

Findings & Recommendations

ONLINE SAFETY — PARLIAMENTARY WORKING GROUP



Recommendations drafted and initially presented over 1-2 July 2025

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Created by Jasper Rhodes and Te Ari Paranihi for the following departments of the Government of Aotearoa New Zealand:

- Classification Office | Te Mana Whakaatu
- Department of Internal Affairs | Te Tari Taiwhenua
- Ministry of Health | Manatū Hauora
- Ministry of Justice | Te Tāhū o te Ture
- Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet | Te Tari o te Pirimia me te Komiti Matua
- Ministry of Education | Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga

Should you seek further clarity on anything, please do not hesitate to get in touch. Additionally, (at the risk of getting ahead of ourselves) if you choose to implement our third recommendation, we are more than happy to help form said Youth Advisory Group.

Email:

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We refers to any co-chair, member, or Youth Press Gallery member of the Online Safety Parliamentary Working Group for Aotearoa New Zealand's Youth Parliament 2025.

I refers to Jasper Rhodes, the co-chair of this Parliamentary Working Group and author of this document.

The purpose of this document is to—

- (a) suggest recommendations to applicable Ministries of the Government of New Zealand, on how to improve the online safety of the nation's young population.
- (b) inform the applicable Ministries of our community engagement, and what influenced our recommendations



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Give us a voice, and we will speak.

Few issues affect our communities as profoundly or as consistently as the dangers of the online world. Year after year, the risks it poses increases—it's so much more than just screen time or stranger danger. With the introduction of technologies like artificial intelligence and deepfakes, and surge of misinformation and manipulation, it is vital to ensure that digital citizens are educated.

Rangatahi in Aotearoa are affected by policies and decisions on online safety more than any other age group. Yet they are too often overlooked in the decision-making process. Our Parliamentary Working Group challenges the convention that other people should make decisions for us, without our input.

This document will provide insight to government leaders on how to make our voices heard meaningfully, not tokenistically or superficially.

Rangatahi deserve a seat at the table.

So grab a chair. We'll see you there.

Community Engagement

What powered our recommendations were the voices, opinions and concerns of rangatahi from around the country. Each committee member ventured into their respective communities in the months prior to the event. We were aware that the more voices we hear, the more rangatahi are represented - it is *this* that drove our mahi. A key aspect of this process, as many members have outlined, was a survey. We ended up with three surveys, which all had similar questions, being distributed to schools and individuals nationwide.

Below are summaries of each member's community engagement, looking at how they connected with rangatahi, and what they found, plus the survey's results.

Aarhi Candadai & Lincoln Jones

Youth MP based in Wellington - Hon Nicola Willis

Youth MP based in Tauranga - Hon Willie Jackson

Aarhi and Lincoln worked together in their community engagement. They reported widespread exposure to online harm—ranging from hate speech and body shaming to grooming, harassment, and AI-generated abuse. Many felt unsupported, citing outdated laws (some older than the platforms themselves), slow response times from Netsafe and tech platforms, and a lack of cultural sensitivity in content moderation. There is currently no standardised or timely social media education in schools, leaving rangatahi unprepared. The proposed social media ban was seen as impractical; instead, youth strongly called for relevant, early, and engaging media literacy education, alongside an urgent update to online safety laws to provide clearer protections for their digital lives.

Ani Retemeyer

Youth MP based in Palmerston North - Hon Andrew Hoggard

Ani's community engagement was conducted across all year levels, revealing a broad range of youth perspectives. Older students expressed a clear lack of media literacy and a strong desire to learn how to stay safe online. Younger students were particularly concerned about how easily harmful content can be accessed. There was widespread critique of the proposed social media ban—not just in principle, but in how it would be implemented. Many questioned how it would affect those already struggling with mental health or using social media as a key form of connection and support. Overall, rangatahi want protection, not restriction—and support that's practical, not punitive.

Chelsea Brown

Youth MP for North Shore Electorate - Hon Simon Watts

Through surveys and conversations with youth council leaders, it became clear that while young people face challenges online, many are responsible users who value tools like private accounts to protect themselves. There is a noticeable lack of education and awareness, but rangatahi largely see social media as a tool, not just a threat. While some form of regulation is welcomed, most felt that an outright ban is not the right approach. Instead, they called for education and awareness programmes that equip users to navigate online spaces safely. Social media has also played a positive role in normalising mental health conversations and encouraging advocacy—highlighted through figures like Jazz Thornton—showing that with guidance, these platforms can empower rangatahi rather than harm them.

Gayle Bain

Youth MP based in Auckland - Hon Deborah Russell

Gayle shared around the survey. Its results, along with community conversations, revealed strong opposition to the social media ban. Rather than restricting access, respondents emphasised the need to educate both adults and students on how to use social media safely. There was clear support for media education as a more effective, empowering solution—one that promotes informed, responsible use rather than blanket bans.

Jasper Rhodes

Youth MP for New Plymouth Electorate - David MacLeod

Jasper's community engagement consisted of a two-pronged approach: Firstly, he created a survey to share with members of his community. Other committee members helped spread it further than the New Plymouth Electorate, and we received hundreds of results between that survey and several others like it. Almost every respondent was a teenager, which aligned with the key demographics of our research. Social media was harnessed in their distribution, and proved successful. Both qualitative and quantitative results were gained. Additionally, he sat down with many of his peers in the New Plymouth Electorate, to gain fewer, but more detailed, qualitative responses. Much of this engagement was centred around MP Catherine Wedd's *Social Media Age-Restricted Users Bill*. Curiously, there was some variation between what he heard through the survey versus talking to individuals face-to-face. The former were quick to dismiss this bill, but the more he talked to them in-person, the more they realised its merits. In spite of this, the overwhelming response was that we need education, not restriction.

