Online Health Taskforce Stakeholder Submission Survey 2025

Fields marked with * are mandatory.

Background

The Online Health Taskforce was established by the Minister for Health in September 2024, with Jillian van Turnhout as Chair. The Taskforce was set up because of evidence that some online activity can harm the physical, mental, social, and sexual health of children and young people. Problems include anxiety, lack of sleep, eating disorders, self-harm, and suicide ideation. The job of the Taskforce is to recommend strategic Public Health responses to address these harms.

The Online Health Taskforce wants to hear ideas from all kinds of stakeholders, including not only experts and people who work on these issues, but also young people and parents affected or worried by them.

We have set up this submission system to help people to contribute.

Submissions

The Online Health Taskforce is inviting stakeholders to put forward clear ideas for what can be done to protect the health of children and young people from harm caused by online activity.

To help you make your case, we have made a template below. It is designed so that members of the Taskforce can read and consider every submission made.

Please note:

- Keep your responses short and to the point.

- You do not have to fill every box in the template – it is just a guide.

- The deadline for submissions is 31 MARCH 2025.

Please keep in mind that the focus of the Taskforce is on protecting public health and that its recommendations will be based on evidence.

If you wish to alert us to any research or articles, please do not paste them in the template but instead provide a link or reference in the final box.

If you are considering a submission, you are strongly advised to read our privacy notice below which explains how submissions will be made public and how your data will be stored.

If you would like to make your submission in Irish, please contact oht_Submissions@health.gov.ie.

What happens to your submission?

The Online Health Taskforce wishes to inform stakeholders that any submissions, including the submitter's name, may be published in whole or in part, either within a Taskforce report or separately, at the discretion of the Taskforce.

The Taskforce maintains the right to decline submissions and is not obliged to publish any submission content.

The Online Health Taskforce expects to finalise and submit its final report to the Minister of Health in October 2025.

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Name of organisation, if applicable:

Irish Medical Organisation

Which best describes your organisation, if applicable?

☐ Business
☐ Educational organisation
☐ Government Body

☐ NGO/Charity

☑ Other

* Where are you/your organisation based?

☑ Ireland

☐ Outside of Ireland

If outside of Ireland please specify:

Your Recommendation

We have provided this template to help you make your case. It is important that submissions are not too long. There is space for links to additional information in the final box.

While character counts for individual sections are provided as guidance, please do not exceed 1000 characters.

Provide a brief statement of your recommendation. What specific action or change are you proposing and why?

1000 character(s) maximum

> The IMO recommends the following actions:
>
> Rapidly develop a well-funded public health strategy modelled on successful "tobacco free" policies to combat the harms related to social media.
> Institute a ban on smartphone use by primary students.
> The IMO calls on the Government, in light of the case taken by 42 US Attorney's General against Meta for their product's detrimental effect on youth mental health to urgently investigate the allegations and publish opinion on whether a similar case should be taken in Ireland.
> Other measures to be considered should include:
> Strengthening age restriction and verification processes for social media accounts.
> Explore options to charge per usage (akin to minimum unit pricing for alcohol).
> Increase competition with alternative not-for-profit or Governmental/EU search engine and hosting platform.
> Social media platforms to be treated as publishers and subject to same regulations.
> Outlaw algorithmic devices that could lead to problem use.

What issue or challenge is your recommendation trying to solve? Why is this important?

1000 character(s) maximum

A public health campaign would raise awareness about the impact of social media on young people's mental health, promote preventative measures, and encourage risk reducing behaviours.

Several studies on the impact of phone bans in schools have found that student performance increased and incidents of cyber-bullying reduced.

In regard to the case against Meta in the US, the Attorney's General stipulate that social media companies create addictive technologies, designed to keep users scrolling, which are detrimental to youth mental health. Not only are kids losing sleep or being distracted while at school, but many children are exposed to deeply destructive content on social media where self-harm and suicidal behaviour is idealised. The lawsuit against Meta aims to stop Meta from marketing to young people through the collection of their data without their parents knowledge or consent. It is alleged that Meta knows the app features are harmful, however, continue to use them for profit.

