

# Policy, Practice, and Futures

*A report on the priorities arising from the  
second Digital Childhoods Summit*

AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH COUNCIL

Centre of Excellence  
for the **Digital  
Child.**



This report synthesises discussions from the Digital Childhoods Summit, held in Canberra on 11-12 June. Both the Summit and this report are initiatives of the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child (Digital Child), aimed at producing agreed priorities and actions for supporting children in the digital world.

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# Priorities for digital childhood in Australia

**Authentically involve children's voices in decisions that affect them**

**Coordinate national digital inclusion efforts**

**Prioritise co-design and a rights-based approaches to policy development**

**Need for data and evidence on the benefits and risks of online spaces**

**Need for more simple, clear, and concise messaging for families**

**Stronger communication of evidence and resources**

**Establish a one-stop hub focused on digital literacy**

**Create standards on privacy- and safety- by design**

**Incentivise online child-focused spaces that are safe, secure, and private**

**Clearer communication about privacy and data specifically for children and families**

# Summary - Identifying priorities for digital childhoods

Building on the insights and connections established at the Inaugural Digital Childhoods Summit in 2024, the 2025 Digital Childhoods Summit aimed to identify key priorities for practice and policy to improve digital childhoods in Australia. This objective was pursued through panels and roundtable discussions organised around four key themes, each recognised as timely and significant issues affecting children, families, educators, industry and government.

Specifically, the four themes identified were:

1. Inclusion and Communities
2. Digital Literacy and Families
3. Privacy and Security
4. Leadership and Action

Following panel discussions led by experts in key thematic areas, Summit attendees participated in structured roundtable discussions, each led by a Digital Child Researcher, to generate top priorities for supporting children in a digital world based on the issues raised by the panellists and drawing on their own expertise.

The priorities identified following each thematic session were subsequently collated and ranked through a structured voting process with Summit attendees to determine the top priorities that emerged from the Summit. These priorities reflect shared opportunities for coordinated action and collaboration across sectors.

The top three priorities under each theme, as determined by this structured ranking process, are presented on the left.





# Introduction

On 11-12 June 2025, over seventy delegates from industry, not-for-profit organisations, government, and research sectors convened in Canberra for the Second Annual Digital Childhoods Summit. The Summit focused on advancing the wellbeing and safety of children in the digital world, with particular attention of young Australian children from birth to 12 years.

In response to concerns from Australian parents around excessive screen use, cyberbullying, and internet safety, the Summit provided an important platform for cross-sectoral dialogue, sharing insights, and developing strategies to ensure children can thrive in a digital age.

This report has been prepared for Summit attendees and broader networks concerned with the wellbeing, education, social participation, and safety of children using digital technologies. By bringing these sectors together, the Digital Child aimed to strengthen its collective impact and define key priorities for future collaboration.

The report summarises key issues and recommendations generated during panels and facilitated roundtable discussions. These discussions were documented by Digital Child scribes and later synthesised to reflect the priorities that emerged across the Summit's thematic sessions.

The priorities identified in this report represent the views of attendees. This report will provide more details regarding the process and meaning behind each priority, as well as proposed next steps.





# Organisations

The Organisations represented at the Summit are undertaking vital work to advance the safety and wellbeing of children in digital environments.