Lucy Kilgour

Youth MP based in Auckland - Hon Paul Goldsmith

Lucy's community engagement involved speaking with the recently launched charity B416. The charity is campaigning for the government to raise the minimum age for social media use to 16 and for them to enforce this minimum age, in efforts to protect youth. Lucy learned that other countries, such as Australia, have more safeguards in place for youth on social media compared to New Zealand. Lucy also listened to other young people who had negative experiences on social media, involving cyberbullying, grooming and the promotion of unhealthy habits.

Lucy's community engagement highlighted the impact of social media on youth, and therefore the importance of listening to youth stories when developing corresponding legislation and policy. This correlates to forming a youth advisory group for the current member's bill and the separate select committee investigation.

Matthew Debreceeny

Youth MP based in Wellington - Benjamin Doyle

Matthew spoke with the student council of his old high school and got them to fill out a survey around online safety to learn what experiences rangatahi have online, what they understand about online safety and what they want to see changed. Matthew's key findings from his community engagement was that youth largely wanted education around online safety to empower them to make smarter decisions online and keep themselves and their friends and whanau safe. Matthew also learnt that youth wanted to be engaged when it came to decisions around online safety, as they are the ones who will be impacted the most.

Matthew found that many youth supported the proposed under-16 ban on social media, while many didn't. Matthew's findings express the importance of empowering youth and equipping them with the tools they need to be safe online. They also highlighted how crucial it is for youth with lived experiences to be involved in the decision making process.

Tautalaleleia Sa'u

Youth MP based in Wainuiomata - Hon Ginny Andersen

Tau spoke to rangatahi in Wainuiomata, including in local schools. Rangatahi highlighted a lack of access to online safety education for both themselves and their whānau. Many were unaware of available support services, and felt underprepared to navigate scams, harmful content, or inappropriate online behaviour. Parents often lacked the knowledge to guide their children, despite being expected to. The issues go far beyond rangatahi—older people of lower socio-economic backgrounds are often likely to fall for scams, which can rob them of their money and dignity. While excessive social media use can harm mental health, it's also a vital tool for connection, information, and even wellbeing—used daily by rangatahi and institutions like Youth Parliament. The proposed social media ban may hinder these positive aspects. With proper, early education, technology can be used safely and effectively.

Te Ari Paranihi

Youth MP based in Whanganui - Rt Hon Adrian Rurawhe

Te Ari returned to her old high school and spoke with Year 9–11 health classes to explore what rangatahi understood about online safety, especially around social media. She found that many had little to no awareness of basic online safety, which raised concerns about the need for better education in this space. To support this, she shared a survey created by the PWG, which received 141 responses through social media. One key insight was that 86.5% of rangatahi believed young people should be involved in shaping solutions. This supported our proposal to form a rangatahi-led advisory panel to help shape the bill on the proposed social media ban for under 16s. Although the bill might still go ahead, we heard strong opposition from the community. This idea doesn't mean getting rid of the bill, but it would make it more fair and relatable for young people, who are the ones most affected. It would also help them understand what the bill means and give them a proper voice in how it's put into action something that hasn't been explained well yet.

Tom Xu

Youth MP based in Wellington - Simon Court

Tom did a session with his school's student council, sent out a google form to his school and through social media accounts to reach a wider audience. The student council discussion mainly centered around concerns young people face online and potential solutions while the survey focused on a wider range of questions which were almost exact copies of the original survey posted on the chatgroup and obtained very similar data. [Tom's Report](#)

