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Submission to Joint Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence



Our Watch

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Acknowledgement of Country

Our Watch acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay respects to Elders past and present and recognise the continuing connection Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to land, culture, knowledge and language for over 65,000 years.

As a non-Aboriginal organisation, Our Watch understands that violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is not an 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander problem.' As highlighted in Our Watch's national resource [*Changing the picture*](#), there is an intersection between racism, sexism and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Our Watch has an ongoing commitment to the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, who continue to experience violence at significantly higher rates than non-Aboriginal women. We acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who continue to lead the work of sharing knowledge with non-Aboriginal people and relentlessly advocate for an equitable, violence-free future in Australia.

About Our Watch

[Our Watch](#) is the national leader in the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia. We are an independent, not for profit organisation established in 2013. All Australian governments are members of Our Watch.

Our vision is an Australia where women and their children live free from all forms of violence. We aim to drive nation-wide change in the culture, behaviours, attitudes, social structures and systems that drive violence against women. Guided by our ground-breaking national frameworks, [*Change the story* \(2nd ed 2021\)](#), [*Changing the picture* \(2018\)](#) and [*Changing the landscape* \(2022\)](#), we work at all levels of our society to address the deeply entrenched, underlying drivers of violence against women. We work with governments, practitioners, and the community, at all levels of Australian society, to address these drivers of violence in all settings where people live, learn, work, and socialise.

About this submission

Our Watch welcomes the opportunity to provide advice to the Joint Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence.

In line with Our Watch's specific evidence base and expertise, this submission emphasises the impacts of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the primary prevention of violence against women. This includes mitigating risks for increasing violence against women, as well as tapping into opportunities to stop this violence before it starts.

To support the Committee's understanding of this dimension of AI, Our Watch's submission points to key content from the emerging evidence base that highlights:

- Risks and harms of AI for women and children;
- Exacerbating conditions that drive violence against women;
- Workforce and skill implications for women;
- Gaps in existing policy, legal and regulatory frameworks; and
- Opportunities to strengthen the prevention of violence against women.

In doing so, Our Watch's submission focuses on the following aspects of the Inquiry's terms of reference:

- (k) the risks and harms arising from AI, including fraud and scams, deepfakes and risks to the safety and wellbeing of children and vulnerable Australians;
- (g) the workforce and skills implications of AI, including the adequacy of Australia's education system, job creation and displacement, and the effects on the quality and security of jobs;
- (i) the adequacy of Australia's existing laws and regulatory frameworks as they apply to AI and whether there are any gaps that warrant reform;
- (a) the opportunities presented by artificial intelligence (AI) to lift Australia's resilience, productivity growth, economic competitiveness, and living standards;

The Commonwealth Government has demonstrated strong leadership and commitment to preventing violence against women and children through the second *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*.¹ The National Plan rests on four pillars – prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery and healing – to holistically address violence against women. Our Watch is Australia's leader under the prevention pillar.

Primary prevention applies an upstream model to stop violence before it starts. It works at a whole-of-population and a system-level to address the conditions that allow violence against women to happen, both in online and offline environments. *Change the story* is Australia's shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women. It demonstrates how such violence is driven by gender inequalities.

Drawing from a public health approach, *Change the story* outlines the gendered drivers that allow violence against women to happen. These are:

1. Condoning of violence against women.

2. Men's control over decision-making and women's independence.
3. Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity.
4. Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control.²

Addressing gendered drivers is crucial to prevent violence against women, both in online and offline environments. It is also important to recognise that while across Australia gender inequality is the primary and consistent driver of violence against women, it does not operate in isolation. Gender inequality intersects with other forms of inequality including impacts of colonisation, systemic racism, intergenerational trauma, ableism, homophobia, transphobia and ageism, to shape women's experiences of violence.

Australia's approach to AI safety should move beyond responding to individual incidents after harm has occurred. We should proactively identify, address and mitigate the risks of AI throughout its lifecycle: from data collection, design and training to procurement, deployment, monitoring and decommissioning. We should not wait for AI-enabled harms to become widespread before acting.

Prevention requires addressing the gendered drivers of violence against women and working with all those who plan, design, develop, procure and deploy AI to embed gender equality and employ Safety by Design principles across online settings. This is both a harm-prevention imperative and a unique opportunity to use AI to promote gender equality and create safer online and offline environments for all Australians.