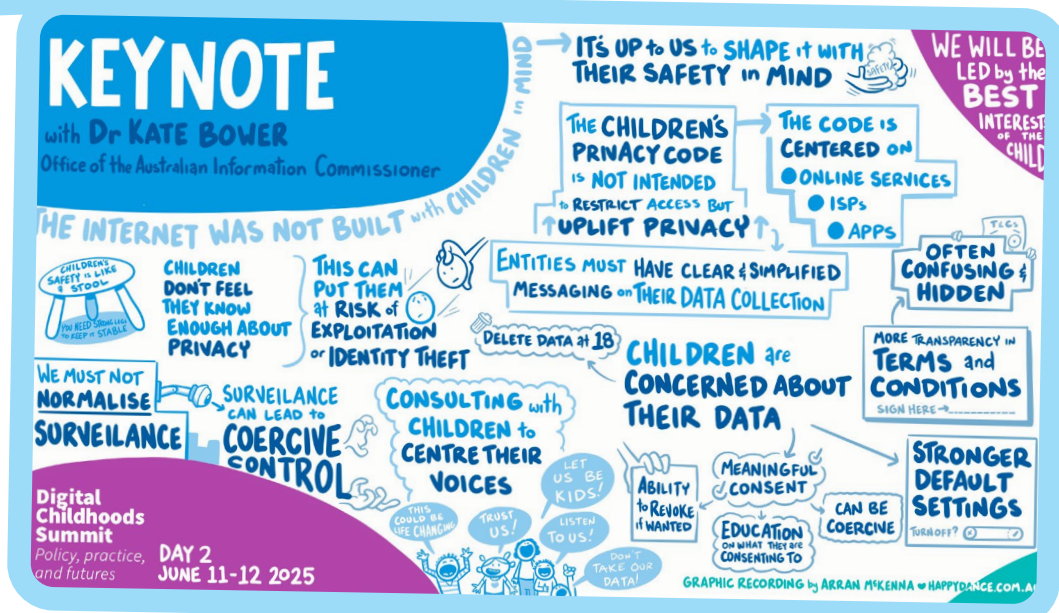
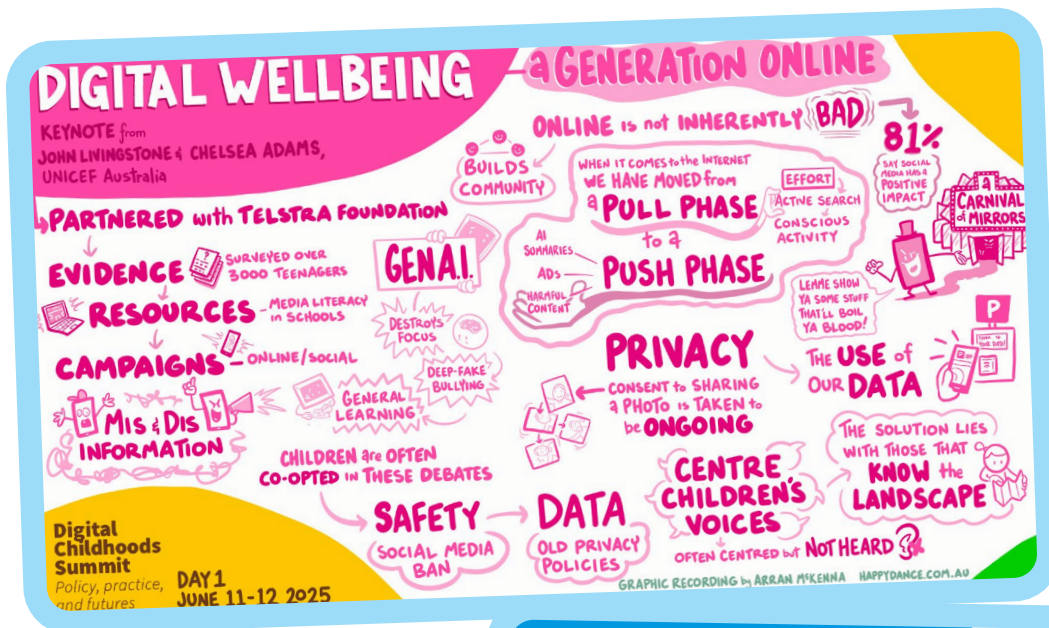
- |                                                                                                   |                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| ACECQA                                                                                            | Early Childhood Australia                         |
| Alannah & Madeline Foundation                                                                     | eSafety Commissioner                              |
| ARACY                                                                                             | Good Things Australia                             |
| Australian Children's Television Foundation                                                       | Goodstart Early Learning                          |
| Australian Federal Police                                                                         | Macquarie University                              |
| Australian Government Department of Education                                                     | Meta                                              |
| Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care                                          | Museum of Australian Democracy                    |
| Australian Library and Information Association                                                    | NAPCAN                                            |
| C&K                                                                                               | National Mental Health Commission                 |
| Centre for Digital Wellbeing                                                                      | Netsafe                                           |
| Community Early Learning Australia                                                                | Office of the Australian Information Commissioner |
| Department of Health and Aged Care                                                                | PROJECT ROCKIT                                    |
| Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts | ReachOut Australia                                |
| DIGI                                                                                              | Snap Inc.                                         |
| Digital Child                                                                                     | Starlight Children's Foundation                   |
|                                                                                                   | The Conversation Media Group                      |
|                                                                                                   | The Smith Family                                  |
|                                                                                                   | UNICEF Australia                                  |

