

Industry codes of Practice for the Online Industry

– yourtown’s advocacy submission



What is it about?

yourtown responded to the public consultation on the draft Industry Codes being developed under the *Online Safety Act 2021 (Cth)*. The purpose of the Codes is to regulate certain types of harmful online material such as child sexual exploitation and pro-terror material (Class 1A and Class 1B Material).

The draft codes cover participants across 8 key sectors of the online industry (as specified in the Act) – this includes providers of social media platforms, messaging, search engines, and app distribution services, as well as internet and hosting service providers, manufacturers and suppliers of any equipment that connects to the internet, including smart devices and computers. Importantly, it also covers operators of all websites that can be accessed by Australian users.

Why is it important?

The enhancement of online protections will help to reduce access and exposure to online material promoting child sexual exploitation and abuse, terrorism, crime and violence, and drug-related content.

Some of **yourtown’s** key messages:

1. The key point we raised in our submission is that broader community consultation must be undertaken with digital service providers in the community, and children and young people directly impacted by the draft Codes, to ensure critical services are not negatively or inadvertently impacted. Consultation should be supported by accessible and easy to understand versions and supporting information.

Given our extensive virtual services work with children and young people, it is critical that large digital counselling, and support services such as **yourtown** are directly engaged in the consultation process prior to finalisation of the Codes. Without this engagement it will be difficult for the eSafety Commission to identify and address potentially unintended impacts upon digital services, both now, and in the future.

2. Online counselling and health services including helplines, or professional counselling services, such as Kids Helpline and Parentline, should be expressly excluded from the Codes where storage, descriptions, or expressions of Class 1A or Class 1B material are used for the purpose of seeking, or receiving counselling, or support.

Online counselling and health providers fill an essential service gap in the health and mental systems, and child protection systems, the undue and increased regulatory burdens proposed in the draft Codes will result in a re-direction of essential funding and resourcing away from helping victims and survivors, and perpetrators seeking help.

3. The Codes should also exclude Helplines, and online support, or counselling services from requirements to obtain a user to register with a phone number, email address or other identifier.

Mandated identification requirements will result in children and young people choosing not to seek help and/or failing to receive critical assistance, particularly in situations of abuse or where they feel and are unsafe.



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