The Survey

Figure 1: Age of survey respondents

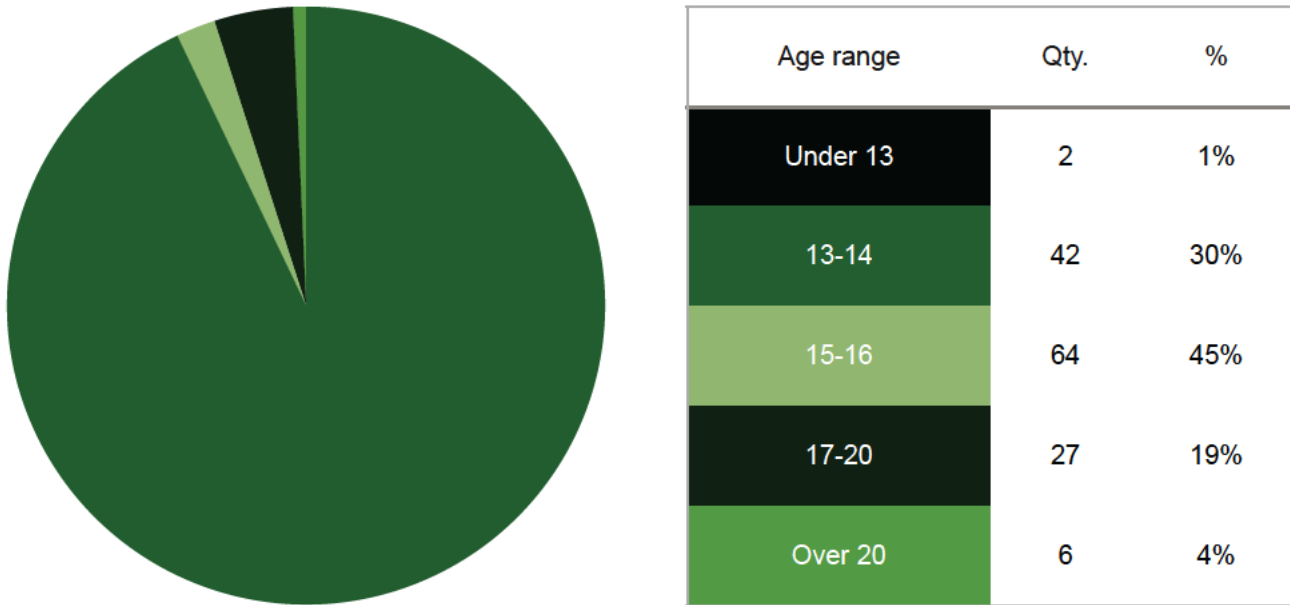


Figure 2: Educational status of survey respondents

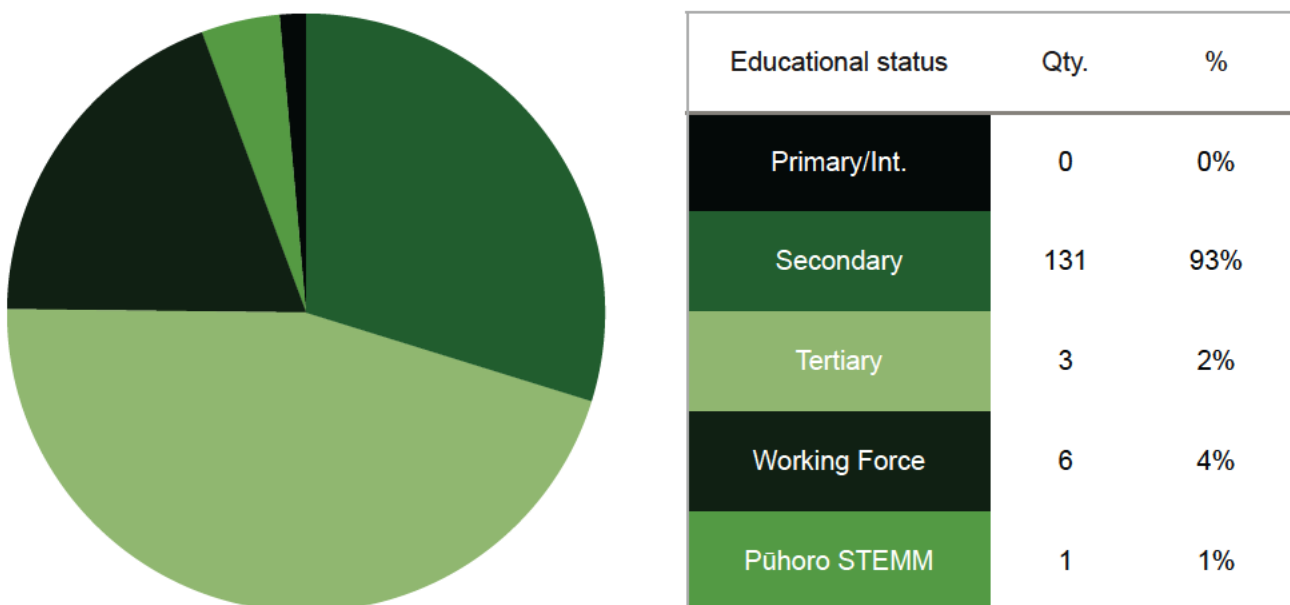
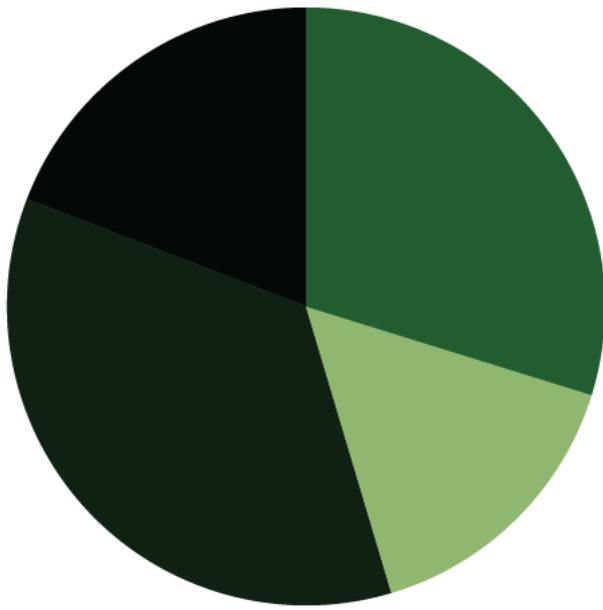
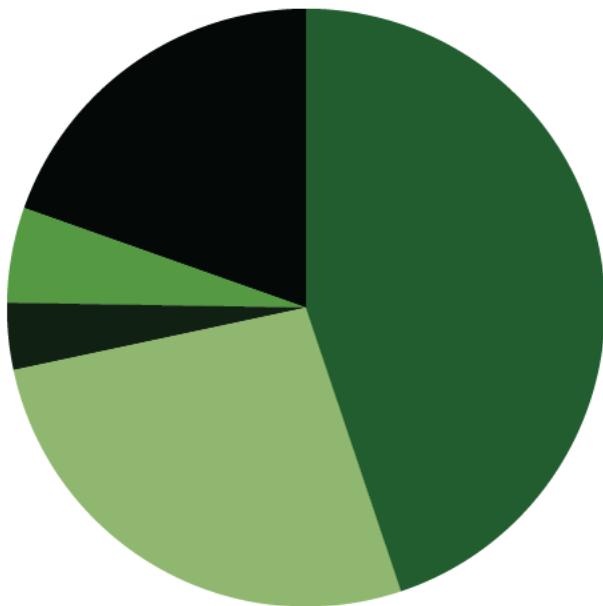


Figure 3: Respondent experiences with harmful content



Have you ever experienced harmful or disturbing content?	Qty.	%
Yes, once	27	19%
Yes, several times	42	30%
Yes, many times	22	16%
No	50	35%

Figure 4: Who respondents would report content to



Who would you tell if you discovered it?	Qty.	%
No one	38	21%
Friends	87	47%
Whānau	52	28%
Counsellor	7	4%
Partner/spouse	10	5%

