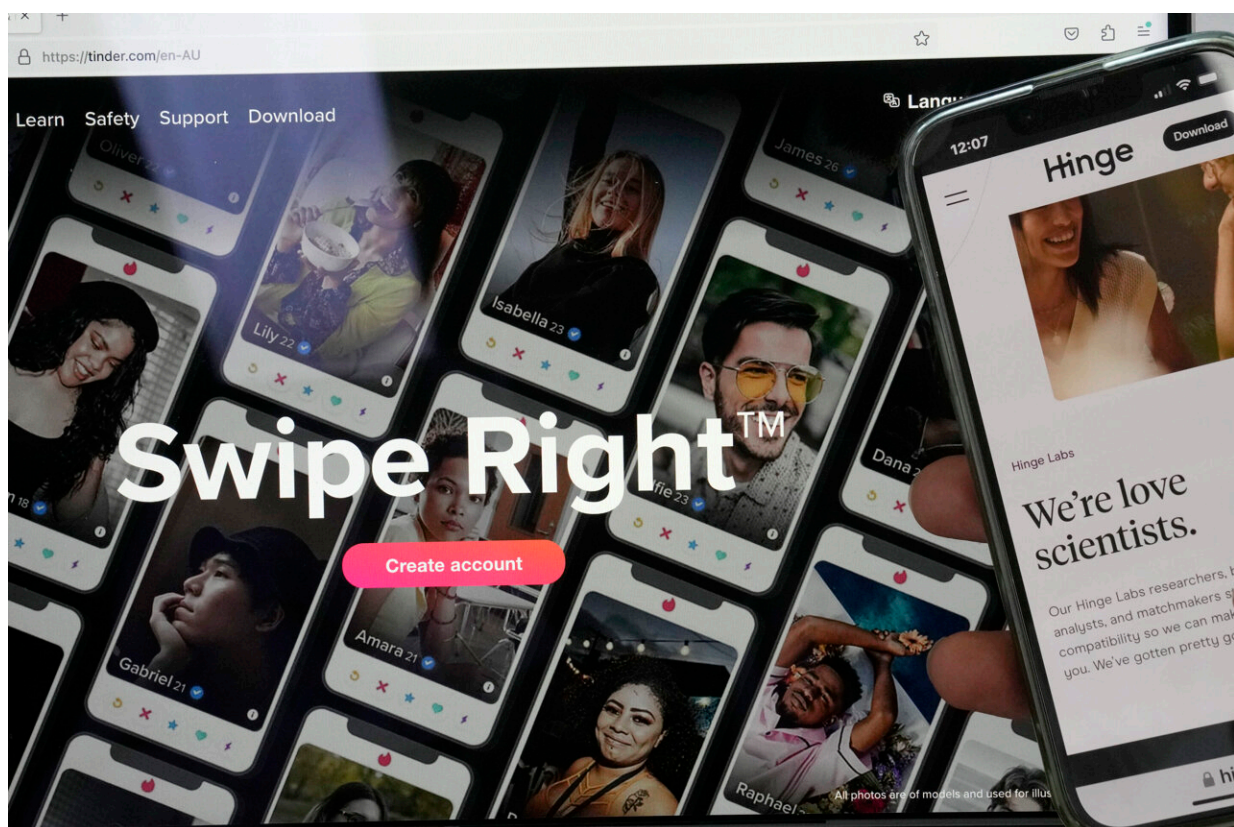


Australia tells dating apps to improve safety standards to protect users from sexual violence

September 18 2023, by ROD McGUIRK



Dating apps are displayed on a computer and a phone in Sydney, Monday, Sept. 18, 2023. Australia's government say the online dating industry must improve safety standards or be forced to make changes through legislation, responding to research that says three-in-four Australian users suffer some form of sexual violence through the platforms. Credit: AP Photo/Rick Rycroft

Australia's government said Monday the online dating industry must improve safety standards or be forced to make changes through legislation, responding to research that says three-in-four Australian users suffer some form of sexual violence through the platforms.

Communications Minister Michelle Rowland said popular dating companies such as Tinder, Bumble and Hinge have until June 30 to develop a voluntary code of conduct that addresses user safety concerns.

The code could include improving engagement with [law enforcement](#), supporting at-risk users, improving [safety](#) policies and practices, and providing [greater transparency](#) about harms, she said.

But, Rowland added, if the [safety standards](#) are not sufficiently improved, the government will use regulation and legislation to force change.

"What we want to do in this sector is not stifle innovation, but balance the harms," she told reporters.

The government is responding to Australian Institute of Criminology research published last year that found three-in-four users of dating apps or websites had experienced some form of sexual violence through these platforms in the five years through 2021.

"Online dating is actually the most popular way for Australians to meet new people and to form new relationships," Rowland said.

"The government is concerned about rates of sexual harassment, abusive and threatening language, unsolicited sexual images and violence facilitated by these platforms," she added.



Australian Communications Minister Michelle Rowland speaks to the media during a press conference at Parliament House in Canberra, Monday, Sept. 18, 2023. Rowland said the online dating industry must improve safety standards or be forced to make changes through legislation, responding to research that says three-in-four Australian users suffer some form of sexual violence through the platforms. Credit: Lukas Coch/AAP Image via AP

The Australian Information Industry Association, which represents the information and communications technology industry in Australia but not the [online dating](#) sector, welcomed the government's approach as "very measured."

"That's the way the [government](#) should regulate technology," the association's chief executive, Simon Bush, said. "Point out where there's

an issue, get the industry together and get the industry to look to see if they can resolve these issues first before pulling the regulatory trigger."

Bumble declined to comment. Tinder and Hinge did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Kath Albury, an online dating researcher at Melbourne's Swinburne University of Technology, said [safety improvements](#) could include a clearer sense of how quickly a user could expect feedback after reporting an unwanted or threatening contact.

"One of the things that dating app users are concerned about is the sense that complaints go into the void or there's a response that feels automated or not personal responsive in a time when they're feeling quite unsafe or distressed," Albury told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

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Citation: Australia tells dating apps to improve safety standards to protect users from sexual violence (2023, September 18) retrieved 9 May 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2023-09-australia-dating-apps-safety-standards.html>

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