eSafety
Youth Council

Annual Report 2024

Acknowledgement of Country

eSafety acknowledges all First Nations people for their continuing care of everything Country encompasses – land, waters and community. We pay our respects to First Nations people, and to Elders past, present and future.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the young people who participated in the inaugural eSafety Youth Council and dedicated their time and expertise for two years to contribute to improving the online safety experiences for young people. We would also like to thank the parents, carers and guardians of our members who supported their young people's participation in the Council.

eSafety gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the youth organisations who supported us with advice and best practice strategies throughout the Council's journey, particularly the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition and Youth Affairs Council Victoria.

Contents

Commissioner's foreword

Message from the eSafety Commissioner

Over the past two years, the eSafety Youth Council has become a powerful example of the role collective action can play in achieving positive change.

As technology continues to advance at breakneck speed, becoming more embedded in our lives than ever, our young future leaders are uniquely positioned to help shape better outcomes for their generation.

Comprising members aged 13 to 24, the Council is an inspiring group of individuals from a diverse range of locations, genders and backgrounds.

Their advice to government offers authentic insights into the issues young people face online and the pathways we can take towards helping achieve a better future for young people now, and in the generations to come.

We know young people have high hopes and aspirations for their online interactions.

They've told us they want an internet that's inclusive, safe and enabling. A place where they can enjoy learning, playing and connecting with friends and family.

Young people also understand they are vulnerable to the risks and potential negative impacts of being online and want to be empowered with the strategies, information and tools they need to maximise the benefits of technology use, whilst mitigating the risks.

That is why they are calling for Safety by Design principles to be incorporated into digital platforms and products, ensuring the burden of safety doesn't fall solely upon them.

eSafety's ongoing engagement and collaboration through the Council plays a crucial role in our mission to support positive online experiences for young people. It also

helps eSafety better direct authentic and powerful guidance that will resonate with all young Australians and empower them online.

As the Council's first term draws to a close, we look back on the valuable contribution they have made to our national conversation, pioneering a new model of youth-driven citizenship in the digital age.

And we look forward to collaborating with future members as we continue prioritising youth voices in all our initiatives.
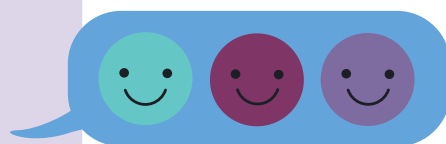
There's so much more important work to do.

Julie Inman Grant
eSafety Commissioner

eSafety Youth Council member reflections

> " After a two-year journey of many opportunities that I never thought I'd be able to experience in my life, I'm glad and thankful that I've been a part of it.

> " I really enjoyed my experience getting the opportunity to learn about eSafety and find out about policy which I'm really interested in and empowered to take part in because of this Council.

> " I think we have all built our knowledge and connected with new people or organisations and gained experience in activities or tasks which we wouldn't otherwise be able to.

> " I greatly enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to work with like-minded young people and felt my understanding of different perspectives across the nation grew.

> " We got our name out there and hopefully made connections that will allow the future Youth Council members to communicate with Big Tech easier. I hope we facilitated future change.

> " I learned that my voice matters, so it's important and I can use it to make a change in helping protect young people online.

> " On a personal level, I was able to learn so much about a range of things, not just in the eSafety space, including public speaking and leadership.

> " I saw my ideas and opinions shaping actions and plans, which in turn has visible, positive impacts. It really motivated me to learn and participate to the fullest of my ability.

> " Talking with the heads of Big Tech was an amazing opportunity to understand how the other side of social media operates.

About the eSafety Youth Council

24 young people, aged 13-24, representing a diverse range of experiences, genders, cultures, languages, and locations across Australia.

Collaborate

Providing a direct line to the Australian Government and eSafety, to ensure the voices of young people remain central in influencing and designing policy, programs and resources impacting them.