On 6 May 2025, MP Catherine Wedd introduced the *Social Media Age-Restricted Users Bill*, which pledged to prohibit under-16s from creating social media accounts. Due to its relevance to rangatahi, much of our community engagement was focused on hearing perspectives on this bill. The following list contains quotes pulled from our survey, categorised by either supporting the bill, opposing it, or standing somewhere in between:

Against	Ambivalent	For
<p>Instead of cutting them off from the online world, we should guide them to use it in a healthy and balanced way. With the right education, banning it becomes just a phase, not a long-term solution.</p> <p>This is an ineffective solution at best - young people will still be on social media, but now they will just have to lie about their ages, as we have seen time and time before. All it does is spend government time and funding on an issue that can't be solved by a simple age ban.</p> <p>Although it seems like a good idea, this would only further teens under 16 HIDING their social media usage and if they did see harmful content, they wouldn't necessarily be able to tell anyone due to the ban. This would only create more problems in my opinion, since anyone can lie about their age.</p> <p>Don't, it would harm a lot of people, also would make people anti-social because people would not be able to communicate properly. It wouldn't make a difference anyway because people can just lie about their ages and we don't want that happening.</p>	<p>Yea and No, there are benefits for both. I would rather see more kids play outside then on their devices but If I was under 16 I would want to be on social media. My honest opinion is that social media is just apart of life now and there's probably no way to get rid of it. We just have to deal with it and work out ways to make it more safer.</p> <p>Good idea in theory but not easy to implement in practice. Privacy implications around use of identity documents (eg drivers licence or passport), susceptible to leakage or misuse.</p> <p>It is a good idea in terms of getting children back off of their phones whether that is during school or at home. But social media provides a free way to contact family members, friends, etc. which is sometimes the only option families have. I think under 13/14s is a more realistic goal due to the upbringing current 15/16 year olds have experienced and maturity they gain within social media because they have had it for a long amount of time.</p>	<p>It sounds sensible.</p> <p>Yea I think thats reasonable. Maybe just restrictions such as need real ID verification to check age. Need parent verification. Nowadays its ok to have an app to contact and call friends but maybe no social media content.</p> <p>Yes as it will allow children to be more sociable in person</p> <p>It's a great idea. I often feel left out from my friends and the online life they have. I chose not to have social media and it it healthier for young people to live away from their screens. I'm glad I don't have it.</p> <p>Yes. Social media has too much influence on young people, especially since when developing, adolescents are very easily influenced and highly impressionable.</p> <p>Honestly I think it is the right thing, when I think about the dangerous things and people on social media I want to keep that away from my younger sisters</p>

Against	Ambivalent	For
<p>I think its bad because it takes away the ability for young people to connect with others. Some teenagers use social media as a way to find support when they're feeling sad or alone. The ban would also be somewhat difficult to enforce because many kids could lie about their age, or find ways around it. Instead of banning it, it would be better to teach young people to use it safely.</p> <p>Personally, I believe social media is a way for young people to make connections with others. Social media supports teenagers' mental wellbeing and state of mind. In today's society, the world is becoming more exposed to digital technology, and if those under 16 years of age are not aware of this shift, we will retrograde as a country. The world is growing, and we must grow with it.</p> <p>I think there are much bigger issues to look at rather than banning social media below 16 years old. I think it's a time waste honestly, people can so easily fake their age nowadays.</p> <p>I don't like it but i can see where they are coming from!</p>	<p>While it seems like a great idea, online platforms can be used for educational purposes not just for binge watching. But I do agree</p> <p>Its an interesting topic, but has its flaws. Banning social media might improve young peoples lives, but it could also make things so much worse. [...] People always find away, teenagers will find ways back onto social media, banning it can possibly make children more inclined to go on.</p> <p>This is not to say this is a bad thing to do (certainly my friends who don't have social media seem to live more fulfilling lives and are usually well-adjusted, and social media has definitely had an impact in how I crtically think or experience things now), but just choosing to ban social media seems to be oversimplifying the problem to an almost shockingly ignorant degree.</p> <p>I think that it may help in some cases but it prevents young people from learning about social media and 'throws them into the deep' later. I think that it wouldn't help majority of people.</p>	<p>Good Idea, as social media only does harm to the youth, foreign media radicalises our youth to their agenda. And Social media makes youth mature faster, which often leads to only negative results.</p> <p>I think it's not a bad idea, even though I love using tiktok everyday and what-not I don't think its healthy at this age. young people are all so invested in social media and its affecting their childhoods and mental health status, because you will constantly compare yourself to people you see online/might try to copy someone older whos doing a stupid stunt or yada yada.</p> <p>yes cuz stuff em why they need it caught my lil cuz postin naughty things at a young aye, darno where the slurry came from</p> <p>I believe this is a good idea, we should have the same laws as what Malinuskas has done in South Australia and is being replicated all over Australia. Children do not know how to control themselves on the internet, we must be able to help control it for them</p>

