



Australia's progress in implementing the Convention on the Rights of Children

*eChildhood* Submission - May 23 2018

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## About *eChildhood* - The Problem We Address

Children in Australia currently have unfettered access to hardcore pornography 24/7. Research is proving the harms of this access.

What does this mean? Pornography has become an educator, grooming tool and a significant contributor to the scripting and programming of a child's sexual and relational development online; as well as a source of trauma for young children due to the nature of pornography. Children having access to pornography is essentially, child sexual abuse via digital images.

It is important to understand what pornography is today, as it is very different from what it was 10 - 20 years ago. Mainstream hardcore porn regularly depicts choking, slapping, derogatory name-calling, incest, bondage, group and rough sex. Regular viewing is linked to sexually abusive behaviours and teaches young men to have an attitude of sexual entitlement, and young women struggle to recognise their own abuse. Kids having easy access to pornography is like steroids for the #MeToo women of tomorrow. We can't ignore the role it plays in normalising bullying, sexual abuse and harassment, and how we now have generations of children growing up with violence as the basis of their sexual scripting due to pornography being the main form of education.

Whilst more research is needed, current analysis of the harms shows ease of access to pornography increases the negative impacts on children's healthy development. Daily we hear stories from key stakeholders in child welfare organisations and schools retelling stories of incidents of sexual harms at an epidemic rate. Unless we take action now, our leaders will face huge costs to support those now being traumatised. Our kids are drowning in a toxic sea of violence and misogyny online and unless we address this, violence against women is going to reach a whole new level.

Speaking with industry experts, unpublished data shows over 50% of teens are attempting to access pornographic sites during school hours even though they are aware that filters limit their devices. Youth also report that violence in sex has become normalised and rules around consent are blurred. They claim that the reason for this is mostly due to the higher rates of access and consumption of pornography.

Pornography is significantly contributing to a rise in:

- child on child sexual abuse
- confusion over consent in sexual relationships
- the normalisation of violence in relationships
- identity and mental health issues
- traumatisation from accidental exposure
- self exploitation and objectification
- addiction contributing to isolation and mental, emotional, physical and relational health issues

## [eChildhood Vision](#)

We envision a world where children grow up free from the harms of pornography, confidently building thriving relationships.

## [eChildhood Mission](#)

*eChildhood* is a registered health promotion charity dedicated to mobilising responses that reduce the harmful effects of pornography on children and young people.

- We take a public health approach through implementing digital, legislative and education solutions across Australia and New Zealand.
- We unlock silos, activate research and empower key stakeholders to build collaborative responses.
- We foster awareness and provide education and training to parents, professionals and the public.
- We advocate for measures that improve children and young people's mental and physical health outcomes, and decrease vulnerabilities to exploitation.
- As a global thought leader, we collaborate, influence and consult internationally as a part of a worldwide movement addressing the harms of pornography on children and young people.

## [eChildhood Statement of Research description](#)

The *eChildhood* Statement of Research relating to pornography harms to children is endorsed by child youth advocates, anti-violence workers and key academics, including Dr Gail Dines, Founder of Culture Reframed, Dr Michael Flood, Dr John D. Foubert, Dr Donald Hilton, Dr Caroline Norma, Dr Heather Brunskell-Evans, Dr Meagan Tyler, Maree Crabbe, Tom Meagher and others. Our Statement of Research highlights current studies, and identify significant areas that require action to prevent harms in children and young people's health, mental-health, physical safety, and wellbeing, and as a part of broader societal effects to prevent violence against women. The Statement of Research and reference list is included as Appendix B to this document.

## [eChildhood approach](#)

Prevention of access to pornography is a vital component of reducing the incidence of harms upon children and young people. *eChildhood* has adopted a public health approach to inform a three-pronged framework. Each prong is supported by the implementation of legislation and policy, digital solutions, and education.

1. PREVENT access to pornography through advocacy for 'Digital Child Protection Buffers'.
2. EQUIP with education through advocacy and provision of 'clearinghouse partnerships' to other providers.
3. RESTORE children and young people harmed by pornography through advocacy and links to specialist support services.

In the sections to follow we will reference [The Porn Harms Kids Report<sup>1</sup>](#) as part of our submission documentation.

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*eChildhood* was formerly known as 'Porn Harms Kids'. *The Porn Harms Kids Report: Protecting our kids from online pornography harms is everyone's business* was published in September 2017. The views and content of *The Porn Harms Kids Report* are those of *eChildhood*.

## *eChildhood* Action Plan - Solution

The *eChildhood* strategy and consequential objectives are designed to build long-term solutions that empower all key stakeholders, support children and young people, and ensure safety for our current and future generations.



Underpinned by a public health approach, research and expert advice, our objectives are based on three key solutions as identified in our report: Legislation and policy solutions, Digital solutions, and Education solutions.

1. Legislation and policy - in the instance of pornography, the loss is first and foremost to our children, and the cost burdens (mental, physical, emotional, relational, social and financial) are rapidly accumulating. The mechanism that facilitates this ongoing burden is failed legislation and policy; changes in this area underpin digital and education solutions, to ensure no child or youth is left behind and all key stakeholders are empowered to support children and youth.
2. Digital / Technological - in the best interests of child safety, health and wellbeing, actions to implement Digital Child Protection Buffers are of vital importance. The online environment is complex, however to ensure children's online childhood is protected on multiple levels for a positive experience, technological solutions must be put in place nationally. A key component of this measure is to ensure the commercial providers of this content, the pornography industry, secure their platforms so that adult content is not easily accessible by children.
3. Education - from a public health perspective, education involves drawing in key stakeholders from a wide range of government, non-government, health professions, 'people helping' services and community organisations. Prevention of pornography harms needs to be addressed both within sectors, and collectively – with a common goal of breaking down the 'silo' situation that currently presents itself. The first step is creating awareness.

## Response - Executive Summary

In relation to the harms of pornography on children and young people - the current legislative, law, policy, educational and administrative measures of the Australian Government are not adequate for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention on the Rights of The Child. *The Porn Harms Kids Report* details our focus on three key areas to address: current legislation and policy, digital, and education approaches. We believe these are foundational areas that must receive equal attention in order to effectively respond to this public health crisis that has remained in the shadows for too long.

Sections 3,4,5 of *The Porn Harms Kids Report* critically analyse existing initiatives undertaken by the Australian government and offers recommended actions for further progress in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our analysis will argue:

### Section 3. Legislative Approaches

The current legislation and policies need urgent attention. Weak and convoluted laws mean that children have unfettered access to pornography from any device connected to the internet without a filtering service installed. There are major disparities in how the government manages prohibited content hosted domestically, versus that hosted overseas.

### Section 4. Digital Approaches

The regulation of the internet service provider (ISP) industry, including codes of conduct and policies, need radical overhaul to ensure that key stakeholders address the harms of pornography nationally. The potential for technological intervention requires a demand to be placed on carriers to implement flexible and robust filtering solutions that support families to block Prohibited URL Content. These changes must be underpinned by updated legislation.

### Section 5. Education Approaches

The current government focus is on further research and education efforts targeted towards parents, children and young people. Whilst families are one of many vitally important protective initiators in their child's life, it is a mistake to solely place education efforts here. There are many other sectors and stakeholders that surround and protect children, and support them to thrive within communities. It is imperative these entities are included in solutions that enable a public health approach.

[eChildhood](#) encourages the reader to review the attached [Porn Harms Kids Report](#) in full as a comprehensive analysis of how Australia is progressing in some areas and needs more focus in other towards implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child, specific to the effects of pornography on children and young people.