How does your recommendation help to solve the problem?

1000 character(s) maximum

A public health campaign would bring awareness to the harms caused by social media to youth mental health. Moreover, a public health campaign would allow for the allocation of resources to address this issue. A phone ban in schools would reduce the impact of social media on youth mental health as it would remove a distraction to children's learning and eliminate the potential for cyber-bulling to take place at school. It may also allow for students to socialise more with each other during break periods.

An investigation of claims made by US Attorney's General could offer an opportunity for the Irish Government to investigate claims separately and, if claims are founded, hold Meta accountable for the hurt caused to children in Ireland.

What results do you expect if this recommendation is acted on? Consider both short-term and long-term outcomes.

1000 character(s) maximum

If these recommendations were acted on there would be more awareness on the impact of social media on children as well as possible solutions to address this problem.

There would also be rules in place to minimise the places where children have access to social media, reduce the distraction of social media on young people's education, and to eliminate opportunities for cyber-bullying.

If the claims against Meta were investigated and found to be well-founded, the Irish Government could hold Meta accountable for the damage done to children, create publicity surrounding the harms, and set a precedent to hold social media companies accountable for the harms they knowingly expose children to.

What difficulties might come up if we act on this recommendation? How could these be overcome?

1000 character(s) maximum

The Government is likely to face substantial lobbying from Big Tech Companies. We urge government to examine how poor health is influenced by corporate entities and the commercial determinants of health, whose profits are significantly dependent on the consumption of products with negative health impacts.

Has what you are suggesting, or something similar, been tried elsewhere, in another country or in another field? If so, please point us to information.

The US Surgeon General issued an Advisory stating concerns about the effects of social media on young people. An Advisory is issued to the public when there is a need to draw attention to an urgent public health issue. Furthermore, Advisory's offer advice on how public health issues should be addressed and what precautions should be taken.

Numerous studies completed on the effectiveness of phone bans globally have found that test scores increased, incidents of bullying reduced, and student learning and connection was enhanced.

While the case taken by the US Attorney's General against Meta for harming youth mental health has not yet appeared in Court, the Government of Ireland should investigate the claims and determine whether it is worth pursuing a similar case in Ireland.

Australia's government recently banned social media for under-16s. Ireland should consider a similar ban with fines received going towards public health campaigns.

Please list or provide links to any reports, papers, websites or technical information that supports your recommendation.

- Increases in Depressive Symptoms, Suicide-Related Outcomes, and Suicide Rates Among U.S. Adolescents After 2010 and Links to Increased New Media Screen Time - Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/2167702617723376

- My World Survey 2 - WhatWorks (2019 Survey) https://whatworks.gov.ie/app/uploads/2019/12/My_World_Survey_2.pdf

- Harmful-impact-of-suicide-and-self-harm-content-online-Review-of-the-literature-Update-August-2023-Final.pdf https://www.nsrf.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Harmful-impact-of-suicide-and-self-harm-content-online-Review-of-the-literature-Update-August-2023-Final.pdf

- A focus on adolescent peer violence and bullying in Europe, central Asia and Canada. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children international report from the 2021/2022 survey. - Drugs and Alcohol https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/40891/#:~:text=This%20report%2C%20Volume%202%20in%20the%20series%2C%20focuses,and%20regions%20in%20Europe%2C%20central%20Asia%20and%20Canada.

- The social media diet: A scoping review to investigate the association between social media, body image and eating disorders amongst young people | PLOS Global Public Health https://journals.plos.org/globalpublichealth/article?id=10.1371/journal.pgph.0001091#:~:text=To%20systematically%20map%20out%20and%20critically%20review%20the,eating%20disorders%20in%20young%20people%20aged%2010%E2%80%9324%20years.