Against	Ambivalent	For
<p>No, it can be used for good and allows socialising when sick and or away from home. Many friendships wouldn't exist without social media</p> <p>Because many people under 16 are so glued to their devices, it would be a difficult thing for them to adjust to. Although social media and screen addictions still don't have a good reputation, I think that people around my age would try find their way around it by doing other things that might be equally as bad (or worse), maybe picking up other, more illegal addictions (e.g., smoking, drinking, etc).</p> <p>No, as for some this is a lot to take away. With it being our MAIN form of entertainment, socialisation, and expression it has proven incredibly beneficial. If this were to be banned, its like snatching away the colour from their life and making it black and white. I'm sure many students would feel bored leading to depression and other mental health issues. I do acknowledge that social media can be harmful, but that should not be solved from a ban</p>	<p>I personally believe social media is harming people, and its effects we can only begin to comprehend but the way social media shapes our world is incredibly intertwined with how the youth interacts with it. You can't just ban social media now -- it's an important aspect in our society</p> <p>In a way it is a good idea as it can prevent a lot of cyber bullying, however it will just make young kids lie about their age or whatever it is that makes them eligible for the app so if they decide to ban it they need to make it very strong and not just trusting what the person behind a screen says</p> <p>i don't think that it is a good idea as it is a bit extreme to ban all social media but i think that there should be bans on certain social media platforms (such as snapchat and discord) that allow unrestricted contact with other people.</p> <p>I somewhat agree with this because the positives of banning social media for under 16s is that they will be more safe off and on-line there cause be a argument about using phones to contact parents and guardians</p>	<p>I think it is a good idea to only show approved and safe videos or photos, where if you are confirmed to be over 16 (maybe through ID), you are allowed to see what you set your settings as.</p> <p>Yes it's a good idea. Because what do people of that age necessarily need social media for, it only causes harm and it not beneficial to them.</p> <p>I believe this is a highly beneficial idea, as a high-school student myself I on the day to day witness the impact these forums have on my peers. I believe social media also has a toll on bullying as I have noticed commonly being 'made fun of' [...] I also believe that by eliminating this technology it will just help overall in the kindness of people. I have found that in specific my year group, and the few ahead are all absolutely mean and majority bully others for not being social media standards. I think with this action taking place it is definitely going to help this situation.</p> <p>This is a fantastic idea. There will be huge benefits in the welfare of students.</p>

As an alternative to this bill, we asked what respondents considered to be viable options to increase online safety amongst rangatahi in Aotearoa. Here are some of the responses:

- Require social media companies to curate their content to suit the age of the user so that they are not shown inappropriate content.
- Make online platforms legally responsible as publisher and promoter (via algorithms) for all and any content that is available to be viewed on their site from anywhere within New Zealand regardless of where it is hosted, with meaningful (EU level) penalties for harmful content (ie \$millions AND personal liability for directors, including overseas based).
- Easier ways to report people, in some cases to authorities.
- Implementing a screen time feature to limit the usage of social media. This makes sure that social media isn't such a big aspect of our lives and/or can affect us as much if we do come across disturbing content.
- More education on the consequences with severe online bullying/harassment more education in general within social media
- Better methods of reporting, more sources for seeking help.
- I feel like instead of banning it [social media] fully, maybe someone needs to create a new app that young people can use safely and is more educational but also serves the purpose of entertainment.
- Tougher penalties for online abuse /bullying
- Stricter moderation rules to quickly remove harmful content like bullying, abuse, or weird stuff.
- Making reporting tools easier to find and use, with fast, real support instead of just automated responses.
- Make it a requirement that social media companies filter sensitive content for younger viewers etc.
- Increase censorship for websites and enforce more security restrictions
- Enforce better safety systems within social media platforms. Warnings tend to come up on videos containing “dangerous activities” such as jumping into a lake, but no warning on explicit, nude, disturbing content.
- To increase the online safety of young people, the New Zealand Government should focus on education, stronger regulations, and support systems. First, schools should be supported to teach digital safety from a young age. This includes lessons on how to deal with cyberbullying, how to spot fake news or scams, and how to protect personal information online. Second, the government could create stronger rules for social media companies, requiring them to have better age verification and quick systems to report harmful content. Third, there should be more support services, like free counselling and online safety hotlines, for young people who are struggling with online issues. Rather than banning social media, these steps would help young people stay informed, safe, and confident when using the internet.