# Program summary

The Summit was Chaired by Digital Child Chief Investigator, Professor Simon Smith, and featured keynote speakers, research highlights from Digital Child research fellows, panel discussions, and roundtable sessions. Arran McKenna, a visual scribe based in Canberra, captured the discussions and presentations as well as research panels and daily summaries.

## Keynotes:

- **Digital wellbeing:** UNICEF Australia youth ambassador Chelsea Adams and Digital Policy Lead John Livingstone provided an address on Digital Wellbeing. They spoke about young people's experiences and ideas on the change that needs to happen. That change includes making digital platforms safer and increasing awareness and access to tools to help young people better navigate digital spaces.
- **Privacy:** The Office of the Australian Information Commissioner's Dr Kate Bower spoke about the development of the Children's Online Privacy Code, including consultation processes for children and families as well as industry and wider stakeholders.

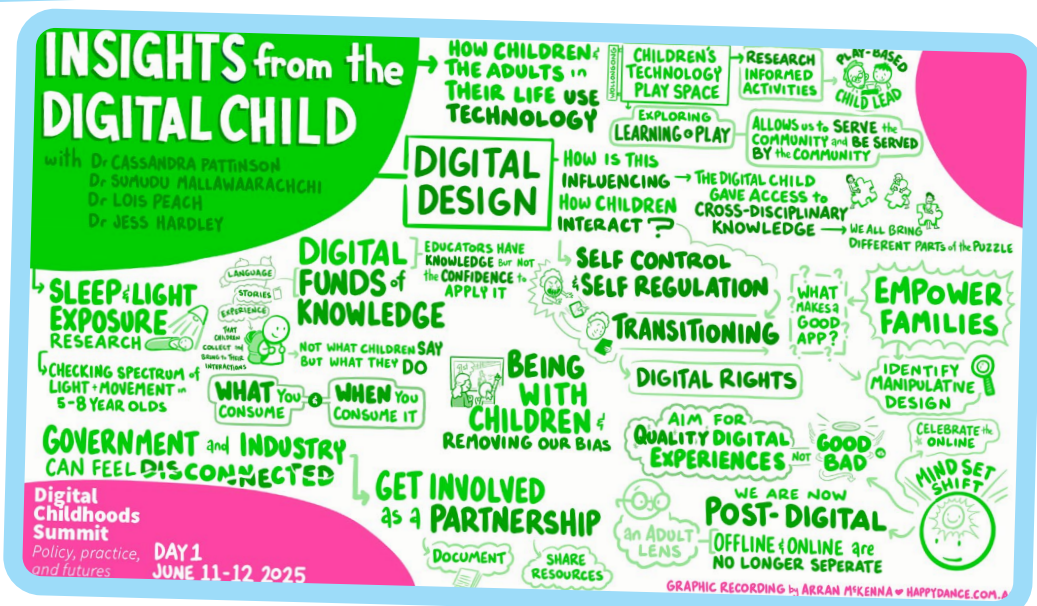
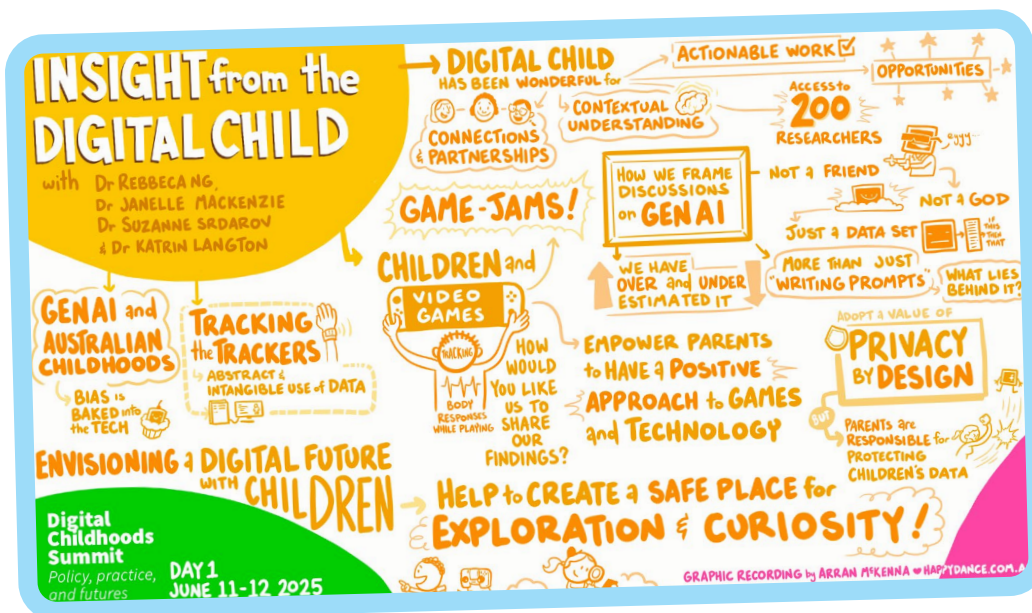