- Meeting regularly online and in-person to discuss a range of online safety topics relevant to young people, including their aspirations for the online world and barriers to help-seeking behaviours.
- Collaborating on a range of projects with both eSafety and external stakeholders.

Inform

Providing valuable feedback informed by member insights and experiences, to guide eSafety's policy, program and resource design.

- Strengthening messaging to young people, including a review of eSafety's education resource, Rewrite Your Story, and the youth focused social media channel, SCROLL.
- Developing eSafety's position statement on generative AI and Age Verification Roadmap.

Influence

Influencing issues that matter most to members by engaging in meaningful discussions, participating in television, radio and print interviews, and creating content for social media.

- Creating an open video letter to Big Tech, resulting in a meeting with key technology industry leaders from Amazon, Google, Meta, Microsoft, Pinterest, TikTok and Twitter.
- Providing a review of ChildFund's SwipeSafe app targeted at young people in Australia and the Solomon Islands.

Develop

Actively participating in a breadth of discussion and engagement with eSafety, Government and other stakeholders, to build the skills of members including critical thinking, facilitation, content creation and team-work skills.

- Presenting at the 2022 Australian Association for Adolescent Health Conference, and as a panel member at Sydney University's Policy and Internet Conference.
- Developing the foreword of the WeProtect Global Alliance 2023 Global Threat Assessment report.

Summary of eSafety Youth Council events

June

Meeting 1 (online)

Council meets online to discuss their idea of what the perfect internet looks like and their understanding of online safety.

August

Video statement

Council contributes to a video statement for the Youth, Tech and Wellbeing event, co-hosted by All Tech is Human and the US-Australian Embassy.

November

Adolescent Health Conference

A Council member presents at the 2022 Australian Association for Adolescent Health Conference, Melbourne.

February

Open letter to Big Tech

Open letter video created by Council addressed to Big Tech is released for Safer Internet Day.

2022   2023

July

eSafety resource review

Council members review eSafety's Rewrite Your Story resource.

September

Meeting 2 (online)

Aspirations for the Council and achievement outcomes are sought on how eSafety can help young people seek support and engage with reporting systems.

December

Meeting 3 (online)

Council discusses eSafety's Age Verification Roadmap and provides advice on how age verification systems impact young people.

April

Meeting 4 (in person)

- First in-person meeting with guided facilitation is held in Sydney.
- Council meets with key technology industry leaders from Amazon, Google, Meta, Microsoft, Pinterest, TikTok and Twitter.
- Council discusses updating the Aspirational Statement, their expectations for 2023 and their contributions to the development of eSafety's age verification roadmap.

June

Meeting 5 (online)

- Council discusses its self-governance strategy, including roles and responsibilities.
- Members consulted on eSafety's International Strategy and Futures work on immersive technology.

ChildNet's International Film Competition

Two members judge ChildNet's International Film Competition, themed 'Time to talk – How can people support each other online?

eSafety position statement

Council contributes insights into the use and impacts of generative AI on young people and their communities, to inform eSafety's position statement on generative AI.

September

Meeting 6 (online)

- First Council meeting to implement self-governance is held – including co-chairs, secretaries and engagement officers.
- Council discusses how to improve eSafety messaging to engage young people and the impacts of digital footprints.

March

First Nations resources launch

A Council member is interviewed on radio, to support the launch of eSafety's First Nations resources and the 'Cool, Beautiful, Strange and Scary' research report.

SBS 'Asking for It' series

Council provides feedback related to eSafety's community service announcements played during SBS's 'Asking for It' series.

Interview on cyberbullying

A Council member discusses cyberbullying with media and emphasises the importance of eSafety's role in educating families and supporting young people and children.

August

WeProtect report foreword

Two Council members develop the foreword of the WeProtect Global Alliance 2023 Global Threat assessment report.

Summary of eSafety Youth Council events (continued)

September

Policy and Internet Conference

A Council member speaks on a panel at Sydney University's 2023 Policy and Internet Conference.

October

Youth Council recruitment campaign

Council creates video content to support eSafety's new Youth Council recruitment campaign.

