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House Select Committee on Social Media and Online Safety  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Via email - [smos.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:smos.reps@aph.gov.au)

## **TikTok Australia's submission to the House Select Committee on Social Media and Online Safety**

Dear Committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the House Select Committee on Social Media and Online Safety.

TikTok is an entertainment platform and our mission is to inspire creativity and bring joy. In late 2019, we officially launched in Australia and since that time, millions of Australians have found community on TikTok.

Our most important commitment at TikTok is to create a welcoming environment that keeps our community safe. Our approach to safety spans policies, product, practices, and partners as we build a community where creativity and free expression can thrive.

We want to take this opportunity to provide some detail on how we work to help keep our community safe, and the tools and resources we provide to empower them to proactively manage their experience on TikTok.

### **Safety and enforcement**

TikTok Australia supports the Australian Government's continued focus on keeping Australians safe online.

Our community's safety is at the forefront of everything we do. Everyone who uses TikTok is bound by our [Terms of Service](#) and the [Community Guidelines](#) apply universally.

We take a firm stance on behaviours and content that are not in keeping with our policies, and we will not hesitate to take action against accounts that might seek to undermine the safety of our community.



Our Terms of Service explicitly state that:

- "We reserve the right to disable your user account at any time, including if you have failed to comply with any of the provisions of these Terms, or if activities occur on your account which, in our sole discretion, would or might cause damage to or impair the Services or infringe or violate any third party rights, or violate any applicable laws or regulations."

Our Community Guidelines cover a comprehensive range of behaviours and content which are not allowed on TikTok, across the following general categories:

- Violent extremism;
- Hateful behaviour;
- Illegal activities and regulated goods;
- Violent and graphic content;
- Suicide, self-harm, and dangerous acts;
- Harassment and bullying;
- Adult nudity and sexual activities;
- Minor safety;
- Integrity and authenticity; and
- Platform security.

Our extensive trust and safety teams use a mixture of technology and human interventions to seek to ensure content and behaviour is consistent with these policy frameworks.

We also provide easy in-app and off platform reporting for our community to flag content that may be of concern, as well as other proactive tools for users to help them manage their experience on TikTok.

We will remove any content – including video, audio, images, comments, and text – that violates our Community Guidelines. Individuals are notified of our decisions and can appeal if they believe no violation has occurred. We will suspend or ban accounts and/or devices that are involved in severe or repeated violations; we may consider information available on other platforms and offline in these decisions. When warranted, we will report the accounts to relevant legal authorities.



Our latest Transparency Report highlights the scale of our work to keep the platform free of violative content and behaviours.

From April-June 2021, 81,518,334 videos were removed globally for violating our Community Guidelines or Terms of Service, which is less than 1% of all videos uploaded. Of those videos, we identified and removed 93.0% within 24 hours of being posted, 94.1% before a user reported them, and 87.5% at zero views.

In the second quarter of 2021, 14,871,412 accounts were removed for violating our Community Guidelines or Terms of Service. This includes 11,205,597 suspected underage accounts that were removed for potentially belonging to a person under the age of 13, which is less than 1% of all accounts on TikTok.

And we of course engage proactively with Australian authorities, including the eSafety Commissioner and her team.

### **Empowering our community**

TikTok provides our community with a range of tools and resources to help them manage their experience on platform. Our [Australian Safety Centre](#) provides a range of helpful resources for new and existing users, families and care givers to help them build an online experience that is right for them.

We provide support to [personalise privacy and safety settings](#), in app, helping people to make choices about who can see their content, send messages or discover their account. We also empower those creating video content to decide who can comment, how those comments are filtered and whether others are able to interact with their content through functions like duet or stitch.

In addition, we also want to encourage our community to treat everyone with kindness and respect. A comment prompt asks people to reconsider posting a comment that may be inappropriate or unkind. It also reminds users about our [Community Guidelines](#) and allows them to edit their comments before sharing.

TikTok also offers a [family pairing feature](#), which lets parents and guardians link their TikTok account to their teen's to enable a variety of content and privacy settings. We encourage caregivers to discuss the Family Pairing features with their teens, and explain why they choose to turn them on.



Even without Family Pairing enabled, parents can help their teens enable our app's Digital Well-being offerings, including Screen Time Management and Restricted Mode, which are protected by a passcode set by the parent or guardian.

