

Inquiry into social media and online safety

Submission by Dolly's Dream

December 2022

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into Social Media and Online Safety.

This is an issue of particular interest to us as parents and as Founders of Dolly's Dream.

Ever since we lost our beloved Dolly we have been working tirelessly, 24/7, on raising awareness about the importance of safety while using social media, especially for children.

We are contacted regularly by concerned parents throughout rural, regional, and remote Australia who are concerned about the safety, security, and privacy of their children using social media. Our children are using online services at an increasing rate and at present we are primarily reliant upon service providers to manage the security and privacy of our data responsibly. And when bullying and other social problems spill over into online spaces and escalate there, it's the school communities of students, parents and teachers who struggle to deal with the fallout.

We have already supported the government's initiatives to strengthen regulations on the matters of online security and privacy.

This issue is so important to our family and, we know, to countless others in Australia. For that reason, we are very disappointed that the Select Committee has provided such a short timeframe for submissions, and over Christmas, that seems to offer no justice to the importance of the issue. We urge you to extend the consultation period and ensure meaningful consultation is conducted with families and school communities in rural, regional and remote Australia.

Nevertheless, we have provided the following observations that we hope the Committee can consider.

We have also consulted with our partners at the Alannah & Madeline Foundation who we understand are providing a more comprehensive submission.

Regards,

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Kate and Tick Everett
Founders
Dolly's Dream

Background

Dolly's Dream was launched in 2018 by Kate and Tick Everett following the tragic suicide of their daughter, Dolly Everett, who took her own life after an extended period of bullying and cyber bullying.

Dolly's Dream is committed to changing the culture of bullying by addressing the impact of bullying, anxiety, depression and youth suicide, through education and direct support to young people and families.

Since its launch, Dolly's Dream has reached over 11 million Australians, and continues to be the voice for those who cannot speak for themselves. The cause is particularly strong in the rural, regional and remote communities of Australia.

Points for further consideration

- It is not clear to us how this Committee will integrate their work with the work of the Privacy Commissioner, the National Children's Commissioner, the eSafety Commissioner, the Online Safety Act 2021, and the Online Privacy Bill Draft. They are all working in similar, very important spaces, and it's vital that their goals and approaches line up clearly.
- We welcomed the positive provision in the Exposure Draft of the Online Privacy Bill that '*the best interests of the child*' should be the primary guiding principle for reform. We would like to see this inquiry adopt the same approach.
- Before its Final Report, the Committee should make provision for a substantial consultation process with children and young people to better understand the impact of social media on children and families.
- Furthermore, families in rural, regional and remote communities have additional issues associated with online services, and the use of social media – especially with children in boarding schools. This cohort deserves a particular consultation process. The Isolated Children's Parents' Association is well placed to assist with this.
- We hope that the Select Committee addresses the need for education, support, and guidance in the use of social media, especially in vulnerable populations.
- Families need to be able to trust that online spaces will have standards of child safety that reflect the community's expectations and line up with the safety standards of real-world environments where children live, learn and play.
- Finally, we hope that the Select Committee appreciates the huge challenges facing parents and carers in helping their children navigate the social media space safely when faced with the overwhelming marketing and data management of large for-profit companies providing these platforms.