It is our view that, the main body of review and subsequent findings in *The Porn Harms Kids Report* identify areas relative to the following Clusters and Articles:

Cluster 1. General measures of implementation <b>Article 4</b>	8
Cluster 3. General principles <b>Article 3 - Best Interest of the Child</b> <b>Article 6 - Right to life, survival and development</b> <b>Article 12 - Respect for the views of the child</b>	9
Cluster 4. Civil rights and freedoms <b>Article 13 - right to seek, receive and impart information</b> <b>Article 17 - access to information from a diversity of sources and protection from material harmful to his or her well-being</b>	13
Cluster 5. Violence against children <b>Articles 19 &amp; 39 - Abuse and neglect, including physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration</b> <b>Article 34 - sexual exploitation and sexual abuse</b>	16
Cluster 7. Disability, basic health and welfare <b>Article 24 - health and health services, in particular primary health care</b>	19
Cluster 8. Education, leisure and cultural activities <b>Article 29 - Aims of education with reference also to quality of education</b>	21

## eChildhood views on how Australia is progressing or not progressing in terms of implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Using the clusters identified by the Committee, the following are the views of *eChildhood* on Australia's progress or lack of progress in achieving specific rights.

### Cluster 1. General measures of implementation

#### **Article 4**

States Parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, States Parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international co-operation.

Please refer to Appendix A. for recommendations on how to improve measures relating to legislation, education, policy and law.

- Relating to Legislation and Policy, these include key recommendations related to government; the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children; the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children; managing prohibited content hosted overseas in the same manner it is managed domestically; the eSafety Office; social and economic costs; additional policies and other governing areas that require action.
- Within Digital, recommendations include for the Communications Alliance to support calls for legislation and a binding code of conduct that governs ISPs, Internet Service Provider and Mobile Phone Service Provider responses, and additional digital areas that require action.
- Relevant to education, recommendations include focus on ThinkUKnow and Student Wellbeing Hub websites; the eSafety iParent website Online Pornography section; the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum; student laptops and hand-held devices; and additional educational areas that require action such as Whole School p-12 education, problem sexual behaviours education and support; and professional and community training.



## Cluster 3. General principles

### ***Best Interest of the Child:***

#### ***Article 3***

1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.
2. States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.
3. States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.

In regards to Cluster 3. Article 3 (1.2.3), Section 4.0 of *The Porn Harms Kids Report* highlights weaknesses and vulnerabilities in the current digital environment and offers calls for action on all areas of policy and legislation, including national frameworks, codes of practice, reporting processes of harms, regulatory body responses, and justice & governance measures which would be in the best interest of the child.

Currently in Australia, parents are charged with ensuring the protection of their children from the harms of pornography. The UK has recognised the unfair nature of this request and have implemented Age Verification Legislation to ensure that the responsibility of this role lands in the correct place - the hands of the commercial pornography producers. We don't expect parents to solely stop children from accessing tobacco, alcohol or adult stores, so why online do we place the onus entirely on parents to manage the extreme harms of pornography?

The current legislation and policies need urgent attention. Weak and convoluted laws mean that children have unfettered access to pornography from any device connected to the internet without a filtering service installed. There are major disparities in how the government manages prohibited content hosted domestically, versus that hosted overseas. (*The Porn Harms Kids Report p. 12*).

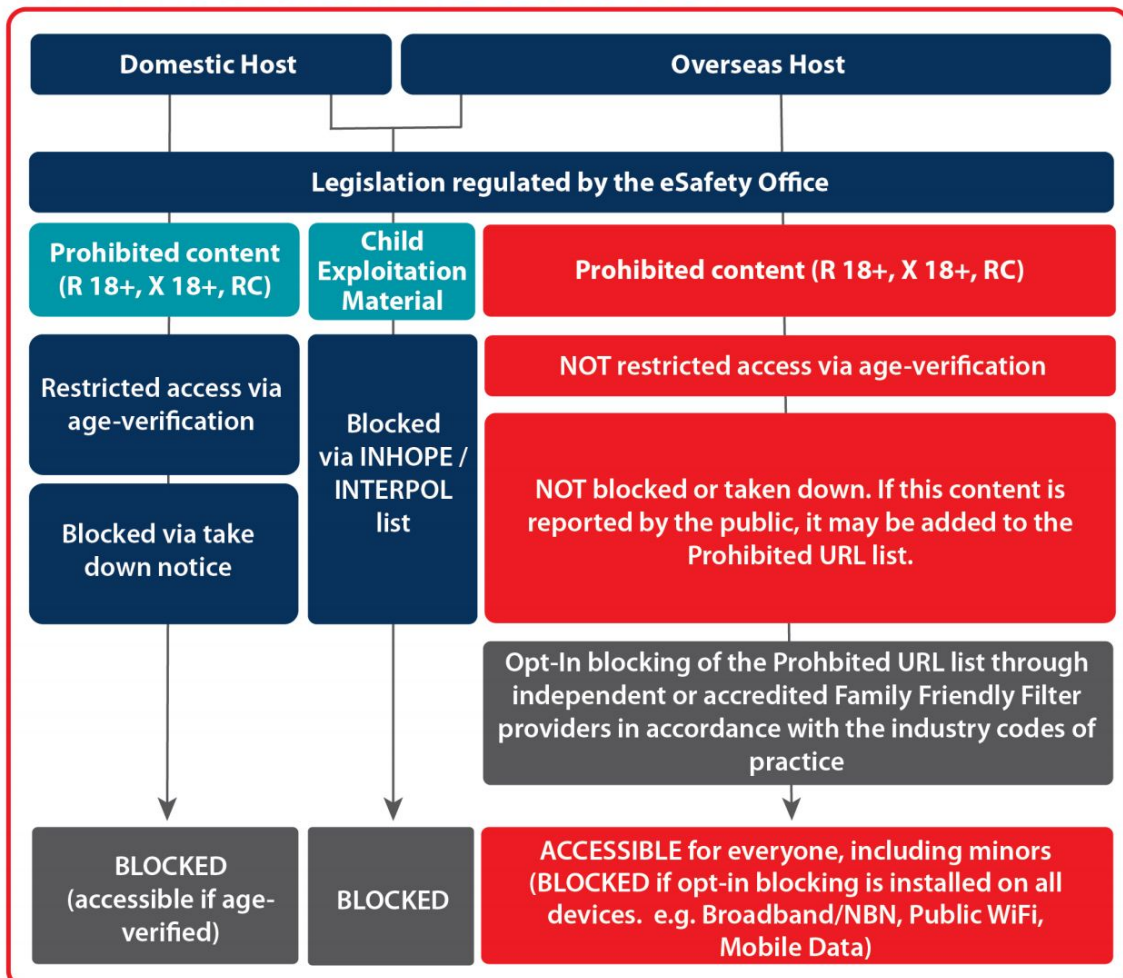
Figure 1. (below) shows why prohibited content hosted overseas is easily accessible by minors, and how the current regulatory system is unjust. If hosted overseas, "prohibited and potential prohibited content investigated is referred to accredited providers of optional end user (PC-based) Family Friendly Filters in accordance with the Industry Codes of Practice." (*The Porn Harms Kids Report p. 24*). It is unjust and infringes

on children's rights to be safe and protected from harmful content for prohibited content hosted overseas to be excluded from blocking in the same way that domestic content is blocked.

We see Age Verification Legislation as a fair and robust solution to ensure the safety of our children online. We call on the government to further take up the mandate to protect children and equip professional care providers with the policies and education needed to prevent harms in all environments. In addition to Age Verification, implementing the full spectrum of Digital Buffers (outlined below), legislative solutions, policy and robust education, means that our children will be protected in all environments from the harms of pornography and supported to heal in instances when harm occurs.

FIGURE 1.