December

Meeting 7 (online)

Council discusses strategies to support parents and carers to have age-appropriate open conversations with their children about online harms.

ChildFund's SwipeSafe app

In collaboration with eSafety's International Engagement team and Western Sydney University, two Council members review ChildFund's SwipeSafe app for young people in Australia and in the Solomon Islands.

2023

2024

May

Debate to Regulate

Three Council members attend Debate to Regulate, a capacity-building event hosted in Bangkok, created through the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Youth Partnership.

April

eSafety Youth Think Tank (in-person)

Council discusses online safety education in secondary schools and post-school environments, online experiences for boys and young men, social media and wellbeing, and intergenerational learning within family settings.

March

Youth Council recruitment process

Council members support the shortlisting of applicants to form the 2024-26 eSafety Youth Council.
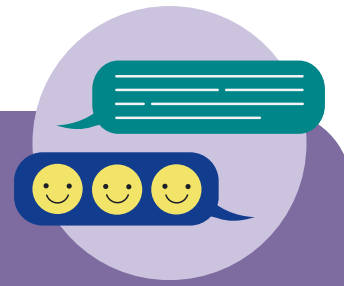
National Youth Forum

Two Council members attend and participate in the 2024 National Youth Forum, hosted by the Department of Education's Office for Youth.

February

Safer Internet Day 2024

Council designs and creates social media content related to online gaming to support Safer Internet Day 2024.

> **"** I felt we were able to make an impact on young people on a national level. The opportunities we had to express our opinions and be heard (media interviews, meeting big tech) felt like we were making some sort of change to the online world and it felt amazing to be part of that.

> **"** Being involved in something like this was very empowering because it gave us a message that we can actually make an impact in this field.

Key learnings from Council meetings

Over the course of the Youth Council's two-year membership, members participated in a range of online safety discussions. Their recommendations informed eSafety's existing and new policies, programs and resources.

Reporting online harm and abuse

- eSafety should openly recognise the barriers young people face when reporting online harm and abuse.
- The reporting process should be less intimidating for young people, to encourage them to make reports to eSafety.
- eSafety should recognise the cultural nuances and cultural barriers in reporting, particularly of those from migrant and refugee, First Nations and rural or remote communities.

Age verification and age assurance measures

- Age verification systems should aim to provide users with different methods to prove their age.
- There are privacy and security concerns about the personal data that must be provided to organisations to verify a user's age.
- It is common for young people not to have access to official documents such as drivers licenses or passports to use for verification.

Online gaming

- Online gaming is a site of social connection for young people. It is a way of connecting and communicating with friends, as well as the wider gaming community.
- The gaming environment and community was identified as a significant influence on young people, with Council members pointing out that 'welcoming' communities can encourage friendliness whereas 'toxic' communities can encourage harmful behaviours.
- Adults, particularly parents and carers, need more support to understand gaming and its benefits. **Council members want adults to engage with gaming to learn more about it and the games young people play.**

eSafety's messaging to young people

- eSafety's social media content and advice should be specific, concise, relatable and feature young people.
- Statistics and/or real-life examples should also be used.
- Consideration should be given to using humour and lo-fi posts to appeal to young people (such as handheld or TikTok-style videos).
- To engage young people, use interactive posts (such as polls in Instagram Stories).

Digital footprints

- Council members suggest that the impact of digital footprints may not be consistently taught in schools, which may affect young people's understanding of the consequences of the content they post.
- They suggest that social media may have contributed to a change in cultural attitudes and desensitisation to wrongdoings and risky behaviours, such as the risks of sharing too much information online or posting content of others without consent.

Mis/disinformation and fake news

- Young people need support to develop the necessary skills to distinguish fake news from real news. The misuse of the term 'fake news' to refer to content people might not agree with may be contributing to this.
- Young people need support and education to understand the impact of algorithms and misinformation and to curate content suited to their interests.
- Messages to young people should be specific to the target audience and offer tools on how to fact-check information.

