

Statement of Work

Evaluation of the Social Media Age Restriction

Overview

Australia has taken a significant step in online safety with the passage of the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act in December 2024. This legislation introduces a mandatory minimum age of 16 for accounts on certain social media platforms. It places the onus on the age-restricted platforms to take reasonable steps to prevent underage users from creating and holding accounts.

eSafety Commissioner (eSafety), Australia's independent regulator for online safety, is conducting an evaluation of the implementation and outcomes of the Social Media Minimum Age. This evaluation will be a key source of evidence for the independent review of the Social Media Minimum Age legislation, which will be led by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts.

This evaluation represents a landmark opportunity for suppliers to contribute to the evaluation of a world-first legislation that is both high-profile and highly publicised. Led by a group of the world's foremost academics in online safety and adolescent wellbeing, the study will attract significant national and international attention, offering unparalleled exposure for participating suppliers and partners. This is a rare opportunity to be part of a transformative initiative that will shape future policy and practice in Australia and beyond.

eSafety will conduct a national longitudinal study, which will follow children aged 10–16 and their parents/caregivers for an initial period of two years, with potential to extend for an additional three years. We will employ multiple modes of data collection including:

- Multi-wave online survey ($n=8,000$ child-parent dyads)
 - **Supplier requirement:** Recruitment of participants, survey fieldwork, data collection and cleaning, and provision of responses.
- Qualitative research (i.e., focus groups, diary studies, and interviews)
 - **Supplier requirement:** Recruitment and logistics support for follow up qualitative research including recruitment of a nested sample of willing participants from the overall cohort sample, recontact, scheduling, cancellation management and payment.
- Objective data collection (i.e., passive tracking of smartphone usage with direct informed consent)

- **Supplier requirement:** Recruitment of a nested sample of willing participants from the overall cohort sample to participate in objective data collection (e.g. passive smartphone usage monitoring with direct informed consent). Collection and integration of this data into the main datasets.
- Data linkage and population-level data
 - **Supplier requirement:** Work with our accredited data linkage partner and data custodians to facilitate linkage of survey data to existing administrative datasets. Working with data custodians and linkage partner in accordance with privacy principles and requirements.

Details of each study component including supplier responsibilities are provided below in the following section.

The Requirement

To evaluate the effectiveness of the Social Media Minimum Age legislation will use a mixed-methods, longitudinal study design involving 8,000 children aged 10–16 and their parents/caregivers. We will use a paired-sample design (i.e., child-parent dyad), and participants will be recruited via an online research panel.

The study will be conducted over an initial period of two years, with potential to extend for an additional three years. We will employ multiple modes of data collection including:

- Multi-wave online survey
- Qualitative research (i.e., focus groups, diary studies, and interviews)
- Objective data collection (i.e., passive tracking of smartphone usage with direct informed consent)
- Data linkage and population-level data

The key outcomes of interest for this study broadly include:

- Knowledge about and attitudes towards the Social Media Age Restrictions
- Compliance with the Social Media Age Restrictions and circumvention
- Digital engagement, literacy, and hygiene and habits
- Exposure to online risks and harms that impact health
- Screen time and app usage

- Help-seeking and disclosure for harmful experiences
- Norms and attitudes related to social media in childhood/adolescence
- Wellbeing (across a range of domains including psychological, social, physical)
- Functioning (school attendance and connectedness; day-to-day functioning)
- Digital parenting
- Family functioning
- Parent-child conflict
- Stress

All study materials (e.g., survey questions, discussion guides) will be designed by eSafety and our academic collaborators.

Multi-wave online survey

The evaluation will comprise a multi-wave longitudinal survey involving 8,000 children aged 10–16 years and one of their parents/caregivers, using a paired sample design. The proposed study waves are as follows:

- Wave 1 (Baseline): ~1-month pre-regulation
- Wave 2: ~3-month post-regulation
- Wave 3: ~6 months post-regulation
- Wave 4: ~12 months post-regulation
- Wave 5: ~24 months post-regulation.

The surveys will primarily collect quantitative data, to measure demographics, and to track immediate and short-term outcomes as well as any potential unintended consequences. Some open response questions will also be included. We envisage that the survey content will remain largely consistent across waves; however, we may choose to switch on and off particular modules. The survey may also evolve as the evaluation progresses. As such, the suppliers should provide costs for up to 20% change to the survey content at each wave. In responding to this RFQ, suppliers should also provide costs per data collection wave, accounting for expected attrition.

Objective data collection (i.e., passive tracking of smartphone usage with direct informed consent)

To compliment the longitudinal survey, child/youth participants will be able opt into, with direct informed consent, passive tracking of smartphone usage, including screentime, app use, time of day, and device pickups. Data will be collected in up to three-week blocks at random intervals, ideally pre- and post-regulation. Participants will voluntarily install a mobile app that records usage data with consent.

The purpose of passive smartphone/device tracking is to capture real-time, in-situ data on digital engagement and social media use, enhancing the ecological validity of self-reported survey responses.

It is important that the chosen technology:

- Places minimal burden on research participants
- Has been used in previous research with children
- Has been previously approved for use by a HREC, preferably in Australia
- Does not capture any data outside of what is required for the study
- Stores data in Australia and complies with Australian Privacy Act as well as eSafety's Privacy and Collection Notification Policy .

For examples of passive data collection in research with children and young people, please see the following papers:

- [Passive Sensing of Preteen's Smartphone Use: An Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development \(ABCD\) Cohort Substudy](#)
- [Children's Passive Online Measurement](#)

Qualitative research

Qualitative participants will be recruited from the survey cohort, forming a nested sample. When presented with the Participant Information and Consent Forms for the survey, participants will be asked if they are interested in taking part in qualitative research and consent to being contacted about opportunities in the future. Direct informed consent to participate in the respective qualitative activities will be gained from parents/caregivers and children prior to participation. This will involve separate Participant Information and Consent Forms. We anticipate qualitative research taking place at Waves 3-5.