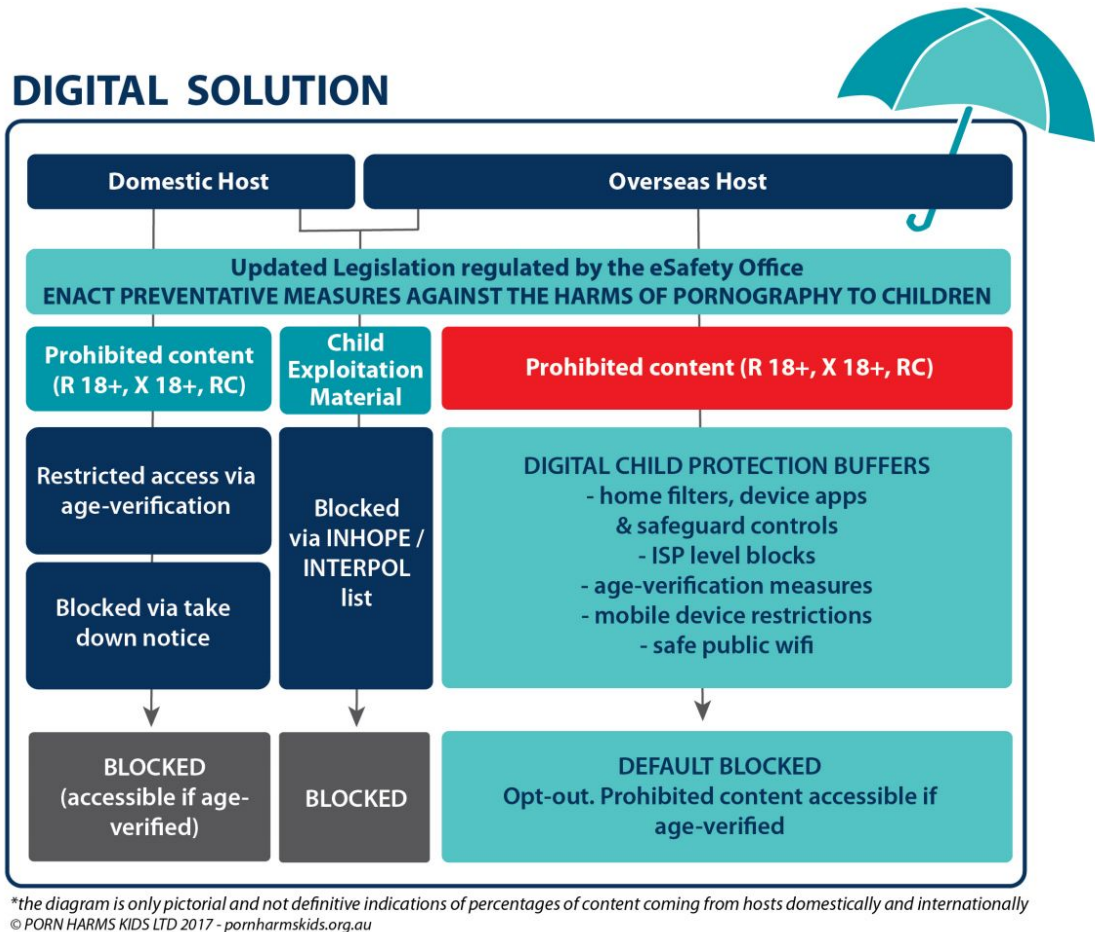
## CURRENT DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT



*\*the diagram is only pictorial and not definitive indications of percentages of content coming from hosts domestically and internationally*  
 © PORN HARMS KIDS LTD 2017 - pornharmskids.org.au

FIGURE 2.

## PROPOSED DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT



### Right to life, survival and development

#### Article 6

2. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.

Specific to Cluster 3. Article 6, Appendix B. the *eChildhood* Statement of Research (below) provides examples of research and studies which evidence the harms of pornography to children and young people. Australia's National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 also recognises that pornography is a contributing factor to violence. Recognition of the harms of Pornography on Children's and young people should dictate calls for action by the government. *The Porn Harms Kids Report* offers key recommendations to government initiatives where further progression could be made to minimize the harms of pornography and maximize development.

## Article 12

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

It is the view of *eChildhood* that young people's views are not being considered on the matter of pornography affecting the child. Nor have key recommendations by leading experts been acted upon. In 2009, Australian researcher Dr Michael Flood, provided robust recommendations in *Journal of Child Abuse Review*<sup>2</sup>. Relating to reducing children's access to pornography, he comments: '*We must minimise exposure to sexist and violent sexual media and improve the kinds of sexual materials available to young people*'.

Dr Flood's review summarised by stating:

*Exposure to pornography is routine among children and young people, with a range of notable and often troubling effects. Particularly among younger children, exposure to pornography may be disturbing or upsetting. Exposure to pornography helps to sustain young people's adherence to sexist and unhealthy notions of sex and relationships. And, especially among boys and young men who are frequent consumers of pornography, including of more violent materials, consumption intensifies attitudes supportive of sexual coercion and increases their likelihood of perpetrating assault. While children and young people are sexual beings and deserve age-appropriate materials on sex and sexuality, pornography is a poor, and indeed dangerous, sex educator.*

Young people themselves, agree with expert opinion. A representative sample of 500 18-year-olds; UK survey conducted from 19–27 June 2014<sup>3</sup> indicates that a large percentage of young people say it's too easy to see pornography, it should be less easy to access, and that sex and relationships advice should be taught in schools.

- Eight out of 10 say it is too easy for young people to accidentally see pornography online.
- Seven out of 10 (72 percent) say 'pornography leads to unrealistic attitudes to sex' and that 'pornography can have a damaging impact on young people's views of sex or relationships' (70 percent).
- Two-thirds of young women (66 per cent) and almost half of young men (49 per cent) agree that 'it would be easier growing up if pornography was less easy to access for young people'.
- More than eight out of 10 (86 per cent) agree that sex and relationship advice should be taught in schools. More than a third (37 per cent) say sex and relationship advice should be taught from the beginning of primary school and almost half (49 per cent) from the beginning of secondary school.

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<sup>2</sup> Flood, M. 2009

<sup>3</sup> IPPR 2014

## Cluster 4. Civil rights and freedoms

### **Access to information from a diversity of sources and protection from material harmful to his or her well-being**

#### ***Article 17***

States Parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.

To this end, States Parties shall:

- (a) Encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child and in accordance with the spirit of article 29;
- (b) Encourage international co-operation in the production, exchange and dissemination of such information and material from a diversity of cultural, national and international sources;
- (e) Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being, bearing in mind the provisions of articles 13 and 18.

Specific to Cluster 4. Article 17., it is the view of *eChildhood* that all avenues must be pursued to explore possible solutions to children’s unfettered access to pornography, including education, voluntary efforts by relevant industries, and regulation. “Governments should<sup>4</sup> encourage mass media – radio, television, newspapers and **Internet content sources** – to provide information that children can understand and to **not promote materials that could harm children.**” [emphasis added] In light of evidence pertaining to sexual violence and exploitation promoted by pornography (provided in Cluster 5. Violence against children, below), it is the view of *eChildhood* that the government must move beyond ‘encourage mass media’, namely the Internet and social media platforms, and instead, implement regulation.

Relevant to educational materials, the current Government Response acknowledges its role in providing readily available educational materials for teachers. The programs currently provided by the government however, do not adequately address pornography. The Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum falls short of providing direction on how to educate about pornography, and implement age-appropriate measures to prevent sexual harms. And cyber safety education is all too often presumed to cover pornography, when in fact, it most often avoids it. In addition, schools are not supported and equipped by government led policies that address this issue. While *eChildhood* is encouraged by the recommended review process of current education materials to consider the adequacy of the information available to parents, guardians and teachers on how to keep children safe online, the implementation of robust measures are required to address educational shortfalls that will effectively prevent children’s vulnerabilities to the harms of pornography.

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<sup>4</sup> Unicef FACT SHEET

The current initiatives in place; online and in-person programs and resources, ThinkUKnow, Student Wellbeing Hub, eSafety iParent Online Pornography and Policy Resource, National Curriculum and educational policies, all require review.

The current level of community knowledge and understanding of the researched harms of pornography is insufficient to effectively respond to its impacts upon children and young people. For pornography to be understood in scope, it is important to know what a public health approach looks like and frame all legal, policy, technological preventative measures, and education efforts through this lens. Dissemination of information and cooperation needs to include key stakeholders from a wide range of government, non-government, health professions, 'people helping' services and community organisations. Prevention of pornography harms needs to be addressed both within sectors, and collectively.

