

6 March 2014

The Director
Cyber Safety Policy and Programs
Department of Communications
GPO Box 2154
CANBERRA ACT 2601

To Whom It May Concern

I am pleased to outline below the response of the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre to the Department of Communication's Discussion Paper "Enhancing Online Safety for Children."

The Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre (www.youngandwellcrc.org.au) was established in 2011 and is an Australian-based, international research centre that unites young people with researchers, practitioners, innovators and policy-makers from over 70 partner organisations. Together, we explore the role of technology in young people's lives, and how it can be used to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 12 to 25. Our three strategic objectives are to conduct internationally recognised research, to create evidence-based tools, applications and resources and to translate research to policy and practice. The Young and Well CRC is established under the Australian Government's Cooperative Research Centres Program and our collective vision is 'a digitally connected world where technologies are used to support young people to feel safe, healthy and resilient'.

Research conducted by the Young and Well CRC and our partners shows that young people aged 12 to 25 can face significant challenges and adversity. The transition from childhood to adolescence to early adulthood can be difficult, and yet these years are also crucial in building resilience to support social and emotional development. Our research shows that a young person's experience of safety online and their own digital citizenship is closely related to their mental health and wellbeing. Being subject to bullying behaviour, both online or offline, can significantly impact a young person's mental health and wellbeing. Furthermore, our research shows that young people who find themselves vulnerable to the development of mental health difficulties offline, are those more likely to experience challenges online.

The Young and Well CRC's current research in the area of cybersafety and digital citizenship includes:

- **Young and Well National Surveys:** This national survey conducted every two years explores the impact of technologies on young people's mental health and wellbeing. In 2012, 1400 young people aged 16-25 participated in a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) while an additional 3095 young people participated in an online survey. This research led by Brain and Mind Research Institute uses CATI and online survey methodologies to create a national databank of young people's experience of mental health and wellbeing and their use of ICT. Findings from this research have been published in the Game On report, presented at the International Association for Suicide Prevention conference, the Family Online Safety Institute Forum in Washington and will form the basis of an invited presentation to the Commonwealth Fund's Health Care Policy Debate in Washington in July, 2014.
- **Safe and Well Online:** This research aims to understand the role of online social marketing campaigns in creating behavioural change with a particular focus on safety and respectful relationships. In partnership with the University of South Australia, University of Western Sydney and Queensland University of Technology we are following a cohort of 1500 young people aged 12 to 17 over four years. Our research also explores the benefits of co-creating campaigns with young people, such as Keep It Tame (<http://keepittame.youngandwellcrc.org.au>) and



@ppreciate a mate (www.appreciateamate.com), and the importance of peer social networks to promote safety and respect.

- **Transforming Institutions and Communities:** The research aims to explore how both institutions (such as schools) and the communities supporting vulnerable young people can better respect young people's insights and experiences, including an appreciation of the central role technology plays in the lives of young people. Pilot work to inform this project, supported by Google Australia and Google United Kingdom, has specifically explored the role of intergenerational dialogue in improving the cybersafety and digital citizenship practices of both young people and those who care for them. The reports from this research can be found at <http://www.yawcrc.org.au/knowledge-hub/publications>.
- **webWise Evaluation:** The Young and Well CRC recently completed an evaluation of the Victorian Government's webWise initiative. webWise supported six sites across Victoria to develop pilot projects which utilise peer-to-peer education to promote online safety and digital citizenship for vulnerable young people. Pilots involve young people who are from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, culturally or linguistically diverse (CALD), living in rural or regional areas, identify as Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender or Intersex, from low social economic backgrounds or live with a disability. This project is providing much needed insights into the specific needs of these cohorts of young people. Of note, there are significant differences between the cohorts of young people. For example, those from CALD backgrounds report being subject to overt racism from those they do not know online, whereas for young people with a disability, safety concerns relate to the escalation of interpersonal conflicts between young people with a disability.

Underpinning the following recommendations is the need to build on the commitment of cooperation shown under the auspice of the Young and Well CRC which aims to improve communication and cooperation between the sector, including across government departments, with Industry, the Not For Profit Sector and Youth and Mental Health serving organisations.

