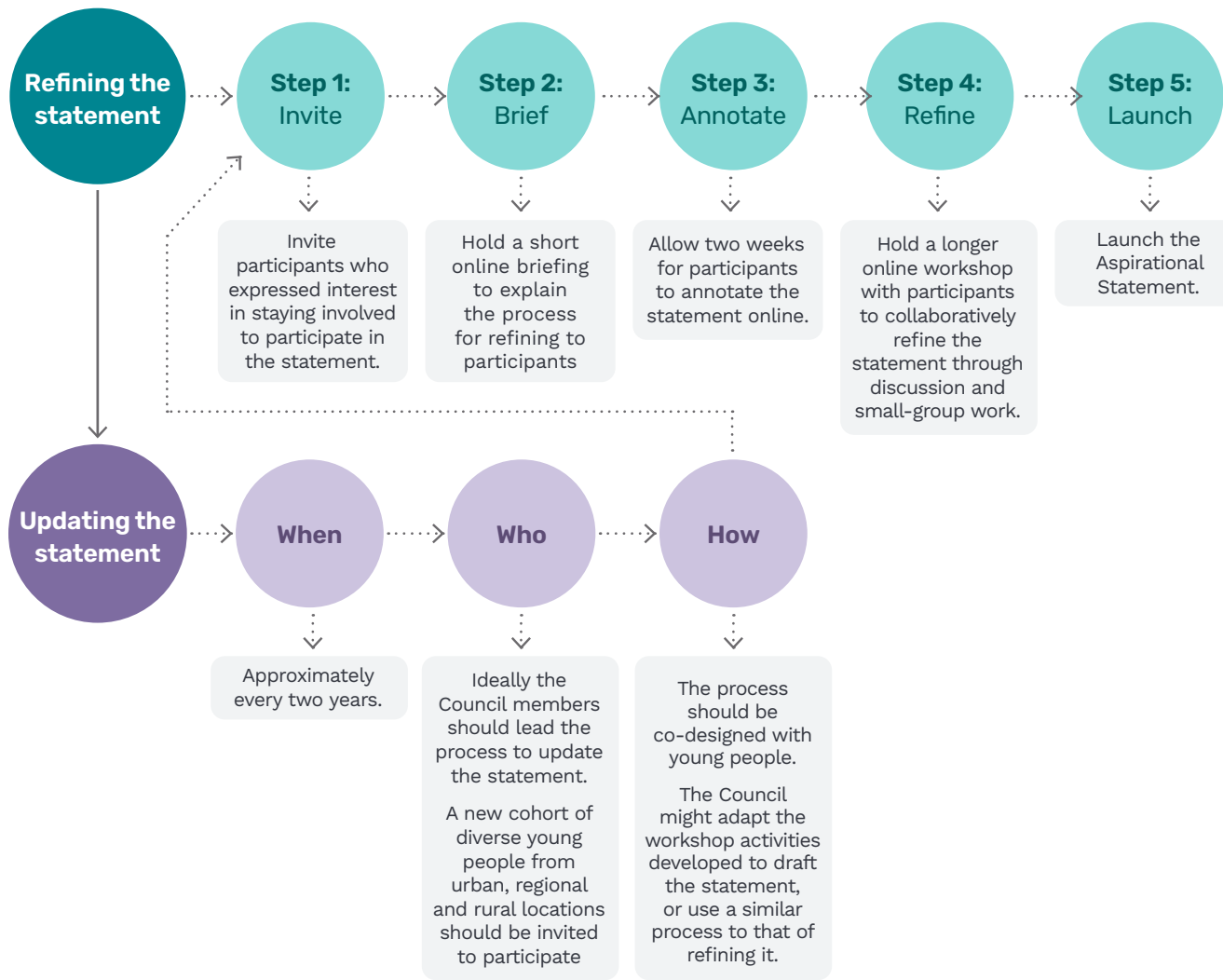
First in-person meeting with guided facilitation held in Sydney

Draft Aspirational Statement renewal

As part of the Youth and Resilient Research Centre’s report to the eSafety Commissioner, the authors drafted an Aspirational Statement based on their nationwide consultations. They recommended that the Aspirational Statement be revisited and revised in a collaborative process every two years with the eSafety Youth Council.

A finalised Aspirational Statement of the inaugural eSafety Youth Council will be published by the end of 2023. Future Councils will also review the Aspirational Statement, in consultation with diverse young people, to make sure it reflects their own vision for safer online spaces.

Refining and updating the Aspirational Statement





[eSafety.gov.au](https://www.esafety.gov.au)