



## Response to the Online Safety Act review

We live in a rapidly changing world, where the ability to access, afford, and effectively use digital services is not a luxury, it is a requirement for full economic and social participation in contemporary life. Access to essential Government, education, social and health services requires us to not only be digitally included, but have the ability to stay safe online.

Digital inclusion and online safety is more important than ever, yet **1 in 4 Australians are digitally excluded.**<sup>1</sup>

Good Things Foundation is Australia's leading digital inclusion not-for-profit (NFP), which partners with thousands of community organisations across Australia, to improve the digital capability and confidence of those most at risk of digital exclusion. Having worked alongside eSafety Commissioner for seven years delivering Be Connected, we welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the review of the Online Safety Act and will focus on three key aspects:

1. Ongoing community-based online safety education for all
2. Regulatory frameworks that keep up with the speed of technological change
3. Clear and easily accessible processes for people to report harm

### 1. Ongoing community-based online safety education for all

A digitally excluded person is unable to access the benefits of being online because they don't have the digital skills, confidence or the right device and affordable internet connection needed to get online. People with lower digital skills and confidence are often more at risk of online harm.

88% of participants in Good Things Foundation programs reported learning how to stay safe online and avoid scams was important to them, making online safety education the most important digital literacy topic for our beneficiaries. The delivery of Be Connected, which combines the delivery of online learning material with local face-to-face support has been proven to increase online safety, with older Australians who accessed our Be Connected digital being safer online, more socially connected and more digitally skilled.<sup>2</sup> Yet this program is not extended to support people of all ages to build digital skills, confidence and online safety. As outlined in the Issues Paper, there are multiple groups

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas et al (2023)

<sup>2</sup> McCosker, A., Tucker, J., Critchley, C., Hiruy, K., Walshe, J., Suchowerska, R., Barraket, J. (2020) Improving the digital inclusion of older Australians: The social impact of Be Connected. Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne.

who are more at risk of online harm, and these groups align with those people who are more likely to be digitally excluded. With the proven benefit to online safety of community based programs like Be Connected, it is essential that alongside improvements in Online Safety legislation, there is extended investment in community based online safety education and support. Educational content and resources need to focus on upskilling people with low digital and media literacy on identifying, reporting and managing online harms such as cyber-bullying, harassment, image-based abuse and technology facilitated abuse. There are fantastic resources available through the eSafety website, but relying on online resources and access to webinars is not enough, ensuring that there is local support in tested locations is the key.

## 2. Regulatory frameworks that keep up with the speed of technological change

Technology is rapidly changing and the Australian population is struggling to keep up. This is particularly relevant in the area of Artificial Intelligence (AI), where the impact of AI and new tech on people who are already digitally excluded is not really known. Research conducted by [Good Things Foundation in 2023](#), showed that 1 in 5 people living in Australia feel overwhelmed with constant changes in technology while 16% were unable to keep up. Two thirds of those surveyed were not confident in their ability to stay up to date, with 1 in 4 saying they need more digital skills support.<sup>3</sup>

More recently we have undertaken consultation across our Network and other key stakeholders about the impact of AI on digital inclusion. This research, to be published in August, indicated real concerns about the significant impact AI tools and generated content could have on online safety and harm. Our consultation participants indicated that:

- Any legislative frameworks or regulations need to be flexible to cater to current and future technologies ensuring that they do not become quickly outdated as AI's capabilities adapt and change and the use of AI tools is expanded across the country.
- Regulation may be best placed within existing law, such as the Online Safety Act rather than the creation of AI specific rules as we see occurring in countries such as the United Kingdom and Switzerland.
- Essential need for technology companies to engage in Inclusive design, human-centred design and Safety by design principles.

Although we understand that there are currently other processes underway to look at the regulation of the way in which AI is designed and used in Australia, the Online Safety Act should also ensure that it is flexible enough to respond to the increase in online harms created as a result of changes. Remaining technology neutral in the Act is helpful, because the technology is changing rapidly, yet, the ability to respond to how technology is used to inflict harm, particularly its use to create and distribute harmful materials is important to include in the Act. We would welcome Safety by Design obligations on the creators of technology platforms.

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<sup>3</sup> Good Things Foundation (2023)

### **3. Clear and easily accessible processes for people to report harm**

The current Online Safety Act already enables eSafety to take action to remove harmful material, yet the knowledge of these current powers are little known or understood by people in the community. As a result, any change in legislation must be supported by clear and accessible information that supports the broader Australian community to understand how to report harm. This could easily be incorporated into community-based online safety education, as identified above, with clear investment to support local organisations to support this.

### **Conclusion**

Good Things Foundation is in full support of the regular review of the Online Safety Act to ensure that it responds to the changing nature of the online world and harms that exist. Although we support investment in helping people to educate and protect themselves online, this must be supported by regulatory frameworks and legislation that hold those who are responsible for creating the harm to account.

We look forward to continuing our work with eSafety and the Australian Government more broadly to empower individuals and the community and reduce online harm they are exposed to.

## About Good Things Foundation Australia

Good Things Foundation Australia is a social change charity, helping people improve their lives through digital. We work with thousands of community organisations across Australia to support those hardest to reach, to improve their digital skills.

We coordinate and deliver the Australian Government funded Be Connected program for over 50s and build capacity in community organisations through digital mentor training and resources, grants and program support.

We develop and deliver a range of specialised digital inclusion programs for people who are most at risk of being left behind in our online world, including women, people with disability, low income families, and migrants and refugees.

Each year we host Get Online Week - our national digital inclusion campaign supporting millions of Australians to get online and improve their digital skills.

Our programs are community led, delivered at scale and create maximum social impact. We advocate for the 1 in 4 Australians who are digitally excluded and raise awareness of the importance of closing the digital divide, for good.

Learn more about our work: [www.goodthingsfoundation.org.au](http://www.goodthingsfoundation.org.au)

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