Young people's online experiences in relation to their bodies, relationships and sexuality

- Council members recommend that young people are given advice and education to help them understand exposure to negative content and behaviour regarding their bodies and relationships (for example, trolling, cyberbullying, inappropriate content).
- It should be acknowledged that it is common for some young people to form friendships and relationships through online gaming and other platforms.
- It should be recognised that some young people may feel pressured to send nudes, share their lives online or be tracked by their partners.

Big Tech and industry

- The Council suggests that technology companies change their reporting processes and the management of complaints. This includes increased consequences for perpetrators of online harassment and abuse, and increased support for victims of online harassment and abuse.
- Active engagement and communication needs to occur between young people and technology companies to co-design solutions, including ongoing dialogue between the eSafety Youth Council, other young people and technology companies.

eSafety Youth Think Tank

On 18 and 19 April 2024, eSafety hosted a Youth Think Tank marking the final Council meeting and the end of their two-year tenure. The two-day Think Tank began with a welcome and thank you from the Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education, followed by an address from and question time with the eSafety Commissioner.

The event included insightful brainstorming sessions and discussions about a range of topics:

- How to reimagine online safety education in secondary schools and post-school environments.
- The future of immersive technologies.
- Empowering young people to support the digital skills of their culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and older family members.
- Supporting boys and young men to confidently navigate gender norms and to foster positive online connections.
- Empowering young people to support their own wellbeing while navigating social media.

Reimagining online safety education in secondary schools

- Develop gamified and interactive resources for children and young people to offer opportunities to develop and practice responsible and safe actions, and critical and digital literacy skills.
- Provide opportunities to teach young people to better support their peers and communities.

- Include a range of online safety education topics beyond extreme issues.
- Provide guidance and education for the appropriate and safe use of generative artificial intelligence (AI).

Reimagining online safety education in post-school environments

- Promote eSafety's Young People webpages in post-school settings, such as the tertiary sector.
- Engage with student unions and student representative bodies as a pathway to implement online safety education in tertiary settings.
- Co-design compulsory eSafety modules (about issues such as online safety and generative AI) with students and tertiary bodies.

Navigating gender norms and online experiences for boys and young men

- Implement engaging social media or marketing campaigns with positive male role models from diverse fields. For example, sporting, gaming, 'dad' figures, rural communities, CALD members, those with disabilities.
- Promote and normalise mental health and telehealth support (such as text support services) to encourage boys and young men to help seek.

Social media and wellbeing

- Implement a holistic approach to educate and consolidate wellbeing skills for social media with students, educators, parents and carers.
- Support young people to navigate the differences between the online and offline worlds.
- Hold Big Tech companies accountable for the wellbeing of their users, with clear and regularly revised regulation.

Intergenerational learning within family settings

- Develop a database, program or online spaces for young people to direct their family members to get support. Any content provided needs to include instructional pictures or images. Support may include digital literacy, online safety advice and wellbeing support.
- Develop an interactive activity or game that young people can play with their family members.

> "
>
> **I really appreciated how inclusive, supportive and collaborative the Council was.**

Key achievements

Self-governance model

In June 2023, Council members and eSafety staff co-designed a self-governance model which aimed to incorporate a youth-led and adult-supported approach. The self-governance model was welcomed, with various Council leadership and support roles created for members as part of a Leadership and Governance committee.

The Leadership and Governance committee aims to empower Council members to take ownership of both the design and facilitation of meetings. Leadership and Governance roles include:

- co-chairs – to lead and facilitate Council meetings
- co-secretaries – to provide timekeeping and notetaking support

- engagement officers – to lead brain break activities and encourage active participation.

Interested members can nominate themselves for a maximum of two Council meetings, in which roles are rotated. This approach ensures an equitable process for members to develop leadership and facilitation skills and understand their role description and expectations.

Council members in leadership roles attend planning sessions to develop meeting agendas and activities.

