

Inquiry into the influence and impacts of social media on Australian society



In June 2024, Cancer Council Australia made a submission to the Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society.

In our response, Cancer Council detailed the prevalence of misinformation online, particularly regarding non-communicable diseases, including cancer, and the important role of Australian media and social media platforms in countering this misinformation. Cancer Council urged that social media platforms have adequate policies in place to prevent and reduce exposure to misleading content, as well as ensuring users are alerted when encountering inaccurate or unverified information.

Cancer Council identified that countering mis-, and disinformation is a regulatory responsibility which must be shared between federal, state and territory government agencies. All sectors must also invest in digital education and media health literacy initiatives.

In our submission, we also recommended that the Australian Government introduce comprehensive, mandatory regulation to protect children from marketing from harmful industries, including unhealthy food and drinks, alcohol, gambling, tobacco and e-cigarettes, and address harms to children caused by the collection, use and disclosure of children's data by digital platforms.

Within our submission, we also addressed the impacts of social media on:

- Suntanning culture, with more than 53% of young Australians aged 18-30 agreeing that the people they follow on social media are always tanned, and misinformation regarding the composition of sunscreen resulting in perceptions that sunscreens contain chemicals at harmful levels.
- E-cigarettes and tobacco use, particularly regarding the proliferation of posts regarding vaping, which can suggest to young people that this is a normal part of life.
- Vape sales, with 5.8% of young adults purchasing vapes through social media in 2022 and anecdotal evidence indicating that vapes are being freely sold on some social media platforms. Despite community guidelines in place on these platforms, it is clear that these rules are not being enforced.
- Alcohol use, with highly targeted marketing features which ensure that alcohol is easy to buy online.
- Junk food consumption, with the marketing of unhealthy food and drinks having a detrimental impact on diet quality. It is crucial that children are protected from this unhealthy food marketing to ensure they have the best possible health as they grow and age.

Further information on the Inquiry can be found on Committee's website

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/SocialMediaMinimumAge