

**Young and Well CRC, ReachOut.com and Google
Enhancing Online Safety for Children**

7 March 2014

The Young and Well CRC and Google welcome the Government's focus on important child safety matters. We are pleased to be making this further joint contribution to the Government's consultation process on *Enhancing Online Safety for Children* in addition to our individual submissions.

We believe that young people's wellness is critical to Australia's future prosperity, and our organisations are committed to this goal.

We take online safety for children seriously and we have been working together for several years to support research and education programs to promote the safety of children online. We have also worked together to encourage service providers to explain and promote their safety, flagging and reporting tools. Just as we need to be street smart in the offline world, we all need the know-how and tools to be 'cybersmart' online.

However, there is more to do. Certainly, there is a role for better coordination of policies in the Federal Government. The different agencies, programs and research as well as different State Government agendas could certainly be better promoted and implemented with focus and better resourcing. Education programs can always reach more people with more funding.

We believe the Government should focus on drawing together existing resources and better coordinating initiatives across:

- education on online safety, especially the promotion of existing programs;
- research and its coordination with a view to evidence-based policy decisions;
- police responses and resources to ensure that existing laws are properly enforced;
- education about existing laws for bullying and harmonising laws across Australian jurisdictions;
- working collaboratively with social media providers; and
- non-criminal responses to cyberbullies and their victims including a best practice guideline to responding to cyberbullying.

We believe a central point of contact in Government for both the public and industry could be set up quickly to deal with referrals and online safety issues, including concerns about content online. The central point of contact would highlight existing avenues for reporting content for removal, and could liaise with social media providers over concerns. There are existing laws and existing infrastructure that could support this work.

We believe mechanisms for removal of 'harmful' content from social media sites are important. However, we believe a hasty legislative approach may be unworkable and inflexible. Legislation can never respond to the fast moving technology world in the way that cooperative arrangements may. In addition, legislation would not capture significant services, especially new

ones based overseas. This may create the (incorrect) expectation that the Government could remove material on any website.

In relation to the proposed new cyberbullying offence, our experience is that the Australian community often doesn't understand the current laws relevant to bullying and aren't aware enough of their rights and responsibilities. Many parents and teachers are unaware of the multiple organisations that work on the prevention of cyberbullying and the safety tools that already exist online. There is much more to be done to educate people about those laws, resources and tools. We believe an evidence based approach should be taken before any new law is introduced.

Once work in this area has been centralised, there would be the opportunity for Government to evaluate the evidence and assess what is further needed to be effective in promoting online safety. The central agency would have the opportunity to see how they could best work with different government departments, NGOs and industry groups. Under new arrangements the Government would be able to properly identify whether social media providers are taking appropriate steps to make sure their users have the proper tools to flag content, and which companies and organisations are not being cooperative.

Again, we thank the Government for being active around this important matter.

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