**Research highlights from the Digital Child**

In response from attendee feedback from the 2024 Digital Childhoods Summit, requesting greater insights into the research of the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child, the 2025 Summit featured two panels showcasing current research underway across the Centre.

The research profiled during the panels ranged from participatory approaches, such as using children’s drawings to explore their perceptions of the internet, to sensor-based studies, including the use of digital spectrometers to examine the types of light that children are exposed to across the day. These examples highlighted the breadth and diversity of methodologies being employed to understand children’s digital experiences and outcomes.





# ROUNDTABLE SUMMARIES DAY 1

## WHAT is the SLIP, SLOP, SLAP of DIGITAL LITERACY?

NOT ONLY AIMED AT PARENTS

WHERE is OUR EVIDENCE & HOW DO WE ACCESS IT?

### IMPLICATIONS of LANGUAGE

SCREEN USE ← AGE RESTRICTED  
OVER SCREEN TIME → BANNED

DATA SHARING BETWEEN US

### PROVIDING the TOOLS that are NEEDED

How DO WE CREATE SIMILAR SPACES to REPLACE those THAT MAY DISAPPEAR

AGENCY for CHILDREN to CREATE THEIR OWN DIGITAL FOOTPRINT

WE'RE in a GREAT POSITION to PROVIDE CLEAR MESSAGING

WHO DOESN'T HAVE THE TECH and HOW CAN WE GET IT TO THEM?

WHAT WILL FILL THE GAP MADE BY THE BAN?

MORE ACTION is NEEDED

USEABLE RESOURCE and CAMPAIGNS

WHAT is THE MESSAGING?

WE HAVE INFORMATION THAT SHOULD BE SHARED

DESTIGMATISE CONVERSATION

### PEER SUPPORT for CHILDREN

WORK COLLECTIVELY and CONSISTENTLY

POLITICS as a BARRIER

HOW DO WE DO THIS?

a DIGITAL LITERACY VILLAGE to HELP with TOUGH TOPICS

THINK DEEPER on WHAT INDUSTRY DOES to FIND CONSISTENCY & PATHWAYS to CHANGE

TOP 5 TIPS

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Digital Childhoods Summit  
Policy, practice, and futures

DAY 1  
JUNE 11-12 2025

# ROUNDTABLE SUMMARIES DAY 2

EVIDENCE-BACKED AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

DATASMART from the START

WHO TO PARTNER WITH?

