

Consultation on developing Horizon 2 of the 2023-2030 Australian Cyber Security Strategy

The Alannah & Madeline Foundation (the Foundation) thanks the Department of Home Affairs for the opportunity to participate in this consultation.

As a leading national not-for-profit charity dedicated to keeping children and young people free from violence and trauma, we support young Australians to recover and heal from trauma and empower them to become positive digital citizens.

Our eSmart Program offers learning tools and resources, aligned to the curriculum and free for all Australian schools, to help students build online safety and digital and media literacy skills and behaviours to thrive online. We also advocate for children's rights in legislation, regulation, systems and policy, notably in the digital environment.

In relation to the development of Horizon 2, we recommend the following steps:

1. Continue to build upon a key focus area for Shield 1 'Increase cyber literacy in school programs'.
2. Prioritise evidence-based prevention and early intervention approaches, including in lower primary school and early years settings, where many behaviours and attitudes are being formed.
3. Ensure initiatives are age-appropriate, pedagogically sound, strengths-based, and reflect lived experiences of children, young people, educators, and parents and carers, including children's wish to talk about lower-level or 'everyday' risks, not only the most severe ones.
4. Ensure initiatives are designed to build aligned understanding and approaches to cyber literacy between educators, families, and students to maximise the likelihood of positive behavioural change.
5. Support educators to keep building their own cyber literacy on a continuous basis.
6. Engage further with the Foundation to hear insights from our suite of eSmart interventions.

Use of digital technologies is almost ubiquitous among Australian children, and usage starts at a very young age. For example, recently we surveyed over 1,000 families of primary school children and found almost all Prep/Foundation students used digital devices already. 84% used tablets, 45% used a smartphone (not necessarily their own), 34% used a gaming console, and 34% used a laptop. Most devices were used for multiple purposes – e.g. education, entertainment, chatting.

Thus, strategies to counter digital threats to Australians must take into account the engagement of very young children in the digital environment. When our researchers interviewed primary school students, it was clear that many already worried about cyber security risks relating to 'contract' and 'contact'. Their remarks included:

- 'My mum's told me not to give that stuff (contact details). People will come and rob us.' (Prep student, Victoria)
- 'I almost got scammed once. My dad stopped me last second. I was like seven. I was gonna click on a link because it said, get free RoBucks.' (Grade 5 student, Victoria)
- 'I read everything. Because once I nearly got scammed. Well, twice I nearly got scammed and somebody nearly sold my data.' (Grade 5 student, Victoria)
- 'Maybe checking reviews on apps to see if other people have experienced stuff or researching it before you download something. That's what my mum did with Temu. Google says that one in 25 people have experienced Scams on Temu.' (Grade 4 student, Victoria)

Similarly, last year the Foundation conducted digital literacy co-design workshops with hundreds of students between Foundation and Grade 3. Students' use of digital technology was high and their feelings about it were mostly positive. However, again we found it was relatively common for these very young students to voice concerns about cyber security risks to do with 'contract' and 'contact'. When asked what worried them about the digital environment, students' answers included 'There could be dangerous things in there like hackers'; 'People can hack you online'; 'Viruses could be on your devices'; 'They can lock you out of your device'; 'Someone might want to scam me or trick me'; 'Getting hacked'; 'Steal your account'; 'Getting scammed'; 'Getting tracked down'; 'Someone will contact us and come into our house'; 'Someone could hack you. They can take money from your bank account.'

Many children took steps to protect themselves, but these were limited by product design and the children's stage of life. Comments included: 'You have to be careful of people you don't know when playing online'; 'I just keep dot points about me online'; 'I look at the ratings on app store'; 'I have five backup accounts.'

In response to concerns about the digital environment, the Foundation has developed a suite of eSmart interventions for primary and secondary schools. These include:

- The popular [eSmart Digital Licence](#) for ages 4-12: a comprehensive suite of educator-led lessons adaptable to a range of settings and diverse needs, co-designed with educators, learners and education experts. Lessons include 'Spotting Artificial Intelligence (AI) images', 'Pause, notice, question, act: stopping the spread of misinformation and disinformation', and 'Ways to say "no": a roleplay lesson.' The model engages children with animated videos, hands-on activities and printables (recognising not all schools use digital technology in the classroom), and upon completion participants earn a 'licence' which can be displayed proudly.
- The [eSmart Digital Licence+](#), an interactive online learning tool that helps build digital intelligence for students aged 10-14. An evaluation by the Australian Council for Educational Research found positive indicators of welcome change when students engaged in this intervention. For example, there were statistically significant increases in students' agreement that managing their screen time could be beneficial and statistically significant increases in students' disagreement that revenge was an appropriate response to being treated unkindly online. 8 out of 10 students agreed that employing strategies for balanced tech use – e.g. 'Put my phone in another room when going to sleep', 'Plan for device-free family dinners' – would help them maintain a balanced life. Analysis of data from 7,364 students showed the particular need to address distraction and compulsion: 1 in 5 students agreed that in the past year they felt they could not stop using digital technology; 1 in 10 agreed they had spent more and more time and/or money on online technology in order to feel the same amount of excitement; and 1 in 12 agreed that during the past year they had done poorly on schoolwork because they spent too much time online.
- The [eSmart Schools](#) initiative, which connects us to hundreds of school communities around Victoria working to build positive and safe uses of digital technology. We hear that some of the features of eSmart Schools especially valued by schools include our topic expertise, our positive approach to student engagement, our support for educators to build their own digital literacy and confidence, and our guidance for educators in making use of the eSafety Commissioner's resources. Most educators were not aware of the help eSafety offered previously.

We would welcome any opportunity to discuss our work and findings further with your team. Please contact:

