



## Social Media Minimum Age – Fact sheet

From 10 December 2025, age-restricted social media platforms must take reasonable steps to prevent Australian under 16s from having accounts. This follows amendments to the [Online Safety Act 2021](#) in late-2024 to introduce a social media minimum age framework (SMMA) (Part 4A of the Act).

The SMMA puts the onus on social media platforms, not parents or young people, to take steps to ensure fundamental protections are in place. This is about protecting young people – not punishing or isolating them – and supporting parents when it comes to overseeing their children’s health and wellbeing.

Key features of the SMMA include:

- Requires age-restricted social media platforms to take reasonable steps to prevent Australians under 16 years old from having accounts (the minimum age obligation),
- Introduces a definition for ‘age-restricted social media platform’ to which the minimum age obligation applies, alongside rule-making powers for the Minister for Communications to narrow or further target the definition,
- Specifies that no Australian will be compelled to use government identification (including Digital ID) to prove their age online, and platforms must offer reasonable alternatives to users,
- Establishes robust privacy protections, placing limitations on the use of information collected by platforms for the purposes of satisfying the minimum age obligation, and requiring the destruction of information following its use,
- Provides powers to the eSafety Commissioner and Information Commissioner to seek information relevant to monitoring compliance, and issue and publish notices regarding non-compliance,
- Imposes maximum penalties of up to 150,000 penalty units (currently equivalent to \$49.5 million) for a breach of the minimum age obligation by corporate actors, and
- Increases maximum penalties of up to 150,000 penalty units for corporate actors for breaches of industry codes and standards, to reflect the seriousness of the contravention, consistent with community expectations.

### Setting a minimum age for social media

The SMMA specifies a minimum age of 16 years for access to age-restricted social media platforms – there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that by 16, young Australians are beyond the most vulnerable stage of adolescence.

Noting variation exists across individuals, a UK study published in 2022<sup>1</sup>, which examined longitudinal data from more than 17,400 participants, found adolescent social media use is predictive of a subsequent decrease in life satisfaction for certain developmental stages including for girls aged 11 to 13 years old and boys 14 to 15 years old.

## Regulated entities and regulated activity

The requirement to prevent under 16s having an account applies to ‘age-restricted social media platforms’. The definition casts a wide net to ensure the minimum age obligation applies broadly to the range of services commonly understood to be social media. At the same time, there is flexibility to reduce the scope, or further target the definition through legislative rules.

Under the SMMA, a platform is an ‘age-restricted social media platform’ if (section 63C):

- the sole purpose, or a significant purpose, of the service is to enable online social interaction between 2 or more end-users,
- the service allows end-users to link to, or interact with, some or all of the other end-users,
- the service allows end-users to post material on the service, and
- it meets such other conditions (if any) as are set out in the legislative rules.

However, the legislative rules can also specify that a platform, or class or platforms are *not* in scope.

Age-restricted social media platforms must be able to demonstrate having taken ‘reasonable steps’ to prevent age-restricted users from ‘having an account’. At a minimum, this will likely require platforms to introduce some form of age assurance.

### Age Assurance Technology Trial

The Australian Government announced \$6.5 million in the 2024-25 Budget for the development of a technical trial of age assurance technologies to determine effectiveness, maturity, and readiness for use in the Australian context.

The trial is being conducted by the Age Check Certification Scheme and is independent of Government – for more information on the technology trial, please visit [www.ageassurance.com.au](http://www.ageassurance.com.au).

Australians under the age of 16 will be unable to have an account with an age-restricted social media platform in their own right. This also applies to existing account holders under the minimum age. However, they will not be prevented from accessing content on an age-restricted social media service in a ‘logged out’ state (i.e. without logging into an account or profile).

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<sup>1</sup> [Windows of developmental sensitivity to social media | Nature Communications](#)

### **Example scenario 1**

Sally, who is 14 years old, currently has a TikTok account. On the commencement of the minimum age obligation, TikTok will be required to deactivate Sally's account if she is still under the age of 16 years.

### **Example scenario 2**

Waheed is 15 years old and regularly uses YouTube for leisure and for research on school projects. On the commencement of the minimum age obligation, Waheed will still be able to use YouTube in a 'logged-out' state.

### **Example scenario 3**

Isobel is an adult who owns a small business, selling boutique crocheted goods. She uses Facebook as her business landing page. As Facebook (currently) allows viewers to access business information without first requiring them to log in, it is unlikely the business's online 'foot traffic' would be affected.