Figure 5

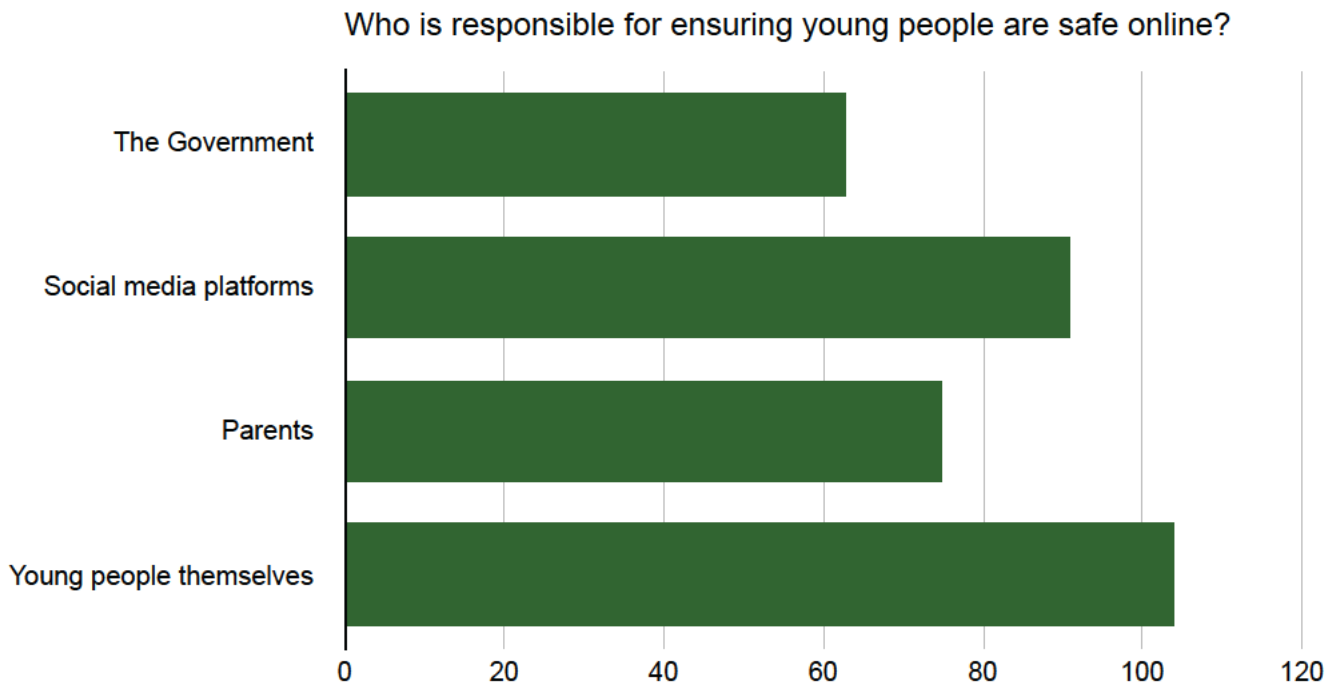
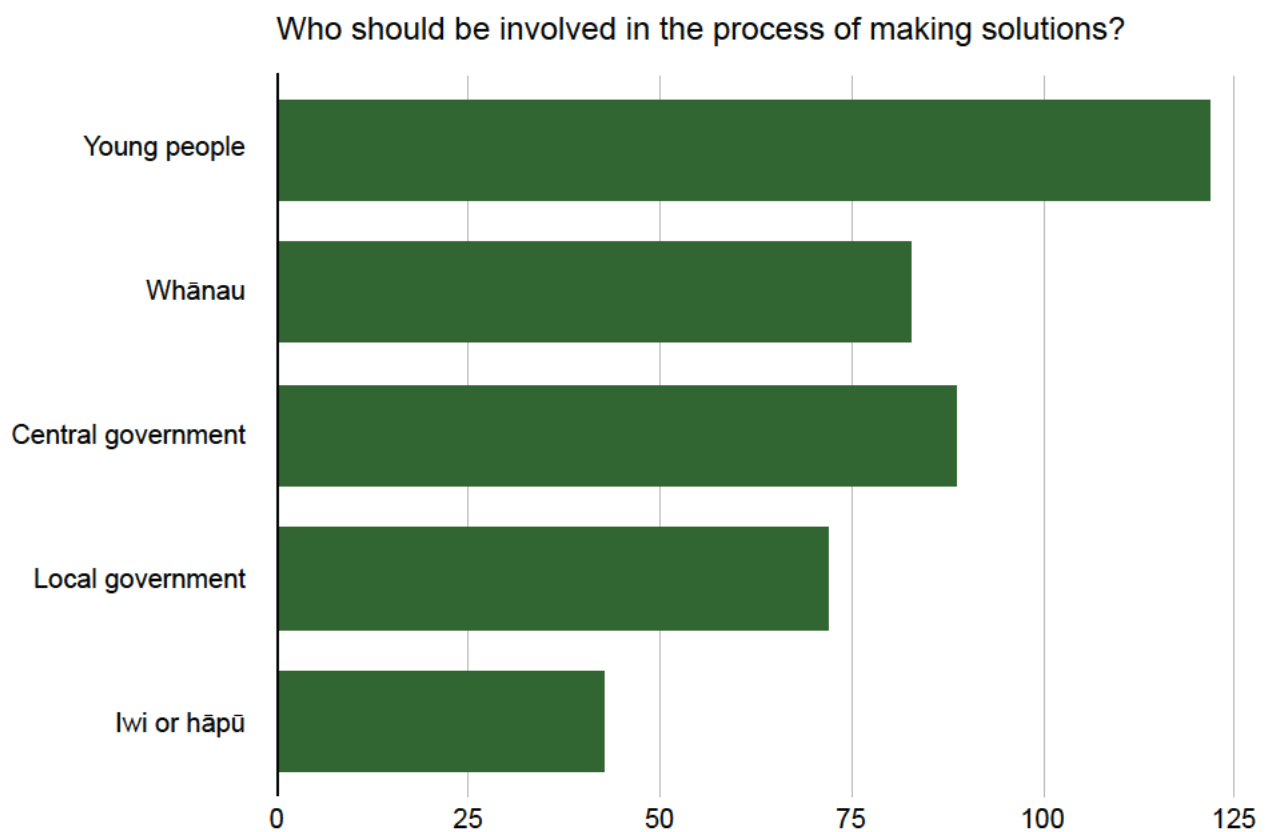


