

Joint Statement

The Urgent Need for an Australian Digital Duty of Care to Protect Children from Online Sexual Abuse

1 May 2025

We are calling on the **Opposition and Crossbench to commit to legislating a digital duty of care** in the next Australian Parliament, which the Government has committed to in [response](#) to the Online Safety Act review.

A digital duty of care policy is an issue of concern amongst Australian voters and will make online spaces safer for children in Australia and across the world.

In a YouGov poll of 1,526 Australian voters conducted in March, **96% of participants considered it important** that the Australian Government legislates a digital duty of care that would require tech companies to take steps to stop their platforms from being used for child sexual abuse.

This issue is urgent to address. The US based National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children received [36.2 million reports](#) of suspected child sexual exploitation and abuse in 2023 - a more than 12% increase in the number of reports on the previous year.

In the [2023-24](#) financial year, the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation recorded 58,503 reports of online child abuse, an average of 160 reports per day, and a 45% increase on the previous financial year's total of 40,232 reports.

The rate of reports of online child sexual exploitation consistently outpaces law enforcement's capacity to respond. Stronger preventative measures are urgently needed and putting a requirement on tech companies to do more to prevent this content from entering their platforms is a responsible action.

The frequency of online child sexual abuse is higher than we would like to think. A [2023 study](#) of 1,945 Australian men found that 2.5% have knowingly viewed child sexual abuse material, whilst 1.8% have webcammed in a sexual way with a child, and 1.7% have paid for online sexual interactions, images or videos involving a child.

Children in Australia are at risk of being abused by the same cohort of offenders who sexually offend against children online. Men in Australia who report online sexual offending behaviours against children also report being [2 to 3 times more likely](#) to seek sexual contact with children between the ages of 10 and 14 years old if they were certain no one would find out.

This crime doesn't only affect children in Australia. On a per capita basis, Australia was the [highest sender](#) of suspicious transaction reports to the Philippines related to child sexual abuse over 2020 – 2022. In the Philippines, [1 in 100](#) children were trafficked in 2022 to produce child sexual abuse materials for paying online offenders from countries including Australia, usually via livestreamed video.

A successful digital duty of care would require tech companies across the tech stack, including the lowest common denominator of device and operating system manufacturers, to **disrupt and deter child sexual abuse material** on their platforms and products, including in livestreamed video.

This would not only make it increasingly difficult for offenders in Australia to access child sexual abuse material online, but it would also have a protective effect for Australian

children from falling prey to sextortion. With [one in ten Australian adolescents](#) having experienced sextortion, and more than half of those under the age of 16, this policy would significantly protect Australian children from online harm.

We support Delia Rickard PSM's recommendations in the [independent review of the Online Safety Act](#) to legislate a duty of care for the online industry as a priority.

“The review recommends that Australia adopt a singular and overarching duty of care that encompasses due diligence, and is underpinned by safety by design principles, risk assessment, mitigation and measurement. An overarching duty of care would place responsibility on service providers to take reasonable steps to address and prevent foreseeable harms on their services. It shifts much of the burden for remaining safe online away from individual users and onto those most capable of identifying and addressing harms – the service providers themselves.”

The review recommended that child sexual exploitation and abuse should be highlighted for attention under a digital duty of care, and that the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration for online service providers when undertaking risk assessment, mitigation and measurement.

We urge the Opposition and Crossbench to commit to legislating this important safeguard for children in Australia and around the world.

David Braga

CEO, International Justice Mission Australia



Professor Michael Salter

Director, Childlight East Asia and Pacific Hub, University of New South Wales



Julie Edwards
CEO, Jesuit Social Services



John Livingstone
Digital Policy Lead, UNICEF Australia



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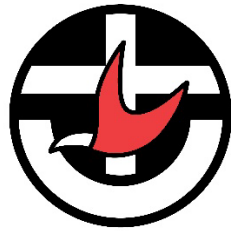


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Quotes

David Braga, CEO, International Justice Mission Australia

“A digital duty of care simply places the same onus on technology service providers for harm prevention that we ask of each other every day. It’s a logical step that will protect us all, and we don’t think that is too much to ask.”

Alison Geale, CEO, Bravehearts

“Every child deserves a childhood free from sexual abuse and exploitation. A duty of care is more than policy, it holds tech companies accountable in the prevention of online harm to children. By legislating this safeguard, we can disrupt abuse at its source and protect children in Australia and beyond. The alarming rise in child sexual exploitation demands urgent action and prevention must be prioritised. Tech companies taking proactive steps to stop their platforms being used to harm children, is a step forward in ensuring a safer digital future for children”

Professor Michael Salter, Director, Childlight East Asia and Pacific Hub, University of New South Wales

“Despite all our hard work to keep kids safe, hundreds of thousands of Australian children are sexually abused online each year. A legislated and enforceable duty of care puts the onus back on technology companies to make sure that their services are not putting children in danger.”

John Livingstone, Digital Policy Lead, UNICEF Australia

“The online sexual abuse of children is a rapidly escalating problem and is the most serious of violations of children’s rights. From our work across the world, UNICEF has learned that those who intend to harm children will exploit weaknesses across borders, so we need to align action internationally. In many ways Australia is a world-leader in how we respond to the online exploitation of children, and bipartisan support for a digital duty of care is the next step in making Australia the safest place in the world for children to go online.”

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