

Exposure draft: The Health Revolution – 20-Year Preventive Health Strategy

The Alannah & Madeline Foundation (the Foundation) is grateful for the opportunity to participate in this consultation.

As a leading national not-for-profit charity dedicated to keeping children and young people free from violence and trauma, the Foundation supports young Australians to recover and heal from trauma and empowers them to become positive digital citizens. Our eSmart program offers learning tools and resources, aligned to the curriculum and free for all Australian schools, to help students build online safety and digital and media literacy skills and behaviours to thrive online. We also advocate for children's rights in legislation, regulation, systems and policy, particularly in the digital environment.

Our vision is that all children and young people are safe and inspired with the freedom to flourish.

We welcomed the Tasmanian Government's announcement of a 20-year preventive health strategy and the strategy's recognition of the relevance of digital technologies to the health of Tasmanians. Our submission speaks to the strategy's sub-pillars of 'Safe digital spaces', 'Digital inclusion', and 'Digital health'.

Unfortunately, Tasmania continues to rank last in Australia for [digital inclusion](#), with most parts of the state scoring below the national average for digital affordability, ability and access. This prevents many Tasmanians from participating fully in education, employment or essential services, with flow-on concerns for their health.

Recommendations

1. **Embed a digital lens across every pillar of the strategy** to reflect the powerful, growing influence of digital technologies on the spaces, behaviours, communities and systems that shape Tasmanians' health and wellbeing.
2. **Explicitly recognise children and young people** as distinct cohorts – either through a dedicated section or tailored actions – to ensure their unique needs, rights and perspectives are fully addressed throughout the strategy.
3. **Prioritise the development of comprehensive digital literacy in children and young people**, supported by clear implementation pathways, staged priorities and measurable outcomes. Digital literacy extends beyond technical skills to include critical thinking about how technologies (including generative AI) are designed and function and how to make safe, ethical, responsible decisions online.
4. **Provide targeted, evidence-based, appropriately resourced interventions for vulnerable children and young people** including those in low digital inclusion communities, out-of-home care and youth justice.
5. **Ensure meaningful engagement with children and young people** throughout this consultation process so their perspectives inform the strategy and their right to participate in decisions affecting them is upheld.



Relevance of digital technologies to all pillars

Ideally, a preventive health plan would address the importance of digital technologies to all its pillars. These technologies affect the lives of children and young people in innumerable ways with many ramifications for their health, good and bad. Here are just a few examples:

- 63% of Australian teens aged 12-17 get [‘health’ information](#) from social media, most commonly about fitness, diet, and/or mental health. (See ‘Healthy environments and places’.)
- 44% of Australian teens aged 13-17 use digital devices in bed [before sleeping](#). (See ‘Healthy people and potential’.)
- 53% of Australian children who play online games say they do it to [connect with friends](#). (See ‘Healthy communities and social conditions’.)
- 1 in 5 Australians are digitally [excluded](#), reducing their access to opportunities and services. Digital exclusion tends to reflect and worsen other barriers like low income, low education attainment, and geographical remoteness. (See ‘Healthy foundations and equity’.)
- 27% of Australian children had received care via [telehealth](#) in 2021. Usage has likely risen since. (See ‘Healthy systems and supports’.)

Building digital literacy in children and young people

At the strategy consultation workshop on ‘Safe digital and online environments / Digital inclusion / Health technology and innovation / Digital health and infrastructure’, the facilitators shared a list of draft actions.

While there were many positives, we were concerned that none of the actions made a specific commitment to build the digital literacy of children and young people directly, including their knowledge, skills, attitudes and intentions in relation to positive uses of digital technologies. The commitment to support digital capability development across the life course, while welcome, did not go far enough to address children’s specific needs and the many dimensions of digital literacy beyond technical skills.

Boosting children’s digital literacy early and often is critical to fostering equitable outcomes, particularly in rural and regional communities where the risk of digital exclusion is high. Children who learn to navigate digital technologies appropriately are better equipped to thrive in an increasingly digital world.

Teaching narrow technical capabilities is not enough; online, children and young people face complex risks and challenges. For example:

- 56% of teens aged 13-17 have seen [deepfake](#) content.
- 26% of children aged 8-17 say they treated someone else in a [hurtful](#) way online in the past year.
- 83% of parents and carers believe their children are [negatively distracted](#) by digital devices.
- 11% of teens aged 16-18 have experienced [sextortion](#).
- 6% of children aged 8-17 say they were victims of [online fraud](#) in the past year.

Tasmanian schools are uniquely positioned to build digital literacy across their whole-of-school communities. However, they require direct, targeted support to make it happen.

The Foundation was funded by the Tasmanian Government to implement our online safety and digital literacy education program, eSmart Schools, from 2017-2020. Schools welcomed engagement with our eSmart Advisors, who supported them to build positive digital culture and practice across a whole-of-school community, including supporting safe and effective use of digital teaching and learning tools.



More recently, through funding from the Commonwealth Government, eSmart has launched a new suite of free online safety and digital literacy resources co-designed with, and for, schools in low digital inclusion areas. These resources are designed to empower learners, their educators, and their families with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate technology safely and responsibly.

While these resources have been embraced, Tasmanian schools continue to request in-school, hands-on support too. We are keen to explore what this could look like in the future.

Addressing vulnerability outside and inside schools

While digital literacy is vital for all children and young people, particular attention should be paid to the most vulnerable cohorts. At present, the draft actions of the strategy do not make explicit commitments there.

We urge that targeted, evidence-based interventions be resourced in schools in areas of low digital inclusion and in non-school settings, recognising that some highly vulnerable children do not attend school regularly.

Children and young people who are very vulnerable in their daily lives are much more likely than their peers to encounter risks and harms online. They also tend to rely more heavily on digital technologies. For example, UK research has found that:

- Teens in [out-of-home care and young carers](#) are much more likely than their peers to encounter problems online including scams, bullying, inappropriate content, stalking, image-based abuse, conflict with loved ones over tech use, and/or feeling 'addicted' to their phones.
- Exposure to violent content on social media is much higher than average among teens who have [youth justice](#) involvement, special educational needs, and/or school disengagement or exclusion.
- Teens with [special education needs](#) and/or physical or mental health conditions are significantly more likely than their peers to send or receive deepfake nudes, use a 'declothing' app, or use AI chatbots in place of human friendship.

Hearing directly from children and young people

We understand the Department of Health has recently secured resourcing to engage more directly with children and young people in relation to this strategy. This is very welcome news. Meaningful engagement can provide the strategy's creators with valuable, unique, direct insights. It can also help to build the civic engagement of children and young people as they experience their right to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives.

The Foundation is keen to discuss how we might contribute to child and youth engagement in this strategy.

We would welcome any opportunity to discuss our work and insights further. Please contact:

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