The selected provider will manage the recruitment, scheduling of the qualitative research, and payment of incentives. eSafety will undertake the fieldwork for this portion of the research.

Data linkage

As part of the broader evaluation, we intend to incorporate data linkage to enhance the depth and breadth of insights while minimising participant burden. The survey includes an option for linkage to Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) data from Services Australia and National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data from various State and Territory data custodians. The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) will act as the Accredited Data Service Provider (ADSP) and manage all MBS/PBS and NAPLAN data linkages, secure transfer, and integration.

The selected provider will be required to work with our accredited data linkage provider and the data custodians to facilitate data linkage.

Summary of evaluation components

A summary of the evaluation components and owner(s) is presented below in Table 1.

Table 1. Responsibilities by evaluation component

Evaluation component	Responsible
Ethical clearance	
Ethics application	eSafety
Provision of information to support ethics application (e.g., compliance with Australian Privacy Policies; data storage and management)	Supplier
Multi-wave online survey	
Design of survey	eSafety
Sampling frame	eSafety
Supporting documents (PICF, distress protocols, help seeking information etc)	eSafety
Survey coding and hosting	Supplier
Survey testing	Supplier and eSafety
Recruitment (including obtaining informed consent) and retention of participants	Supplier
Data capture and cleaning	Supplier
Analysis and reporting	eSafety
Qualitative research	
Provision of supporting documentation (PIFC documents)	eSafety
Recruitment (including obtaining informed consent)	Supplier
Scheduling	Supplier

Evaluation component	Responsible
Payment of incentives	Supplier
Fieldwork	eSafety
Analysis and reporting	eSafety
Objective data collection (i.e., passive tracking of smartphone usage with direct informed consent)	
Provision of supporting documentation (PIFC documents)	eSafety
Provision of information to support ethics application and supporting documentation (e.g., data management practices, privacy compliance etc).	Supplier and/or third-party contractor
Recruitment (including obtaining informed consent)	Supplier
Data collection	Supplier and/or third-party contractor
Payment of incentive	Supplier
Provision of integrated dataset, inclusive of survey data	Supplier
Data linkage	
Provision of supporting documentation (PIFC documents)	eSafety
Programming and administering compliant e-consent forms	Supplier
Recruitment	Supplier
Linkage of survey data to administrative data	Supplier, AIFS, data custodians
Provision of integrated, dataset inclusive of survey data	Supplier, AIFS
Analysis and reporting	eSafety

Summary of supplier requirements

- Recruit the sample of children aged 10-16 and one of their parents/caregivers for the longitudinal survey via research panels or other sources if appropriate.
- Provide fieldwork services for each wave of the longitudinal online survey – program, test, host, and distribute the online survey.
- Conduct the passive smartphone tracking with direct informed consent from willing participants and integrate this data into the survey data set, linking to the relevant participants. Suppliers may partner with a relevant third-party supplier for this component of the work, but the lead supplier must disclose any third-party suppliers used to complete this research, ensure the third party complies with all relevant requirements outlined in this document, take responsibility for management of the third party, as well as integration of the objective data into the main data set.

- Provide data collection and processing services for each wave of the online survey – collect and clean the data and provide raw datafiles in SPSS.
- Provide data tables for each wave of the survey, set up according to eSafety’s specification, ideally in Q.
- Where applicable, facilitate recontact, scheduling, and payment of participants who agree to participate in qualitative follow-up including focus groups and interviews.
- Work collaboratively with our selected data linkage provider and the data custodians (e.g. Services Australia, Education Departments etc) to facilitate a linked dataset.

Further details of the approach are in the [Detailed Methodology](#) section.

Subcontractor Engagement and Approval

Where the Respondent proposes to engage any subcontractor(s) to deliver the passive tracking of smartphone usage, the following conditions apply:

- The Respondent must identify any proposed subcontractor(s) in their response and describe the services they will provide.
- eSafety reserves the right to assess and approve any proposed subcontractor, particularly in relation to privacy, data protection, and information security standards.
- The Respondent must provide sufficient information to enable this assessment, including relevant policies, certifications, and evidence of capability.
- Engagement of any subcontractor is subject to eSafety’s written approval.

Deliverables

Key deliverables for this evaluation include:

- Nationally representative sample of children age 10-16, and a parent/caregiver.
- Target number of survey completes, including sufficient participant retention for longitudinal analysis.
- Each wave: complete, clean, datasets each wave with instructions for use, in SPSS format.
- Each wave: Data tables in Q with variables as specified by eSafety.

Selection Criteria

The preferred supplier will be selected based on having submitted the response that provides the best value for money as determined by an assessment against the following selection criteria.

1. Demonstrated understanding of the required services.
 - Suitability of proposed approach to meeting the requirements of the RFQ
 - Understanding of the required services including the complexity of the data collection methodology and stakeholder management
 - Clear understanding of the requirements of the RFQ
2. Demonstrated capacity to deliver the required services.
 - Demonstrated ability to meet target quotas for survey with specific attention paid to maintenance of the sample over multiple waves
 - Demonstrated capabilities to deliver fieldwork services (including scripting/programming moderately complex online surveys)
 - Demonstrated capacity to manage integration of complex datasets including data from multiple sources
 - Suitability of proposed methodology in meeting the requirements of the RFQ within the given timeframe, including contingencies
 - Specific experience and capacity to deliver longitudinal surveys including strategies for managing participant recontact and retention (i.e., retention of children/young people and across sample pairs)
 - Demonstrated experience providing recruitment and logistics support (e.g., scheduling and payment) for follow-up qualitative research
 - Demonstrated experience with objective data collection (passive tracking of smartphone usage with direct informed consent) or ability to partner with experienced provider of said services (details of any subcontracting to be included in proposal) and compliance with data capture, technology and privacy requirements.
 - Experience with complex project management.
3. Technical skills and knowledge to successfully deliver the required services.