- https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0927537116300136

- Evidence for and against banning mobile phones in schools: A scoping review - Marilyn Campbell, Elizabeth J Edwards, Donna Pennell, Shiralee Poed, Victoria Lister, Jenna Gillett-Swan, Adrian Kelly, Dajana Zec, Thuy-Anh Nguyen, 2024 https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/20556365241270394

- The EU's Digital Services Act https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/digital-services-act_en#:~:text=The%20DSA%20regulates%20online%20intermediaries%20and%20platforms%20such,harmful%20activities%20online%20and%20the%20spread%20of%20disinformation.

- Twenge JM. Generations: The Real Differences Between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and

Silents—and What They Mean for America's Future. Simon and Schuster; 2023 Apr 25.
https://books.google.ie/books/about/Generations.html?id=UCS2EAAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y

- Twenge JM, Haidt J, Blake AB, McAllister C, Lemon H, Le Roy A. Worldwide increases in adolescent loneliness. Journal of adolescence. 2021 Dec 1;93:257-69.
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34294429/

- Dyson MP, Hartling L, Shulhan J, Chisholm A, Milne A, Sundar P, Scott SD, Newton AS. A Systematic Review of Social Media Use to Discuss and View Deliberate Self-Harm Acts. PLoS One.
https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0155813

- Cosma A, Molcho M, Pickett W. A focus on adolescent peer violence and bullying in Europe, central Asia and Canada. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children international report from the 2021/2022 survey. Volume 2. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2024.
https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/9789289060929#:~:text=This%20report%2C%20Volume%202%20in%20the%20series%2C%20focuses,and%20regions%20in%20Europe%2C%20central%20Asia%20and%20Canada.

- Griffiths MD, Kuss DJ, Demetrovics Z. Social networking addiction: An overview of preliminary findings. Behavioral addictions. 2014.
https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/B9780124077249000069#:~:text=This%20chapter%20provides%20empirical%20and%20conceptual%20insight%20into,of%20SNS%20usage%2C%20and%20exploring%20potential%20SNS%20addiction.

- Zendle D, Bowden-Jones H. Is excessive use of social media an addiction?. Bmj. 2019 May 15;365
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31092392/

- Dept of Education UK, Mobile phones in schools: Guidance for schools on prohibiting the use of mobile phones throughout the school day, February 2024.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65cf5f2a4239310011b7b916/Mobile_phones_in_schools_guidance.pdf
- Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory
https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-youth-mental-health-social-media-advisory.pdf

- Meta Multi-state complaint
https://ag.ny.gov/sites/default/files/court-filings/meta-multistate-complaint.pdf

- Australian social media ban on under-16s approved by parliament
https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c89vjj0lxx9o

Privacy Notice

Any personal information, which you volunteer to the Online Health Taskforce, will be treated with the highest standards of security and confidentiality, in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation 2016/67 and the Data Protection Act 2018. However, please note the following:

- By providing a submission to the Online Health Taskforce, you are consenting to your data being processed by the Online Health Taskforce. Your data will only be used in the context of the Terms of

Reference of the Online Health Taskforce* and for no other purpose. If, at any time, you wish to withdraw your submission please contact oht_submissions@health.gov.ie.

- The Online Health Taskforce expects to publish submissions and a report outlining the key themes arising from the public consultation. The Online Health Taskforce may include a full list of those who make submissions in an appendix to any report.

- Submissions received by the Online Health Taskforce may be subject to Freedom of Information requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2014. In this regard, submissions will be considered for release under the Act.

- The information provided in the submissions may be shared with members of the Online Health Taskforce, the Secretariat to the Online Health Taskforce and relevant Department of Health officials.

- Submissions will be retained until the final report of the Online Health Taskforce, including the implementation of any accepted recommendations, has been concluded.

[*Online Health Taskforce details and Terms of Reference](#)

☑ I accept your Terms

Contact

oht_submissions@health.gov.ie