Recommendations

Our Watch makes the following recommendations to the Commonwealth government:

- **Recommendation 1:** Regulate the requirement for gender impact assessments to be undertaken on all AI tools, products and capabilities before public release to increase compliance and accountability and incentivise sector leadership.
- **Recommendation 2:** Increase women's participation in AI industry and governance to reduce gender bias through the Commonwealth government's *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality*.
- **Recommendation 3:** Scale Respectful Relationships Education to improve digital literacy and as a mechanism to prevent online harm.
- **Recommendation 4:** WGEA to develop and provide advice for the government regarding AI's impact on gender segregation in the workforce.
- **Recommendation 5:** Integrate the prevention of violence against women in the national AI infrastructure through aligning *The National AI Plan* and associated policy with *The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*, and develop a priority dedicated to violence against women under Australia's AI Safety Institute.
- **Recommendations 6:** Invest in partnerships between eSafety, technology companies, researchers and the domestic, family and sexual violence sector to promote gender equality and respect through platform design, safety, moderation and AI development, and to support the delivery of evidence-informed primary prevention initiatives in online settings.

Contact for further information

Our Watch welcomes the opportunity to provide further advice or assistance in relation to the issues outlined in this submission. Please contact Director of Government Relations, Policy and Evidence, Dr Sanjugta Vas Dev, at sanjugta.vasdev@ourwatch.org.au.

Risks and harms of AI for women and children

While AI may present extensive opportunities for Australia, the rapid growth of AI, including generative AI (genAI), is adversely impacting the safety of Australians. Women, children and marginalised groups are particularly affected.

AI has made the perpetration of violence against women not only easier but also cheaper, faster and more widespread.³ The Third National Survey of Technology Abuse and Domestic Violence in Australia conducted by Wesnet in 2025 found that three-quarters of practitioners surveyed reported seeing perpetrators use AI-generated threats and impersonation tools.⁴ AI has been used to exacerbate existing forms of violence against women and to create new forms of such violence. Forms of violence created and/or assisted by AI include, among others:

- image-based abuse and deepfakes
- sextortion
- scamming and impersonation
- cyberharassment and cyberbullying
- coercive control, stalking, monitoring and surveillance, and
- doxing⁵ and threats.⁶

Deepfakes are realistic images, videos or audio recordings created with the use of AI that falsely depict a real person saying or doing something they have not said or done. With the growth of AI, the use of deepfakes has become an increasingly common form of sexual image based-abuse. AI is used to create artificial content that depicts real people in sexually suggestive or explicit situations that did not take place.⁷

Young people are both more likely to be victim-survivors and to perpetrate deepfake image abuse.⁸ The Adolescent Man Box survey conducted by The Men's Project found that across Australia, almost one in ten boys (9%) aged 14-18 said they had seen sexually explicit deepfakes of someone they knew and 13% reported having friends who create such material.⁹ Impacts of this abuse include distress, reputational harm and long-term psychological effects.

Other emerging AI capabilities that are seemingly useful can also cause harm to women and children. For example, AI-assisted geolocation capabilities used to identify the exact geographical location based on images and other sources of dispersed data can be used to identify the locations of women and children fleeing domestic and family violence.¹⁰ This puts them at the extreme risk of escalated violence from their partners.

There is an opportunity to manage these impacts by requiring the technology industry to conduct gender impact assessments on all AI tools, products and capabilities before public release. A gender impact assessment is a structured analysis of how a policy, program, investment or initiative may have a gendered impact, enabling decision-makers to identify potential gender inequalities and consider mitigation measures to advance gender equality outcomes. Regulating the need for a gender impact assessment into future AI and digital/online legislation and regulatory levers would:

- assess impacts before decisions are made;
- identify potential harms and inequities;

- consider mitigation measures;
- create an evidence base for decision-makers; and
- increase industry compliance and accountability.

Recommendation 1: Regulate the requirement for gender impact assessments to be undertaken on all AI tools, products and capabilities before public release to increase compliance and accountability and incentivise sector leadership.

Exacerbating conditions that drive violence against women

AI can exacerbate the underlying conditions that drive violence against women in the first place. This includes the following issues.