- Approach demonstrates ability to provide the services in a manner that is technically sound, rigorous, practical, ethical, engaging and appropriate to the cohort/subject matter
 - Ability to deliver high quality data
 - Demonstrated ability to collect and clean the data and provide raw datafiles that can be easily converted into data tables (i.e. with complete value and variable labels, all relevant variables de-looped/de-piped etc)
4. Ability to comply with data linkage requirements.
- Experience conducting surveys involving minors and parental consent
 - Capacity to deliver secure e-consent systems compliant with Services Australia and NAPLAN data custodian linkage requirements
5. Ability and willingness to incorporate engaging elements into the survey interface to encourage participation and minimise the burden on participants
- Survey tool can provide an engaging and user-friendly experience in a device agnostic manner
 - Use of logic and where possible pre-filled demographic information based on qualification responses to minimise survey length and burden on respondents
6. Ability and willingness to align with eSafety's preferred ways of working.
- eSafety seeks to build mutually respectful relationships with service providers, grounded in shared goals around online safety
 - We value open communication, co-design, and early engagement to ensure services are fit-for-purpose and aligned with community needs
 - eSafety expects clear, timely, and honest communication throughout the engagement
 - Providers are encouraged to be proactive in identifying risks or challenges, and to work constructively toward solutions
 - eSafety understands that projects evolve and values adaptability in service delivery
 - We appreciate providers who are responsive to feedback and committed to continuous improvement

- Given the number of stakeholders, eSafety appreciates providers who can collaborate with a complex network of stakeholders (please see section on stakeholder mapping for details)
7. The extent to which the level and structure of fees proposed provides value for money for the Australian Government.
- Suppliers should provide costs for each of the study components outlined in this statement of work, including costs for each survey wave accounting for expected attrition.

Additional information for suppliers to provide in their responses to this RFQ

Prospective providers should provide the following information:

- Details of sampling strategies, including information about methods of recruiting participants for online panels, size and representativeness of panel, potential pool of participants available for recruitment, and details of any other proposed avenues of recruitment. Sufficient information should be provided to enable eSafety to assess the likely quality and representativeness of the sample.
- The study is designed as a longitudinal panel, with the same paired-sample participants (i.e., child-parent dyad) invited to complete each wave. Suppliers should outline strategies for participant retention and recontact across all waves. Please provide estimated participant retention rates at each key time point, using both low and high scenarios based on your experience with similar studies or previous work.
- Strategies for meeting the specified quotas and level of confidence in ability to achieve them. This includes guidance on as to how many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children residing in remote areas of Australia are within the panel.
- Recommendation for appropriate incentive values for surveys to encourage retention. This could include structured models such as tiered or increasing incentives based on completion rates or longitudinal participation. Additionally, provide guidance on suitable incentives for a 1-hour in-depth interview, a 1-hour online chat-based focus group, and participation in passive data collection.
- Details of survey testing, including how much testing the survey will undergo prior to being sent to eSafety for a final check and details of any pilot processes.
- Time required to program the survey and propose field period (to achieve the required sample size and quotas).

- Details of survey hosting platform, including security and privacy measures used. Specific attention should be paid to the measures taken to protect identifiable data collected for the data linkage and qualitative follow up components of the survey.
- Details of the survey interface, including whether it is mobile phone and tablet compatible, and any features that would provide a more engaging experience for participants who do the survey, with example screen shots/links.
- Measures used to ensure quality of survey responses e.g. to avoid duplicate or overly speedy responses, bot detection, detect dishonest screening.
- Information about experience in successfully delivering projects of similar size, timeframe, and complexity.
- Details about experience conducting objective data collection (passive mobile phone usage) studies, particularly with children and young people.
- Information about experience integrating objective data collection (passive smartphone usage tracking with direct informed consent) into survey data including where relevant plans to partner with a third party to conduct this component of the survey. This may include Ksana Health Effortless Assessment Research System (EARS) and RealityMine.
- Information about the proposed passive smart phone tracking technology platform proposed, privacy, data security and compliance measures, device compatibility (IOS, Android etc.), and any user experience limitations.
- Information about experience conducting surveys with children and young people and ability to implement distress protocols provided by eSafety.
- Ability to implement objective data collection in a way that is engaging, non-intrusive, and ethically sound.
- Details of industry credentials.
- Suggestions for innovative approaches to enhance the evaluation will be considered.

Stakeholder mapping

The selected supplier will be required to manage information flows between several different stakeholder groups throughout the evaluation. To make these relationships clearer, several diagrams have been included in this RFQ.

As can be seen in Figure 1, the selected supplier will be required to engage with both the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and the relevant data custodians to produce the administrative data and linked survey responses. eSafety will engage directly with AIFS; however, we will not engage with the data custodians for the purposes of linking the data, beyond initial approvals of consent forms. The supplier will be responsible for providing consent forms to the data custodian and working with the data custodian and AIFS for the purposes of data linkage.

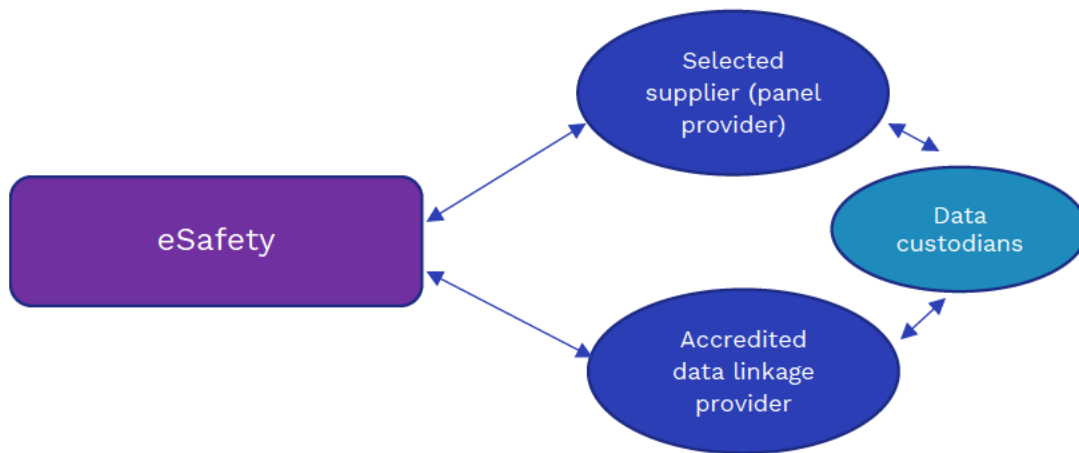


Figure 1. Data linkage stakeholder map.

