



**headspace submission to:  
The Joint Select Committee's  
Inquiry into Cyber-Safety**

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## Introduction

**headspace** welcomes the opportunity to participate in the Joint Select Committee Inquiry into cyber-safety issues affecting children and young people. The inquiry has already generated informed debate with over 120 responses submitted from a range of stakeholders including youth and health organisations, state and territory governments, parents, schools, police, and industry representatives such as yahoo, google and nine msn. This is a topic that touches a range of people in our community and has sparked an interesting debate on possible solutions and the ways forward.

In this submission we will draw on the key points from the submissions to date highlighting the areas where there is consensus, raise several issues that we feel haven't be adequately addressed, and put forward **headspace's** position and recommendations.

## About headspace

**headspace** aims to promote and facilitate improvements in the mental health, social wellbeing and economic participation of young Australians aged 12-25 years.

**headspace** was launched in 2006 and was initially funded as part of the Federal Budget commitment to the Youth Mental Health Initiative. **headspace** is currently funded by the Australian Government under the Promoting Better Mental Health – Youth Mental Health Initiative.

**headspace** has thirty centres that provide services to young people across Australia. **headspace** centres are located in each State and Territory and cover metropolitan, regional and rural locations. **headspace** Centres provide support, information and services to young people. A **headspace** Centre is a youth friendly community based provider of services to young people 12 – 25. During our establishment phase, our 30 services provided over 300, 000 sessions of care to over 37 000 young people. We anticipate that these numbers will grow dramatically as the centres consolidate and become better known in the communities that they serve.

Provided at a community level by a consortium of services, all **headspace** Centres have at their core a primary care component with allied health, drug and alcohol workers and mental health practitioners. The array of services is diverse and multidisciplinary ensuring Centres can address a wide range of concerns affecting young people. In addition, the **headspace** website provides information and support to young people, parents, carers and workers and is widely accessed. The **headspace** Centre of Excellence provides evidence and best practice information in youth mental health for workers.

The National work is driven through four core areas: community engagement and awareness raising, provision of training and education, driving service sector reform and building knowledge in evidence based treatment.

### **Key Activities:**

- Providing young Australians with a coordinated and integrated service which addresses health and wellbeing needs
- Promoting local service reform to meet the needs of young people
- Creating awareness and educating young people about how and when to seek help
- Providing an extensive and accessible web-based resource targeting young people, but also providing resources for families, teachers and practitioners.
- Reviewing evidence and interventions to provide Australians with the most up-to-date information on youth health, reported through our website
- Giving young people a voice by providing opportunities to participate in shaping service delivery
- Training professionals in working with young people
- Ensuring that youth mental health issues are prioritised by influencing policy direction and service sector reform

The recent Independent Evaluation of **headspace**<sup>1</sup> was favourable in its view of the **headspace** model, its acceptability among young people, and the quality of care provided across the four core streams.

## Discussion

From the range of work that **headspace** undertakes in its direct service provision to young people and their families through our centres and **e-headspace**, through our work in schools, through our connection with workers and professional bodies, our education and training packages, and our exploration of research and practice it is clear that all members of the community are shouting out for direction, solutions, guidance, resources and support to address the issue of cyber-safety.

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<sup>1</sup> Muir K., Powell A., Patulny R., Flaxman S., McDermott S., Oprea I., Gendera S., Vespignani J., Sitek T, Abello D. and Katz I. (2009). Independent Evaluation of **headspace**: the National Youth Mental Health Foundation. Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales.

Since this inquiry began there has been a range of initiatives put in place by governments, industry bodies, and NGOs. For example the introduction of cyber-safety into the *National Safe Schools Framework* released 18 March 2011 and also the ACMA *Cybersmart* initiative providing resources to schools, parents and young people including training and print based material. We are also pleased to see the recent announcement by Facebook that it is looking to appoint a cyber-safety expert to be based in Australia.<sup>1</sup> Also encouraging is another initiative run by Facebook in the UK, in conjunction with the Samaritans, where users have a system where they can report friends who they think may be contemplating suicide and a service response is delivered.<sup>2</sup>

Although there have been some moves forward in addressing cyber-safety, there is a need for a coordinated approach and further investment. This important inquiry will further advance the debate and the ways forward to addressing cyber-safety. Encouragingly, from reading a range of already submitted responses, it is clear that there is consensus among the different interest groups on a range of issues. We all agree that:

- Cyber-safety is an important issue that needs addressing.
- We do not know enough about the extent of the issue or what works in what setting. We have an idea of best bets but further research is needed in an Australian context.
- We all have a role to play: schools, workplaces, children and young people, parents, police, governments, the community and the ICT industry. A partnership approach is required.
- There is no one solution – a multi-pronged approach will achieve better results.
- The law needs to keep up to date with technology.
- The on-line world is an extension of the off-line world. We need to promote being responsible citizens on-line as well as off-line and reinforce the messages that there are consequences to our actions.
- Censorship or restrictions do not solve the problem. They can place our young people at further risk. We need to equip our young people with the skills and knowledge to stay safe on-line.
- The internet provides young people with many benefits.
- Cyber-bullying is an extension of face-to-face bullying. Schools need a whole school approach to bullying that includes policies on cyber-bullying and involves the whole school community in developing the solutions. Interventions that focus on improving peer relations is paramount.
- Consultations with young people are key to addressing the issue of 'cybersafety'.

Whilst acknowledging there are a range of issues we have consensus on, **headspace** would like to highlight a few areas that we believe haven't been adequately addressed or discussed in the current submissions.