The Young and Well CRC fully supports an environment where open discussions are standard practice, knowledge is shared, decisions and policy are evidence based and informed by research and collaboration is encouraged. Below are four general recommendations for consideration that span many questions flagged by the Department of Communications.

RECOMMENDATION ONE: Conduct a systematic review that explores the relationship between cyberbullying and youth suicide.

In 1999 a team of suicide prevention experts conducted a systematic literature review regarding the epidemiology, risk profile and potential preventive interventions for youth suicide¹. Our research clearly showed an innate complexity in addressing issues surrounding mental illness and suicide. It is widely contended across academic literature that cumulative adverse experiences, including negative life events, early childhood adversity and non-supportive school or familial environments greatly influence an individual's mental health and wellbeing. While evidence is clear that cyberbullying may contribute to feelings of depression, anxiety and social isolation the relationship between cyberbullying and suicide is not clear. Given the significant shift in the way in which young people use technologies and the lack of evidence regarding the association between cyberbullying and youth suicide it is critical that this review is updated with urgency and that this evidence be used to inform future cybersafety policy.

RECOMMENDATION TWO: Establish an e-Safety Commission rather than a Commissioner.

The greatest value to be garnered by the Commissioner/Commission is to create a united and strategic approach to cybersafety that promotes collective buy-in and commitment across Industry, education and the youth and mental health sector, specifically with a focus on ensuring greater coordination across and within government departments. This is critical to ensure less duplication, wastage and lack of evidence based programs and policy. A commission that includes a representative from each sector and that gives equal weight to the voice of young people will fundamentally be best placed to harness the good intent and commitment that has been built across the sector. The first job of the Commission should be to determine the effectiveness of existing programs – across government, industry and the not for profit sector. If the program cannot prove effectiveness then resource should be provided to support an impact evaluation of the program. The commissioner should also have responsibility for common standards of accountability, which moves beyond process evaluation (did someone use it and like it) to impact evaluation (did this work) to finally determining value for money.

¹ http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/mh12.pdf

RECOMMENDATION THREE: Examine existing evidence to determine the effectiveness of proposed legislation and determine the most relevant framework to support cybersafety policy

The Young and Well CRC is currently part of a consortia led by the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales commissioned by the Department of Communications to conduct research on youth exposure to and management of cyberbullying incidents in Australia. As part of this project, the consortia, which also includes Young and Well CRC Partners the University of Western Sydney, the University of South Australia and the National Children's and Youth Law Centre, the consortia is conducting research to explore:

- The estimated prevalence of cyberbullying incidents involving Australian minors, based on a review of existing published research including how such incidents are currently being dealt with.
- The estimated prevalence of cyberbullying incidents involving Australian minors that are reported to police, community legal advice bodies and other related organisations, the nature of these incidents disaggregated by broad socio-economic categories and categories of cyberbullying behaviours, and how such incidents are currently being dealt with.
- An evidence based assessment to determine, if a new, simplified cyberbullying offence or a new civil enforcement regime were introduced, how such an offence or regime could be implemented, in conjunction with the existing criminal offences, to have the greatest material deterrent effect.

This project is currently underway and we look forward to sharing the evidence generated with the Department in due course.

RECOMMENDATION: Consolidate existing education efforts to achieve maximum impact.

The government alone across the Department of Communications, Australian Communications and Media Authority, Australian Federal Police, Social Services, Education and the Australian Human Rights Commission have created 13 online safety programmes and resources. This comprehensive list does not include the resources created by Industry, the Not For Profit sector and the state and territory governments of Australia. The Young and Well CRC and its partners strive to see young people armed with skills and resources to use the internet in a responsible and considered manner, truly contributing to a safe and supportive online space. A major concern, however, that could be addressed by the Commission/er is that these approaches may be fragmented, there is a high risk of duplication and certain demographics are not targeted. A holistic and comprehensive approach such as that offered by the Alannah and Madeline Foundation through their e-smart schools and e-smart libraries framework provides a good starting point to allow schools and libraries to make informed decisions about what incorporating material into whole school approaches.

I look forward to working with Mr Fletcher in his role as Parliamentary Secretary for Communications and the Department of Communications, particularly in relation to evidence based policy and how Australia can truly support the wellbeing of our children, teenagers and young adults.

Sincerely,



A/Prof Jane Burns
Chief Executive Officer
Young and Well CRC