

**Interim Government Response to
Report of the Education and Workforce Committee
on the
Inquiry into the harm young New Zealanders encounter online, and
the roles that Government, business, and society should play in
addressing those harms**

Presented to the House of Representatives

In accordance with Standing Order 256

Interim Government response to the report of the Education and Workforce Committee on the inquiry into the harm young New Zealanders encounter online, and the roles that Government, business, and society should play in addressing those harms

Introduction

- 1 The Government welcomes the Education and Workforce Committee's report, which recommends a wide range of actions to address young people's experiences of online harm. The Committee concluded that government, businesses including online platforms and social media companies, and civil society, all have a role in improving online safety in New Zealand.
- 2 The Committee found that young people are experiencing significant psychological, social, and financial harm from online platforms. In its interim report, released in December 2025, the Committee described the nature and extent of online harm experienced by young people. This included harm from exposure to child sexual abuse material, depictions of violence, cyberbullying, and coercive advertising.
- 3 The Committee's report also concludes that online harm should be addressed as a public health issue, and that Government should consider ways to improve the institutional frameworks, education, and legislation that underpins online safety regulation, and take steps to support parents and caregivers to protect their young people.
- 4 The Government responds to the report in accordance with Standing Order 256.

Education and Workforce Committee's Recommendations

- 5 **Recommendation 1: Address legislative gaps and overlaps.** "We recommend that the Government review the legislative framework for online safety, including, but not limited to, the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993 and the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015, to address current and emerging risks and introduce new offences and penalties associated with online harm."
- 6 **Recommendation 2: Strengthen liability for online harm.** "We recommend that the Government review the legislative framework for online safety, with a particular view to increasing platforms' civil and regulatory liability for harm resulting from the content they host and platform design (such as use of algorithms and infinite scroll features)."
- 7 **Recommendation 3: Establish an independent national regulator for online safety.** "We recommend that the Government establish an independent national regulator for online safety in New Zealand. The regulator should have a full suite of modern regulatory tools and a flexible mandate that allows it to be nimble in response to emerging harms and technologies."

- 7.1 “We recommend that the Government propose empowering this regulator to make, or advise the Minister on, secondary and tertiary legislation to give effect to regulatory proposals within its intended mandate.”
- 8 **Recommendation 4: Introduce age restrictions for social media platforms.** “We recommend that the Government progress its consideration of restricting social media access for under-16-year-olds, noting that the majority of us consider doing so is necessary to mitigate the harms young New Zealanders face online.”
- 9 **Recommendation 5: Ban “nudify” apps and prohibit the creation and distribution of non-consensual deepfake sexual imagery.** “We recommend that the Government take immediate action to condemn and ban all web- and device-based applications that automate or substantially lower the technical barrier to creating deepfake sexual imagery of real people.”
- 10 **Recommendation 6: Explore options to regulate deepfake technology.** “We recommend that the Government explore options to regulate deepfake technology as part of a wider legislative and regulatory review, or task this to the regulator to prepare further advice on.”
- 11 **Recommendation 7: Regulate algorithmic recommendation systems.** “We recommend that the Government closely consider taking action to regulate recommendation systems and take note of the options we have presented for this intervention.”
- 11.1 “We recommend that the House take note that members of the Labour Party of New Zealand would recommend that Government regulate recommendation systems, rather than closely consider taking action.”
- 12 **Recommendation 8: Mandate algorithm transparency.** “We recommend that the Government explore: introducing powers for a regulator to require information from platforms relating to their algorithms; introducing requirements for platforms to provide accredited researchers with access to information about algorithm design and operation; regulating in a manner consistent with the EU or other counterparts.”
- 12.1 “We recommend that the House take note that members of the Labour Party of New Zealand would recommend that the Government undertake the actions described above to mandate algorithm transparency, rather than explore them.”
- 13 **Recommendation 9: Restrict online advertising of alcohol, tobacco, and gambling.** “We recommend that the Government regulate to prevent online advertising of restricted goods to young people under the age of 18, in a way that aligns with the relevant offline advertising restrictions.”
- 14 **Recommendation 10: Educate and empower parents, caregivers, and young people.** “We recommend that the Government invest in public online safety campaigns or consider ways to fund the creation and promotion of

comprehensive resources designed to educate and inform parents, caregivers, and young people about online safety.”

- 15 **Recommendation 11: Promote New Zealand-based research.** “We recommend that the Government promote further research grounded in the New Zealand context, further deriving benefit from our recommendation to mandate algorithm transparency.”
- 16 **Recommendation 12: Consider further matters.** “We recommend that the Government consider each of the matters set out in Chapter 4 of [the] report and/or task them to the regulator recommended above to further consider, as appropriate.”
- 16.1 These relate to: including young people in regulatory design, reducing opportunities to evade restrictions, minimising privacy risk and intrusion on rights and freedoms, reviewing the approach to labelling, updating offences and penalties, and accessibility considerations.

Interim Government response to the recommendations

- 17 The Government acknowledges the Committee’s conclusion of the need to improve the institutional frameworks, education, and legislation relating to online safety for young people. Children’s safety and freedom from harm is a human right, as affirmed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- 18 The Government has examined the Committee’s recommendations and notes that the recommendations span multiple agencies, regulatory systems and institutional frameworks. Many of these recommendations by nature are long term or relate to, and have implications for, interconnected systems and functions that address online harm.
- 19 The Committee’s report acknowledges that the interventions it recommends include regulatory measures that could be implemented within a short time frame, as well as broader system reform.

The government has already acted on matters that relate to some of the Committee’s recommendations

- 20 **Recommendation 4** – “introduce age restrictions for social media platforms”. The government is progressing towards considering introducing legislation before the end of this Parliamentary term to address children’s online safety.
- 21 **Recommendation 10** – “educate and empower parents, caregivers, and young people”. The Government recently announced proposed changes to the national curriculum. As part of this, the draft Health & Physical Education and Te Waiora curricula for Years 0-10 includes teaching knowledge and skills that support online safety. Consultation on this updated curriculum content closed in April 2026. The Ministry of Education is working through the feedback. Final content is currently planned to be released in mid-2026, with phased implementation in schools and kura over 2027 – 2029.

- 22 The Ministry of Education has also published a resource to help grow people's understanding of the online world and support them to make safer choices online and offline. That resource ([Te Kāpehu Whetū](#)) is targeted towards teachers to help foster information literacy in a classroom setting.
- 23 In addition to this, Health NZ has initiatives underway within the health system to reduce online harm:
- 23.1 Rolling out MediaSmart to 20 schools across New Zealand. This initiative teaches children and young people critical thinking skills related to media literacy, body image, and online safety.
- 23.2 Health promotion activities focused on reducing harm from online gaming and online gambling ([Tūturu gaming and gambling harm prevention resources](#)).
- 23.3 Improving the work done by Netsafe, as the Approved Agency under the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015, to better triage, respond to, and prevent youth mental distress from online harm. This work is supported by the Government's Mental Health Innovation Fund.
- 24 The Government will further consider the Committee's remaining recommendations and provide a substantive response in due course.

Conclusion

- 25 The Government thanks the Committee for its thorough inquiry and acknowledges submitters taking the time to share their experiences and views on young people's experiences of online harm.