

Media Release**May 9, 2025**

Youthline advocates for youth voice on proposed social media ban

Youthline, the mental health and development organisation that is strongly “with youth, for youth,” has genuine concerns that any proposed blanket ban on social media for under 16-year-olds could stop young people from accessing essential mental health support.

Shae Ronald, CEO, Youthline, says, “A ban would remove a critical front door to the mental health system, cutting young people off from free and accessible support. We know this from what we see firsthand and from talking with young people. A ban would also have a major impact on marginalised and rural communities.”

She says there is currently no concrete evidence to suggest that a social media ban for under-16-year-olds will be effective, and many potential negative impacts. For example, it risks driving young people to less regulated spaces where there is an increased risk of harm.

“Many young people who reach out to us for counselling or crisis support access our services through social media. That’s why we show up in these spaces - it’s what young people ask for and importantly, where they want to connect with us. A ban would bluntly cut through these support avenues in the process of trying to reduce harm. Evidence-based approaches are needed to address the complex issues young people face, and that includes social media.”

Ronald said this is even more important in the face of rising rates of mental health distress being seen through its national Helpline, and an overstretched mental health system.

The Youthline State of the Generation 2023 survey found that 49% of young people surveyed identified social media as one of many big issues facing their generation. Of those, over half went on to explain why, highlighting concerns that were themed as mental health and social challenges, including bullying, body image, peer pressure and racism. However, many young people also see social media channels as the best way to reach them.

“I think we would all agree more needs to be done to ensure that young people are safe and protected from online harm.”

Ronald says there is a risk that a blanket ban could create unintended consequences that don’t acknowledge the way social media can support youth wellbeing, connect young people, provide a sense of representation, identity and inclusion, and offer valuable resources and help.

“We are advocating for a wider consultation on the whole issue and as a priority, to ensure the voice of young people is heard because they are the cohort most affected.

Any solutions need to be grounded in the lived experience of young people in order to be effective, with young people actively involved in shaping the solutions that affect them. Solutions also need to look to the future given the rapidly evolving AI developments.

Youthline will put a spotlight on the topic to find out how young people really feel and how they want to be supported as part of its State of the Generation research taking place before the end of the year. *

Ronald says young people being protected and safe online is a complex and nuanced issue, and New Zealand should be looking at all of the options available and being considered by other countries, to find an effective solution.

“What we really need is a collaborative and broad approach with greater platform accountability, better tools, education and support for parents and young people, stronger regulation and legislation, and active dialogue that really cuts to the heart of these issues and creates evidence-based solutions. It would be good to see what happens in Australia’s evaluation of the impact of the ban and its enforceability.”

She says how platforms intervene and prioritise action over harmful content needs to be strengthened, as do swifter protection and action around reported harmful content.

“We know that young people are resourceful and that effective age assurance technologies are yet to be identified. Young people who find loopholes to continue using social media may run into difficulties and be more reluctant to seek help because of a ban. We know that being able to have open dialogue with peers and trusted adults about social media is an important part of how young people learn to navigate social media in safe and healthy ways.

There’s an assumption that a ban will protect young people, but we know firsthand that the young people reaching out for our help around bullying, online harassment, abuse, and mental health need connection and empowerment to deal with situations where they feel unsafe or to talk about content that is unsafe. This is a key area to direct our collective efforts.” Ronald concluded.

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Released by Goode PR on behalf of Youthline NZ.

For more information on Youthline NZ or to arrange an interview please contact Vikki Lee Goode on 021 964 888 or vikkilee@goodepr.co.nz

NOTES TO EDITORS:

*The Youthline State of the Generation report 2023 is available here – [State of the Generation 2023](#). This bi-annual report will be released again before the end of 2025.