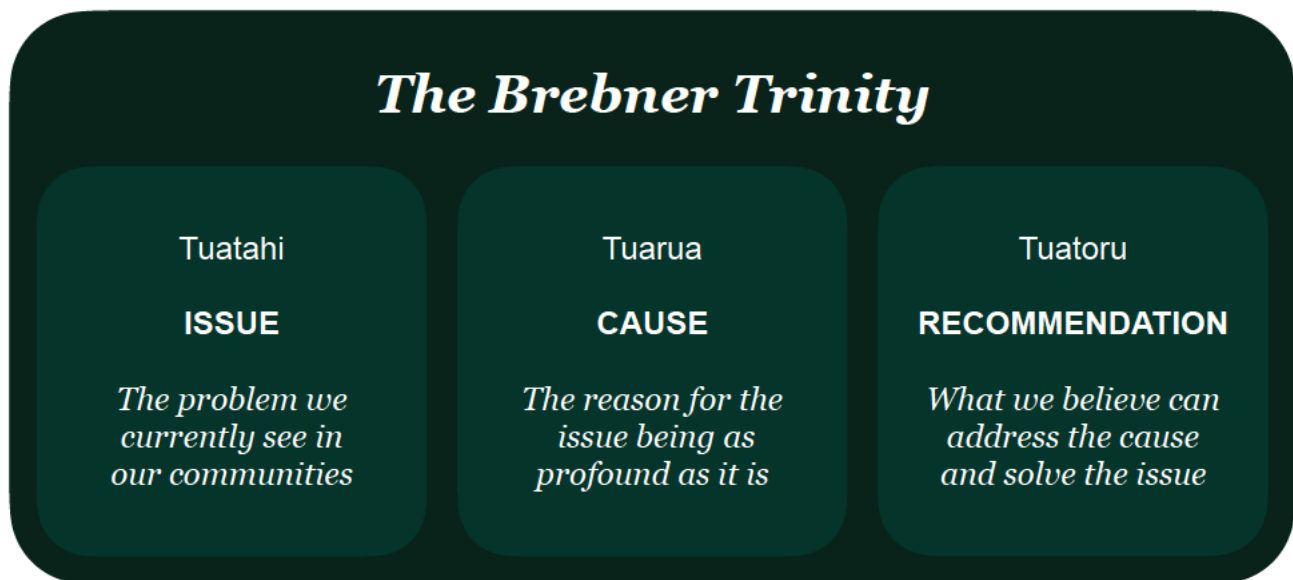
Figure 6



Areas of Research and Proposal

We now look to solutions. Our community engagement and our findings have helped us form three distinct sections: Education, Legislation and Restriction.

Each section will ultimately conclude with a recommendation to the government. To precede and set up each recommendation, we will use something we like to call The Brebner Trinity (courtesy of Johnny Brebner from MOJ):



Education

Applicable for:

- Department of Internal Affairs | Te Tari Taiwhenua
- Ministry of Health | Manatū Hauora
- Ministry of Education | Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga

ISSUE — Lack of education

Most of us found, during our community engagement, that rangatahi have a very limited understanding of how to keep themselves safe online. This has a direct affect on the likelihood of them discovering harmful/explicit content, or dealing with cyberbullies, predators, deepfakes, or artificial intelligence.

How can rangatahi be safe online when they haven't been taught how to do so?

Many students have a basic understanding of digital citizenship, but they have likely not learned this through school, rather parents/caregivers, their own research, or trial and error.

CAUSE — Few opportunities to learn

The cause for this widespread lack of education surrounding digital literacy is lack of educational opportunities. Simply, they don't know how to be safe online because they haven't been taught.

Online safety is not taught in school. Some schools teach parts of it in subjects like health or life skills, which is commendable, but with this, we run into problems:

- Every school teaches it differently, which results in every student having a different understanding of what is deemed 'safe' and how to be a good digital citizen.
- Teachers themselves are often inadequately educated. Social media arrived well into their adulthood, so they never used it as teenagers. Most of them would not have experienced things like grooming due to this.
- What is taught is often outdated. It generally tackles cyberbullying, but not grooming, digital consent, artificial intelligence, or any issue that has recently emerged.
- Lessons are brief and limited in their scope. As we have found, the topic of online safety is so wide ranging; a few lessons per year will not allow a complete education.

RECOMMENDATION — Curriculum framework

Aotearoa lacks a curriculum framework that teaches digital citizenship consistently and comprehensively. We believe that they should create one, to teach this broad and important topic to students of this generation, and many to come.

We acknowledge that creating a whole new compulsory subject is unrealistic. Instead, digital literacy should be integrated into existing subjects (at the discretion of each school). These may include, but are not limited to—

- health
- life Skills
- social Sciences
- a dedicated subject for teaching online safety

Tamariki are starting to regularly use devices at progressively younger ages. Based on our experiences, technology wasn't consistently used until intermediate school, and many of us didn't even get a phone until later than that. Now, it is commonplace to see primary students with their own mobile phones. But most students, on average, begin using tablets or laptops daily at intermediate school. We believe that the framework should span years six to ten, so students are equipped with knowledge a) before they reach intermediate, and b) well into their teenage years and high school tenure. Ending at year ten avoids NCEA integration, which would be time-consuming and costly (plus, NCEA is experiencing enough change right now, further curriculum replacements are the last thing it needs).

Due to the alarming rate at which technology is becoming increasingly ubiquitous, we propose that the age that online safety is taught from is reviewed every parliamentary term (three years), to assess whether the current age range is sufficient. We can't predict the state of technology in three years, so any decision we make must be future-proof—or at least have a clause to allow frequent revision and updates.

As beneficial as this may be, we acknowledge that every three years may be unrealistic. If the rate of technology's accessibility slows down, it may be assessed less-frequently. As long as the age is reassessed semi-frequently, then rangatahi can continue to be educated and safe.

Additionally, we propose that a trial run is conducted prior to nationwide roll-out. This would involve selecting a handful of schools around the country to hear feedback on what works, and what can be improved. This sample must include intermediate and high schools, in all parts of the country, at different Equity Index ratings.

We believe that this framework should cover—

- how to manage discovering explicit content
- the mental health impacts of social media (external validation, body image)
- identifying and dealing with scams, fraud and phishing
- learning how to keep your data secure
- understanding digital footprints
- deepfakes and artificially-generated content
- dealing with predators and grooming
- how to report disturbing content or interactions
- digital consent

With this recommendation, every student in Aotearoa will access the same vital education, regardless of where they live, what school they attend, or their socio-economic background.

Legislation

Applicable for:

- Classification Office | Te Mana Whakaatu
- Department of Internal Affairs | Te Tari Taiwhenua
- Ministry of Justice | Te Tāhū o te Ture

ISSUE — Outdated legislation

Several pieces of legislation that protect New Zealanders are too old, and no longer fit for purpose. They are:

- Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015 (10 years old)
- Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993 (31 years old)
- Broadcasting Act 1989 (35 years old)

The Broadcasting act, for example, was designed to regulate television content, not social media content, algorithms, or artificial intelligence. Technology has advanced so dramatically in the last three decades. It is now decades behind the very thing it has to control.

