AUSTRALIA IN QUESTION

VOLUME 1

Should Australia restrict social media access for under-16s?



A research series for secondary students

The issue



THE SCENARIO

A 15-year-old uses social media to stay connected with friends and find support, and has also encountered harmful content.

BEFORE YOU TAKE A POSITION

What do you currently think?

What evidence might change your mind?

What you need to know

Background

Since 10 December 2025, certain social media platforms have been required to take reasonable steps to prevent Australians under 16 from creating or keeping accounts. The platforms are responsible for taking those steps. Young people and their parents or carers do not face fines under these rules.



Key Terms

Age restriction
A rule that sets a minimum age for having an account on a covered platform.

Platform design
The features that shape what users see and how they interact with others.

Digital literacy
The skills people use to evaluate information and make informed choices online.

Question to consider

If the number of under-16 accounts falls, what else would you need to measure to find out whether young people are safer online?

Source: eSafety Commissioner (full reference on page 8)

What changed in the first three months?

The eSafety Commissioner surveyed children and parents before Australia's social media age restrictions began and again about three months after they took effect. The follow-up explored whether children still had accounts, how their online habits were changing and what they and their families had noticed so far.

Children reported different experiences. Some described difficulty keeping in touch. Others said they were using social media less or felt less pressure to be on it. The evaluation also found an increase in the use of messaging platforms. That gives researchers another question to follow: are young people moving some of their online activities to other services?

The survey offers an early look at how children and families experienced the restrictions. Researchers would need more time and evidence to judge whether changes lasted, whether young people became safer online and how much of any change could be attributed to the policy.

Source: Original summary of the eSafety Commissioner's three-month evaluation (2026). Full reference on page 8.

THINK CRITICALLY

Which findings describe a change in behaviour? What would you measure to find out whether the change made young people safer?

Where can young people turn for support?

In its guide to the social media restrictions, headspace explains that young people can use social media to find support for themselves or someone they know. A change in access can therefore raise a practical question. Where will someone turn if an account was one of the ways they found information or asked for help?

The guide points young people towards options such as headspace centres and eheadspace's phone and online support. These examples give policymakers something concrete to examine. Are young people aware of those options? Can they use them privately? If someone used to learn about support through social media, how will they hear about alternatives?

Headspace's guide identifies ways to find help as access changes. To judge whether the alternatives are reaching the people who need them, researchers could ask young people where they look for support, what they find and what barriers they encounter.

Source: Original summary and discussion based on headspace's guide for young people. Full reference on page 8.

THINK CRITICALLY

What question about access to support does this reading add to the eSafety evaluation? Whose experience would you want to hear about before answering it?

Weigh the options



Use both readings to weigh the options below. For each option, consider how it might reduce harm and how young people could still find connection and support.

Option	Likely benefits	Possible drawbacks	What would it take to make this work?
Age restrictions	May reduce exposure to harmful content for younger teens; may reduce social pressure to join platforms; gives families and schools a clearer rule to discuss.	Some young people may lose helpful connection or support; under-16s may move to less visible spaces; difficult age-checking systems may raise privacy concerns.	Clear platform duties, privacy-protecting age assurance, independent monitoring, support for young people who lose access to online communities.
Safer platform design	Targets risky features directly; can protect users of all ages; may reduce harmful recommendations, unwanted contact and addictive design.	Platforms may make surface-level changes without reducing real harm; safety changes can be hard to test; may require strong regulation.	Independent audits, clear safety standards, transparent reporting, fast response to harmful content and meaningful user controls.
Digital literacy and mental health education	Helps young people make informed choices; builds help-seeking skills; supports students who are already online or will be online soon.	Education may place too much responsibility on young people; lessons may become outdated quickly; does not remove harmful design features.	Updated curriculum, teacher training, parent resources, student-led discussion and links to mental health support services.

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

Which option addresses the strongest mental health concern? Which option is most practical to enforce?

Make your recommendation



You are advising an Australian parliamentary committee reviewing the r
whether Australia should keep, change or supplement its current approa
eSafety evaluation and explain how headspace's perspective informs your

My recommendation

What do you propose, and why?

Evidence and perspective

Which eSafety finding matters most to your recommendation? What issue does the headspace guide raise that your proposal should address?

A likely objection and a fair response

What might someone challenge about your recommendation? How would you respond?

How I would measure success

What would you measure to find out whether your proposal reduced harm and preserved access to support?

Source credits and subscriptions

Record the full details of the sources you have used in your research. Use the APA 7 format and make sure you give clear credit for every source.

Reference

eSafety Commissioner. (n.d.). *Social media 'ban' or delay FAQ.* https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-us/industry-regulation/social-media-age-restrictions/faqs

eSafety Commissioner. (2026). *Early days, early insights: Understanding experiences of social media age restrictions at the three-month follow-up.* https://www.esafety.gov.au/research/social-media-age-restrictions-evaluation/early-days-early-insights-three-months-report

headspace. (n.d.). *The social media ban: A guide for young people.* https://headspace.org.au/explore-topics/for-young-people/social-media-ban/

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