We anticipate that the selected supplier will choose to partner with a third-party provider for the passive mobile phone monitoring component of the study. In this case, the selected supplier will be responsible for disclosing the engagement with the third-party provider, ensuring compliance with requirements, and for management and integration of the passive mobile phone monitoring data as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Objective data collection (i.e., passive mobile phone monitoring) stakeholder map.

Detailed Methodology

Multi-wave online survey

The study will use a multi-wave longitudinal design involving 8,000 children aged 10–16 and their parents/caregivers, recruited via an online research panel using a paired sample design. The study will be conducted over an initial period of two years, with potential to extend for an additional three years. Each wave the survey will be distributed and completed online.

The survey questionnaire, screener, and participant information and consent sheets will be provided by eSafety.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Children or young people aged 10–16 years and the parents or caregivers of children aged 10–16 years (and meets relevant quotas)
- Must be residing in Australia

Quota-Based Eligibility Limits:

- While all children aged 10–16 years living in Australia will initially be eligible for inclusion, recruitment quotas will be applied.
- Once quotas are achieved for specific demographic groups, additional participants from those groups will become ineligible to participate.
- The supplier must ensure that the survey platform supports quota management and eligibility screening in accordance with these criteria.

The child survey will take approximately 20–30-minutes to complete and comprise mostly close-ended questions, including several ‘other - please specify’ responses and approximately four open-ended questions (eSafety will code these responses). The parent survey will follow a similar format, but we expect the parent survey will be slightly shorter, taking up to 20-minutes to complete. We expect the surveys will include a set of core questions, after which participants may be randomised to complete one of several modules, to ensure coverage of the evaluation domains without making the survey too long and cognitively demanding of the participants. The selected supplier will work with eSafety to estimate the draft survey length and advise if cuts will be needed to fit within a 20–30-minute completion time.

The sample for the survey will be recruited by the successful supplier, via its online research panel and, if needed supplemented with other panel suppliers (please state if this will be required to meet the required sample size and, if so, which other panels will be used). We are also open to other methodologies (e.g., CATI to online) or innovative approaches to achieve our required sample within our budget parameters.

Completed survey responses should reflect the Australian general population of children aged 10–16, according to ABS Census data. Quotas or quota targets will be set for the child participant’s age, gender, state, metro/non-metro area, Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSAD), and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity.

The survey sample will include participants from groups identified as being most at risk of online harm (i.e. LGBTIQ+, First Nations, young people with a disability). However, quotas will only be set for participants with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (minimum of 6%). We will however aim to boost the sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to a target of n= 600, if feasible. The number of people from other at-risk groups within the survey sample will be as per natural fall out. Please indicate the anticipated sample (n) for each of these groups.

The proposed sample frame and quotas for the survey is set out in Table 2 and 3 below.

Table 2: Sampling frame (quotas for child survey)

Child demographics	Population (10-16 years old)	Online sample %	Online sample n	Max margin of error at 95% confidence
Gender by age		Target (quota)		(± percentage points)
Male aged 10–13	29.9%	30%	2400	2.0%
Female aged 10–13	28.3%	28%	2240	2.1%
Male aged 14-16	21.6%	22%	1760	2.3%
Female aged 14-16	20.2%	20%	1600	2.5%
Other than cisgender (any age)	Unknown	Natural fall-out (up to 6%)		
State/territory		Target (quota)		
NSW	31.5%	31%	2480	2.0%
VIC	24.6%	25%	2000	2.2%
QLD	21.6%	21%	1680	2.4%
WA	10.8%	11%	880	3.3%
SA	6.6%	7%	560	4.1%
ACT, TAS, NT	4.8%	5%	400	4.9%
SEIFA		Target (quota)		
IRSAD Quintile 1	18.5%	19%	1520	2.5%
IRSAD Quintile 2	19.3%	19%	1520	2.5%
IRSAD Quintile 3	20.5%	20%	1600	2.5%
IRSAD Quintile 4	20.7%	21%	1680	2.4%
IRSAD Quintile 5	20.9%	21%	1680	2.4%

Remoteness					
	Major cities	71.1%	71%	5680	1.3%
	Regional and remote areas	28.9%	29%	2320	2.0%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander			Minimum(quota)		
	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	6.0%	6%	480	4.5%
Total	n= 8000	100%	100%		1.1%

Table 3. Demographics of other priority groups (not hard quotas)

	Estimated population %	Estimated sample %	Estimated sample n
Living with disability	4%	Natural fallout	Natural fallout
Language other than English spoken at home (LOTE)	19%	Natural fallout	Natural fallout
LGBTQIA+	4.5% ¹ - 8% ²	Natural fallout	Natural fallout

At each survey wave, informed consent to participate in the survey will be sought from participants (i.e. parents/caregivers and children). Upon entering the survey, participants will be presented with a link to the Participant Information Sheet, and an electronic consent form, asking if they agree to participate in the research. Those who agree will click a 'next' button at the bottom of the screen to give consent and participate. Once this is checked, they will be asked to complete the survey.

To enhance completion rates and improve participant experience, eSafety requires that the online survey vehicle be engaging and easy to use for participants.

The selected provider will program, host, test and distribute the survey questionnaire, collect the data, and provide raw datafiles in SPSS and data tables, ideally in Q according to eSafety's specification.

eSafety staff will code, interpret, and write up the results.

¹ For 16+ per ABS: [Estimates and characteristics of LGBTI+ populations in Australia, 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)

² eSafety's recent youth survey achieved a sample of 8% LGBTQIA+ young people (aged 13-17).

Recruitment and management of qualitative follow-up studies

Participants for the follow-up qualitative research will be recruited from the survey cohort, forming a nested sample. During the survey consent process, participants will be asked if they are interested in taking part in follow-up qualitative research in the future. It will be made clear that like all research activities, participation is strictly voluntary. Not consenting to follow-up qualitative research will not prevent participants from participating in the cohort survey.

Those who register interest will be provided with an additional participant information and consent form explaining what is involved, what data is collected and how, and how their privacy will be protected. The selected supplier will be responsible for maintaining a database of these willing participants and providing eSafety with a list of respondent IDs who have consented, allowing us to identify potential participants based on their experiences and demographics. The selected supplier will be responsible for recontacting identified participants and scheduling the follow-up participation when requested by eSafety. The selected supplier will be expected to manage cancellations, rescheduling and payment.

Objective data collection (i.e., passive tracking of smartphone usage with direct informed consent)

During the survey consent process, participants will be asked if they are interested in taking part in objective data collection of their screentime. These participants will be able to opt into the passive tracking of smartphone usage, including screentime, time on apps, time of day of use, and device pickups. Data will be collected in up to three-week blocks at random intervals ideally pre- and post-regulation. Only data needed to support the research will be collected.

Participant recruitment and consent

Like the qualitative recruitment, participants will be recruited from the survey cohort, forming a nested sample. During the survey consent process, participants will be asked if they are interested in taking part in passive data collection and whether they consent to being contacted about it in the future. Those who register interest will be provided with an additional participant information and consent form explaining what is involved, what data is collected and how, and how their privacy will be protected. Consent will be obtained from both the child and their parent/caregiver.

Data collection approach

We envisage that the objective data collection will be conducted using an app that participants will be prompted to download to passively track screen time, app usage, time

of day of use, and device pickups. We envision capturing this data across multiple time points during the longitudinal study.

Data integration

Objective data should be linked to individual survey responses for participants who consent, using a unique participant ID. Suppliers must describe how the objective data will be cleaned, formatted, and integrated into the overall dataset. Data should be delivered in a format compatible with survey data and should be accompanied by clear documentation.

Data Linkage

The selected supplier will be responsible for working with our accredited data linkage provider and the data custodians (e.g., Service Australia, State Education Departments etc) to facilitate the provision of linked datasets (integration of survey and administrative data) in a way that complies with consent and privacy requirements.

Participant recruitment and consent

The survey includes an option for linkage to MBS and PBS data from Services Australia and NAPLAN data from various State and Territory data custodians. Given the age range of participants, the supplier must implement an age-appropriate consent framework that includes:

- Parental Consent (Ages 10–13):
 - At initial enrolment, parental consent must be obtained for participation and for MBS/PBS linkage. Consent materials must use plain language tailored to parents/guardians and young people.
- Child Assent (Ages 10–13):
 - At initial enrolment, we will be seeking assent from children aged 10-13, in addition to parental consent.
- Participant Re-Consent (Age 14+):
 - For participants who enter the study aged under 14, the vendor must implement a re-consent process at age 14 or older for MBS/PBS linkage. This re-consent must:
 - Be securely administered via the online platform
 - Inform the young person of their continuing participation and linkage

- Allow them to independently confirm or withdraw consent for MBS/PBS data linkage

Consent forms must use Services Australia's and NAPLAN data custodian's standard data linkage consent wording. Consent materials will be developed by eSafety but will be distributed by the supplier. The supplier must:

- Incorporate a digital signature (typed name or e-signature) with timestamp
- Include decline/withdrawal options that do not affect broader survey participation

Timing of consent for data linkage

While our original intention was to seek participant consent for data linkage at baseline, we acknowledge that delays in obtaining Services Australia approval for the consent forms—following ethics clearance—may impact the commencement of baseline fieldwork. As a contingency, we are exploring the possibility of deferring consent for data linkage to wave two. This approach may allow for a slightly extended baseline fieldwork period, reducing pressure on initial timelines.

Suppliers are asked to consider the implications of this adjustment, including potential benefits such as improved recruitment flexibility, as well as risks such as lower consent rates at wave two or challenges in linking data retrospectively. We welcome supplier input on the feasibility and operational impact of this alternative approach.

Supplier responsibilities

The successful supplier will be responsible for:

- Designing and implementing a secure, user-friendly online survey and e-consent interface
- Ensuring validation of required fields, consent status tracking, and encrypted storage of consent data
- Facilitating secure delivery of consent files, metadata and identifiers to AIFS, Services Australia or NAPLAN data custodians for linkage processing
- Managing participant communication, including:
 - Notifications about re-consent at age 14+
 - Handling of consent withdrawal requests
 - Providing plain-language support materials, FAQs, and contact options

AIFS (ADSP) responsibilities

AIFS will be responsible for:

- Liaising with Services Australia and NAPLAN data custodians for access to MBS/PBS and NAPLAN data, respectively.
- Managing data integration
- Delivering the final linked dataset to the eSafety Commissioner

The supplier will work collaboratively with AIFS to meet linkage readiness requirements and support updates if required.

Privacy, Ethics and Compliance

Suppliers must:

- Ensure data security at rest and in transit.
- Adhere to the Privacy Act 1988, Australian Privacy Principles, and any relevant state legislation.
- Comply with Services Australia's and NAPLAN data custodian's conditions for data use.
- Provide evidence of ethics compliance (HREC approval or application processes) – ethics applications will be managed by eSafety, but suppliers will be required to provide information to support the application (e.g., data storage and sharing).
- Ensure staff involved in handling consent data are trained.