APP SAFETY RATINGS

UPSKILLING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

SAFETY + INCLUSION

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS & AGENCY

DIPLOMACY and LITERACY FOR THAT WE CANNOT CONTROL

DEFINE DIGITAL LITERACY

3 AUTHENTIC, 7 AGE-APPROPRIATE, 15 CONSULTATION

REFRAME DEBATE

GUIDE the NARRATIVE

a MESSAGE THAT EMPOWERS & CELEBRATES

LET'S MAKE SOMETHING TANGIBLE in the NEXT 12 MONTHS

LANGUAGE & CONTEXT MATTERS

a CO-ORDINATED PARTNERSHIP

HOW DO WE KEEP OUR CONNECTION?

Digital Childhoods Summit  
Policy, practice, and futures

DAY 2  
JUNE 11-12 2025

a REPOSITORY of RESOURCES

WHO is ACCESSING and WHERE ARE THEY ACCESSING?

TRANSPARENCY & TRUST

GRAPHIC RECORDING by ARRAN M'KENNA @ HAPPYDANCE.COM.AU





# Panel discussions: Identifying priorities for digital childhoods

The program for the 2025 Digital Childhoods Summit was shaped by input from a steering committee comprising experts from Digital Child Partner Organisations, including UNICEF Australia, Alannah & Madeline Foundation, C&K, Office of the eSafety Commissioner, and the Telstra Foundation. Drawing on their collective expertise, the steering committee identified four thematic areas that reflect urgent issues of significance facing children, families, educators, industry and government.

Specifically, the four themes identified were:

1. Inclusion and Communities
2. Digital Literacy and Families
3. Privacy and Security
4. Leadership and Action

## Event structure and priority identification process

Each of the Summit themes was explored through a panel discussion of experts from relevant sectors, facilitated by a researcher from the Digital Child. These panels were followed by roundtable discussions, where attendees drew on their own expertise and experience to identify the top priorities for supporting children in the digital world.

To ensure a rigorous process, each table was assigned a trained Digital Child research staff member who acted as a scribe. These scribes documented the priorities identified during the discussions for the first three themes and submitted them to the Summit's organisation team. The full set of priorities was then entered into an anonymous Qualtrics survey.

At the conclusion of Day 2, attendees were invited to participate in the survey via a QR code. The survey asked attendees to rank the list of priorities for each theme.

Each rank was given a score, which allowed votes to be tallied across each of the themes. Following final ranking, a thematic analysis was conducted to consolidate overlapping priorities. Where the top-ranked priorities were conceptually similar, they were collapsed into a single, unified priority. This process enabled the identification of the top three priorities under each theme, reflecting broad agreement for the most urgent areas for cross sector action.

## Overarching cross-cutting priority

### Authentically involving children's voices in digital policy and practice

A consistent and unanimous priority recognised across all summit themes was to authentically involve children's voices in the development of digital policy and practice. This priority reflects the attendee's commitment to the principle that children must have their own voice in consultation and decision-making processes that directly affect their lives.

Throughout the summit, panellists and attendees issued specific calls to action regarding the inclusion of children's perspectives. Some panellists and attendees noted the absence of this voice from contemporary policymaking and decisions, including the notable absence of child voice when the social media bans were being discussed.

Panellists spoke compellingly about the changing context of childhoods in the digital age, emphasising that these shifts must be understood through children's lived experience, not just from observation or adult interpretation.

This overarching priority calls for a shift in embedding children's voices in research, policy development and practice.