Appendix A. (below) details *eChildhood* key recommendations relating to Article 17. These key recommendations are also detailed comprehensively in section 5. and in summary in section 6., pp. 48-49 of *The Porn Harms Kids Report*.

### **Article 13**

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.
2. The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:
  - (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or
  - (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.

It is estimated that globally<sup>5</sup>, one in three of all Internet users are below the age of 18. Specific to Cluster 4. Article 13 1. and 2 (b), children in Australia have the freedom to seek and receive information via the internet. However, children are accessing or being exposed to, intentionally or incidentally, age-inappropriate sexual or violent content, or content otherwise considered harmful to their development. Under a public health lens, *eChildhood* calls for the Australian government to establish certain restrictions for their protection.

Section 4.3 pp. 31-34 of *The Porn Harms Kids Report*, details existing ISP levels of protection and filtering mechanisms. Section 6.3 p. 43, outlines proposed digital solutions put forward by *eChildhood*, including; home filters and device apps, ISP level blocks, Age Verification processes, mobile device restrictions and safe public wifi. These solutions would assist in protecting children from the accessing pornography and potential harmful impacts (Article 13, 2. b) while maintaining their right to seek information (without being harmed) on the internet (Article 13 1.)

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<sup>5</sup> Unicef, One in Three 2016



## Article 18

2. For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.

Specific to Cluster 4. Article 18, Section 4.0 p. 19 of *The Porn Harms Kids Report*, illustrates *eChildhood's* argument that while parents and carers are indeed, a diverse group, and have the potential to be one of many protective initiators in their child's life, reaching all parents to provide the knowledge, skills and technical 'know how' to protect and equip their children, is a long term social change strategy. In the current environment even if a carer is diligent with home filters, device apps and safeguard controls, there are no guarantee that their peers have the same restrictions, which in turn, places them at risk. Furthermore, insisting families across Australia individually arrange for their own protection to content that most don't want their children to see, does not adequately comply with the laws and the needs of society for protection.

*eChildhood* recommends digital solutions that would help support parents in protecting their children, even if the child is being cared for outside of the family home. For further details, refer to pp. 46-47 of *The Porn Harms Kids Report*.

FIGURE 3.



## Cluster 5. Violence against children

### **Abuse and neglect, including physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration**

#### ***Article 19***

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.
2. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.

#### ***Article 39***

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.

### **Sexual exploitation and sexual abuse**

#### ***Article 34***

States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. For these purposes, States Parties shall in particular take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent:

- (a) The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity;
- (b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices;
- (c) The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

It is clear that children viewing online pornography is a form of mental violence that can lead to physical violence, injury, and exploitation, including sexual abuse. This exposure can happen well beyond the home - in schools, day care centres, after school care, community centres and other environments where children congregate and are cared for.

Relying on international definition, exposure to harmful content refers to children accessing or being exposed to, intentionally or incidentally, age-inappropriate sexual or violent content, or content otherwise considered harmful to their development. Exposure of children to harmful content that is “pornographic” in nature is sometimes referred to as the “corruption” or “pornification” of children. This can be the case, for



instance, if an adult deliberately shows (harmful content or) pornography to a child, or watches pornography in the presence of a child. The first example could be a form of non-contact sexual abuse, and harmful and/or sexual content is often used in the process of grooming children. Exposure to harmful content can normalise harmful sexual behaviour for children as individuals or within their peer groups<sup>6</sup>.

Specific to Cluster 5. Article 19, the ease of children's access to hardcore pornography requires urgent attention. *eChildhood* calls on *States Parties to take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence*.

Hardcore Pornography: Among the most travelled sites are Porn Hub, Red Tube and You Porn. Within these sites and others, the most readily available porn, is hardcore pornography. A new definition<sup>7</sup> that was developed from observing the free online mainstream, hardcore sites that are major forms of distribution today: Illegal, unclassified, "gonzo" or hard-core XXX, "free online material that depicts individuals or groups engaging in sexual behaviours where inequity between the parties is clear, violence is observed or audible, where degradation, humiliation, punishment and extreme submission appear to be the general objective of the power dynamics or behaviour depicted.

Hardcore pornography is classified as RC, X18+, and R18+ material; which, according to Federal Legislation, is both prohibited and unsuitable for minors to access<sup>8</sup>. However, as outlined in Figure 1, page 10 of this submission, the current digital environment and failures of the regulatory measures means that prohibited content is accessible for everyone, including minors.

Sexual Violence: as defined by the Third Action Plan 2016-2019 of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022: sexual violence consists of actions that are without consent. This can include coercion, physical force, rape, sexual assault with implements, being forced to watch or engage in pornography, forced prostitution, or being made to have sex with other people.

As outlined on p. 7 of *The Porn Harms Kids Report*, a "gold star" of research is a meta-analysis study; in 2016<sup>9</sup>, it was found that "*the accumulated data leave little doubt that, on the average, individuals who consume pornography more frequently are more likely to hold attitudes conducive to sexual aggression and engage in actual acts of sexual aggression than individuals who do not consume pornography or who consume pornography less frequently.*" These types of behaviours, when non-consensual, are condemned by domestic violence workers around the globe.

A 2015 journal article<sup>10</sup> that explored peer-to-peer grooming and sexual offending amongst young people concludes that:

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<sup>6</sup> Terminology Guidelines 2016

<sup>7</sup> Etheredge, L. (2015)

<sup>8</sup> National Classification Code as amended (May 2005)

<sup>9</sup> Wright et. al. (2016)

<sup>10</sup> Young people, peer-to-peer grooming and sexual offending (2015)

*There is ample evidence that young people are using social media in grooming and bullying to abuse and exploit others sexually with enough frequency to make those behaviours important concerns for both society and care providers.*

It goes on to state that:

*Access to and use of pornographic materials has increased over the past few decades, as sexting has become almost a way of life among young people using smartphones and social media applications. These social media applications appear now to be the method-of-choice for grooming and sexual engagement.*

Combined with ease of access to pornography, young people are using social media to groom and exploit other children and young people. Children cannot 'consent' to watching pornography - it is both prohibited and unsuitable for minors to access. Research confirms that hardcore pornography is readily available, many children do not wish to see this content, and it is used both directly and indirectly to 'groom' children, thereby normalising harmful sexual behaviours. It is the view of *eChildhood* that reducing access to pornography will prevent children who do not wish to see pornography from being exposed, and send a clear societal message to all viewers of pornography that content is harmful to children. Specific to [Cluster 5, Article 34](#), *eChildhood* calls on States Parties to undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

For expansion on the areas of defining pornography, child sexual abuse, sexual violence, grooming, child sexual exploitation and exposure to harmful content, refer to further definitions and framing within *The Porn Harms Kids Report* Defining Terms pp. 7-9.

From *eChildhood* conversations with a large number of health professionals, child advocacy organisations and child protection services, and attempts to further investigate the current policies and procedures in place to support Australian children, there is little evidence to suggest that current professional services, law enforcement and child protection services incorporate policies and procedures which identify when pornography has been involved in the harming or negative behaviours, or grooming of a child. Identifying when pornography has been involved would aid in the establishment of social programs, along with laws and policies to ensure effective process and protective measures are followed, and for readily accessible therapeutic support for the child once harm is caused.

Specific to Cluster 5., *eChildhood* describes our 'Statement of Harms' in section 2.3 of *The Porn Harms Kids Report*. Included as Appendix B (below), our Statement of Harms highlights studies which evidence the role of pornography in relation to violence and abuse. In that regard, Sections 3.0 - 5.0 of *The Porn Harms Kids Report* critically analyse existing initiatives undertaken by the Australian government and offer recommended actions for further progress in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## Cluster 7. Disability, basic health and welfare

### **Health and health services, in particular primary health care**

#### **Article 24**

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.
2. States Parties shall pursue full implementation of this right and, in particular, shall take appropriate measures:
  - (f) To develop preventive health care, guidance for parents and family planning education and services.