Ethical considerations

Ethics review and approval of this research will be sought by eSafety from the AIFS Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). eSafety will prepare and submit the HREC submission.

To manage potential risks to participants, informed consent to participate in the research will be obtained, including providing information about the kinds of questions that participants will be asked, the potential risks of participating and help seeking/self-support information. This will help to mitigate the risk of participants experiencing discomfort and distress due to participating in the study, by allowing participants to weigh up if taking part is the right choice for them.

Help-seeking information will also be provided to participants throughout the survey. eSafety will provide the selected provider with Help Seeking Resources and Distress Protocols.

The supplier will be required to provide documentation outlining data storage and management practices and compliance with Australian Privacy Policies, to support our application.

Secure data deletion

Any research data that is gathered under the evaluation (i.e., from online surveys, qualitative research, objective data collection, or data linkage) that contains personal information that cannot be de-identified should be retained for no more than 6 months before being disposed of in a secure and confidential manner. If a valid case can be made to justify retention for 12 months to support the needs of the research project, this needs to be agreed with eSafety in advance, with data to only be kept for the particular purpose (‘primary purpose’) of the original project.

Milestones

Wave 1: October - November 2025 (1-month pre-regulation)

Milestone Description	Delivery Location	Due Date
Project start-up meeting	Online	Mid-September 2025
Survey programming	Online	Mid-October 2025
Fieldwork	Online	Late October - November 2025
Fieldwork complete	Online	No later than Dec 5th 2025
Provision of SPSS datafile and tables in Q	Online	December 2025

Wave 2: March 2026 (3-months post-regulation)

Milestone Description	Delivery Location	Due Date
Survey into field	Online	March 2026
Provision of SPSS datafile and tables in Q	Online	May 2026

Wave 3: June 2026 (6-months post-regulation)

Milestone Description	Delivery Location	Due Date
Survey into field	Online	June 2026
Provision of SPSS datafile and tables in Q	Online	August 2026
Qualitative recruitment	Online	October 2026

Wave 4: December 2026 (12-months post-regulation)

Milestone Description	Delivery Location	Due Date
Survey into field	Online	December 2026
Provision of SPSS datafile and tables in Q	Online	February 2027
Qualitative recruitment	Online	April 2027

Wave 5. December 2027 (24-months post-regulation)

Milestone Description	Delivery Location	Due Date
Survey into field	Online	December 2027
Provision of SPSS datafile and tables in Q	Online	February 2028
Qualitative recruitment	Online	April 2028
Completion of data transfer and post-matching (i.e., data linkage) review	Online	June 2028

Meetings

Meeting Type	Position Required	Frequency	Mode	Location
Project kick-off meeting	The supplier; eSafety	Once per wave	Video Conference	Online
WIP meeting	The supplier; eSafety	Weekly (during set up) Fortnightly, or as needed	Video Conference	Online

Status update reporting (per wave)

Status Reporting Description	Delivery Location	Due Date
Reporting on completes by quota categories	Email	Twice a week during field period

Attachment A: Terms of Reference

Social Media Minimum Age Evaluation

Academic Advisory Group: Terms of Reference

Date: 12 June 2025

Version: 2

Timeframe/Term: The evaluation will commence in April 2025 and continue until at least December 2027, with the possibility of extending into Stage 2 subject to approval.

Review Term: The membership of the Academic Advisory Group will be reviewed at the end of Stage 1 (December 2027), with potential for re-appointment. Members will reflect on a yearly basis their ability to contribute.

Membership: For the purposes of the Terms of Reference, representatives from the Lead Academic Partner are considered members of the Academic Advisory Group. These Terms of Reference govern the behaviour of all members.

These Terms of Reference are not for dissemination or citation.

Background

The Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024, hereafter Social Media Minimum Age, introduces a mandatory minimum age of 16 for accounts on certain social media platforms. This legislation is part of a broader strategy to create safer digital spaces for all Australians. The Australian eSafety Commissioner (eSafety) is responsible for implementing and evaluating the Social Media Age Restriction.

To support the evaluation of the Social Media Minimum Age, eSafety has convened an Academic Advisory Group, comprising domestic and international experts with expertise relevant to the evaluation to provide advice, peer review and support throughout the design, analysis, and dissemination phases of the evaluation.

This document outlines the details of the Academic Advisory Group formed to support the Social Media Minimum Age evaluation.

Purpose of the evaluation

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A monitoring and outcome evaluation will be conducted by eSafety's Research and Evaluation team, in collaboration with a Lead Academic Partner and Academic Advisory Group.

The primary objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Monitor the implementation of the Social Media Age Restrictions.
- Understand the impacts (both intended and unintended) over the short- and medium-term of the legislation for:
 - Children and young people
 - Parents and caregivers
- Provide objective, robust evidence to inform the independent review of the legislation.
- Contribute to the evidence base on the efficacy of the Social Media Age Restrictions.
- Contribute to the evidence base on the relationship between social media and youth wellbeing.

A central component of this evaluation is collaboration with academic experts to enhance the rigor, quality, reach and utility of the evaluation process and outputs.

Membership and Composition

eSafety has recruited a **Lead Academic Partner** and academic experts to form an **Academic Advisory Group** for the evaluation of the Social Media Minimum Age Restriction. Members were merit selected based on their expertise and experience in relevant fields.

If significant gaps are identified in the experience or expertise of the Academic Advisory Group, eSafety may seek to appoint additional members through a merit-based selection process. Likewise, if appointed members do not have the resources to contribute according to their role, they will inform the Secretariat and withdraw from the Advisory Group.

Chair: eSafety's **s 47E(c), s 47F** will chair the Academic Advisory Group. The chair will be responsible for facilitating meetings, guiding discussions, and ensuring the group's objectives are met.

