

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 General Manager, Technology and Strategy 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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- Kathryn King, General Manager, Technology and Strategy Division
- Deborah Welsh, Executive Manager, Strategy, Engagement & Research
- Members of eSafety's Research and Evaluation Team

Members of the Lead Academic Partner

- Professor Jeff Hancock, Stanford University Social Media Lab
- Dr Sunny Xun Liu, Stanford University Social Media Lab
- Members of the Social Media Lab Team

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
- 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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