Specific to Cluster 7. Article 24, *The Porn Harms Kids Report* Section 6.3 pp. 48-49 argues that currently the harms of pornography are incorrectly presumed to be addressed under an online safety lens. Through this lens alone, pornography harms are not encompassed within the context of child development, more specially relating to a child's healthy social, sexual, emotional, physical and relational development. Creating a robust education requires pairing the harms of exposure to pornography with a mandatory holistic sex education curriculum.

Also, indicated education efforts are required which focus on identified groups already significantly harmed from exposure to pornography. In addition to the peer-to-peer grooming and sexual offending amongst young people outlined above, The Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse produced findings that seem to indicate that children who are harmed by violent pornography, are then expressing tendencies to perpetuate those harms upon others. This results in the need for inclusion of sexual health policies for groups of children and young people vulnerable to becoming sexually abusive; psychology and counselling services to support those harmed directly or indirectly from resulting abuse or exploitation factors; and the development of service delivery that supports restorative justice responses<sup>11,12</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> *This view of the negative effect of pornography on children's sexual behaviours is consistent with evidence Australian treatment providers and academics have submitted to the Royal Commission and other government inquiries. One practitioner who treats children with harmful sexual behaviours told us at a private roundtable, 'I can't think of anything that is going to impact us or what is actually happening for our young kids as much as the easy access of quite hardcore pornography.'*

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<sup>11</sup> Tokaji, A. (2016).

<sup>12</sup> McKibbin, G., Humphreys, C., Hamilton, B. (2017)

<sup>13</sup> Royal Commission, Final Report: Volume 10 (2017)

Further to education, policies and restorative justice responses for professionals, *eChildhood* has identified that there is a shortfall in resources, specialists and services to support families who are faced with managing mental health and disease related impacts of pornography. Based on the harms from pornography that children are subjected to, we know that families need information specific to:

- Identifying warning signs of pornography's impact on children and teens
- Responding to children and young people hooked on pornography
- Implementing measures to promote mental health when pornography is in the home
- What to expect from professionals when requiring support

The *Porn Harms Kids Report* details educational strategies from a health perspective and calls on the government to provide funding and guidance to health professionals on how to support parents with children affected by the harms of pornography, and ensure information and resources are readily available.

## Cluster 8. Education, leisure and cultural activities

### **Aims of education with reference also to quality of education**

#### ***Article 29***

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

- (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
- (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
- (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;

Hardcore Pornography (as previously defined) depicts inequality between the parties. "...Free online material that depicts individuals or groups engaging in sexual behaviours where inequity between the parties is clear, violence is observed or audible, where degradation, humiliation, punishment and extreme submission appear to be the general objective of the power dynamics or behaviour depicted<sup>14</sup> Also, Scholars Sun, Bridges and Johnason and Ezzell have stated:

*Through high rates of exposure, the pornographic script may inform colleges men's expectations about their own sexual performance as well as what they want and expect from a sexual partner. It is associated with increased sexual concerns, particularly among the youngest men in our study, and they come to rely on it and prefer it to intimate sexual relations with a partner. Current sex education models - in the schools and in the home do not seem well-equipped to assist boys in navigating or critically engaging the messages of pornography<sup>15</sup>.*

Specific to Cluster 8. Article 29 (d)., *eChildhood* argues there is room for further progress in terms of implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child. With hardcore porn depicting inequality between parties and considering scholarly evidence that pornographic scripts may inform sexual expectations, the Australian Governments current education solutions fall short of protecting children from the harms of pornography.

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<sup>14</sup> National Classification Code as amended(May 2005)

<sup>15</sup> Sun C., Bridges, A. Johnason, J., Ezzell, M., (2014).

*eChildhood* also recognises five areas within their education solutions that are best positioned to support families, children and young people (pp. 48-49 of *The Porn Harms Kids Report*) and calls for review of five areas:

- mental health, health and allied health professions
- family, child and youth services
- whole-school (p-12) and universities
- parents, carers, children and young people
- and sporting and community groups

FIGURE 4.



In summary, *The Porn Harms Kids Report* sections 3, 4, 5 provides an analysis of the government's Current Legislative, Digital and Educational approaches in disseminating information relating to this public health issue. In conjunction with this submission, *eChildhood* strongly encourages the reader to consider *The Porn Harms Kids Report* in its entirety, and promote the adoption of key recommendations to the Australian Government in order to progress Australia's implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. *All adults should do what is best for children* 4.

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## Appendix A – Key Recommendations

### **Related to Government**

In Section 3.2, on page 21, of *The Porn Harms Kids Report* related to government:

- a. Federal MPs to be informed and provided with a deeper understanding of the harms that access to pornography is having on children and young people, and to move to support active steps that address these harms, including but not limited to the calls for action presented by Porn Harms Kids throughout this report.
- b. The Australian Government to uphold the Convention on the Rights of the Child and protect their right to not be harmed psychologically, emotionally and physically through access to, or harms resulting from, online pornography.
- c. The Australian Government to protect children from all forms of (actual or online) violence, injury or abuse, including sexual abuse, through robust and informed preventative measures.
- d. The Australian Government to uphold its commitment to exercise due diligence responsibility to protect children from non-State actors perpetrating such harm against them. [As recommended by Tokaji, 2016<sup>32</sup>]
- e. The Australian Government to protect its citizens from harm, and to ensure any foreseeable harms are prevented. Emphasised in international case law, legal recourse has shown that a state can be found complicit in human rights abuses perpetrated by non-State actors. Legal precedents are outlined in the legal journal article: *Due Diligence Obligation of a State to Children Harmed by Porn: A Critical Appraisal*.<sup>32</sup>

### **Related to the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children**

In Section 3.2, on page 22, related to the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children:

- a. The National Plan to reframe the current discourse to move beyond discussion about the ways in which people engage in pornography, towards a public health and social based issue. See Framing a Public Health SECTION 6.1.
- b. The National Plan to ensure that this public health issue receives adequate attention for the prevention of sexual harms now; as well as prevent second generation costs arising from non-rehabilitated victims who perpetuate sexual harms.
- c. The National Plan to facilitate a national media campaign highlighting how pornography is linked to an increase in violence against women, who are the primary caregivers of children; as well as educating on other mental health and wellbeing risks.

### **Related to the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children**

In Section 3.2, on Pp. 23, related to the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children:

- a. Prioritising the protection of children from pornography harms through its inclusion as a researched harm within the National Framework, particularly related to prevention of sexual harms including exploitation, grooming and mental health vulnerabilities.
- b. The National Framework to support the implementation of strong laws relating to online access of pornography, with the intention to protect children.



c. The National Framework to place emphasis on the need to respond to the shortfall in resources, specialists and services to support families who are faced with managing mental health and disease related impacts of pornography.

d. The National Framework to facilitate a social marketing campaign targeting mothers to strengthen their knowledge about harmful sexual behaviour by children and young people (particularly related to pornography) so that they can have informed conversations with their children. [As recommended by McKibbin et al., 201744]

### **Related to managing prohibited content hosted overseas in the same manner it is managed domestically**

In Section 3.3, on Pp. 25, related to managing prohibited content hosted overseas in the same manner it is managed domestically:

a. Warnings to appear on the prohibited content websites to inform the viewer of the potential of addiction and the risk of an increase in their attitudes of aggression towards women.

b. Overseas content to be legislated in the manner as domestic content, by being either age-verified or blocked. At minimum, those sites which seek to display X and R rated content must have age verification gateways, regularly monitored by an appropriately resourced body. The UK have already established legislation setting a requirement of age-verification for sexual film websites.

c. Legislation specifying that 'sexual film' websites have a period in which to seek compliance approval from a suitably experienced and resourced safety Board certifying that they comply with the standards set out in the relevant Acts and the schedules to those Acts.