# Panel 1: Inclusion and Communities

**Panel:** Professor Sandy O’Sullivan (Macquarie University), Felicity McMahon (Starlight Children’s Foundation), Dr Sandra Garrido (ReachOut Australia), and Penny Markham (Goodstart Early Learning)

**Facilitator:** Professor Daniel Johnson (Digital Child)

This panel discussed how accessibility and affordability influences capacity to participate in digital spaces and discussed the important role of social media in accessing information and connecting with community. The top priorities were identified as:

## Coordinate national digital inclusion efforts

- Organisations deliver overlapping initiatives – coordination could make resources more accessible and consistent in homes, schools, and community.
- Create minimum viable device specifications to ensure longevity and sustainability.

## Prioritise co-design and a rights-based approaches to policy development

- Co-design approaches should be used to ensure that policies and resources reflect the lived realities of diverse children, including Indigenous, LGBTIQ+, and neurodivergent kids.
- In addition, a rights-based approach could ensure a focus on children’s agency and dignity.

## Need for data and evidence on the benefits and risks of online spaces

- Trustworthy data should be provided and used to generate policy.



# Panel 2: Digital Literacy for Families

**Panel:** Jordana Brown (The Smith Family), Dr Sandra Cheeseman (C&K), Dr Stephanie Smith (Museum of Australian Democracy), and Wendy Henning (ICPA QLD)

**Facilitator:** Professor Lennie Barblett (Digital Child)

This panel's conversation covered how families define digital literacy and the importance of establishing trusted sources of evidence-based information. They discussed how the word "digital" should be removed as our lives are immersed in technology. The top priorities were identified as:

## Need for more simple, clear, and concise messaging for families

- Families need clear, practical, and digestible guidance without jargon.
- Messaging should reduce guilt and instead highlight positive/constructive uses of digital technology.

## Stronger communication of evidence and resources

- Attendees indicated strong interest in developing a memorable public campaign on digital literacy.
- Integrate messaging into channels that families naturally access (e.g. social media).

## Establish a one-stop hub focused on digital literacy

- Families need a 'one-stop shop' or hub for trusted advice.
- Participants asked if the Digital Child could act as a primary source and partner with organisations skilled in knowledge translation.





## Panel 3: Security and Privacy

**Panel:** Mia Garlick (Meta), Andrea Leask (Netsafe), Rachel Purdy (Australian Federal Police), and Craig Bennett (ACECQA) discussed children’s privacy and security.

**Facilitator:** Professor Tama Leaver (Digital Child)

This panel considered how industry and government could work to centre children’s voices while working to make spaces safer. The top priorities were identified as:

### Create standards on privacy- and safety- by design

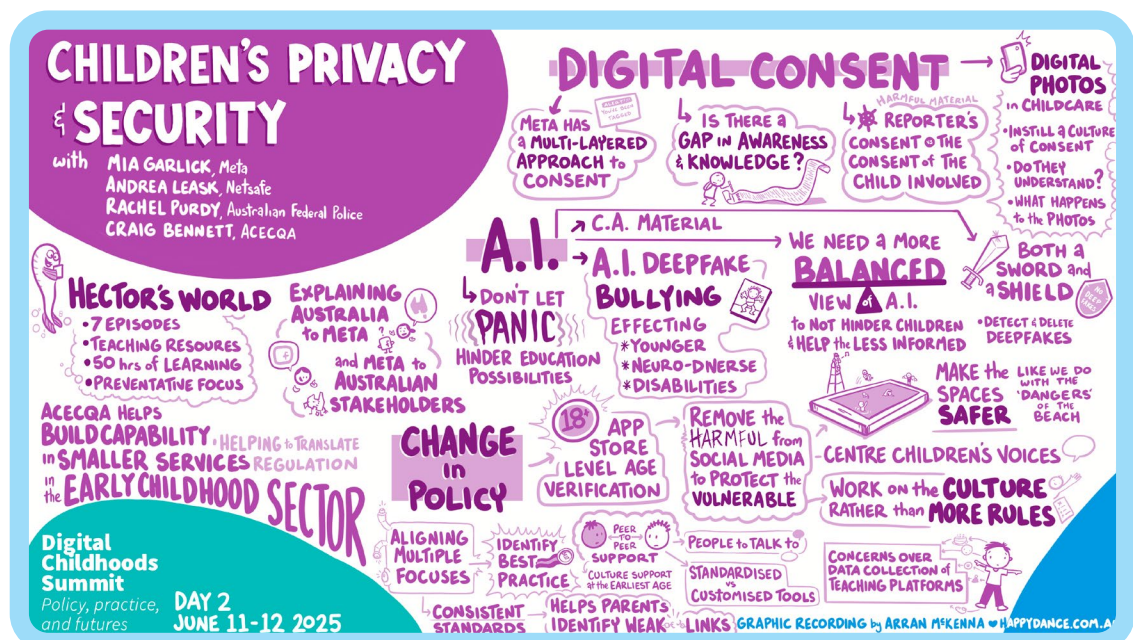
- Standards should be created to bring different sectors together and establish transparency on data privacy/data use and provide clarity to end users.
- Data collection should be limited to what is reasonably necessary.

