

MEDIA RELEASE

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Digital duty of care for online safety and platform accountability in Australia

Last week the Australian Government released an [Issues Paper](#) outlining a proposed framework for a Digital Duty of Care for online services, marking a significant step toward strengthening online safety and platform accountability in Australia.

The Government has committed to legislating a Digital Duty of Care that would require online services to take reasonable steps to prevent foreseeable harms experienced by Australians. The proposal responds to a key recommendation of the Statutory Review of the [Online Safety Act 2021](#) and reflects extensive consultation with stakeholders across academia, industry and civil society.

Researchers from the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society (ADM+S) at The University of Melbourne, The University of Sydney, QUT and The University of Queensland have participated in consultation processes exploring key issues relating to the design and implementation of the proposed framework and the responsibilities of online platforms.

They say the proposed Digital Duty of Care represents an important opportunity to strengthen Australia's online safety framework by moving beyond reactive, content-based regulation toward a more systemic approach to platform accountability.

In response to the Issues Paper, leading researchers in digital governance and AI ethics from ADM+S and the Centre of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Ethics, University of Melbourne have released a [new policy brief](#) outlining key considerations for the framework's design.

The brief outlines the significance and value to Australia in legislating an overarching, systems-based Digital Duty of Care to respond to risks to online safety, respect the rights of Australians, and support long-term public value in the digital environment.

The brief suggests that Australia's Digital Duty of Care should move beyond specifying a set of narrowly defined risks to safety such as online abuse or exposure to violent material. It should require platforms to address systemic risks, including not only safety but also inhibited public access to information, and patterns of inequality, discrimination and exclusion embedded within digital systems.

It also highlights the need for the policy to support positive outcomes for users, including safer, more inclusive and rights-respecting digital environments.

Approaches to designing a Digital Duty of Care

The policy brief outlines two possible models for the design of an effective and systemic statutory Digital Duty of Care.

- A **risk-based model**, which would require digital platforms to assess and take reasonable steps to prevent and mitigate the risk of harm arising from the design, operation and use of their services.
- An **outcomes-based model**, which would require platforms to actively enable a safe, inclusive, healthy and rights-respecting digital environment in the long term.

Strengthening accountability and transparency

The researchers argue that the effectiveness of any Digital Duty of Care will depend on robust accountability frameworks that govern how platforms operate, curate content for, and facilitate engagement between users.

They note that existing transparency measures, which often rely on aggregated reporting, are not sufficient to explain how algorithmic systems shape users' online experiences.

Instead, they call for new legal and technical infrastructure to enable users, regulators and civil society to meaningfully monitor and observe platform behaviour.

Call for a national platform observatory

A key recommendation of the brief is the establishment of a dedicated national platform observatory, with the mandate and resourcing to track how algorithmic systems target and curate content for Australians.

The observatory would also be responsible for collecting and analysing the information needed to assess whether platforms are complying with the proposed Digital Duty of Care.

Researchers argue that such infrastructure is essential to ensure the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of the new regulatory framework, and to support long-term public trust in digital platforms.

Read the full [Digital Duty of Care policy brief](#)

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ABOUT THE ARC CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE FOR AUTOMATED DECISION-MAKING AND SOCIETY



The ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society (ADM+S) is a cross-disciplinary, national research centre, which aims to create the knowledge and strategies necessary for responsible, ethical, and inclusive automated decision-making (ADM).

Funded by the Australian Research Council from 2020 to 2027, ADM+S is hosted at RMIT in Melbourne, Australia, with nodes located at seven other Australian universities, and partners around the world. The Centre brings together leading researchers in the humanities, social and technological sciences in an international industry, research and civil society network.

Our Centre aims to contribute to the mitigation of the social and economic risks in the development and implementation of ADM and artificial intelligence (AI), and to improve outcomes and efficiencies in four key focus areas where these technologies are already well advanced: news and media, transport and mobility, health care, and social services.