

26 July 2024

Committee Secretary
Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email to socialmedia.joint@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear at the Committee hearing on 28 June 2024.

On 3 July 2024, we received an email from the Committee's Principal Research Officer requesting answers to the additional questions set out in **blue font**, below - our answers follow:

Corporate affairs

95) How many employees do you have in Australia?

Google started in Australia with one employee in 2002, and has grown to employ approximately 2,000 people in offices across the country - a significant portion of which are software engineers working on some of our most important products. These engineers work on a diverse range of products including Google Maps, Google Photos, and new technologies for internet users in the developing world.

In fact, the technology that today has become Google Maps was first invented in Australia, and to this day Google Australia hosts one of the biggest Google Maps engineering teams in the world. Google Australia's engineers also work on maintaining Google's global infrastructure and core systems. In 2021 Google announced the Digital Future Initiative, a \$1 billion investment in Australia over five years focused on infrastructure, a new AI Research Centre and additional research partnerships, which it was independently estimated would provide a \$1.3 billion boost to Australia's GDP and

support 6,500 additional jobs across the economy.

96) How much did you pay to employees each year over the past five years?

Google Australia lodges its financial statements with ASIC annually, which are publicly available. Employee related expenses are disclosed in the financial statements. Over the last five years, Google Australia incurred more than A\$4 billion on employee benefits which includes wages and salaries, share-based compensation, superannuation and other short-term benefits.

97) How much did you pay to Australian suppliers over the past five years?

Google Australia Pty Ltd paid approximately AU\$2 billion to Australian suppliers from 2019-2023.

98) Where are your corporate offices located in Australia?

Our Australian Headquarters are located in Sydney at 48 Pirrama Road, Pyrmont, New South Wales. We also maintain a Google Office at 161 Collins Street, Melbourne Victoria.

Our registered office is:
Tower One - International Towers Sydney
Level 46, 100 Barangaroo Avenue
Barangaroo
NSW 2000

99) How much revenue did you make each year over the past five years?

Google Australia Pty Ltd made approximately A\$8 billion revenue over the past five years.

100) How much tax did you pay in Australia in the past five years?

In the past five years, Google Australia Pty Ltd paid more than AU\$450 million corporate income tax. Corporate income tax is paid on taxable profits. Taxable profits are determined by way of Australian tax law and international tax laws which includes international tax treaties. In the past five years, Google Australia's taxable profits were around A\$1.8 billion.

In addition, in the past five years, Google Australia paid more than A\$250 million employer related taxes.

Google Australia remains the only multinational technology company to have signed

Australia's voluntary Tax Transparency Code (TTC), having been a signatory since 2018 and publishing annual reports under the Code.

Media literacy as a means of tackling mis and dis-information

101) How important do you think it is for children to be taught media literacy at primary school?

- a) If so, at what age?
- b) What should the key components be?

Reliable facts and trusted information are more important than ever, especially for young Australians. This is why Google Australia has a long-standing commitment to supporting media literacy efforts in Australian schools, building on the broader work and partnerships across the wider community.

As part of our efforts, we've established partnerships with:

- **Squiz Kids:** We have proudly supported [Squiz Kids' Media Literacy Newshounds](#) since its launch in 2022. The [8 part module](#) is targeted at primary school children and their teachers to encourage students to “stop, think and check” before they decide to believe what’s in front of them. More than 2,600 Australian teachers have now signed up to the module. The project tracks the level of engagement from classrooms (to ensure it is useful), ensures children are versed with misinformation techniques (so they can spot them in the wild) and is interactive (so children and teachers feel empowered to assess whether something is trustworthy and address misinformation when they see it).
- **Alannah and Madeline Foundation:** With support from [Google.org](#), the Alannah and Madeline Foundation developed the [Media Literacy Lab](#), a first-of-its-kind education resource for teachers and students aged 12-16. The Media Literacy Lab is an e-learning platform which helps young Australians develop their skills to become media-savvy digital citizens, **questioning** what they see, practising smart and safe online behaviours and seeking help when needed.