In the event that the Chair is unavailable or unable to fulfill their duties, a replacement Chair shall be appointed on an interim basis. The replacement may be nominated by the Chair or

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Secretariat. The interim Chair will assume all responsibilities and authorities of the Chair until the Chair resumes their role, or a permanent replacement is appointed, as appropriate.

Time-limited sub-working groups: It is anticipated that the Advisory Group will establish smaller, time-limited special interest sub-working groups to progress and provide technical advice and expertise on specific measures within its remit. Members for sub-working groups will be nominated based on relevant expertise and availability.

A special interest group will be established when there are two or more interested members and will include representatives from the Lead Academic Partner and eSafety.

Observer status: At the discretion of eSafety, and with notice to the members, other parties may be invited to attend Advisory Group meetings as observers.

Role of academic collaborators

Lead Academic Partner

The Lead Academic Partner will work closely with eSafety to:

- Design the evaluation, including developing research instruments and methodologies.
- Support the analysis of data generated through the evaluation and provide expert guidance.
- Provide peer review of public-facing evaluation reports.
- Lead or co-author papers for publication in peer-reviewed journals based on evaluation findings. Support dissemination of the evaluation outputs more broadly (for example by sharing through Investigator networks, presenting findings at conferences etc.)

Academic Advisory Group

Key functions of the Academic Advisory Group are as follows:

- Advise on the evaluation design and methodology.
- Review and provide feedback on research instruments and evaluation outputs.
- Lead or co-author papers for publication in peer-reviewed journals as per dissemination plan, in negotiation with eSafety and Lead Academic Partner.

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- Propose and lead papers specific to their research interests and specialities for publication in peer-reviewed journals.
- Support dissemination of the evaluation outputs more broadly (for example by sharing through Investigator networks, presenting findings at conferences etc.)

Conduct

The expectations set out below for Member conduct reinforce and build upon the clauses in the MOU. Additional guidance is provided in Appendix A: Guidance Document - Role Expectations, Public Communication, and Professional Conduct, Appendix B: Disclosure Form, and Appendix C: Guidance for SMMA Evaluation Academic Advisory Group Members - Freedom of Information (FOI).

Confidentiality Obligations

The Lead Academic Partner and members of the Academic Advisory Group may have access to highly sensitive and confidential information. As such, members and their representatives will agree to keep and maintain as strictly confidential any highly sensitive information they may receive or have access to in their capacity as Advisory Group members. Any information that cannot be shared will be marked accordingly.

Freedom of Information (FOI)

It is important members of the Academic Advisory Group are aware of their responsibilities under the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Cth). This legislation provides the public with a legal right to access documents held by government agencies, which may include correspondence, meeting notes, and reports produced or received in the course of your advisory work. Maintaining transparency, professionalism, and clarity in all communications is essential, as your contributions may be subject to public release. Being mindful of FOI obligations helps uphold public trust and reinforces the integrity of the advisory process. Further information is provided in Appendix C: Guidance for SMMA Evaluation Academic Advisory Group members - Freedom of Information (FOI).

Public Statements and Activities

The objectivity of the evaluation and public trust in the findings is of the utmost important. It is therefore integral that Members are not involved in any public statements, commentary, and/or activities that might compromise the objectivity (real or perceived) and purpose of the evaluation. Further guidance is provided for members in Appendix A: Guidance Document - Role Expectations, Public Communication, and Professional Conduct.

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Conflicts of Interest

As part of your role on the Academic Advisory Group for the Social Media Minimum Age evaluation, members are required to complete and maintain a Conflict of Interest (CoI) disclosure form (Appendix B). This form ensures transparency by documenting any relationships, activities, or interests—financial or otherwise—that could be perceived as influencing your contributions to the evaluation. Disclosures should cover the past 36 months and include affiliations with entities involved in youth mental health, digital platforms, or policy advocacy. Members must update their disclosure at least annually and will be reminded at quarterly meetings to refresh the form if any relevant changes have occurred. Completing this form is a commitment to openness and does not imply bias.

Collaboration

All members of the Advisory Group are expected to work together in a collaborative and collegiate manner, including in the dissemination of evaluation findings and co-authorship of papers. Collaboration, respectful relationships, and accountability to the group are essential to achieving the objectives of the evaluation.

We encourage you to make the most of the opportunity to collaborate and draw on the considerable and varied expertise of the advisory to inform any publication, proposals, or funding related to or as an extension of the evaluation.

Referral of Matters

The secretariat will provide support for any referral of matters to other relevant groups, including groups within the eSafety governance structure and other national policies. Emerging risks or issues identified within the evaluation will be escalated to the appropriate authority for further action.

Meeting Arrangements

Meeting Frequency: The Academic Advisory Group will meet quarterly, with additional sub-group or individual meetings or agreement to progress matters out-of-session as needed. The cadence of meetings will be reviewed annually and updated based on the agreement of the Members of the Academic Advisory Group.

Meeting Format: Meetings will be conducted via videoconference (Microsoft Teams), unless otherwise required. In-person meetings may be scheduled as necessary.

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Please see Attachment A for Expectations for Member participation and secretariat support.

Ways of Working

Every effort will be made to incorporate feedback received within the designated consultation period. However, due to time constraints and the need to maintain project momentum, it may not be possible to follow up individually. In such cases, eSafety, in consultation with the Lead Academic Partner, will exercise discretion and make final decisions to ensure timely progress.

Outside of the meetings, correspondence with Advisory Members will be via email and documents will be shared through a secure SharePoint folder. Data sharing will be guided by a separate protocol to be developed by a special interest group.

Administration and Secretariat

Secretariat: eSafety will act as the secretariat for the Academic Advisory Group. The secretariat will be responsible for meeting logistics, coordination of meeting papers, and documenting and tracking actions arising from meetings.

Meeting Administration: The secretariat will circulate the final meeting agenda and any relevant documentation within a reasonable time before a meeting. The secretariat will also monitor meeting attendance, undertake minute-taking, record decisions, and maintain project plans.

