



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

## Submission: Social Media, Body Image, and Eating Disorders.

This submission is presented in support of the legislative recommendations developed by the Social Media and Body Image Working Group from a roundtable discussion convened by Zoe Daniel MP and Butterfly Foundation September 2023- May 2024.

It is estimated that more than one million Australians (4% of the population) experience an eating disorder in any given year. However, this estimate is based on decade-old data and is likely to be an underestimation of the current prevalence. Globally, the prevalence of eating disorders has risen over the past decade. COVID-19 restrictions were reported to be a trigger for eating disorder behaviours in 40.4% of adolescents diagnosed with anorexia nervosa in 2020.

Across Australia, services have reported a marked increase in presentations of both new and relapsing eating disorders, across diagnostic presentations, and in the level of acuity and severity of these presentations.

Young people face unprecedented issues with negative body image, disordered eating and eating disorders, research has demonstrated that content and features within social media use are a major factor escalating the risk of these disorders, with adolescents and young adults disproportionately affected.

Research has established that social media use can increase body dissatisfaction among children and young people, particularly image-based social media. Body dissatisfaction is a significant risk factor for disordered eating and the development of eating disorders. A more direct form of harm is caused by pro-eating disorder content which promotes dangerous weight control measures such as restrictive diets, extreme exercise regimes, and images of very thin bodies (e.g., “thinspiration,” “fitspo”). Direct harm is also evidenced in weight stigmatizing content and messaging that promote body shape, size, and ability discrimination.

NEDC (National Eating Disorders Collaboration) has integrated two decades of sector and lived experience consensus and service development into a model of the stepped system of care for eating disorders. The model is the overarching framework for the National Eating Disorder Strategy 2023-2033 (National Strategy). This National Strategy is designed to be embedded within the stepped care approach and used across mental health policy and services. The National Strategy articulates clear standards and actions for an effective, equitable and coordinated system of care for eating disorders. The key recommendations presented from the roundtable are in line with the Prevention standards and actions outlined in the National Eating Disorder Strategy 2023-2033.

For more information on the Prevention standards in the National Eating Disorder Strategy <https://nedc.com.au/national-strategy/prevention>

### Key Recommendations

The Roundtable developed 21 recommendations across the themes of:

- Regulatory requirements
- Social media algorithms

- Social media platform functionality
- Interventions, training, and resources
- Research

For more detailed information into the recommendations: <https://butterfly.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Roundtable-Recommendations-FINAL-ONLINE.pdf>

We urge the Committee to consider and implement these recommendations swiftly and effectively, ensuring that Australian youth are protected from the pervasive harms associated with distorted body image and eating disorders exacerbated by social media.

Thank you for considering these recommendations in your ongoing efforts to promote online safety and protect the well-being of all Australians.

For Further information contact Dr, Beth Shelton,

#### About NEDC

NEDC is a national sector collaboration dedicated to developing and implementing a nationally consistent, evidence-based system of care for the prevention and treatment of eating disorders. NEDC is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. Over the past decade NEDC has created a large body of comprehensive, evidence-based information and resources which establish standards for prevention and treatment of eating disorders. NEDC implements these standards in system-building projects, workforce development and consultation.

To inform its work, NEDC engages a broad range of stakeholders, including people with lived experience of eating disorders and their families and supports, clinicians, researchers, and other experts. NEDC has more than 10 000 members. NEDC also provides expert consultation and guidance on evidence-based provision of eating disorder services to policymakers and to national, state/territory and regional health, mental health and community organisations. NEDC's work is led by National Director Dr Beth Shelton and Chair Professor Phillipa Hay, and a Steering Committee of national sector leaders and experts. NEDC's contract is administered by the Butterfly Foundation on behalf of the Commonwealth Government.