# Social media platforms may dodge age restrictions if harm risks are low, says minister



In a significant development regarding digital safety, Communications Minister Michelle Rowland announced that social media platforms could potentially avoid the Albanese government’s proposed age restrictions if they can demonstrate that their services pose a “low risk of harm to children.” This announcement was made at a social media conference organised by the New South Wales and South Australian governments.

The proposed amendments to the Online Safety Act aim to impose responsibility on digital platforms to enforce the age restrictions, rather than placing the onus on parents or young people themselves. This initiative reflects a strategic move by federal Labor to incentivise social media companies to create age-appropriate versions of their platforms. In particular, it suggests the possibility for children below the proposed age threshold to continue having controlled access to social media services if these platforms can prove they minimise risks effectively.

Rowland's announcement accompanied findings from the eSafety commissioner, which highlighted the current engagement of children aged eight to 12 with a range of digital platforms including BeReal, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and Discord. The results underscored the extensive use of digital platforms among young Australians, further fuelling the debate on digital safety.

The proposed legislative changes will not penalise individual users but will task platforms with taking reasonable steps to safeguard children from harmful content and addictive behaviours. The reform is designed to encourage platforms to foster positive social interactions while mitigating risks, with a planned implementation period of 12 months to allow the industry and regulators to adapt.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese expressed the government's commitment to supporting parents and young Australians who have voiced concerns about the potential harms of social media. The government’s strategy, shared by both Rowland and Albanese, underscores an effort to support families rather than isolate them, by upholding a set of values aimed at protecting young online users.

The initiative follows Albanese's announcement in September to enforce a national social media ban prior to the next federal election. This decision, prompted by a proposal from South Australian Premier Peter Malinauskas, received backing from other states and territories.

In light of the proposals, Prime Minister Albanese has solicited feedback from state leaders on the appropriate age for a potential ban and whether existing young users should be allowed to maintain their accounts under grandfathering provisions.

Andrew Barr, Chief Minister of the Australian Capital Territory, questioned the efficacy of barring existing teen users from social media platforms and suggested a potential transition to age-appropriate accounts.

Meanwhile, New South Wales Premier Chris Minns clarified that young people already active on social media would not be forcibly removed when new regulations take effect. Discussions continue regarding harmonising a nationally consistent age limit.

South Australia’s Premier Malinauskas compared the proposed regulations to existing age restrictions on products like alcohol and tobacco, arguing the legislative action, albeit blunt, is necessary to guide societal norms towards healthier interactions.

This ongoing dialogue involves more than 120 experts and numerous organisations, who have signed an open letter challenging the notion of a blanket ban as an effective tool for online safety. The discussion is set to continue as the nation endeavours to balance safety, access, and the welfare of young Australians in the digital age.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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