Funding arrangements

The evaluation is funded by the Australian Government through the eSafety Commissioner.

If Members are to seek funding from other sources related to or as an extension of the evaluation, they will first seek advice and/or review from eSafety.

Financial compensation is not available to the Lead Academic Partner or the Academic Advisory Group.

Members

eSafety Representatives

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- s 47E(c), s 47F
- s 47E(c), s 47F
- s 47E(c), s 47F
- s 22
- s 22

Members of the Lead Academic Partner

- Professor Jeff Hancock, Stanford University Social Media Lab
- s 47F
- Dr Sunny Xun Liu, Stanford University Social Media Lab
- Dr Anja Stevic, Stanford University Social Media Lab
- Angela Yuson Lee, Stanford University Social Media Lab

Members of the Academic Advisory Group

- Distinguished Professor Bronwyn Carlson, Head of Critical Indigenous Studies, Macquarie 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 Peter Etchells, School of Psychology, Bath Spa University
- Professor Katherine Keyes, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University
- Dr Amy Orben, Programme Leader Track Scientist at the MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit, University of Cambridge
- 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

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- 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

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Attachment A: Expectations for Member participation and secretariat support

Purpose: the Academic Advisory Group has agreed to set consistent expectations for all Members.

1. Notice of meetings, papers, and scheduling

- a. The secretariat will circulate the final meeting agenda and papers within a reasonable timeframe ahead of an Advisory Group meeting.
 - i. Members will provide papers to secretariat within a reasonable time before they are due for distribution to the Advisory Group.
- b. Best efforts will be made to accommodate Members' time zones and availability when scheduling meetings.

2. Preparation

- a. Members should ensure that they have sufficient time and capacity to meaningfully engage in the Advisory Group.
- b. Members should come to meetings prepared to discuss items on the agenda.
- c. Members are expected to complete assigned action items within agreed timeframes. Should there be delays in completing action items, relevant members should notify the secretariat as soon as possible. The secretariat will work with members to adjust agendas to accommodate delays on tasks (including managing risks and dependencies).

3. Attendance

- a. Members should attend all relevant meetings, as far as reasonably practicable. If Members are unable to attend, they should be given the opportunity to provide input outside of the scheduled meeting.
- b. Members should notify the secretariat of changes to planned attendance with as much notice as practicable.

4. Recordkeeping

- a. The secretariat will monitor attendance, undertake minute-taking, and record decisions.
- b. The secretariat will be responsible for coordinating members' input into the Evaluation.

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- c. The secretariat will record action items and distribute these along with meeting minutes for members' records and action within a reasonable timeframe after the meeting.

5. Meeting principles

- a. Members are requested to:
 - i. arrive to meetings on time
 - ii. raise problems constructively and suggest solutions wherever possible
 - iii. be courteous and respectful to each other
 - iv. participate in specific tasks of the Advisory Group
 - v. actively seek, receive, and offer feedback for continuous improvement
 - vi. consistently share knowledge and information
 - vii. focus on making timely decisions, and if necessary, follow up on minor concerns offline.
- b. Meetings should commence with an Acknowledgment of Country.
- c. Meetings should be accessible for all participants.

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eSafety appoints Stanford University-led academic advisory group to assess the impacts of the Social Media Minimum Age obligation

Australia's eSafety Commissioner has appointed an academic advisory group of eleven distinguished experts led by Stanford University's Social Media Lab to support a robust and transparent evaluation of the implementation and outcomes of the Social Media Minimum Age (SMMA) obligation.

Since December 2024, eSafety has been working towards the implementation of the SMMA obligation and this advisory group is the latest step.

eSafety has provided [Advice to the Minister for Communications](#) to inform her [legislative Rules](#) tabled in July ahead of the Government's release of the Age Assurance Technology Trial finding.

eSafety has undertaken extensive public consultation and last week released its Social Media Minimum Age [Regulatory Guidance](#) for industry to begin taking reasonable steps for compliance before the December 10 start date. eSafety also published a [statement](#) reaffirming its commitment to children's digital rights in its implementation of the social media minimum age legislation.

The advisory group will support the eSafety Commissioner to examine how the SMMA obligation is being implemented and evaluate its short- and medium-term impacts on children, young people, and their parents or caregivers.

The evaluation will contribute to the broader evidence base on the effectiveness of social media age restrictions and the relationship between social media use and youth wellbeing.

This will also be a data source informing the future independent review of the legislation, within 2 years of commencement, led by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts.

eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant said the advisory group was selected following a detailed independent review process.

"The advisory group experts underwent a rigorous selection process and will represent the fields of online safety, social media, and adolescent wellbeing, from Australia and abroad," Ms Inman Grant said

"Collectively, the group brings unique and specialised experience in adolescent mental health, child and adolescent development, family dynamics in digital media use, and the lived experiences of children and parents in online environments. Their specialisations include children's digital rights, online harms, and the digital lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The team also brings deep knowledge in psychiatric epidemiology, digital parenting, and the complex relationship between social media and wellbeing."

The Group will provide independent, evidence-based guidance throughout the evaluation's design, analysis, and implementation phases. The evaluation will assess how well the obligation delivers on its intended goals, while also identifying any unexpected or unintended effects.

"This collaborative model underscores our commitment to a robust, transparent, and high-quality evaluation, including identifying any unintended consequences of the obligation and making recommendations around what adjustments may be required to address those," Ms Inman Grant said.

“The inclusion of both domestic and international experts from a range of complementary disciplines ensures the evaluation is informed by a rich diversity of perspectives and enhances the relevance and global impact of its findings.”

Neither Stanford nor the advisory group members will receive remuneration. They will instead benefit from access to research data, publication opportunities, and collaboration with leading scholars.

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 [TBC pending MoU negotiations]

- Professor Amy Orben, Programme Leader Track Scientist at the MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit, University of Cambridge