### **Related to the eSafety Office**

In Section 3.3 on Pp. 25, related to the eSafety Office:

d. The eSafety Office to recommend the establishment of a reporting and measuring mechanism to be used within health precincts and hospitals; to collate data on the number of children and young people presenting with (internal) injuries, sexual and other physical harms, and mental health harms, suspected as being attributed to pornography's influence.

e. The implementation of a complaints process for community members who want more robust legislation to deal with pornography, as opposed to relying on optional end user (PC-based) Family Friendly Filters.

f. Support the government in implementing mandatory nationwide holistic sex education, utilising a public health response, particularly relating to prevention of sexual harms including exploitation, grooming, addiction and mental health vulnerabilities.

g. For the eSafety Office to continue to regulate online content by managing the "Prohibited URL List", and provide simplified processes to manage whitelisted sites where organisations can register their URL to avoid being blocked. This initiative should be implemented prior to the enactment of any URL default blocking to allow sufficient time for legitimate organisations to register, with care being taken to not block legitimate sites that provide education and support.

In Section 3.3, on Pp. 25, regarding the classification scheme, Porn Harms Kids observes seven opportunities to strengthen the scheme:

1. Acknowledge the violent nature of pornography and its contribution to an increase in sexual assault against women and children, and remedy the legislation accordingly.

2. Stop distinguishing the government response based on whether the content is hosted/located domestically or overseas.

3. Make the blocking system default, by direct provision of the prohibited URL list identified by the eSafety Office, for all Internet Service Providers to enforce, with provision for opt-out.
4. Stop relying on a non-compulsory product that requires payment by a parent or business supplying internet access to the child.
5. Stop putting the burden of uncovering prohibited content on Australians.
6. Prevent as opposed to respond and make it incumbent on the overseas profit makers to prove to the Government regulator that they comply with the Online Content Scheme.
7. Assess state law penalties relating to non-compliance to the classifications code against Federal laws, and provide consistencies that adequately comply with the laws and needs of society for protection.

These measures create a safer online environment for children, as well as equity and fairness for content providers and recipients of that content.

#### **Related to social and economic costs**

In Section 3.6, on Page 28, related to social and economic costs:

- a. Respond to the needs to put the rights of our children to be protected, in front of the rights of adults who want to watch online pornography.
- b. A nationwide survey to be conducted to determine the extent to which Australian children have been impacted by online pornography. [As recommended by Safe4Kids]
- c. An inquiry into the economic costs incurred because of children and young people accessing online pornography. A detailed report should include (but not be limited to) the costs<sup>44</sup> relating to:
  - Loss of quality of life
  - Health costs such as expenses related to delivery of health services to victims of pornography harms, pornography related violence, and pornography related child-on-child sexual abuse. This includes the costs associated with the extended health effects of pornography / abuse impacts and not just the treatment of the initial medical injury or trauma; for example, the costs associated with the treatment of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.
  - Lost productivity for teachers and support staff navigating the complexities of supporting children harmed by pornography within school settings.
  - Lost productivity for children and young people, linked to mental health issues and reduced learning capacity arising from pornography access and ongoing use.
  - Costs related to related to enactment of sexual harms resulting from pornography access, including exploitation, grooming, addiction and mental health vulnerabilities.
  - The lost economies of scale that victims of pornography impacts would experience due to being in a relationship with a partner perpetuating pornographies violent norms; including potential for less likelihood to be in relationships in the future.
  - Second generation costs arising from non-rehabilitated victims who perpetuate harms.
  - Criminal justice and administrative costs.

d. Funding to be allocated to research that explores best practice support for children and young people who are physically, psychologically and emotionally harmed by access to, and use of, online pornography.

e. Tools to be developed that assist counsellors, psychologists, social workers and other child/youth mental health professionals to respond to children harmed by pornography.

#### **Related to additional policies and other governing areas that require action**

In Section 3.6, on Pp. 28, related to additional policies and other governing areas that require action:

f. Formulate sexual health policies for groups of children and young people vulnerable to becoming sexually abusive. [As recommended by McKibbin et al., 201744]

g. Restorative justice responses to be set up for the victim and perpetrator children who have engaged in, or experienced harmful, abusive, sexual abuse or misconduct by other children [As recommended by McKibbin et al., 201744], followed up by a thorough education program around healthy sexuality, healthy relationships and the harms of abusive behaviour. [As recommended by Tokaji, 201632]

h. Safe houses for Women and Children to be established, towards eradicating any feelings of helplessness or hopelessness. [As recommended by Minnie Mace, Indigenous Koa Elder]

i. Bodies representing mental health and allied health professions such as the Australian Psychological Society, Australian Medical Association and similar; as well as family, child and youth services; and sporting and community groups; to develop position statements and policies on pornography harms informed by research, a public health approach, and guided by a best practice industry response.

#### **Communications Alliance to support calls for legislation and a binding code of conduct that governs ISPs**

In Section 4.3, on Page 31, Porn Harms Kids calls for the Communications Alliance to support calls for legislation and a binding code of conduct that governs ISPs and ensures:

(i) Mandatory provision of ISP blocking tools to reduce access to prohibited content.

(ii) Cooperation with calls to implement age-verification measures to manage prohibited content

(iii) Monitoring adherence of ISPs to an accreditation process that measures effectiveness of blocking tools that restrict access to prohibited content.

(iv) Restriction of prohibited content on all digital devices that connect to Broadband/NBN, WiFi, Public WiFi, Mobile Data.

(v) Provision of a process for all ISPs to be connected through membership to the Comms Alliance, to position them to adhere to the proposed updated legislation and binding codes of conduct.

#### **Related to Internet Service Providers**

In Section 4.3, on Pp. 34, related to Internet Service Providers:

a. ISPs to cooperate with calls for legislation that would enact age-verification processes and blocking to prevent access to prohibited content.

b. All ISPs to be connected through membership to the Communications Alliance and adhere to the proposed updated legislation and binding codes of conduct.

- c. ISPs to make cyber safety a proactive part of their business model.
- d. ISPs to follow Telstra's example by updating or creating filtering products and services that provide practical and comprehensive blocking options to control harmful content.
- e. ISPs to place child protection over profits.
- f. ISPs to support government and community through initiatives that fund education to directly deal with the harms of pornography as a public health crisis.
- g. ISPs to uphold an ethical responsibility to exercise due diligence to protect children from online harms.

### **Related to Mobile Phone Service Providers**

In Section 4.3, on Pp. 35 related to Mobile Phone Service Providers:

- h. Mobile device restrictions through use of SIM cards that restrict access to adult content unless and until the account holder completes an age-verification procedure.

### **Related to additional digital areas that require action**

In Section 4.4, on Pp. 35, related to additional digital areas that require action:

- i. The eSafety Office to facilitate oversight of ISP membership to the Communications Alliance and compliance by all providers of internet services to the proposed updated legislation and binding codes of conduct; and issue penalties for non-compliance.
- j. The eSafety Office to facilitate the establishment of an accreditation body that facilitates compliance by all providers of Public WiFi, to ensure Prohibited content is blocked in public spaces. Explanation of this Digital Child Protection Buffer is outlined in SECTION 6.3.
- k. The eSafety Office to establish a phone hotline for parents, to assist in providing technical advice to implement and monitor home filters and device apps.
- l. The eSafety Office to explore initiatives that place pressure on social media companies to implement age-ratings consistent with those for films set by the Australian Classification Board [As recommended by the NSPCC]. These initiatives include (but are not limited to)
  - Safe accounts automatically offered to under 18's – with default privacy settings, proactive blocking of harmful content and mechanisms to guard against grooming [As recommended by the NSPCC]
  - Penalties for non-compliance for social media companies who fail to protect children. [As recommended by the NSPCC]

### **Related to ThinkUKnow and Student Wellbeing Hub websites**

In Section 5.1, Pp. 37, related to ThinkUKnow and Student Wellbeing Hub websites:

- a. Provision of a dedicated space to provide resources relating to pornography harms prevention, tailored for each target group. In alignment with other materials already provided, this could include:

EDUCATORS: Key information and classroom resources

PARENTS: Information and advice

STUDENTS: Information and activities

- b. Provision of policy guidelines to support schools to address pornography.
- c. Targeted preventive measures that specifically mention online pornography and not just inappropriate content.
- d. Provision of information about the harms of pornography to mental health and addiction related issues.
- e. Further explanation and strategies related to the potential for pornography to be used as a grooming tool (either directly or indirectly) for sexual exploitation.
- f. Explanation and strategies to address the potential for pornography to trigger problem sexual behaviours and sexually abusive behaviours towards other children.
- g. Explanation and strategies to address the potential for pornography to normalize online and offline exploitation (including sexting).
- h. Explanation and strategies to address the potential for pornography to shape sexual tastes and desires.
- i. Provision of curriculum links to address pornography.
- j. Inclusion of pornography as a risk factor within the school audit survey tool; guidance for schools to address pornography; and information to prevent all forms of sexual harms related to pornography.