We also believe it's important to ensure even stronger proactive protections to help keep teenagers safe, and we've continually introduced changes to support [age-appropriate experiences](#) on our platform.

Our Terms of Service detail that TikTok is only for people aged 13 and above. We age gate all users, requiring them to neutrally enter their birth date which is an important part of not only our age verification process, but also our process to ensure that teens are provided an age-appropriate experience when they sign up for TikTok.

We want to help our younger teen users in particular to develop positive digital habits early on, and we regularly consult with leading paediatric experts and youth well-being advocates to develop our [Youth Portal](#), [bullying prevention guide](#), and other features that support [youth wellbeing](#).

We have a range of settings and features that aim to protect the [privacy of teens](#), while enabling them to have an age-appropriate experience on TikTok.

These features include controls around direct messaging, restrictions on the ability to livestream, controls around who can view content created by teens and guardrails around notifications sent to teens:

- **Direct messaging:** For accounts aged 13-15, the direct message functionality is turned off. To help teens make active decisions about their privacy settings, when someone aged 16-17 joins TikTok, their direct messaging setting will be set to 'No One' by default. To message others, they will need to actively switch to a different sharing option.
- **Account status:** Accounts aged 13-15 are set to private by default. Private accounts can choose to share their content with Followers or Friends, as the 'Everyone' setting is turned off.
- **Video sharing:** With regard to video sharing, to help teens understand the options available to them, when accounts aged 16 are ready to publish their first video, they will see a pop-up appear that asks them to choose who can watch the video. They won't be able to publish their video until they make a selection. With each video, users can select who can watch before they post.



- **Duet and Stitch functionality:** The ability to use the duet and stitch functions are disabled for accounts aged under 16. The video download functionality is also turned off for accounts aged under 16, and those aged between 16-17 must make an active choice to enable the feature.
- **In-app notifications:** We restrict the times at which our younger teens can receive in-app notifications, to ensure they do not receive notifications late at night. Accounts aged 13-15 will not receive in-app notifications after 9pm local time, and accounts aged 16-17 will not receive in-app notifications after 10pm local time.

These privacy settings build on an already considerable range of product features and content moderation practices designed to keep our community safe, including the inability to send video and images via direct message.

### **Transparency and Accountability**

At TikTok, we believe that accountability and transparency are essential to facilitating trust with our community – and we're committed to leading the way when it comes to being transparent in how we operate, moderate and recommend content, and secure our platform. That's why we opened our global Transparency and Accountability Centres for experts and policy makers to see first-hand how we're working to build a safe and secure platform for our growing and diverse community.

While our Centres are currently accessible virtually given the pandemic, once they are opened, we will be able to facilitate interaction with our recommendation system and source code in a safe and secure environment.

Our Centres are at the forefront of the technology industry and allow participants to see how our moderators review content and accounts that are escalated via user reports and technology-based flagging. This includes walking visitors through our safety classifiers and deep learning models that proactively identify harmful content and our decision engine that prioritises potentially violating content to help moderation teams review the most urgent content first.

We also demonstrate our object detection models that flag things like hate symbols to our human moderators for further review. At our physical Centres, guests are able to sit in the seat of a content moderator, use our moderation platform, review and label sample content, and experiment with various detection models.



Our Centres and tours also go into considerable detail about the extensive privacy and security measures we take to protect our community's information and stay ahead of evolving security challenges.

TikTok is striving to be the most transparent and accountable company in the industry when it comes to how we are keeping our users safe. In addition to the above, we regularly publish Transparency Reports to provide insight into the volume and nature of content removed for violating our Community Guidelines or Terms of Service, and how we respond to law enforcement requests for information, government requests for content removals, and copyrighted content take-down notices.

Our latest report is available through a recently redesigned [Transparency Centre](#). Here you will find our most up to date reports, that cover our Community Guidelines enforcement data as well as law enforcement, legal and intellectual property requests.

TikTok Australia is also a signatory the *Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation*. Our first report is available [here](#) and our code commitments are [here](#).

With respect to our recommendation system, TikTok has sought to be transparent and [shared details on our recommendation system](#) and how it works. And as mentioned, we offer tours of our Transparency and Accountability Centres, where participants are able to interact with the algorithm in a safe environment.