### Incentivise online child-focused spaces that are safe, secure, and private

- Attendees voiced a strong desired for child-focused online spaces and devices that default to privacy and safety.
- Children should be involved directly in designing child-focused platforms, so the spaces reflect their lived experiences.

### Clearer communication about privacy and data specifically for children and families

- Called for use of plain language, visuals, and readability scales in terms and conditions.
- Transparency on privacy settings, terms of service, and data use is a priority for enabling meaningful consent.



# Panel 4: Leadership and Action

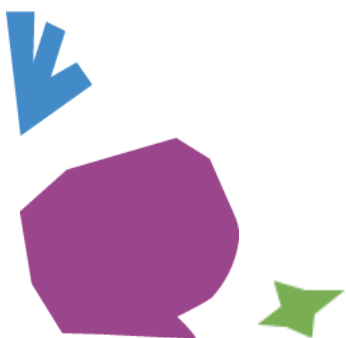
**Panel:** Lucy Thomas OAM (PROJECT ROCKIT), Chloe Shorten (Centre for Digital Wellbeing), Sunita Bose (DIGI), and John Livingstone (UNICEF Australia) covered leadership and action.

**Facilitator:** Professor Louise Paatsch (Digital Child)

This panel’s conversation covered how key organisations can take action on improving digital childhoods in Australia. The panellist identified priorities for action which were then voted on by the group.

The top three priorities were identified as:

- Achieving a better balance of children and young people’s rights
- Finding a way to uplift the benefits of the online world
- Better operationalisation of the ‘best interests of the child’ by industry





