

## **Proposed funding to safeguard children against harmful impacts of phones, screens, and gaming**

Friday 27 January 2023

Centre for Digital Wellbeing welcomes the announcement by the NSW Opposition Leader Chris Minns MP to commit to tackling problematic screen and phone use among children and young people.

If elected, NSW Labor has committed to a \$2.5 million research fund to expand the understanding and impact of excessive screen, phone, and gaming use on young people's health, wellbeing, and learning.

Screen and phone dependence among Australians is on the rise. A recent study conducted by Monash University shows that a staggering 99.2% of users fear not having their phone with them. For more than 10%, that fear is considered severe and linked to dangerous use.<sup>1</sup>

There is concern that the majority of Australian children are heading in the same direction, with 83-77% of pre-schoolers and 85% of children aged 5 to 12 already spending more than the recommended time on screens.<sup>2</sup>

Ms Carla Wilshire OAM from the Centre for Digital Wellbeing is a strong advocate for further research into young people's excessive screen time and mobile phone use:

"The announcement to fund research into problematic screen use comes at a really important time. Phone, screen, and gaming time are on the rise among children in Australia, yet we don't fully know the potential impacts," Ms Wilshire said.

Early research is already hinting at a range of health and developmental issues among children. Problematic device usage has been associated with negative impacts in areas such as weight, motor and cognitive development, and social and psychological wellbeing.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, problematic video gaming behaviours can severely impact children and young people. Currently, 1-3% of people worldwide are gaming excessively and are impacted by Internet Gaming Disorder. Studies have associated Internet Gaming Disorder with lower psychosocial wellbeing and impaired functioning.<sup>4</sup>

The time children spent on their phones, playing games, and watching TV has been reported by parents as their top health concern.<sup>5</sup> Anecdotally, parents have been struggling to navigate device usage and gaming in the home and are in need of advice on how to encourage healthy habits.

"It is really important to invest in supporting children and their parents now to prevent this spiralling into a life-long issue," Ms Wilshire continued.

"This commitment to funding will mean we can better understand the issues related to problematic screen use and therefore develop targeted policy solutions to help the children, families and communities that are most affected," Ms Wilshire concluded.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://itbrief.com.au/story/smartphone-addiction-endangering-health-study>

<sup>2</sup> <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/short-articles/too-much-time-screens>

<sup>3</sup> <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/short-articles/too-much-time-screens>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.racgp.org.au/afp/2016/january-february/just-one-more-level-identifying-and-addressing-int>

<sup>5</sup> <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/short-articles/too-much-time-screens>

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### **About the Centre for Digital Wellbeing**

The Centre for Digital Wellbeing is a policy research centre focusing on social media's impact on mental health and wellbeing, safety and social cohesion in the Australian community. The Centre for Digital Wellbeing brings together a network of health, mental health, digital technology, and policy experts to facilitate critical discussions on social media's impact on mental health and social cohesion, formulate policy responses and develop resources that assist users to better engage in healthy digital practices.

The Centre for Digital Wellbeing facilitates research about the impact of social media, formulates policy solutions to ensure that the development and use of social media and other online platforms are human-centred, and develops tools to assist users to better engage in healthy digital practices. The Centre for Digital Wellbeing has a particular focus on youth.

#### Media Contact Details

Carla Wilshire: 0409 363 888

Centre for Digital Wellbeing

Website: <https://digitalwellbeing.org.au>

Contact: [secretariat@digitalwellbeing.org.au](mailto:secretariat@digitalwellbeing.org.au)