

Privacy reforms highlight need to protect children from harmful product marketing

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Public health organisations have welcomed the Federal Government's acknowledgement that more needs to be done to protect children through the ongoing Privacy Act Review, and look forward to opportunities to engage further in the detail relating to how we can best keep children safe online.

On Thursday, the Federal Government released its response to the Review, responding that they support and support in principle a range of recommendations designed to keep children safer online.

Research has shown that by the time a child in Australia is 13 years old, an estimated 72 million data points have been collected about them and marketers use this target kids with advertisements for alcohol, gambling, unhealthy foods and sugary drinks.

The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), the Alliance for Gambling Reform (AGR) and the Food for Health Alliance (FHA) support the Government's acknowledgement that children's privacy needs to be better protected online.

Alliance for Gambling Reform (AGR) CEO Carol Bennett said children deserve to be protected from online gambling advertisements.

"Children's personal information should not be collected and used for harmful marketing, such as gambling ads," Ms Bennett said.

"Gambling companies want to get children hooked on gambling as young as possible and we need common sense measures to stop this marketing.

"The government has given in-principle support to prohibiting marketing targeting children, unless it is in the child's best interests. This is an important reform that can make the online environment safer for children across Australia."

Food For Health Alliance Executive Manager Jane Martin said children should be free to go online for study, play or to connect with friends "without being constantly targeted by unhealthy food marketing."

"Every time a child goes online, uses TikTok or Instagram, they leave a digital footprint that allows marketers to collect information about their age, gender, interests, how they feel and where they live," Ms Martin said.

"We know 77% of Australians are in favour of government taking action to stop children's information and activity being used to target them with unhealthy food and drink advertising online. We welcome the commitment to strengthening protections for children, including stopping companies targeting them with marketing and greater protections for how their data is used."

FARE CEO Caterina Giorgi said that the reform being considered by the Federal Government is a step in the right direction. "We all want our children to be safe when they are online. But digital platforms and alcohol companies are using machine learning to build profiles of young people to sell them unhealthy and addictive products," Ms Giorgi said.

“The earlier that a child or young person is exposed to alcohol marketing, the more likely they are to start drinking and the more likely they are to drink at riskier levels.

“We look forward to working with decision makers as they work out the detail, to make sure these reforms are fit-for-purpose in protecting children when they’re online.”

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