### **Related to the eSafety iParent website Online Pornography section**

Section 5.1, Pp. 38, related to the eSafety iParent website Online Pornography section:

- a. Provision of a resource list of children's books for parents to use with young children to help them with conversations regarding the harms of pornography.
- b. Provision of links to reputable, factual, holistic sex education websites for parents to refer their young people to, and that these sites adequately acknowledge and explain the harms of pornography.
- c. Clearly explain that unless a parent uses a filtering service or app, their child has access to pornography whenever they have access to the internet at home, personal devices or elsewhere. Due to unfettered access to prohibited content, their child is not guaranteed from avoiding pornography in other homes, peers' devices or public spaces.
- d. Provision of a link back to The action we take eSafety webpage, along with a link to the recommended implementation of a complaints process as outlined in SECTION 3.3.
- e. Reframing the conversation around arousal as mentioned in the Porn Harms Kids review, so that parents have necessary information to explain this fact to children and young people correctly.
- f. Comprehensive explanation of what pornography is using the critical porn analysis educational response, making clear how the porn industry sets out to normalise consumption of its product; and how serious the risks of potential harms are to children, particularly relating to sexual harms including exploitation, grooming, addiction and mental health vulnerabilities.

g. Provision of more detailed information for parents to effectively understand the potential harms of pornography on a young person's attitudes, behaviours, identity, relationships and overall wellbeing - emotional, mental and physical.

h. Full explanation of how pornography can shape sexual tastes and desires of its viewers and the impacts this can have on a developing child's sexuality and future relationships, including potential to increase violence against women.

i. Culturally appropriate information for parents and carers on how to teach their children about the potential harms of pornography, and where to seek help if their child is displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviours. [As recommended by Safe4Kids]

### **Related to The Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum**

In Section 5.2, Pp. 40, related to The Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum

a. Implementation of updated curriculum guidelines to address pornography harms within both High School and Primary Schools, underpinned with a public health approach.

b. Updated curriculum guidelines to address the impact of pornography on mental, physical, relational and emotional health; and the influences upon attitudes and behaviours.

c. Updated curriculum to address key areas, such as prevention of sexual harms linked to pornography (including through technology use).

d. Introduction of school protocols for implementing policies that prevent sexual harms.

e. Implementation of an updated curriculum response that utilises Critical Porn Analysis: an educational response to the researched harms of pornography as a public health crisis. Outlined in SECTION 6.2: Framing an Educational Response to pornography.

### **Related to student laptops and hand-held devices**

In Section 5.2, Pp. 40, related to student laptops and hand-held devices:

f. An independent audit of school issued and BYOD devices required for schooling education to ascertain if these contain content found on the Prohibited URL list.

i. Through the auditing process, weigh findings against the school policy and measures taken to prevent access to content found on the Prohibited URL list.

ii. Identify where schools could improve in following existing policies.

iii. Identify how policy could improve reporting, digital management, child protection, and responses to sexual harms.

g. Consultative focus groups within school communities and parents to identify improved processes for managing students' personal mobile devices within schools.

### **Related to additional educational areas that require action**

In Section 5.3, Pp. 40, related to additional educational areas that require action:

### **Whole School p-12 education**

h. For the eSafety Office to work with Departments of Education (State and Independent sectors) to update policies to include preventative measures for the harms of pornography, particularly related to prevention of sexual harms including exploitation, grooming and mental health vulnerabilities.

i. Early intervention, and incorporating attention to education for young people and families, social determinants, and health promotion.

j. More proactive child-protection measures that include age appropriate education about the harms of pornography within primary schools.

k. Early intervention in Indigenous communities to begin with educating Children that they are sacred and in control of their body's and actions. [As recommended by Minnie Mace, Indigenous Koa Elder]

l. Mandatory relationships and sexuality programs to include information on healthy relationships, the prevention of sexual harms, and the importance of consent in a sexual relationship. The negative impacts of pornography are included in both sexuality education programs and respectful relationship programs. [As recommended by Safe4Kids5]

m. Departments of education to introduce a of whole-school scoping document to ascertain where in curriculum pornography is addressed as a harm, particularly related to prevention of sexual harms including exploitation, grooming and mental health vulnerabilities.

n. Schools to fully disclose what cyber safety education does and does not cover in relation to prevention of sexual harms through pornography education.

#### **Problem sexual behaviours education and support**

o. Adjust sexually abusive behaviour treatment models to take pornography into account. [As recommended by McKibbin et al., 201744]

p. A comprehensive education and health care approach so that health care professionals are provided with the relevant information to assess and treat harms resulting from pornography.

#### **Professional and community training**

q. For the eSafety Office and government to implement a comprehensive nationally mandated framework underpinned by preventative policies, education and restorative policies. This broadens the scope to sectors which include (but are not limited to) family, child and youth services; mental health and allied health professionals; universities and sporting and community groups.

r. Provision of training for teachers and educators on how to recognise a child who is displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviours and what actions they need to take from a mandatory reporting perspective; and how to discuss this with parents and carers. [As recommended by Safe4Kids]

s. Training and education for the whole children's workforce in their role and responsibilities for preventative measures for the harms of pornography, particularly related to prevention of sexual harms including exploitation, grooming and mental health vulnerabilities.

t. A whole-of-community education program including a national advertising campaign to raise the awareness of the negative impact pornography can have on children. [As recommended by Safe4Kids] Such a campaign could be led by Our Watch.

## Appendix B – Statement of Research

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### STATEMENT OF RESEARCH RELATING TO PORNOGRAPHY HARMS TO CHILDREN

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The harms of pornography to children and young people are becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. Messages that children and young people learn from pornography, shape themselves and the culture we live in. [Worldwide](#), pornography is now being framed as a [Public Health Crisis](#) by many governments, health, violence prevention and advocacy organisations. Given there is significant evidence indicating that pornography is linked to negative mental health outcomes for young people, sexist attitudes, sexual aggression and violence, child-on-child sexual abuse, and high risk sexual behaviours, this issue has not received adequate public attention.

This statement of research is endorsed by child youth advocates, anti-violence workers and key academics, including Dr Gail Dines, Founder of [Culture Reframed](#), Dr Michael Flood, Dr Caroline Norma, Dr Heather Brunskell-Evans, Dr Meagan Tyler and others.

Areas of pornography's impact on children and young people include:

- Poor mental health
- Sexism and objectification
- Sexual aggression and violence
- Child-on-child sexual abuse
- Shaping sexual behaviours

#### **Rates of exposure**

Trends in children and young people accessing online pornography show an increase.