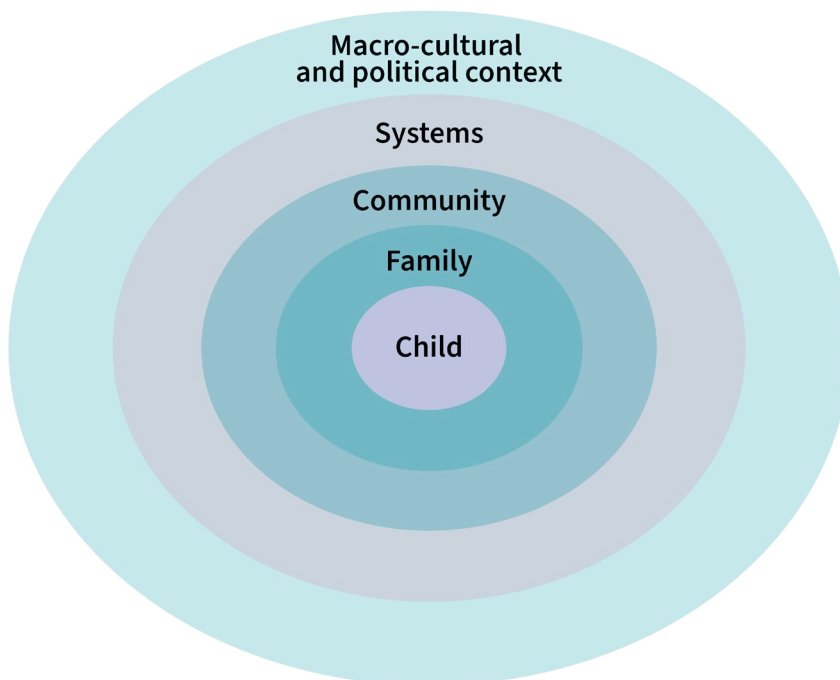


# A model of digital childhoods in Australia

Drawing on the findings from the Summit, we propose a socioecological models to make sense of how different factors and contextual conditions influence digital childhoods in Australia.

At the centre of the model are children, whose digital lives are embedded within nested layers of family, community, and broader systems. The outermost level, the macro-cultural and political environment, governs the conditions of the entire system. The nested structure of the model reflects that there are dynamic interactions between factors and stakeholders, both within and across all levels. This framing highlights the need for coordinated and aligned action across all levels of influence to effectively support children’s wellbeing and safety in digital environments.

Socioecological framework of multi-level stakeholders for children’s digital wellbeing





### How we can use this model

- This model can be used as a framework for refining questions and exploring mechanisms that influence children's digital wellbeing and safety.
- The model can help us to identify which stakeholders, including those represented at the Summit, are best positioned to act or intervene at different levels of influence. The priorities identified at the Summit highlight the need for coordinated, multi-level action to support children in digital environments.

### An example of how to use this model

Table 1 shows an example of types of factors at each level of the socioecological model that influence children's digital wellbeing and safety. It also identifies the primary level at which different stakeholders are positioned to exert influence.

**Table 1: Factors and stakeholders influence children's digital wellbeing and safety**

<b>Level of influence</b>	<b>Example factors</b>	<b>Example stakeholders</b>
Child	Children's digital literacy Children's digital agency Children's self-regulation	Children Children advocates
Family	Family attitudes Family digital literacy Family rules and supervision	Parents and carers Extended families Organisations that support families
Community	School and ECEC programs Community initiatives	Schools and educators ECEC providers Community organisations Workplaces
Systems	Digital curriculum Digital engagement with health system	Education departments and governing authorities Health services Professional associations
Macro-cultural and political context	Policy Infrastructure Cultural norms Platforms Regulation	Technology & Media companies Policy makers Regulators Research funding bodies Legal and governance bodies Infrastructure providers

# Next steps

Inclusive, accessible, and safe digital childhoods are a priority for all. Ensuring these spaces are inclusive and safe for children and families requires a multi-level socio-ecological approach.

The Digital Child plays a role in this space, which includes bringing organisations together. We will continue this in the next iteration of the Summit.

## For the Digital Child

1. **Generate evidence on the identified priority areas** - We will continue the work to translate the priorities identified at the Summit into an action framework which can be mapped, evaluated and referenced to guide cross-sector efforts to improving digital childhoods.
2. **Facilitate connections** - We remain committed to facilitating multi-sector and level engagement, and to being involved in contributing to and responding to emerging policies around young children and digital technologies.
3. **Convene the next Digital Childhoods Summit** - Planning is underway for the Third Annual Digital Childhoods Summit, to be held on 3-4 June 2026. This event will continue the conversation and deepen collaboration.

## For attendees

1. **Reconnect with us** - We invite attendees to connect with us and share how we can support evidence-based initiatives and foster deeper connections between key organisations.
2. **Register for the Digital Childhoods Summit in 2026** - To continue this conversation, we invite attendees to participate in the next Digital Childhoods Summit.
3. **Collaborate with each other** - Connect with each other to share evidence, tools, resources, and approaches across the sector to help build and cement a common language to ensure that we are giving consistent messaging to children and families.



## Save the date

The Digital Childhoods Summit 2026 will be held in Canberra on 27 - 28 May.