Our approach has been to partner with leading Australian organisations with expertise in this space, which we can support through our own technology, services and expertise.

While we strongly support building media literacy efforts in schools, and across the broader community, we would trust the youth education experts to advise on age appropriate curriculum and specific components, and provide support to them accordingly.

102) Do you provide any support to media literacy programs at any school level?

Please see answer to question 101 above.

103) What plans do you have to increase and/or make permanent your support for programs that educate media literacy skills to Australian school children?

As demonstrated through our long-standing partnerships with Squiz Kids, the Alannah and Madeline Foundation, AAP and others (as explained further in our written submissions), Google has made a significant and enduring contribution to supporting media literacy across Australia, responsive to the changing needs of the community and advice of our expert partners.

104) Do you acknowledge the role social media plays in expanding the reach of mis- and disinformation?

When crises and significant global events occur, from the Coronavirus pandemic to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, technology can act as a lifeline, connecting people around the world and providing access to critical information. We've seen this more than ever in recent years, as people increasingly turn to the internet to meet, form communities and better understand the events happening around us.

But, while digital acceleration is helpful during these times, it can also mean that misinformation can spread in new and more problematic ways — making it harder for people to find reliable guidance.

We have teams of experts around the world working in the fight against misinformation. Their work focuses on ensuring that we provide users with high quality and trusted information, rewarding the publishers and creators who produce it, surfacing more authoritative sources and reducing the spread of borderline content and removing content that puts people at risk.

In early 2021, we launched the Google Safety Engineering Center for Content Responsibility, a hub for Google experts working to combat the spread of illegal and harmful content. It's a place where we can share this work and improve it - with policymakers, researchers, and regulators.

From Search to YouTube to Google Ads, misinformation manifests in different ways on different platforms. A part of the work we do to tackle misinformation starts with the rules we put in place across Google services to prohibit certain types of harmful content and behaviours. When we find content that violates these policies, we take action - like blocking, removing or restricting content so it is less likely to cause harm.

This approach allows us to tailor how we moderate content across products. This might include deceptive behaviour online such as the use of deepfakes, fraudulent activity and spamming, impersonation and the misrepresentation of ownership as well as

medical misinformation. We take action against this kind of content at scale.

- 105) Would you consider options like ensuring that news or information on your platform not from a verified news channel is verified as such?**
- a) What would you suggest is the best way of doing this?**
 - b) Are you required to do this in any jurisdiction currently?**
 - c) If so, where?**

These questions raise important and complex issues around what is “news” and who—if anyone—should be responsible for “verifying” news, to the extent “verification” here implies some kind of professional accreditation process.

We do not require news publishers to have specific professional credentials in order to use our services. Rather, Google seeks, first, to use ranking to raise high-quality, reliable information and, second, to give users context about the reliability of sources, like Google Search’s “About this Result” feature that enables users to get the context about a website before they click through. This approach allows for diverse voices to contribute to discourse on issues of public importance, which would be endangered if internet services were required to place hard-and-fast limitations based on “verification.” [Please see this document for more information about how Google combats disinformation.](#)

Google does support fact checking services including Australian Associated Press’ FactCheck since its launch in 2019. This has included support to grow capacity for fact checking services, audience growth strategy and translation. AAP’s service is IFCN certified and has never had to retract a fact check since launch. Further information about how we are investing in fact checking is available at <https://blog.google/outreach-initiatives/google-news-initiative/how-google-and-youtube-are-investing-in-fact-checking/>.

We’re not aware of any other country requiring Google to “verify” news publishers in the manner suggested above.