Gender-segregation of the technology industry reinforcing gender stereotypes in the design of AI systems

Just like the broader technology industry, AI remains male-dominated. Women constitute only three in ten (30.1%) of AI authors and inventors in Australia.¹¹ This figure is distorting the impact of gender segregation of the AI industry given that Australian audiences use AI produced globally where women are even less prominent among AI creators. The absence of women's voices impacts the design and implementation of AI systems, reinforcing the gender bias and widening gender gaps. The Commonwealth government's *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality*¹² notes that the technology industry is responsible for many products that influence the way people think about gender and must be proactive in ensuring gender bias is not built into new technologies.

For example, AI recruitment tools have been found to reproduce gender bias. Over half of Australian organisations are utilising AI tools to filter their job candidates. These systems use algorithms to classify, rank and score applicants, which can negatively affect women and other job seekers impacted by other forms of discrimination and bias. Even when gender has been removed from the algorithm, AI is able to learn bias through patterns in the data, for example, it can rank applicants with gaps in their resume due to parental leave or caring responsibilities lower than those without such employment gaps.¹³

Use of AI to promote online content

Influencers who are part of the manosphere¹⁴ use AI tools, including AI algorithmic forums, customised conversational chatbots and generative image tools to spread online misogyny and radicalise young men and boys under the pretence of financial, fitness and self-improvement advice. For example, influencers leverage genAI to rapidly produce large volumes of videos, posts, podcasts and comments promoting messages that evidence demonstrates drive violence against women. The national framework for preventing violence against women, *Change the story*, identifies the following drivers of violence, which are promoted by masculinity influencers and proponents of platforms and networks that discuss men's issues, masculinity and self-improvement, often from a perspective critical of gender equality and amplified by their use of AI:

1. Condoning of men's violence against women.
2. Men's control over decision-making and women's independence.
3. Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity.

4. Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control.

These messages may be coupled with AI-enhanced social media strategies that repeatedly target users with their content. This trend is particularly concerning for young people.¹⁵ As soon as young people enter the online world, they are bombarded with harmful attitudes and content, including young men being told by admired influencers that they should control and abuse women.¹⁶ In doing so, AI can amplify the condoning of violence against women. This can drive both online and offline violence.¹⁷

Use of AI chatbots shaping young people's understanding of sex and relationships

Online environments can be highly influential in shaping how young people understand sex, relationships, and gender roles and identities.¹⁸ Concerningly due to the largely unregulated nature of online platforms, a fast-moving technological environment and the same underlying social conditions that produce and drive gender inequality, disrespect and sexism in wider society, these environments can replicate the gendered patterns of power and control found offline. Young people are also both seeking information in online spaces and engaging with AI chatbots to find answers to their questions.¹⁹ The content they receive shapes their attitudes around gender, sex and relationships, yet it is often anti-gender equality messaging.

Simultaneously, research shows that boys with harmful attitudes towards gender, sex and relationships are far more likely to view violent or non-consensual pornography and encounter or normalise image-based abuse such as deepfakes.²⁰ They are also more likely to cause harm to others or experience harm themselves.

Targeted industry participation through policy and industry levers is an effective approach to addressing gender inequality. In the mining industry, coordinated industry action on diversity and inclusion increased women's representation from 14% in 2015 to 22% in 2025, while 57% of mining companies improved their gender pay gap in 2023-24. Further, there is an opportunity to strengthen existing approaches to engaging young people through existing interventions such as Respectful Relationships Education to improve digital literacy and better equip young people to navigate online environments.

Recommendation 2: Increase women's participation in AI industry and governance to reduce gender bias through the Commonwealth government's *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality*.

Recommendation 3: Scale Respectful Relationships Education to improve digital literacy and as a mechanism to prevent online harm.

Workforce and skill implications for women

AI adoption is likely to have uneven impact on the workforce, exacerbating financial and economic insecurity for women.

The Australian labour market remains highly gender segregated.²¹ As mentioned above, the technology sector, including the AI industry, is male dominated. Men are also overrepresented among STEM enrolments.²² There are also gender differences in AI use

and confidence, with young men being eager adopters and the biggest user group.²³ In consequence, men have more job stability in the rapidly changing work environments. By contrast, women's concentration in administrative and clerical work may create particular exposure to task automation and job displacement, while they remain underrepresented in many technical and decision-making roles.