In September 2023, the self-governance model was implemented with five dedicated roles including co-chairs, co-secretaries and one engagement officer role.
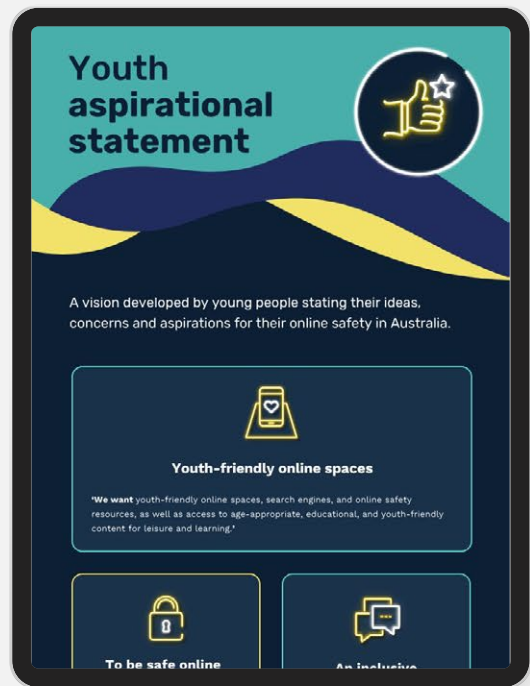
Finalised Aspirational Statement

An Aspirational Statement was first developed as part of the Young and Resilient Research Centre's **'Youth Engagement' report** to eSafety in 2021. The statement presented visions for online safety and aspirations for a safe, enjoyable and constructive internet. The statement was developed with an expectation that the statement would be refined and updated as eSafety grew its capacity to meaningfully engage with young people.

In December 2023, the Aspirational Statement was updated to further reflect the diverse views and experiences of young people, and to account for technological change and the evolution of online safety risks of harm.

To ensure the Aspirational Statement is up to date and meaningfully reflects the young people of today, the new eSafety Youth Council will complete a review of the Aspirational Statement to refine and update it by the end of their term in 2026.

Click here to view infographic

eSafety's youth engagement process

eSafety is committed to offering engagement opportunities that are outside the four formal meetings a year. An engagement process was developed to formalise contributions and co-design by young people across eSafety projects, policies and resources. An eSafety working group facilitates internal engagement opportunities.

Engagements need to consider:
- the appropriateness and relevance of the opportunity to the Council's objectives and goals, and eSafety's strategic priorities
- provision of incentives
- child safeguarding measures.

Youth engagement opportunities with the Council are expected to be authentic, mutually respectful and non-hierarchical, as well as incorporating the 'Best Practice Principles for Youth Engagement' outlined in the **Youth Engagement report.**

Next steps for eSafety's Youth Council

In October 2023, recruitment for new Council members commenced and eSafety saw an 87% increase in applications compared to the previous recruitment period.

With support from serving Council members, eSafety's Strategic Communications team designed and led a comprehensive social media campaign that focused on reaching young people from under-represented groups and geographic locations.

The process encouraged a choice in ways young people could make their submission. eSafety received written responses, videos, audio files, songs and posters. Applicants were required to have a letter of endorsement from a referee in support of their application.

Serving Council members were also engaged to ensure youth voice and perspectives were part of the assessment process.

The 2024–2026 eSafety Youth Council comprises 17 young Australians from diverse backgrounds and cultures, representing all states and territories. The new Council's induction process began in May 2024 and their first official meeting was held in June 2024.

The new Council members will have additional opportunities to develop their collaboration and leadership skills.

A new sub-committee, the Communications committee, will be established to provide Council members with the opportunity to collaborate with other Council members and the eSafety Strategic Communications team. This collaboration will see Council members help develop ideas and content for social media and other media opportunities to reach more young people online.

Participation in Council committees is voluntary, and ongoing training and support is provided to Council members.

> **"**
>
> **Now that I'm coming to the end of my time on the Council, I have a sense of pride because I feel like I have been able to make the most of this incredible experience.**