

Australian Media Literacy Alliance submission to the Inquiry into international digital platforms operated by Big Tech companies

The Australian Media Literacy Alliance (AMLA) thanks the Senate Economics Reference Committee for the opportunity to make this submission. This submission primarily responds to the issues raised under “Big Tech disinformation” and “Algorithmic transparency”.

The submission includes this cover document supported by three more detailed documents:

- Submission to the Digital Platform Services Inquiry
- Towards a National Media Literacy Strategy: National Consultation Report
- Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences and Needs

The submission makes two key recommendations:

1. That the Australian Government work with the Australian Media Literacy Alliance to develop a national media literacy strategy
2. That the Australian Government requires greater transparency for users including how data is being collected and used, as well as more control to users over data use.

About AMLA

The key public institutions that have come together to form AMLA are committed to supporting a united approach to media literacy. Our focus is on lifelong learning, with a focus on those who are vulnerable to disinformation or digital exclusion. Our vision is a modern media literate society equipped to face challenges and seize opportunities in a world increasingly defined by media and information abilities. The Members of AMLA include ABC Education (ABC), Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI), Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD), National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA), National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA), Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) and Western Sydney University (WSU). The AMLA approach emphasises building the capacity of state, regional and local organisations and delivering high quality national media literacy resources, research and training that can be used and adapted by these organisations. The approach follows successful national evidence-based models led by public cultural institutions in countries including Finland and the Netherlands.

About Media Literacy

Media literacy is the ability to critically engage with media in all aspects of life. It is a form of lifelong literacy essential for full participation in society.

The role of media literacy in addressing disinformation

Media literacy Strategy

Every day Australians use media technologies to receive and share news, get help and advice, conduct business, connect socially, learn, share ideas, knowledge and opinions. This engagement with media and technologies increasingly demands sophisticated skills, knowledge and critical capabilities.

As the issues paper notes, amongst the challenges is the proliferation of disinformation, misinformation and mal-information online. Misinformation can circulate at speed and scale on digital platforms. Misinformation challenges democratic processes, social cohesion and public health

outcomes by diminishing people's ability to make timely and well-informed decisions. In Australia, misinformation has been created around the past two federal elections, the 2019 Black Summer bushfires, and the COVID-19 pandemic. As these events unfolded, false claims were used to influence the way people voted, promote racist attitudes, encourage illegal activities and advocate for dangerous health decisions – for example, by contributing to COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy.

A healthy democratic society requires that citizens have the skills, knowledge and capabilities to use media to engage with politics, policies and world events, and recognise when information is misleading or deliberately deceptive. In addition, media production skills are now critical for full participation in society, whether for work, strengthening family and social relationships, advancing health and education goals.

Research by AMLA core members shows that many adults and children have a low level of confidence in their own media abilities and most say they are not getting support to help them. Just one third of young Australians think they can tell fake news from real news,¹ and almost two thirds (64%) of adults are not confident that can tell if a website can be trusted. Media literacy competency is negatively correlated with being more than 55 years old, having low literacy, living with a disability, having a low income or living in regional Australia.²

Given this, AMLA recommends that the Australian government progress a national policy, strategy and framework for media literacy. National approaches support media literacy educators, including schools, libraries, national organisations and media organisations, to work together in a coherent way while allowing for benchmarking over time. The strategy should work across all ages, but include particular attention to adults who were not able to access curriculum resources through schools, and those with lower media literacy skills and include the development of resources, toolkits and networking opportunities. For more detail please see the attached *Towards a National Media Literacy Strategy: National Consultation Report*.

This recommendation echoes the 2021 *Australian Senate Inquiry Report Into Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy* which recommended that the Australian Government should work with the Australian Media Literacy Alliance, through a co-design process, to develop a national strategy to tackle fake news and misinformation.

Recommendation: That the Australian Government work with the Australian Media Literacy Alliance to develop a national media literacy strategy

Transparency and regulation

In 2021 AMLA conducted a national consultation to inform a national media literacy framework. There was consensus from that consultation that Media Literacy initiatives must be accompanied by government support for appropriate regulation of traditional and digital media, along with responsible practice by social media and other media companies, including robust self-regulation. Participants believed that Australians should be engaged in discussions about the need for regulatory change to ensure a media environment exists that all citizens can be part of and thrive in, and we thank the Committee for furthering this discussion.

¹ Notley, T., Dezuanni, M., Zhong, H.F. & Chambers, C. (2020) News and Australian Children in 2020: How young people access, perceive and are affected by news media, Research Report, Sydney, Western Sydney University and Queensland University of Technology.

² Notley, T., Chambers, S., Park, S., Dezuanni, M. (2021). *Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences and Needs*. Western Sydney University, Queensland University of Technology and University of Canberra

Transparency plays an important role in enabling Australians to productively engage with digital media. Many Australians do not understand why they see what they see, as the algorithms that determine what content is served to whom, and based on what data, are invisible. As Professors Park and Notley write:

We believe that full media literacy is constrained without greater transparency about how social media platforms operate. **Consumers should also be made aware if and how they can control or influence the personalised content and advertising** that are delivered. They also need to **regularly be informed about reporting options** for harassment and offensive content. For this, both regulatory and educational efforts are needed.

Currently only a quarter (26%) of adults are confident they understand the terms and conditions of social media platforms, including what data is being collected, and by implication how that is being used.³ The increased proliferation of AI generated content, where it is unclear what underlying data is being drawn upon and how answers are being created, only increases these challenges.

Recommendation: That the Australian Government requires greater transparency for users including how data is being collected and used, as well as more control to users over data use.

³ Notley, T., Chambers, S., Park, S., Dezuanni, M. (2021). *Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences and Needs*. Western Sydney University, Queensland University of Technology and University of Canberra