

RADD - Research Alliance for Digital Determinants

3-Year Project Summary

Background

Australia has taken a world-first step by passing the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024, restricting access to certain logged-in social media platforms for young people under the age of 16. This landmark policy intervention is globally significant and offers a rare, strategic opportunity for Australian governments, and particularly Australia's leading prevention agencies, to monitor and evaluate its impact on the health and wellbeing of adolescents.

To seize this opportunity, a national evaluation has been jointly funded by three preventive health agencies: **Preventive Health SA**, **VicHealth**, and **Healthway WA**. The evaluation will examine the effects of the age-restriction policy, with a specific focus on policy implementation and its impacts on adolescents' physical and mental health and wellbeing.

The overall project comprises three separate, but linked projects to collectively evaluate the impact of the social media ban on young people.

What is RADD?

The Research Alliance for Digital Determinants (RADD) is the title given to this research and funding alliance. RADD delivers a coordinated public health systems approach to understanding the impacts of the Australian Social Media Minimum Age Act (2024) on adolescent health and wellbeing. By aligning research priorities and linking complementary streams of work, this collective of leading experts strives to generate timely, policy-relevant evidence to inform decision-making, strengthen health promotion strategies, and support improved outcomes for young people. The three projects comprising RADD are as follows:

1. The Parent-Adolescent Dyad Project

Project Leads:

- Prof. Luke Wolfenden, University of Newcastle School of Medicine and Public Health
- Dr Courtney Barnes, University of Newcastle School of Medicine and Public Health

Project Aim: This project will examine whether the national social media age restriction reduces social media use among adolescents under 16 and explores its broader impacts on health and wellbeing, including mental health, sleep, social connection, and lifestyle behaviours. By collecting information from both young people and their parents, the study aims to provide a more complete understanding of the policy's effects over time.

2. The Annual Cross-Sectional Survey

Project Leads:

- Prof. Kathryn Backholer, Institute for Health Transformation, Deakin University
- Dr Sally Schultz, Institute for Health Transformation, Deakin University

Project Aim: This project will serve as an ongoing monitoring system capable of tracking how young people's health, wellbeing, digital engagement and equity will change over the coming years in response to the age restrictions and the broader evolution of the digital environment

3. Qualitative Stream Project

Project Leads:

- Assoc Prof Carmel Williams, Centre for Health in All Policies Research Translation (CHiAPRT), Adelaide University, and the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI).
- Dr Yonatal Tefera, CHiAPRT and the SAHMRI

Project Aim: Through a series of focus group discussions with adolescents and key informant interviews with parents, this qualitative stream will explore the lived experiences, perceptions, and contextual factors surrounding the implementation of the Social Media Minimum Age legislation. It aims to help expand on the findings of the other two projects by examining why and how changes occur, and will provide insights into unintended consequences, implementation challenges, and equity considerations across jurisdictions.

Governance

This alliance is supported by a tiered governance structure (Figure 1). Providing high-level oversight and strategic guidance is the National Steering Committee, with representatives from the funding and research agencies, as well as digital and wellbeing experts, as needed. The project will also be informed by a Youth Advisory Committee, which will help ensure the research and outputs stay relevant to the target population. Lastly, the Research Project Coordinating Committee brings together the three research teams to oversee overarching methodological quality, review emerging findings, and work to resolve research-related issues. CHiAPRT will provide the overall project coordination function for the alliance, including project planning and reporting; maintaining timelines and deliverables; coordinating jurisdictional engagement; liaising with partner agencies; integrated reporting; and ensuring consistent communication.



Figure 1: RAAD Governance Pyramid

Communications

RADD aims to communicate and translate findings effectively and promptly, responding proactively to emerging opportunities for dissemination. All communications, including media, publications and social media engagement, should represent and acknowledge RADD and the funding agencies as per written agreements with each party. As such, any project team is able to communicate with stakeholders independently, but when doing so, they represent RADD.

The specific guidelines for acknowledgment will be developed collaboratively with the National Steering Committee and introduced accordingly.

Outcomes and Significance

This research alliance represents a nationally coordinated evaluation of Australia's landmark Social Media Minimum Age policy. Through examining the implementation and impacts of this world-first policy in real time, the alliance will generate valuable, timely evidence to inform both Australian and global discussions on the regulation of digital environments and adolescent wellbeing.

By bringing together three complementary research streams, the alliance combines expertise across adolescent health and development, digital technologies, public health, policy, and evaluation. By drawing on real-world experiences and emerging findings throughout the evaluation, the alliance will help identify opportunities to strengthen the policy, address unintended consequences, and maximise its effectiveness over time. This approach will provide a comprehensive understanding of how this landmark policy influences social media use, health and wellbeing outcomes, family experiences, and broader social and behavioural patterns.