- 106) In mid-June 2024, The Squiz and Squiz Kids conducted a survey of our audiences to understand the impact social media has had on them and their children. More than 1,000 responded, the majority being parents of school-aged children and teachers. 98% of parents identified exposure to misinformation, deep fakes and biased media as their number one concern for their kids when online, and 73% of respondents believe media literacy should be taught to kids in Grades 3-6 before they have a smartphone in their hands**
- a) Do you acknowledge the role social media plays in proliferating mis and disinformation?**

Please see answer to question 104 above.

As outlined above, we acknowledge that this is a serious issue in society and take significant steps through our products and partnerships to combat mis and disinformation, including through [our partnership with The Squiz](#) which aims to help young people build critical media literacy skills.

b) Would you consider options like ensuring that news or information on your platform not from a verified news channel is highlighted as such?

Please see answer to question 105 above.

Data storage

107) What data on Australian users do you store?

- a) Under which legal jurisdiction is this data stored?**
- b) What specific laws apply to the data where it is stored?**

Google collects a range of data from Australian users, and we are transparent with users about the data we collect and for what purpose, and how users are in control of that process. The information Google collects depends on how users use our services and how they manage their privacy controls. When Australians use our services, they are trusting us with their information. This is a responsibility that we take very seriously at Google. And we protect user privacy with industry-leading security infrastructure, responsible data practices, and easy-to-use privacy tools that put our users in control.

We are committed to treating that data responsibly and protecting user privacy with industry-leading security infrastructure and easy-to-use privacy tools that put users in control.

Tools like our Privacy Checkup and our Security Checkup give people personalised privacy and security reminders and recommendations, including flagging actions they should take to immediately secure their Google account

In general, we use the information we collect from users from all our services to:

- provide, maintain and improve our services and develop new services.
- provide personalised services to users, including providing recommendations, personalised content, and customised search results. Depending on the user's settings, we may also show the user personalised ads based on their interests and activity across Google services.
- measure performance to understand how our services are used and to help advertisers understand the performance of their ad campaigns.
- to communicate with users, and to protect Google, our users, and the public (for example, for detecting fraud, abuse, security risks and technical issues).

We provide further detail about how we use data in our [Privacy Policy](#).

Our [Privacy Policy](#) also describes the types of data we collect from users. These include:

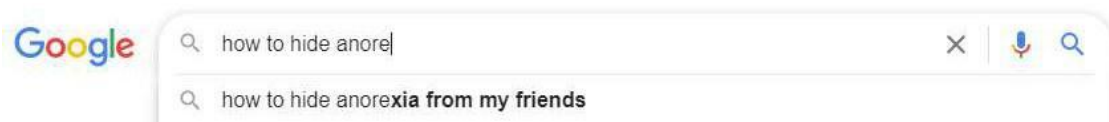
- personal information a user provides to us when they create a Google Account, including their name and a password.
- content users create, upload, or receive from others when using our services. This includes things like email users write and receive, photos and videos they save, docs and spreadsheets they create, and comments they make on YouTube videos.
- information about the apps, browsers, and devices users use to access Google services, which helps us provide features like automatic product updates and dimming users' screen if your battery runs low.
- information about users' activity in our services, which we use to do things like recommend a YouTube video the user might like. The activity information we collect may include terms the user searches for, videos the user watches, and views and interactions with content and ads.
- location information when users use our services, which helps us offer features like driving directions, search results for things nearby, and ads based on the user's location.

Data we collect from Australian users may be processed or stored on any of our servers. We maintain servers around the world and transparently publish a list of locations [here](#).

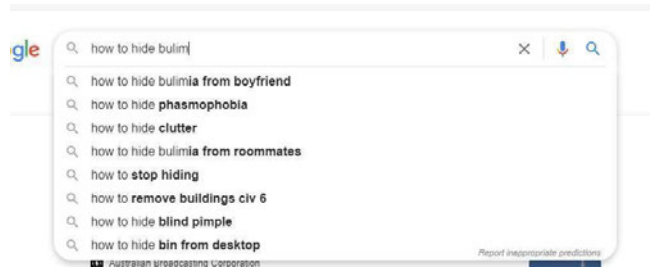
Data protection laws vary among jurisdictions. For example, the *General Data Protection Regulation* applies in the European Union, the *California Consumer Privacy Act* applies in California, and the *Lei Geral de Proteção de Dados* applies in Brazil. Regardless of where a user's information is processed, we apply the same protections described in our [Privacy Policy](#), including by using industry-leading security infrastructure, responsible data practices, and giving users easy-to-use privacy tools that put them in control of their data.

