

Brief: Older Canadians and the Safe Social Media Act

Summary

In June 2026, the Government of Canada introduced the [Safe Social Media Act \(Bill C-34\)](#) - legislation that would establish a legal framework for online safety. It emerged from years of analysis and debate, public consultation, and input from an expert advisory group. A central aim of the Bill is on protecting children and youth, a group that has been the focus of widespread and coordinated advocacy activities from many segments of Canadian society.

Yet, older Canadians are also major users of social media. They report experiencing significant harms on social platforms, and strongly support government action to advance online safety - both for themselves and to protect their grandkids and others in society.

As Bill C-34 progresses through the legislative process in Fall 2026 and into 2027, there is a big opportunity for older Canadians - and the organizations that represent them - to raise their voices and take action to support passage of this critical legislation.

Older Canadians and Social Media

The Dais' [Survey of Online Harms in Canada](#), and other research and evidence, provide key insights about older Canadians' social media use and online safety threats.

- **Older Canadians are significant users of social media.** Facebook is by far the most used social platform, with 56% of Canadians 60+ reporting daily use in 2025. Rates of use annually are much higher.
- **Older Canadians report experiencing significant harms on social media platforms.** Among older Canadians, 19% report seeing hateful content weekly, 10% report seeing violent content, and 18% report seeing identity theft or fraud weekly. Additionally, 3% say they have had intimate images of themselves shared online without their consent.
- **Harm is driven by both social media platform design and 'bad content'.** Clinical evidence finds clear dose-response effects from engagement-maximizing design of social platforms like Facebook as a core cause of harm. Platforms that enable peer-to-peer engagement with strangers can enable financial frauds and scams, with few protections. Sites saturated with misleading content, about news and public affairs, health and medical treatments, are another major source of harm.

- **Social media use is associated with harms to both mental and physical health.** A recent Canadian study found that social media use among older adults was associated with poorer reported mental health. This is consistent with other studies of the broader population that link higher screen and social media use with increased depression, anxiety, psychological distress, sleep disruption, and inattention. These harms are widespread, measurable, and worsening. For older adults, social media driven screen time can exacerbate social isolation, loneliness, and sedentary behaviour, hastening both cognitive and mobility decline.
- **Social media threatens older Canadians' civic awareness and participation.** While more likely to use traditional media for news than younger Canadians, 36% of older adults report getting "news" from any social media platform - including Meta's platforms that block Canadian journalism.
- **Higher social media use is linked with belief in mis and disinformation.** Among older Canadians, 48% of those who get news from social media believe at least 3 of 8 misinformation statements, compared to only 34% of those who do not use social media for news.
- **Older Canadians strongly support government regulation of social media.** More than two in three Canadians support government action to regulate social media, even where there are tradeoffs. Support is near universal for specific interventions like requiring platforms to quickly remove child sexual abuse material, or requiring platforms to label synthetic media. Older Canadians 60+ are significantly more likely than any other age group to support regulating social media.
- **Canadian older adults are very concerned about harms to young Canadians on social media.** As grandparents and parents to adult children with kids, older Canadians also have a significant stake in protecting their loved ones and other children and youth in their communities. More than 2-in-3 (70%) support restricting access to social media for youth under the age of 16.

Canada's Proposed Social Media Legislation

The *Safe Social Media Act* (Bill C-34) would introduce a legal framework for online safety, emerging from years of analysis and debate, public consultation, and input from an expert advisory group. A central focus is protecting children and youth. Key elements include:

- **Regulating social media and AI chatbot services** (like Facebook, Instagram and ChatGPT), with mechanisms for adding other online services in the future,

- **Establishing four legal duties** for services to: act responsibly (e.g. address harmful content), protect children (safe design), be transparent (risk assessments), and make certain content¹ inaccessible via takedowns within 24 hours,
- **Identifying seven categories of harmful content**² for platforms to address, with requirements to take-down content or report to police in some circumstances,
- **Introducing an under-16 age-restriction**, requiring social media services to block access to accounts unless they can meet standards for “adequate safety”,
- **Establishing a Digital Safety Commission**, a regulatory body with commissioners and expert staff to administer and enforce the act, e.g. set safety standards, take public complaints, investigate violations, issue financial penalties, building public awareness and more.

The legislation builds on an earlier bill, the *Online Harms Act* (OHA), that failed to pass in 2025. It retains key elements of the OHA framework that were broadly supported by stakeholders and the public, and introduces new elements that respond to changes in the policy landscape - notably including AI chatbots in response to growing safety concerns, and the under-16 age restriction that first launched in Australia and is part of a growing movement towards this approach (UK, France, multiple US states have introduced legislation with similar aims).

Since late 2025, the government has also introduced legislation to address related objectives, such as the Combatting Hate Act (C-9), and Criminal Code amendments to prohibit distribution of sexualized AI-generated deepfakes (C-16).

Engaged Actors

A broad cross-section of organizations are mobilized to advance online safety policy and the introduction of this bill. This is most advanced among children’s mental health and protection organizations (e.g. SickKids, Canadian Paediatric Society, Canadian Medical Association), university-based centres (the Dais @ Toronto Metropolitan University, the McGill Centre of Technology, Media and Democracy), civil society and grassroots advocates (Children’s First Canada, Unplugged parents), and segments of the philanthropy community. Others, including civil liberties advocates, are focused on ensuring the law does not overreach in its impact on privacy, expression and other rights.

At the same time, large social media companies (e.g. Meta, Google, TikTok) are very well-resourced opponents of legislative action. They were vocal in opposing Canada’s

¹ The two types are child sexual abuse material and non-consensual intimate images.

² These are content that: sexually victimizes a child or revictimizes a survivor; is used to bully a child; induces a child to harm themselves; intimate content communicated without consent (i.e. revenge porn); foments hatred; incites violence; and incites violent extremism or terrorism.

previous legislation, and have opposed measures to redress online harms in the European Union, Washington, and other jurisdictions with the justification that it impedes free speech, potentially exposes younger people to privacy risks (e.g. from age-verification), and it may push users to even more unregulated platforms.

To date, however, there has been little engagement from older Canadians in raising their voices collectively and taking action to advance online safety legislation.

The Call to Action

Groups supporting older Canadians - and older Canadians themselves - can be critical advocates for the Safe Social Media Act, as the bill progresses through the parliamentary process in Fall 2026 and 2027. Older Canadians are an influential and well organized voting block who are concerned both about online harms affecting themselves as well as younger generations (e.g. grandkids).

Groups representing older adults can show their support by signing this [endorsement letter](#).

Interested in getting more involved? Contact:

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