SMMA Academic Advisory Group Meeting Minutes

Meeting 6 | 01 September 2026 | 7:00 – 9:00am (AEDT)

Attendees

Affiliation	Name
eSafety	Kathryn King, General Manager, Corporate and Strategy Division, eSafety Commissioner (Chair) Ashley Katz, Executive Manager, Strategy, Engagement and Research Members of the eSafety Research and Evaluation Team
Social Media Lab (SML), Stanford University	Professor Jeff Hancock Dr Sunny Xun Liu Members of the SML team
University of Melbourne; Royal Children's Hospital; Murdoch Children's Research institute	Professor Susan Sawyer
Black Dog Institute, University of New South Wales	Associate Professor Aliza Werner-Seidler
Professorial Fellow and Director, Centre for Youth Mental Health, University of Melbourne	Associate Professor Jo Robinson
Young and Resilient Research Centre, Western Sydney University	Professor Amanda Third
School of Education, Deakin University	Professor Julian Sefton-Green
Social Dynamics and Well-Being Laboratory, Georgia Institute of Technology	Associate Professor Munmun De Choudhury
Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University	Professor Katherine Keyes
Winston Center for Technology and the Developing Mind, University of North Carolina	Distinguished Professor Mitch Prinstein

Apologies

Distinguished Professor Bronwyn Carlson

Professor Pete Etchells

Professor Amy Orben

Minutes

Welcome and opening remarks

- The Chair opened the meeting with an Acknowledgement of Country.
- The Chair introduced Ashley Katz as the newly appointed acting Executive Manager of the Strategy, Engagement and Research Branch following Deb Welsh's departure from eSafety.

Reflections on evaluation milestones

- The Chair reflected on the release of the *Early Days, Early Insights* report, and the accompanying methodology report.
- While acknowledging that the age restrictions are one part of a broader ecosystem of supports required to promote children's safety and wellbeing online, the Chair shared eSafety's reflections on the report findings and planned responses to the findings.
- The Chair thanked all members for their contributions to the report, and Jeff Hancock, Aliza Werner-Seidler and Jo Robinson for their participation as panellists in the stakeholder webinar.

Proposed changes to the legislation

- The Chair updated members on the Commissioner's compliance and enforcement powers proposed under the new Online Safety Amendment (Strengthening Enforcement for the Social Media Minimum Age) Bill 2026, which stimulated discussion about how, if passed, this amendment was expected to change the outcomes that are being observed for children.

Evaluation updates

Reporting

- eSafety thanked the AAG for their contributions to the *Early Days, Early Insights* report and activities around its release.

- eSafety announced that the Study Protocol had been accepted by BMJ Open and thanked SML for leading this.
- eSafety invited AAG members to provide feedback on the forthcoming Cohort report, which provides a baseline profile of the children and parents participating in the evaluation.

Fieldwork and retention

- eSafety updated members on passive metering and data-linkage consent, sample representativeness and participant retention for the 6-month follow-up survey (Wave 3). eSafety shared that fieldwork was conducted between 28 June and 13 August 2026, with 1860 parent-child dyads completing the survey, representing a retention rate of 45%.

Ethics

- eSafety noted that they are preparing an ethics amendment for the 12-month survey and that a separate amendment will be submitted for the first round of qualitative research.

Qualitative studies

- eSafety thanked the Qualitative Special Interest Group (SIG) for convening in July and provided an overview of the key discussion points, including potential lines of inquiry, investigating unintended consequences and the timing of the first round of qualitative studies.
- eSafety shared that there was agreement on commencing the first round of qualitative studies in December 2026 or January 2027 to allow more time for implementation practices to improve. The SIG also agreed that findings from the 6-month survey should be used to inform the design of the first round of qualitative research.
- eSafety outlined the next steps for the qualitative study, which were to refine the study design and research questions, following receipt of the Wave 3 survey data.
- eSafety encouraged members to conduct complementary research projects in areas beyond eSafety's remit to support a broader understanding of the impacts of the legislation.

Feedback on *Early Days, Early Insights* report

- eSafety led a discussion on the reception of the report and related resources.

- eSafety noted they were pleased with the public's engagement across the *Early days, early insights: understanding experiences of social media age restrictions at the three-month follow-up* report and related resources including the methodology report, stakeholder webinar and findings recap video.
- eSafety and members felt the report was received well, with balanced and fair media coverage. They both noted considerable interest in findings on reduced parental awareness. Members also noted considerable interest from media outlets in the ban more generally.
- Some members noted that media interest in the report was lower than expected, with greater attention given to research from other organisations on the impacts of the legislation on children and young people. eSafety facilitated discussion on what might support broader awareness and engagement with future reports.

Data Sharing Agreement

- eSafety presented the draft Data Sharing Agreement and outlined the proposed process for sharing evaluation data with members. eSafety noted that access to linked administrative data will be governed by a separate Data Use Agreement.
- eSafety invited feedback from members on the Data Sharing Agreement during the meeting and for up to two weeks following the Advisory Group meeting.
- eSafety advised that the final Agreement will be shared with members once feedback is implemented.

Response maximisation discussion

- eSafety and members agreed that retention was lower than anticipated, relative to comparable cohort studies involving similar populations, which reinforced the need for a proactive participant retention strategy for future waves.
- eSafety led a discussion about maximising responses for future survey waves. They suggested the following strategies:
    - Multi-mode invitations and reminders (email and SMS)
    - Ongoing participant communication
    - Telephone follow-up of non-responders
    - Participant support services and incentives

- Members noted that the lower than anticipated response rate may have been influenced by participants receiving invitations to participate in multiple studies from the same panels. The group discussed whether messaging in future waves, emphasising that this is the official government evaluation, could help improve response rates
- Members also recommended exploring opportunities to strengthen retention by offering higher incentives and communication with participants between survey waves and during fieldwork.

SML update

Pre-registration collaboration

- The SML led a discussion about their proposed pre-registrations and outlined their proposed analytic plans, whilst inviting feedback from members.
- SML thanked members for reviewing their pre-registrations.

Any other business and close

- eSafety welcomed members to attend the Safer Online Futures: eSafety Symposium 2026.
- eSafety thanked the AAG for providing their conflict of interest (COI) declaration forms as part of the BMJ resubmission process and urged members to keep them up to date.
- eSafety reminded AAG members to inform them of any forthcoming publications that relate to the SMMA legislation.
- eSafety encouraged AAG members to direct stakeholders requesting briefings or updates on the evaluation to the eSafety Research and Evaluation team. They also reminded the AAG of the Evaluation Hub it as a central repository of information regarding the evaluation they can direct people to.
- eSafety thanked members for their time and thoughtful contributions over the year and formally closed the meeting.

Action Items

- Members to review draft minutes of this AAG meeting prior to publication on the Evaluation Hub.

- Members to review draft Data Sharing Agreement.
- Members to update eSafety of any change to COI declarations.
- Members to provide feedback on the forthcoming Cohort Report, if interested.
- eSafety and Qualitative Special Interest Group to finalise design of the first round of qualitative research.