The workforce question is broader than the number of jobs created or displaced due to AI adoption. The International Labour Organization suggested that one in four workers globally is in an occupation with some exposure to genAI, but most jobs are more likely to be transformed than eliminated.²⁴ This analysis emphasised the effects on working conditions and job quality. Relevant impacts include workload and work intensity, autonomy and professional judgement, surveillance and privacy, employment security, pay and career progression, access to training, occupational health and safety, and whether productivity expectations increase without workers sharing the benefits of AI. These issues should be carefully considered and assessed by workplaces before AI adoption.

Australia's national Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) is uniquely positioned to develop further understanding of the potential impact of AI on gender segregation to then provide advice to government, and to explore possible opportunities to monitor impacts through its reporting and data collection functions. WGEA could provide advice to government on emerging risks associated with AI, including job displacement, workforce segregation, pay equity, access to training and leadership pathways, helping ensure that AI adoption supports rather than undermines progress towards gender equality.

Recommendation 4: WGEA to develop and provide advice for the government regarding AI's impact on gender segregation in the workforce.

Gaps in existing policy, legal and regulatory frameworks

Current AI infrastructure, policy and legal landscape and regulatory frameworks largely ignore addressing the gendered drivers of violence. While AI harms and risks are increasingly noted within domestic, family and sexual violence portfolios, frameworks that guide Australia's approach to AI and Australia's AI industry fail to prioritise these issues.

The National AI Plan, launched to grow the AI industry in Australia, is built around three goals: capturing opportunity, spreading the benefits and keeping Australians safe. While the plan recognises that AI-facilitated abuse disproportionately impacts women and girls, it makes no links to *the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*.

A flagship initiative under *the National AI Plan* is Australia's AI Safety Institute. The remit of the AI Safety Institute includes supporting regulators and agencies in responding to emerging AI risks and harms and shaping safe AI development, deployment and international governance in Australia's interests. However, at present the AI Safety Institute does not include gender equality or prevention of violence as a priority area of concern.²⁵ There is an opportunity to strengthen the remit of the Institute by including prevention of violence against women as a dedicated focus.

Recommendation 5: Integrate the prevention of violence against women in the national AI infrastructure through aligning *The National AI Plan* and associated policy with *The National*

Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032, and develop a priority dedicated to violence against women under Australia's AI Safety Institute.

Opportunities to strengthen the prevention of violence against women

With the rapid development of AI technologies, Australia is at a critical juncture. AI presents significant harms in relation to violence against women noted in the above. It also offers a unique opportunity to address existing gender inequalities and gaps. AI systems can reproduce, amplify and create new forms of violence, but they can also provide an opportunity to proactively address entrenched gender biases.

A prevention of violence against women lens approach to AI governance, grounded in safety, equality and human rights principles, is essential to ensuring that AI contributes to, rather than undermines, the safety of all Australians, and disrupts the long-standing patterns of violence against women.

There is an increased attention to AI-enabled harms in the development of the Second Action Plan under *the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children* and the development a Digital Duty of Care under *the Online Safety Act 2021 (Cth)*. Building on this, a prevention approach requires addressing violence against women before it starts, including through investigating the potential risks for such violence in the development of AI systems, and through embedding Safety by Design principles²⁶ early by the AI industry.

Online environments should be understood not only as sites of harm, but also as settings for prevention. Technology companies, regulators and prevention organisations each have a role to play in promoting gender equality, challenging harmful norms and creating safer online environments.

Recommendations 6: Invest in partnerships between eSafety, technology companies, researchers and the domestic, family and sexual violence sector to promote gender equality and respect through platform design, safety, moderation and AI development, and to support the delivery of evidence-informed primary prevention initiatives in online settings.

¹ Department of Social Services. (2022). *National plan to end violence against women and children 2022–2032*. <https://www.dss.gov.au/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children>

² Our Watch. (2021). *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia* (2nd ed). <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story>

³ UN Women, & Everyday Sexism Project. (2025). *How AI is exacerbating technology-facilitated violence against women and girls*. <https://knowledge.unwomen.org/en/digital->

[library/publications/2025/12/how-ai-is-exacerbating-technology-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls](#)

⁴ Wesnet. (2026). *Third national survey of technology abuse and domestic violence in Australia*. <https://wesnet.org.au/3rdnatsurvey/>

⁵ Doxing refers to ‘the intentional online exposure of an individual’s identity, private information or personal details without their consent with the intent of causing harm’. eSafety Commissioner. (2020). *Doxing*. <https://www.esafety.gov.au/industry/tech-trends-and-challenges/doxing>

⁶ UN Women, & Everyday Sexism Project. (2025).

