



28 February 2023

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## **CONSULTATION ON INQUIRY INTO INTERNATIONAL DIGITAL PLATFORMS OPERATED BY BIG TECH COMPANIES**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the Senate Select Committee Inquiry on the Impact of International Digital Platforms

Cancer Council Australia works to reduce the incidence and the impact of Cancer. We focus on cancer research, prevention programs, advocacy and providing information and support for people affected by cancer.

It is well established that unhealthy diets and alcohol use are a risk factor for cancer, and that marketing influences our dietary choices. Evidence shows that alcohol marketing is one cause of alcohol use amongst young people<sup>1</sup>. Currently, digital platforms are creating harmful online environments that undermine people's health and wellbeing. 'Big Tech' tracks and profiles Australians using highly sophisticated algorithms to control how we are targeted by companies.

Cancer Council supports measures that ensure people, specifically children and those who have purchased harmful products in the past, can participate in the digital environment without exposure to harmful marketing of unhealthy food and alcohol. Children should be able to learn, communicate and participate online without their data or personal information being collected, used and disclosed, in particular to design and deliver marketing for harmful products.

Senator Pocock recently held a round table of experts to advocate for reform in this space to protect the community and in particular young people from online marketing of harmful products. A recent Australian study of 83 young people reported that alcohol ads appeared on the Facebook feed in 93% of 16-17 year olds.<sup>2</sup> This study suggested that Facebook attached more alcohol-related keywords to young

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<sup>1</sup> Sargent JD, Babor TF. The Relationship Between Exposure to Alcohol Marketing and Underage Drinking Is Causal. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, Supplement*, (s19), 113–124 (2020).

<sup>2</sup> Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education. Facebook and Instagram are bombarding young people with targeted alcohol, gambling and unhealthy food ads. (2023). Available from: [https://fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/MEDIA-RELEASE-Facebook-bombarding-teens-with-targeted-ads-for-unhealthy-and-harmful-products.pdf?utm\\_source=miragenews&utm\\_medium=miragenews&utm\\_campaign=news](https://fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/MEDIA-RELEASE-Facebook-bombarding-teens-with-targeted-ads-for-unhealthy-and-harmful-products.pdf?utm_source=miragenews&utm_medium=miragenews&utm_campaign=news)



people who drank more alcohol. Highlighting the important need to improve regulation to protect young people from their data being used by marketing companies.

The MetaVerse is collecting an abundance of data and using this for highly targeted marketing. For example, individuals who are attempting to reduce their alcohol use can be subjected to a barrage of targeted marketing and easy 'click to buy' features. Of 220 Australians surveyed 83% agreed or strongly agreed that marketing makes it more difficult for them to reduce the use of these (alcohol, gambling, unhealthy food) products<sup>3</sup>. It is vital that protections are put in place to prioritise the health and wellbeing of people within the community.

Cancer Council strongly supports and endorses the submission and recommendations made by the **Obesity Policy Coalition**. In particular, we are supportive of the following:

- The Australian Government must introduce comprehensive, mandatory regulation to protect children from unhealthy food marketing. This should ensure children are not exposed to any unhealthy food marketing when online or using social media.
- As part of its digital platforms regulatory response, the Government should address harms to children caused by the collection, use and disclosure of children's data by digital platforms, including specific consideration of the harms caused in relation to exposure to harmful industry marketing.
- Certain practices should not be permitted in relation to children including:
  - collecting using or disclosing children's personal information for the purposes of commercial marketing, particularly marketing by harmful industries, including unhealthy food and drinks, alcohol and gambling. Parental consent should not be an option for enabling this.
  - harmful industries cannot collect, use or disclose children's personal information for the purposes of analysing or influencing children's personal information for the purposes of analysing or influencing children's behaviour or decisions in any circumstances.
  - tracking, profiling, or monitoring the behaviour of children for commercial purposes online.
- Certain protections should apply to adult users of digital platforms, including social media services:
  - an individual's data or personal information cannot be collected, used or disclosed by digital platforms for the purposes of commercial marketing without express consent, particularly in the case of marketing for harmful industries.
  - digital platforms cannot collect, use or disclose (or enable collection, use or disclosure to occur) personal information or data related to a person's physical or mental health and wellbeing of financial situation, for the purposes of marketing harmful products.
- Social media organisations and large online platforms should be required to disclose information or report on how they collect, use and disclose individuals' data and personal information for the purposes of marketing, including how automated systems and algorithms are used to deliver marketing to individuals or groups of individuals.

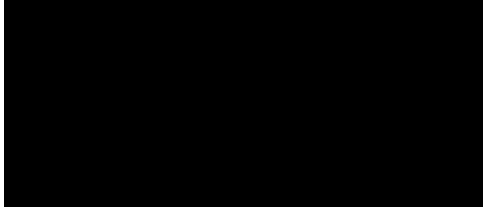
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<sup>3</sup> Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education and VicHealth. Experiences with online marketing of alcohol, gambling and unhealthy food: A survey. (2023). Available from: <https://fare.org.au/experiences-with-online-marketing-of-alcohol-gambling-and-unhealthy-food-a-survey/>

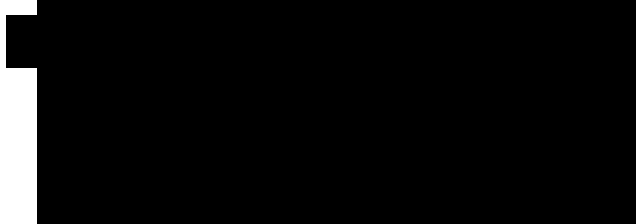


We thank you for your consideration of these important issues.

Yours sincerely,



Prof Tanya Buchanan  
Chief Executive Officer  
Cancer Council Australia



Clare Hughes  
Chair  
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