

# WHY CANADA NEEDS A SOCIAL MEDIA AGE MINIMUM OF 16

## THE PROBLEM

### 01 | THE HARM

#### Social Media is Hurting Youth

**23%**

of teens 12–17 use social media excessively at 5+ hrs/day (CAMH)

**1 in 7**

teen girls in grade 9–10 have addiction signs (PHAC 2025)

**52%**

of teens were sent unwanted sexual images, mostly via social media (C3P)

- 12% of boys in grade 9–10 have tried risky behaviours, like stunts or challenges, learned on social media ([Public Health Agency of Canada](#)).
- Youth social media use is linked to anxiety, depression, disordered eating, body image issues, self-harm, suicidality, mental distress, lower self-worth, attention challenges, and chronic sleep deprivation ([Canadian Medical Association Journal](#)).

### 02 | HARMFUL AT THE CORE

#### It Was Never Made for Children

- **Addiction by design:** Social media's unpredictable rewards (likes, feeds, streaks, swipe-to-refresh) trigger the same brain pathways as gambling ([Topoi, 2024](#)).
- Feeds of unfiltered user-generated content and anonymous stranger solicitation is just not child safe. This is what social media is.

**82%** of Gen Z call social media “addicting” ([Harris Poll](#))

**1 in 2** teens (48%) say social media is “mostly negative” for people their age ([Pew Research Centre](#))

### 03 | Why 16

#### Under-16s are Particularly Vulnerable

- **Puberty is a critical developmental window:** A [longitudinal cohort study](#) of 17,400 UK youth found highest harm in girls 11–13 and boys 14–15.

*“We KNOW that children under the age of 16 do not yet have the full mechanisms for impulse control, adequate risk assessment, and in tact decision making.”*

— Dr. Michele Locke, Adolescent & Child Psychologist, Toronto

## THE SOLUTION

### 04 | GLOBALLY RECOGNIZED APPROACH

#### Age Gates are a Key Prevention Measure

- **Adding friction works.** Age gates for tobacco and gambling reduce youth access and set norms.
- **NATO allies like [France](#), the [UK](#), [Spain](#), and [Greece](#) are moving.** Advancing social media age minimums of 15–16 alongside their enforceable design standards and a robust oversight body.
- **Dozens** of countries globally are developing social media age minimum legislation as part of their online youth safety laws to prevent harm.

### 05 | MOST CANADIANS WANT THIS

#### Widespread Public Support

**84%**

agree kids should be 16+ to join social media (Ipsos)

**90%**

want an enforced age minimum (National Post)

- **[Ontario school boards](#)** are suing social media platforms.
- **[The Canadian Paediatric Society](#)**'s Centre for Screen Use lists a social media age minimum as a top policy priority.

### 06 | IMPLEMENTATION IS FEASIBLE

#### Canada Has the Tools to Act Now

- **Model other countries:** Require platforms to put reasonable measures in place to prevent underage accounts.
- **Canada's new [National Standard for Age Assurance Technology](#)** sets a privacy preserving & data minimizing framework to implement.

*“The friends of my 14-year-old also say they wouldn't want social media if their friends weren't on it too. Their moms also hate it. We need a social media age minimum so we're not forced to choose between harm or isolation.”*  
— Erin Koshal, Ontario

### OUR ASK

Please include a social media age minimum of 16 in Canada's Online Safety legislation to prevent child harm.