## **Rules – Excluded Services**

On 29 July 2025, the Minister for Communications made the [Online Safety \(Age-Restricted Social Media Platforms\) Rules 2025](#) (the Rules), which exclude certain services from the minimum age obligation.

Under the Rules, the below services will be excluded from the minimum age obligation:

- Messaging, email, voice calling or video calling
- Online games
- Services that primarily function to enable information about products or services
- Professional networking and professional development services
- Education and health services

These exclusions strike a balance between protecting young people from the harms associated with social media use, and allowing ongoing access to services that are essential for communication, education and health. The Rules also enable maintained access to services that are (currently) known to pose fewer risks of online harms, particularly arising from addiction, problematic use, unhealthy social comparisons, and exposure to content that is inappropriate for children.

All services that meet the definition of 'age-restricted social media platform' in the SMMA, and are not excluded in the rules, will be subject to the minimum age obligation. This includes Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter) and YouTube, amongst other platforms.

## **Privacy safeguards**

In practice, platforms will be required to undertake some form of age assurance on account holders, as a means of satisfying the 'reasonable steps' element of the minimum age obligation. While assurance techniques vary, many involve the capture of new information or data for the purposes of age assessment.

The SMMA incorporates strong protections for personal information collected by platforms for age assurance purposes. These privacy safeguards impose robust obligations on platforms to ringfence and destroy any information collected, with serious penalties applicable for breach of these requirements. Platforms must not use information collected through age assurance methods for any other purpose, unless explicitly agreed by the user. This agreement must be voluntary, informed, current, specific and unambiguous.

The SMMA also includes two information protecting provisions, that:

- empower the Minister to exclude specified types of information being collected and used by platforms for the purposes of meeting the minimum age obligation, and
- specify that platforms must not collect government-issued identification or require the use of Digital ID (provided by an accredited service, within the meaning of the [Digital ID Act 2024](#)), unless a reasonable alternate means is also offered.

In effect, this means that no Australian will be compelled to use government identification (including Digital ID) for age assurance on social media. Collectively, these measures minimise the impact of the minimum age framework on Australians' privacy. They place the power squarely in the hands of users, allowing them to minimise data handling (only 'assure once'), and ensure they are well-placed to make informed decisions about what information platforms can ask for and how it is used.

#### **Example scenario 4**

Upon signing up for an account with Discovery<sup>2</sup> (an age-restricted social media platform), Rebecca was prompted to provide details about her age. The platform did not seek Rebecca's consent to use that personal information for any other purpose, but has since used it to curate advertising content to Rebecca. This use of the personal information is not permissible and would be considered an interference with Rebecca's privacy for the purposes of the *Privacy Act 1988*. As a result, Discovery could face serious penalties.

#### **Example scenario 5**

To address the above situation, Discovery introduces new terms of service, setting out that they can use any information supplied by account holders for targeted advertising. This approach is still unlikely to meet the threshold of consent being voluntary, informed, current, specific and unambiguous. The use of the information would still be an interference of privacy, and could give rise to penalties.

#### **Example scenario 6**

Raj also decides to sign up for Discovery. In setting up his account, he is directed towards using Digital ID and not given any other option for demonstrating he is over 16. This would constitute a breach of the information protection under section 63DB and be subject to significant penalties.

## **Penalties**

Significant penalties for breaching the minimum age obligation. A breach by a provider will be subject to a maximum penalty of 30,000 penalty units (currently equivalent to \$9.9 million). This increases to 150,000 penalty units (currently equivalent to \$49.5 million) if the provider is a body corporate, due to the application of section 82 of the [Regulatory Powers \(Standard Provisions\) Act 2014](#) (Regulatory Powers Act).

Equivalent penalties apply for breaches of the information protection provisions.

The penalty amounts are intentionally large, which reflects the significance of the harms the SMMA is intended to safeguard against. Maximum civil penalties equivalent to \$49.5 million for bodies corporate also brings Australia in line with the online safety maximum civil penalties in Ireland, the EU and the UK.

## **Commencement**

The minimum age obligation comes into [effect](#) on 10 December 2025. This is a deferred commencement of 12 months following Royal Assent.

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<sup>2</sup> A fictional social media service for the purposes of this scenario.

## Review

The SMMA Act incorporates a review of the legislation within two years of effective commencement. The review provides the Government with an opportunity to recalibrate policies, if required, to be proportionate to changed behaviours – of both social media platforms and young people.

It will allow time for assessment of:

- the fitness-for-purpose of the definition of an age-restricted social media platform, as well as any legislative rules made by the Minister for Communications
- any technological advancements since commencement
- the effectiveness of privacy provisions
- whether any alternative forms of access to social media should be in place.