### **The term cyber-bullying.**

Young people have told us they don't use the term cyber-bullying and they do not understand it. It is a term adults have generated and use. The young people we have talked to use the term 'on-line bullying' to describe bullying via social networking sites and mobile phones. **headspace** believes that our programs and materials need to reflect the language and terms that young people use and understand. With this in mind we also support AYAC's recommendation that all privacy policies and other internet policies placed on the internet are written in child-friendly, plain language<sup>3</sup>.

### **Tribute pages**

In the off-line world there are many rules and regulations regarding the reporting of suicide in the media, but no such guidelines exist for on-line. **headspace** has concerns regarding tribute pages (i.e. pages that have been generated on Facebook to honour a friend that has passed away). There are potential dangers with tribute pages when a person has suicided. We have found in the situation where a young person has suicided, the tribute page inadvertently glamorises suicide. Some pages also give details of the way the person killed themselves. Whilst we recognise and acknowledge the important role of tribute pages in the grieving process and the need to provide young people with ways to express themselves, we believe that some parameters need to be set. Mindframe National Media Initiative provides guidelines to the media how to report and discuss suicide and provide guidance of what support material should be provided. **headspace** believes that a set of guidelines should be established for the reporting of suicide on-line and especially for social networking sites. This could be an extension of the current Mindframe National Media Initiative.

### **Schools and social media**

Young people have told us that many schools ban the use of social media during school time and this can have the affect of driving on-line bullying underground or out of sight of the teachers and other school personnel. **headspace** believes that although social media can be distracting for students during class time a blanket ban can be detrimental to the well-being of young people. It closes off discussion and debate and possible solutions to on-line bullying amongst other issues.

Young people have embraced social media and the range of skills sets that are required to navigate and utilise this dynamic medium. As adults we are often catching up with the technology that young people are using. There needs to be an acknowledgement of the benefits that social media and other ICT brings to young people and embrace these tools in our classrooms. For instance, with regard to being digital citizens, many young people use the internet to participate in their community, advocate for social justice etc.

Schools need to be guided in the way that ICT and social media can enhance the education experience of young people. By placing restrictions and bans we serve to isolate ourselves from the conversations that our young people are having and the worlds they are experiencing. Further guidance is required for schools to assist them to accept and utilise the whole range of technology that is available to young people and to teach young people how to be responsible citizens on-line as well as off-line.

### **The role of workplaces or workplaces as a setting.**

Many of the current approaches for cyber-safety focus on program in schools. Although this has merit we want to advocate for the needs of young workers as not all young people are in school. Young workers, including apprentices, need information, guidance, and resources too.

### **headspace position and recommendations:**

- **headspace** believes that currently the reporting of on-line suicide is not monitored and is potentially dangerous. **headspace** recommends that a set of guidelines is developed for on-line sites on the responsible reporting of suicide including tribute pages.
- **headspace** recommends a multi-pronged approach to tackle the issue of cybersafety for children and young people. There is no one solution to this issue.
- **headspace** recommends that solutions are generated using a partnership approach. Key partners include schools, young people, parents, industry bodies, police and other community members working together.
- **headspace** recommends that young people are continually consulted about cyber-safety issues including defining the issue and finding solutions.
- **headspace** believes that although the internet and other technologies pose risk to young people they also have a positive role to play. **headspace** believes that ICT has an important role to play in the health and wellbeing of young people and recommends that restrictions are avoided.

- **headspace** recommends that guidance is provided to schools on how to embrace social media and ICT rather than placing restrictions and bans. This will assist schools to have informed debates about cyber-safety and be present to the experiences that young people have.
- **headspace** acknowledges that what happens on-line often reflects what is happening off-line. **headspace** recommends that like the real world where young people live, work, and play, we equip them with the knowledge and skills to operate in the on-line world. **headspace** believes that schools, parents, and the community have a role in teaching and guiding our young people on how to be responsible citizens on-line and off-line.
- **headspace** believes that cyber-bullying can often be more debilitating for young people than direct bullying, with victims feeling like there is no escape. **headspace** acknowledges that most young people who are cyber-bullied also tend to be bullied face-to-face. Therefore **headspace** recommends strategies should not be seen separate to addressing other forms of bullying. Improving peer to peer relationships is key.
- **headspace** recommends that a variety of settings need to be targeted to address cyber-safety including workplaces and community spaces. A sole focus on schools does not acknowledge the fact that not all young people are at school.
- **headspace** acknowledges the contributions that the ICT industry have made to date regarding addressing the issue of cyber-safety. This is a step in the right direction. **headspace** believes that the ICT industry have a social responsibility to contribute to the solutions - including financial contributions. ICT companies are typically large, financially robust organisations. Their products are vehicles for behaviours that impact on the health and wellbeing of our young people. Focusing strategies that target the end-user (e.g. young people) alone will only have limited success. **headspace** recommends that the government continue to work with the industry and make them more accountable for researching and facilitating solutions that improve the safety of their applications and sites.

## Conclusion

Cyber-safety is an important issue that affects our communities. Strategies to address cyber-safety should involve a range of stakeholders and a variety of approaches. It is apparent from reading the submissions to date that there is consensus on many issues surrounding cyber-safety and a willingness to collaborate. The role of the government is to provide guidance and resources to facilitate further collaboration and innovation. **headspace** looks

forward to the findings from the inquiry and working with the government to address cyber-safety.

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<sup>1</sup> nine msn news <http://news.ninemsn.com.au> (22.03.2011)

<sup>2</sup> BBC News <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-12667343> ) 07.03.2011

<sup>3</sup> Submission No.28. Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (June 2010) Submission in Response to The Joint Select Committee on Cybersafety Inquiry into cyber -safety issues affecting children and young people.