Unsafe content

- 108) **On the 28/6 as a witness at the Social Media Inquiry you said you said you 'enforce policies... that prohibit...content related to suicide and eating disorders', and that auto fill answers do not come up for identified harmful questions (for example, about suicide). How do you explain the below recommended answers and available content?**



This is the seventh recommendation: how I hide my anorexia from my friends (and family); a thread ~ - Rattibha



Autocomplete is a feature within Google Search that makes it faster to complete searches that users start to type. Our automated systems generate predictions that help people save time by allowing them to quickly complete the search they already intended to do.

While Autocomplete uses systems designed to prevent potentially unhelpful and policy-violating predictions from appearing, Autocomplete predictions aren't perfect. There's the potential for unexpected or shocking predictions to appear.

If the automated systems don't catch problematic predictions, our enforcement teams remove those that violate our policies. Users can report a prediction they think violates our policies by following the instructions [here](#).

On 10 July 2024, we received an email from the Committee's Principal Research Officer requesting answers to the additional questions set out in **red font**, below - our answers follow:

**1. How many adult users were reported by Australian end-users aged under 18?
a. What was the average response time?**

This question seems more appropriately directed to social media services which allow users to discover other users and facilitate two-way social relationships between them. Google does not operate a social media service in this sense.

For certain Google products (Meet, Chat, Gmail and Messages, for example), a user can only be contacted by another user of those services if that user knows or has been provided with that user's address. A user can at any time block another user from contacting them via the service.

For YouTube, a video hosting service, we have clear policies against videos, playlists, thumbnails and comments on YouTube that endanger the emotional and physical well being of minors. This includes content that involves the sexualization of minors, content that depicts harmful or dangerous acts involving minors, misleading family content (that targets young minors and families, but includes potentially harmful themes), and content involving cyber bullying and harassment involving minors. YouTube does not support private messaging between users.

**2. How many CSAM reports made by Australian end-users?
a. What was the average response time?**

The great majority of CSAM detected on Google's platforms and services is found and reported not by individual users, but through our proactive detection methods as described [here](#) and as reflected in our [Transparency Report](#).

If a user is aware of CSAM on Google's platform, our Help Centre directs users first and foremost to report this material to the appropriate organisation or to the police. The Help Centre directs users to submit CSAM to US NCMEC, which can direct reports to law enforcement around the world, and also provides contact information for local organisations around the world, including the Office of the eSafety Commissioner in Australia. If a user suspects that a child is in immediate danger in any way, Google directs that user to contact the police immediately.

In turn, Google partners with NCMEC and other NGOs to receive reports of CSAM on our platform. When reports are received from these NGOs, we prioritise and take action on that content as soon as possible.

We also allow users to submit reports of child endangerment, inappropriate content, or inappropriate behaviour towards children on specific Google products. Again, if a user is aware of immediate danger, exploitation, or trafficking of a child, we direct the user to contact the police immediately.

