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**House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Media and Online Safety  
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**Opening Statement to the Committee, Google**

Good morning, my name is Lucinda Longcroft and I am the Director of Government Affairs and Public Policy for Google here in Australia. I'm joined by my colleague Samantha Yorke, who leads our online safety efforts in Australia. Thank you very much for inviting us to appear before you today. We appreciate this opportunity to discuss our longstanding and committed efforts to make Australians' digital lives safer while using Google products and services.

Because Australia is one of the world's leading democracies, nations around the world will be closely watching how you and your colleagues grapple with these challenges. We're keenly aware that the policy choices being addressed by this Committee involve complex trade-offs between competing interests: where demands for greater user privacy can be in tension with law enforcement demands for access to data in certain circumstances. Where the interests of content rights owners can differ from the demands for public access to information. Or where the right to speak and read opinions freely must be balanced with the need to keep the public safe from content that causes distress or harm.

Google fully supports open and honest discussions to reconcile these tough issues. And we'll continue to closely engage in these discussions with you, and with our users.

At Google, we firmly believe that technology can be a force for good - unlocking our creativity, fostering expression, and developing skills that help people of all ages build their futures. We've heard from many of our users — all over the world — that technology is a key contributor to their sense of wellbeing. It connects them to those they care about and provides information and resources that build their sense of safety and security. In many rural and isolated areas, smartphones are the main connection to the digital world and new opportunities such as education and work.

We consider technology should play a helpful, useful role in all people's lives, and we're committed to protecting our most vulnerable users, such as children, and helping everyone strike a balance with technology that's right for them.



For example, in 2018, we developed a Digital Wellbeing Initiative based on extensive research, which provides tools and features to help our users across Android, Family Link, YouTube and Gmail better understand and manage their usage of technology and create healthy habits for their families. These tools help people gain awareness of time they spend online, the need to disconnect for sleep, and manage their tech habits.

In September last year, we announced a series of global changes to Google products for Google Account holders under the age of 18. The pandemic increased childrens' and teens' reliance on technology, particularly for online schooling and staying connected with friends and family, so we updated our products with more age-appropriate experiences.

We work with internal and external experts to develop clear policies to keep children safe, and we don't allow content that endangers or exploits minors on our platforms. For example, our YouTube Community Guidelines set out clear categories of content that are excluded from the platform and categories of content that are subject to age restriction.

We also have a number of tools that we specifically designed to curb harmful misinformation and promote authoritative content in our products for all our users. For example, on YouTube, we raise up authoritative voices when people are looking for information by prioritising authoritative sources in search and recommendations. We reduce the spread of content that brushes right up against our policy line, including harmful misinformation, by building our recommendation systems to limit low-quality content from being widely viewed.

We continue to invest heavily in the systems, policies and products needed to protect users from harmful content, and we've seen significant progress.

While we're strongly committed to the steps we're taking to enhance the digital wellbeing of all our users, we know we cannot accomplish it alone. We partner closely with governments, industry leaders, and experts in these fields. And this collaboration will be even more important over the coming year as the Australian Online Safety Act comes into effect. We plan to take a number of other critical steps: we'll launch a series of commitments under industry codes relating to online safety, offer suggestions on how to reform our Privacy Act, and work closely with the eSafety Commissioner on a roadmap for introducing age assurance measures to safeguard Australians.

We will continue to invest our resources in solutions like these moving forward. We build all of our products with protections for all Australians, and with vulnerable people's safety in particular top of mind. We welcome a continued dialogue with this Parliament and the government on these crucial issues.

[End statement]