

**Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society**

**PUBLIC HEARING**

**Monday 30 September 2024**

Susan Templeman MP

Question on Notice

To:

**Australian Parents Council**

**Catholic School Parents WA**

**The Heads Up Alliance**

**Ms Toni Hassan**

Question:

A number of young people and their parents have raised with me the positive opportunities for social media where a young person has, for instance, neurodiversity or they identify as queer, are seeking support for a mental illness including eating disorders, have a particular interest or hobby, or live remotely or regionally, or are isolated in some way.

- (i) What impact do you think an age ban on social media will have on young people who use it to connect with others in a positive way?

**While social media can offer connection and support, particularly for young people who are isolated or marginalised, research consistently shows that the risks for those under 16 outweigh the potential benefits.** Multiple studies have found that excessive social media use in young people is linked to higher rates of anxiety, depression, and issues like cyberbullying and body image concerns. For instance, a 2019 study published in The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health found that social media use was strongly associated with mental health challenges in young teens, largely due to disrupted sleep patterns, exposure to harmful content, and decreased face-to-face interactions.

This is especially concerning for young people with neurodiversity, mental health challenges, or those identifying as queer, who may already face heightened vulnerability. The unregulated nature of social media makes it difficult to control what they are exposed to, and studies show that these groups are disproportionately affected by cyberbullying and harmful communities that could exacerbate conditions like eating disorders or depression. **In fact, research from the Journal of Youth and Adolescence highlights that young people who use social media to seek mental health support can often encounter harmful content, including glamorisation of eating disorders or self-harm, rather than receiving positive support.**

- (ii) What would you suggest is put in place as an alternative for those particular young people?

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Instead of granting unrestricted access to platforms with such risks, we need to create safer, more moderated alternatives. For example, tailored online support networks with strict moderation could provide safe spaces without the risks tied to social media. In addition, strengthening peer support programs in schools, investing in community-based platforms, and ensuring young people have access to moderated, supportive spaces—both online and offline—will give them the connection they need without exposing them to the dangers of mainstream social media.

By prioritising their mental health and development, we can create environments where young people are supported, without placing them in harm's way.