None of these pieces of legislation protect rangatahi from online grooming from predators, artificial intelligence or deepfakes, or algorithms boosting harmful and extremist content. There are so many issues with the legislation as it stands today, that we truly can't capture it all in this document.

Currently, digital citizens that identify as LGBTQIA+, Asian-New Zealand, Māori, chronically ill, under 30, and neurodiverse are more likely to have their mental and physical health affected by cyberbullying.

Another issue is confusion of who to contact. When young people come across or are part of harmful material, they have to decide between:

- Netsafe (Ministry of Justice), which is responsible for solving complaints under the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015 (HDCA); they help victims through the process.
- Department of Internal Affairs, which is who harmful content can be reported to.
- The Classification Office, which decides which content should be banned, and is more focused on educating whānau on navigating harmful content.

Having so many options that, to the average teenager, are pretty much the same thing leads to incertitude—or even the lack of any contact at all, which could have disastrous effects.

CAUSE — Failure to review

Governments since 2008 have attempted to review and modernise these, but they remain unreviewed and unreformed.

But in the big '25, with technology continuing to advance, and the threats to rangatahi continuing to increase, updating these pieces of legislation is no longer just a 'nice to have'—we believe it is necessary to ensure the online safety of younger generations.

The Department of Internal Affairs started a review on online content moderation, but it was halted, and got no further than the public consultation stage.

RECOMMENDATION — Review legislation

We recommend a comprehensive review of the Classifications Act 1993, the Broadcasting Act 1989, and the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015. None of these adequately protect rangatahi from the online world as we know it today.

Based on our research about the current legislation and the systems surround it, lots needs to change. Specifically, we believe the government should focus on:

- Ensuring that legislation can adaptable to the ever-changing world of social media (future-proofing it for generations to come)
- Basing legislation around Te Tiriti and acknowledging the te ao Māori worldview
- Simplifying the confusing array of complaints systems
- Protecting marginalised and disproportionately affected peoples

We recommend that the DIA, MOJ and the Classification Office work in direct consultation with the Broadcasting Standards Authority and the Human Rights Commission, as their research can help influence decisions for ideal outcomes.

Ultimately, we want to see the HDCA reviewed so it can be strengthened and modernised. The end goals are for—

- harmful and disturbing content taken down quicker
- digital citizens to know exactly where to report harmful content
- the amount of rangatahi discovering harmful content and the rate of cyberbullying amongst them to decrease

Restriction

Applicable for:

- Department of Internal Affairs | Te Tari Taiwhenua
- Ministry of Justice | Te Tāhū o te Ture
- Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet | Te Tari o te Pirimia me te Komiti Matua

ISSUE — Lack of rangatahi voice on social media ban

Our committee was lucky to have Catherine Wedd give up some of her time to discuss her bill, and answer some questions. She said that part of this process (figuring out this bill's logistics) included visiting schools. It was unclear how the opinions she heard actually influenced the bill. So, from what we could gather, it very much comes from the perspectives of politicians and parents, not those who it will affect most.

CAUSE — Lack of engagement in process

It is not often commonplace for the government to critically listen to rangatahi when making decisions that affect them. Such is the case in this bill. This reflects a broader lack of rangatahi voice in decision-making.

RECOMMENDATION — Youth advisory group

Despite many objections from those in our communities, we are not suggesting a whole-sale revision of this bill, nor a complete scrap. But to make it the best for rangatahi, their voices must be heard. That is why we are proposing that a youth advisory group be created, who can work in consultation with decision makers to make the laws relevant to rangatahi, and reasonable. Other areas of government have similar panels, including the Ministry of Youth Development and the Classification Office. These are effective; we believe this should follow suit.

This group is contingent on the bill passing as legislation. For some, we acknowledge that forming a youth advisory panel for just this bill may not be deemed 'worth it.' That is why, in addition, we are open to the creation of youth advisory panels for any bill, piece of legislation, or government department that relates to online safety. All government decisions that affect rangatahi—especially regarding online safety—should be in consultation with them.

Social media holds a duality, which appears to have been ignored in the creation of this bill. Parents see the negative effects of social media on their children. But without platforms such as Instagram, the mental health of rangatahi can suffer (from loss of social connection or information sources, to name a few). In saying this, we acknowledge the appeal of this bill to parents and older generations, but at this juncture, we do not believe it is fit for implementation. Allowing us to help shape it will provide the government with a breadth of perspectives, and allow key stakeholders to work together to accentuate social media's positives, and eliminate its negatives, if you will.

This panel's responsibilities include, but are not limited to—

- helping decide the age for restriction
- balancing the risks and benefits of social media

Conclusion & Acknowledgements

Here is a brief summary of each recommendation:

Education

- Create a curriculum framework for year 6-10 students that comprehensively and consistently teaches digital citizenship to rangatahi.
- Cover all aspects of online safety, including artificial intelligence and deepfakes, cyberbullying, data security, disturbing content, digital consent, and much more

Legislation

- Review the HDCA, Broadcasting Act, and Classification Act
- Streamline and simplify the options of who to report harmful content to
- Update the legislation to modernise and future-proof it - it must deal with AI, social media and grooming.

Restriction

- Create a youth advisory group for MP Catherine Wedd's *Social Media Age-Restricted Users Bill*.
- They shall meet with Ministers and senior government officials to represent their generation in working out the finer points of this bill's implementation, ensuring that it balances removing the risks of social media with its many benefits.

If this process has taught us anything, it's that there is no silver bullet; the online world is too broad and complex to take a one-solution-covers-all approach. But if the government implements all, or even one, of our recommendations, we believe that we *can* increase the online safety of rangatahi—for this generation, and many to come.

Thank you for reading this document, and thank you in advance for your consideration.

For their extensive mahi, we acknowledge:

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E mihi atu nei ki a koutou

