

FAO: Committee on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

During the hearing on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, Monday 26.7.2021, when representing Sex and Gender Education (SAGE (Australia)). I referred to Google and other technical mediums' blocking of information for access to healthcare in Australia, which is distorting our healthcare services. It is also referred to in our original submission. Since this is of paramount importance to access to mental health services and suicide prevention I am going to elaborate further.

In delivering mental health services and suicide prevention the first key strategy is to make the public aware that those services exist and identify the available points of access. This has traditionally been done via advertisements in newspapers, newsletter, the printed version of Yellow Pages etc.

To get people into those services, not only must service providers identify their service but what the services can offer eg. treating depression, anxiety, PTSD, suicidal thoughts and so on. The public shops by what the problem is and what can be done for them not by what kind of discipline a professional may be. Service providers must advertise to reach the public.

The traditional routes of reaching the public such as the printed Yellow Pages, newspaper advertising, paper newsletters has now virtually ended. People's point of access to information is through electronic media, largely via their mobile phones. Search engine statistics show that Google alone claims to have between 75%-92% of online searches depending on the country. This places Google as a monopoly that dominates the search engine market, yet Australia has no monopoly laws to control its activities.

Google is now a drug company; its investments in the pharmaceutical industry are constantly growing and it makes billions of dollars per year selling other companies' pharmaceuticals. Google makes more money from advertising pharmaceuticals than it does from practitioners that offer non-pharmaceutical services like nurses, psychologists, psychotherapists, social workers, counsellors or hypnotherapists – all of whom work with mental health and suicide prevention.

Non-pharmaceutical services options for advertising are restricted by Google and other tech companies who block non-pharmaceutical practitioners' advertising.

The fewer services offered to clients for non-pharmaceutical options, the more tech companies can make by pushing-pharmaceuticals which is the greater profit.

“What's clear from [the June quarter results of Apple, Google parent company Alphabet and Microsoft on Tuesday night](#) is that the pandemic has entrenched their dominance, pushing consumers and businesses towards digital services and products at an even faster rate.

“The trio reported combined quarterly earnings of \$US50 billion (\$68 billion) with Apple's profits almost doubling to \$21.7 billion, Alphabet's earnings nearly tripling to \$US18.5 billion and Microsoft's earnings rising 47 per cent to \$16.5 billion.

“The numbers are so big that they almost start to lose context, but nonetheless they blew past analyst expectations.”

- (Financial Review, 28/7/2021)

A government can never provide all the mental health services and suicide prevention required in Australia. The private health sector and charities provide the rest at probably around a 50% split but that sector can no longer reach many of their clients because Google and other tech companies are blocking their advertisements and what they are allowed to discuss on their websites, claiming it is for the public good but as evidence shows, it is to push their own pharmaceutical interests so the public is herded only into drug option treatments.

Drugs do not cure suicidal thoughts, they subdue them until a time when they will reemerge. Therapy helps people change their cognitive, behavioural and emotional experiences to grow beyond the suicidal ideation and become more resilient.

Google has already been fined the equivalent of around 13 billion dollars (AUD) in Europe for these anticompetitive practices. In the USA laws are being formed to constrict those companies' activities. In Australia the ACCC published the Digital Advertising Services Inquiry interim report (January, 2021) that identified the problem but the government is yet to act to constrain tech companies' activities.

In the meantime, mental health practitioners, who do not prescribe drugs, which is the largest part of the mental health workforce, can no longer advertise many of their mental health and suicide prevention services or discuss how they help people on their website. Millions of Australians can no longer find the mental health services they need.

The government must bring in laws to constrain the practices of tech companies and restore the common law right for practitioners to advertise and discuss on their websites the mental health services they offer.

Thank you for your kind time and attention.

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