- In 2011, it was reported that over two in five (44%) Australian 9-16 year olds had seen sexual images in the past 12 months. This is much greater than the 25-country average of 23%. ([Green et al. 2011](#))
- Between 2008 and 2011, exposure to porn among boys under the age of 13 jumped from 14% to 49%. Boys' daily use more than doubled. ([Sun et al. 2016](#))
- In 2016, a study of 1565 18-19-year-old Italian students ([Pizzol et al. 2015](#)), 4 out of 5 stated they consumed pornography. Almost 22 per cent (21.9%) reported that it became habitual, 10% stated that it reduced their sexual interest towards potential real-life partners, and 9.1% reported a kind of addiction.
- In 2017, a Swedish study reported that nearly all respondents (98%) had watched pornography, although to different extents. Eleven per cent were found to be frequent users (watched pornography one or more times per day), 69 per cent average users (at least once a month up to several times a week, but less than once per day), and 20 per cent infrequent users (less than once a month). ([Donevan and Mattebo 2017](#))
- In 2006, 35 per cent of Dutch children aged 8 to 12 had had a negative Internet experience in the home, involving an encounter with pornography. ([Soeters and van Schaik 2006](#))
- Well over two-thirds of 15-17-year-old adolescents have seen porn websites when they did not intend to access them, with 45% being 'very' or 'somewhat' upset by it. ([Kaiser Family Foundation 2001](#))

For the purposes of the following research, adolescents are defined as primarily between the ages of 13-18. The rise in rates of child-on-child sexual abuse indicates younger children are inadvertently exposed to pornography.



## **Poor mental health**

In a research review by [Owens et al. \(2012\)](#), the authors stated that:

The structural deficits in brain maturation of adolescents, and theories such as the picture-superiority effect, offer insights into the ways adolescents may be disproportionately vulnerable to negative consequences when exposed to sexually explicit material.

Whilst the literature varies in its ability to show if pornography directly causes mental health issues or instead, conditions are correlational (existed prior to viewing), or a combination of both, studies indicate that porn users experience:

- higher incidence of depressive symptoms
- lower degrees of social integration
- decreased emotional bonding with caregivers
- increases in conduct problems
- higher levels of delinquent behaviour

Research suggests links between mental health issues and problematic porn use, such as low self-esteem and depressive traits ([Doornwaard et al. 2016](#)), and impacts to academic performance ([Beyens et al. 2014](#)). Almost 22 per cent (21.9%) of young people report habitual use ([Pizzol et al. 2015](#)), 9 – 11% report frequent use or a kind of addiction, and a further 10% indicate that pornography reduces sexual interest towards potential real-life partners ([Donevan and Mattebo 2017](#)). The Swedish authors stated, it is striking that one-third of frequent users admitted they watch pornography more than they want to. Since adolescents' brains are still in their development phase, young people may be especially vulnerable to problematic pornography use. The adolescent brain is highly impressionable and vulnerable to forming addictions ([Chein et al. 2011](#); [Crews et al. 2007](#)).

Studies also indicate that pornography impacts self-image; for girls, this relates to feelings of physical inferiority, and for boys, fear of not measuring up, with both virility and performance. ([Owens et al. 2012](#), [Sun et al. 2016](#)).

In addition, adult cohort studies have identified that pornography use and associated sexual arousal patterns have been found to interfere with decision making ([Laier et al. 2014](#)); is linked to diminishing working-memory ([Laier et al. 2013](#)); and decreased ability to delay gratification ([Negash et al. 2016](#)). Adult users of pornographic material also report greater depressive symptoms, poorer quality of life, more mental- and physical-health diminished days, and lower health status than compared to nonusers. ([Weaver et al. 2011](#))

## **Sexism and objectification**

The relationship between pornography, sexual coercion, abuse and sexting was explored in a large European survey of 4,564 young people aged 14-17 ([Stanley et al. 2016](#)). The authors of this study argued that pornography is both underpinned by and perpetuates gender inequality, and that boys who regularly watched online pornography were significantly more likely to hold negative gender attitudes.

Other studies show that sexual arousal to online pornography by adolescents leads to sexist attitudes and notions that women are sex objects ([Peter and Valkenburg 2007](#), [Hald et al. 2013](#)) These findings are consistent with a review of 20 years of research that found pornography use was associated with more permissive sexual attitudes and tended to be linked with stronger gender-stereotypical sexual beliefs. ([Peter and Valkenburg, 2016](#))

## **Sexual aggression and violence**

Consistently, findings link the viewing of violent pornography to increased tendencies for sexually aggressive behaviour ([Owens et al. 2012](#), [Sun et al. 2016](#)).

- there is a clear association between regular viewing of online pornography and perpetration of sexual coercion and abuse by boys. ([Stanley et al. 2016](#))
- both regularly watching pornography and sending or receiving sexual images or messages were associated with increased probability of being a perpetrator of sexual coercion. ([Stanley et al. 2016](#))

In a 2017 mixed-gender Swedish study of 946 students ([Donevan and Mattebo 2017](#)), frequent users watched hard core and violent pornography to a higher extent, were more likely to have engaged in a wider range of sexual activities, fantasised about trying sexual activities seen in hard core pornography, and showed signs of sexual preoccupation and problematic pornography use.

Rather than relying on a single research paper to draw conclusions, a meta-analysis synthesises data from a range of studies and looks for common and consistent findings. A meta-analysis is the “gold star” of research papers. [Wright et al. \(2016\)](#), carried out a Meta-Analysis of Pornography Consumption and Actual Acts of Sexual Aggression in General Population Studies. Their findings stated that:

“the accumulated data leave little doubt that, on the average, individuals who consume pornography more frequently are more likely to hold attitudes conducive to sexual aggression and engage in actual acts of sexual aggression than individuals who do not consume pornography or who consume pornography less frequently.”

### **Child-on-child sexual abuse**

Freely available online pornography is shaping the sexual conditioning of increasing numbers of young people. Australian research findings ([Etheredge, 2015, citing Lemon, 2014](#)), highlight that 75% of 7-11-year-old boys and 67% of 7-11-year-old girls in treatment for Problem Sexualised Behaviours (PSBs) reported early sexualisation through online pornography.

Between 2013 and 2016, police figures in the UK show a rise of child-on-child sexual offences by almost 80% ([Barnado's, 2016](#)). Australian practitioner, [Russell Pratt](#) says:

One thing seems clear: pornography provides a “how to” manual, showing every possible angle of what goes where and who can do what to whom, as well as providing sexual stimulation and shaping patterns of sexual arousal. When coupled with other risk factors present in the young person’s life, pairing the “how to” with the sexual stimulation provided by pornography both equips and primes youth to undertake more advanced sexual practices earlier than they otherwise might or earlier than those who have not accessed pornography, simply because they have just that – a template for what to do, based on the graphic nature of pornography.

### **Shaping sexual behaviours**

Exposure to sexually explicit Internet material directly predicts adolescents’ willingness to engage in casual sex ([van Oosten et al. 2016](#)). A review of the research also identified that it is connected to higher levels of permissive sexual attitudes, sexual preoccupation and earlier sexual experimentation ([Owens et al. 2012](#)), including younger ages for first oral sex and sexual intercourse ([Kraus and Russell, 2008](#)).

The ways in which pornography is influencing young people’s sexual experiences is reflected in research by [Marston and Lewis \(2014\)](#). Their qualitative, longitudinal study of 130 men and women aged 16-18 from diverse social backgrounds in the UK, found a normalisation of painful, risky, coercive heterosexual anal sex. Interviewees frequently cited pornography as the explanation for anal sex, a practice they expected to be painful for young women but pleasurable for young men. Participants described an expectation that young men would persuade or coerce a reluctant female partner.

Amongst college students, research has also demonstrated that higher frequency porn viewing correlates with an increased number of sexual partners and higher incidence of hooking up ([Braithwaite et al. 2015](#)).

In addition to these studies, another meta-analysis asked the question: Is sexual content in new media linked to sexual risk behaviour in young people? ([Smith et al. 2016](#)). Exposure to sexually explicit websites was correlated with condomless sexual intercourse; and sexting was correlated with ever having had sexual intercourse, recent sexual activity, alcohol and other drug use before sexual intercourse, and multiple sexual partners. The authors stated:

“Cross-sectional studies show a strong association between self-reported exposure to sexual content in new media and sexual behaviours in young people.”

These studies identify significant areas that require action to prevent harms in children and young people’s health, mental-health, physical safety, and wellbeing, and as a part of broader societal effects to prevent violence against women.