

Australia wants Facebook to seek parental consent for kids

October 25 2021, by Rod McGuirk



In this April 23, 2021, file photo, The Facebook app is shown on a smart phone in Surfside, Fla. Australia plans to crack down on online advertisers targeting children by making social media platforms seek parental consent for users younger than 16 years old to join or face fines of 10 million Australian dollars (\$7.5 million) under a draft law released Monday, Oct. 25, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee, File

Australia plans to crack down on online advertisers targeting children by making social media platforms seek parental consent for users younger than 16 years old to join or face fines of 10 million Australian dollars (\$7.5 million) under a draft law released Monday.

The landmark legislation would protect Australians online and ensure that Australia's privacy laws are appropriate in the [digital age](#), a government statement said.

Social media platforms would be required to take all reasonable steps to verify their users' ages under a binding code for [social media services](#), data brokers and other large online platforms operating in Australia,

The platforms would also have to give primary consideration to the best interests of children when handling their [personal information](#), the draft legislation states.

The code would also require platforms to obtain [parental consent](#) for users under the age of 16.

The proposed legal changes come after former Facebook product manager Frances Haugen this month asserted that whenever there was a conflict between the public good and what benefited the company, the social media giant would choose its own interests.

Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention David Coleman said the new code would lead the world in protecting children from social media companies.

"In Australia, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a consistent increase in signs of distress and mental ill health among [young people](#). While the reasons for this are varied and complex, we know that social media is part of the problem," Coleman said in a statement.

Facebook regional director of public policy Mia Garlick said her platform had been calling for Australia's privacy laws to evolve with new technology.

"We have supported the development of international codes around young people's data, like the U.K. Age Appropriate Design Code," Garlick said in a statement, referring to British legislation introduced this year that requires platforms to verify users' ages if content risks the moral, physical or mental well-being of children.

"We're reviewing the draft bill and discussion paper released today, and look forward to working with the Australian government on this further," she added.

Australia has been a prominent voice in calling for international regulation of the internet.

It passed laws this year that oblige Google and Facebook to pay for journalism. Australia also defied the tech companies by creating a law that could imprison social media executives if their platforms stream violent images.

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