TikTok is constantly working to make improvements to our user experience, which is why we have recently outlined a range of steps we are taking to iterate our recommendation system.

Our recommendation system already works to ensure that our users receive a wide variety of content on their feed, which plays an important role in combating "filter bubbles". In addition, we continue to develop new strategies to interrupt repetitive patterns, and we are looking at how our system can better vary the kinds of content that may be recommended in a sequence. That's why we're testing ways to avoid recommending a series of similar content – such as around fitness, sadness, or breakups – to protect against viewing too much of a content category that may be fine as a single video but problematic if viewed in clusters.

We're also working to ensure our recommendation system works in a way which avoids inadvertently recommending limited types of content which, though not violative of our policies, could have a negative effect if that's the majority of what someone watches, such as content about loneliness or weight loss. Our goal is for each person's For You feed to feature a breadth of content, creators, and topics.



This work is being informed by ongoing conversations with experts across medicine, clinical psychology, and AI ethics, members of our Safety Advisory Council, and our community.

As we build safeguards into TikTok by design, we also want to empower people with more choices to customise their experience to their own preferences and comfort. For example, we're working on a feature that would let people choose words or hashtags associated with content they don't want to see in their For You feed. We already enable people to tap any video and select "Not interested". This new tool will offer another way to help people customise their feed – whether for a vegetarian who wants to see fewer meat recipes, or someone working on self-esteem who would rather see fewer beauty tutorials.

### **Advertising policies**

It's worth noting our advertising policies on TikTok, many of which may be different to those the Committee might be familiar with.

Our advertising policies are strict.

On TikTok in Australia, you will not see ads for alcohol, gambling or political parties and causes.

TikTok does not allow advertisers to market toys or other products intended to appeal specifically to children in Australia.

Details of our policies are available [here](#).

### **Partnerships to support the Australian Community**

While TikTok may be relatively new in Australia, we are committed to keeping Australians safe as they learn, share, find connections, and are entertained on TikTok.

In our two short years in Australia, we have worked hard to forge relationships with trusted organisations to ensure our community has access to service providers, resources and content that supports their wellbeing.

In October 2021, to coincide with Mental Health Awareness Month, we curated a [wellbeing hub](#) that offered a centralised and dedicated destination for tools, expert advice, and content that supports holistic wellbeing across both mind and body. We featured content from trusted voices such as ReachOut, Red Cross Australia and the Mental Health Commission.



In 2021, we collaborated with key online safety partners including the [Alannah and Madeline Foundation](#) and [Project Rokit](#), to produce TikTok content to educate, inform and support our community with digital wellbeing and literacy support.

We surface Public Service Announcements that redirect users to key support services when they search for terms associated with particular wellbeing topics, including for crisis support (Lifeline and Kids Helpline), [sexual assault \(1800Respect\)](#) and body image (Butterfly Foundation).

Throughout the pandemic, we have proactively provided our community with reliable and trusted sources of information, including through the development of our COVID-19 Vaccination Hub (which was part of our partnership with UNICEF Australia), the [livestreaming of the NSW Health daily COVID-19 media conferences](#) and a [live Q&A with Dr Kerry Chant](#), as well as a special livestream with Professor Sharon Lewin of the Doherty Institute and Dr Karl on vaccination and tackling misinformation.

There is always more to be done when it comes to keeping our community safe, but TikTok is committed to the wellbeing of our Australian community and we look forward to this important work continuing and evolving in 2022.

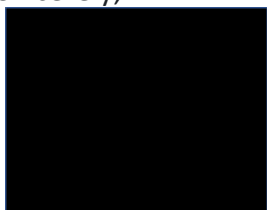
### **Invitation to Transparency and Accountability Centre Tour**

We know there is no finish line when it comes to our efforts to keep our community safe and we would welcome Members of the Committee to take part in a virtual tour of our APAC Transparency and Accountability Centre, as described above, which would be facilitated through our regional Trust and Safety Hub in Singapore.

We would be delighted if the Committee were able to take us up on this invitation.

Once again, we thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide a brief overview of some of our policies and practices to keep the TikTok community safe in Australia.

Sincerely,



**Brent Thomas**

Director of Public Policy, Australia and New Zealand