- 3. How many scam posts were reported on the platform by Australian end-users?**
- a. What was the post's average engagement rate?**
 - b. What was your response, including average response time?**

Google has strong policies and detection mechanisms in place to fight scams across our platforms. While Google's products and services do not generally have 'posts', we share the following data points to demonstrate how our years of experience and efforts in this space are having significant impact in responding to scams:

- Gmail blocks 99.9% of spam, malware, and dangerous links from reaching users' Gmail inboxes.
- Google's Messages and Phone apps filter scam and spam [messages](#) and identify around 65% of scam [calls](#).
- Google Safe Browsing helps keep users secure from bad websites, automatically protecting more than 5 billion devices.
- On YouTube, a video hosting platform, more than 15 million channels were removed for spam, misleading and scams in Q1 2024. In that same quarter, 189,313 videos were reported by users in Australia as potentially violating our policies against spam, deceptive practices, and misinformation.
- In 2023 we blocked or removed 206.5 million advertisements for violating our misrepresentation policy, which includes many scam and fraud tactics, and 273.4 million advertisements for violating our financial services policy. We also blocked or removed over 1 billion advertisements for violating our policy against abusing the ad network, which includes promoting malware. and suspended 12.7 million advertiser accounts (nearly double from last year). We also blocked ads from serving on more than 2.1 billion individual publisher pages, as detailed in our annual [Ads Safety report](#).
- We've also partnered with governments on a number of initiatives, such as expanding our [financial services verification](#) program to thirteen countries and regions globally. In Australia for example, financial services advertisers are required to demonstrate that they are authorised by the financial authority ASIC in order to promote their products and services through ads.

- 4. What human resources do you have dedicated to content moderation in Australia?**
- a. What is the number of content moderators located within Australia?**
 - b. Where are these resources based?**
 - c. What is the number dedicated to Australian content or addressing reports from Australian end-users?**
 - d. What are their qualifications and training requirements?**
 - e. What support is available to them to ensure they can do their job?**
 - f. What is their volume of work and KPIs (for example, how much content per hour are they required to review)**
 - g. What languages do they review posts in?**

We do not have human resources dedicated to content moderation in Australia, but have provided some information about our content moderation approaches below.

To enforce our policies fairly, consistently and at scale, we rely on both specially-trained experts and machine learning technology. We invest over \$1 billion annually on moderation efforts across our platforms with over 20,000 people spread across the globe providing 24/7 coverage and supporting over 40 different languages.

Qualifications for Google employees who work on sensitive content may include role related knowledge in the content matter, professional experience in content moderation or sensitive workflows, linguistic expertise and computer proficiency. The linguistic expertise required varies depending on the specific workflow of a product or service, the type of content, and languages that content is available in. Some products or services require native proficiency in global supported languages, others may use translation tools if necessary, and some videos or images do not require any language proficiency in order to review. Some Google employees who work on sensitive content are also subject matter specialists skilled in specialty areas, such as child sexual abuse material or violent extremism.

Google employees that work on sensitive content teams are offered subject matter specific training on a variety of topics. Employees working in sensitive content are required to complete a training on the Psychological Impact of Sensitive Content Review at the point of onboarding, and managers are required to complete an additional training on Supporting Teams who Work with Sensitive Content. Additional optional training opportunities include those on self-compassion, emotional agility, and subject matter specific training to provide a deeper dive into the unique challenges faced by each team. The training is generally conducted via e-learning with opportunities for live facilitated training.

Google is committed to supporting the wellness of its employees that work with sensitive content through comprehensive programs and resources. Google strives for safe and healthy working conditions for all employees exposed to sensitive content and is committed to ensuring they have the highest standard of support. Google has invested significantly in these teams by:

- Providing access to on- and off-site counselling for workers who need it, dedicated wellness spaces, on-site specialist counsellor support in certain Google offices, and 24/7 phone support;
- Limiting content exposure for those focusing on sensitive content by providing guidance on daily review time limits;
- Providing peer-led peer support groups and optional listening sessions if teams experience escalations or specific events that are particularly impactful;
- Providing physical and mental wellbeing activities (e.g., gym space, workout classes, mindfulness app access, educational sessions on a variety of topics);

- Providing post-exit mental health support, including counselling services, for one year after an employee who was regularly exposed to sensitive content and situations as part of their core role exits their position at Google.

Yours faithfully,

Lucinda Longcroft

Director, Government Affairs and Public Policy

Google Australia and New Zealand