⁷ eSafety Commissioner. (2025). *AI-assisted image-based abuse: Navigating the deepfake threat*. <https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-07/AI-assisted-image-based-abuse-handout-14.7.25.pdf>

⁸ Our Watch, & University of Melbourne Youth Research Collective. (2026). *Young people, online worlds and respectful relationships education: What the research tells us*. <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/education/resources/australian-curriculum-guide>

⁹ The Men’s Project. (2025). *The Adolescent Man Box: Findings from a survey with Australian adolescents aged 14-18 years*. Jesuit Social Services. <https://jss.org.au/programs/the-adolescent-man-box/>

¹⁰ Privacy International. (2026). *Nowhere to hide? Privacy risks and policy implications of AI geolocation*. <https://privacyinternational.org/report/5736/nowhere-hide-privacy-risks-and-policy-implications-ai-geolocation>

¹¹ Sajadieh, Sha et al. (2026). *The AI Index 2026 Annual Report*. AI Index Steering Committee, Institute for Human-Centered AI, Stanford University. Stanford, CA. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2606.15708>

¹² Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. (2024). *Working for women: A strategy for gender equality*. <https://genderequality.gov.au>

¹³ Working with Women Alliance. (2025). *AI, gender and economic equality*. <https://wwwa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/2WwWA-Policy-Brief-AI-Gender-and-Economic-Equality.pdf>

¹⁴ The manosphere refers to ‘the global collection of online forums, websites, social media communities, influencers and podcasters that talk broadly about men’s rights and contemporary issues facing men and boys.’ Pfitzner, N., McCook, S., Phelan, A., Wescott, S., Roberts, S. & Scott, B. (2026). *An Introductory Guide to the Manosphere and the Impacts for Young People, Teachers and Schools*. ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/resources/guide-to-the-manosphere/>

¹⁵ Meger, S. (2026). *Misogyny, online radicalisation, and youth extremism in Australia*. Research report. The University of Melbourne. https://figshare.unimelb.edu.au/articles/report/Misogyny_Online_Radicalisation_and_Youth_Extremism_in_Australia/33250176?file=67531593

¹⁶ Our Watch, & University of Melbourne Youth Research Collective. (2026).

¹⁷ UN Women. (2025).

¹⁸ Our Watch, & University of Melbourne Youth Research Collective. (2026).

¹⁹ eSafety Commissioner. (2026). *Talking to machines: Children’s experiences with AI assistants and companions*. <https://www.esafety.gov.au/research/talking-to-machines-childrens-experiences-with-ai-assistants-and-companions>

²⁰ The Men’s Project. (2025).

²¹ Women’s Gender Equality Agency. (2025). *WGEA Gender Equality Scorecard 2024-25*. <https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/australias-gender-equality-scorecard>

²² Department of Industry, Science and Resources. (2026). *STEM Equity Monitor: Data report 2026*. <https://www.industry.gov.au/sites/default/files/2026-07/stem-equity-monitor-summary-report-2026.pdf>

²³ auDA. (2025). *Digital Lives of Australians 2025*. <https://www.auda.org.au/news-insights/research-reports/digital-lives-of-australians/digital-lives-of-australians-2025/>

²⁴ International Labour Organization. (2026). *Gen AI, occupational segregation and gender equality in the world of work*. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2026-03/Research%20Brief%20GenAI_final0403_0.pdf

²⁵ Department of Industry, Science and Resources. (n.d.). *Australia's AI Safety Institute*.
<https://www.industry.gov.au/science-technology-and-innovation/technology/artificial-intelligence/ai-safety-institute>

²⁶ Safety by Design is a proactive and preventative approach encouraging organisations to anticipate, detect and eliminate online harms while embedding safety, accountability and positive user experiences into their culture and leadership. At the heart of Safety by Design are three principles: service provider responsibility, user empowerment and autonomy, and transparency and accountability. eSafety Commissioner. (2024). *Technology-facilitated gender-based violence: An industry guide for addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence through Safety by Design*.
<https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-09/SafetyByDesign-technology-facilitated-gender-based-violence-industry-guide.pdf>