

8 September 2026

Joint Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence

Re: Artificial intelligence

Suicide Prevention Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Joint Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence's inquiry on artificial intelligence (AI), including its adoption across Commonwealth departments and agencies and the risks and harms arising from its use. Our submission responds to Terms of Reference:

- (h) the adoption of AI by Commonwealth departments and agencies to improve services for Australians, and the transparency and accountability measures that apply to AI use; and,
- (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.

We are the national peak body for the suicide prevention sector, representing more than 330 member organisations and over 140,000 workers and volunteers across Australia. Our role is to provide a collective voice for suicide prevention, informed by evidence, lived experience, and frontline service delivery.

Recommendations:

1. The Australian Government should require safety-by-design principles to be embedded in the development, procurement and implementation of AI systems, including assessment of psychological safety and suicide risk where systems may affect people's safety, wellbeing or access to essential services.
2. The Australian Government should establish clear transparency requirements for Commonwealth agencies using AI and automated decision-making, including notifying individuals when AI is being used, explaining its role in decisions, and providing accessible mechanisms to review or challenge AI-assisted decisions.
3. The Australian Government should require meaningful human oversight and independent evaluation of AI systems before and during deployment, including assessment of accuracy, bias and unintended harms, with ongoing monitoring and clear accountability for decisions informed by AI.
4. The Australian Government should ensure strong privacy and data governance safeguards apply to AI use, particularly where systems process sensitive information or are used in health, social services, justice and other settings where concerns about surveillance or data misuse may deter people from seeking help.
5. The Australian Government should require AI systems that may affect safety, wellbeing or access to essential services to be co-designed with the people and communities they may affect from the earliest stages of development, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, children, people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and other groups disproportionately affected by suicide and digital harms.
6. The Australian Government should ensure its AI governance and safety frameworks explicitly address emerging harms including AI-enabled fraud and scams, deepfakes, harmful or misleading content, and risks to the safety and wellbeing of children and vulnerable Australians, including through appropriate prevention, reporting, response and support mechanisms.

AI has significant potential to improve Government services and outcomes for Australians. Used appropriately, it can improve efficiency and support better decision-making to allow public servants to focus on work requiring human judgement, empathy and expertise. AI adoption should be guided by whether its use will improve the quality, accessibility or timeliness of services while maintaining safety, fairness and meaningful human engagement.

Suicide Prevention Australia's AI and Digital Safety Report (The Report) identified that AI and digital systems can amplify established suicide risk factors, including isolation and loneliness, bullying and harassment, discrimination and stigma, and financial distress.¹ The Report also identifies risks such as lack of transparency and risks associated with exposure to harmful or misleading content, including material that may normalise self-harm or discourage help-seeking.¹ These risks demonstrate the importance of considering safety at the point of design and adoption, rather than relying on individuals to manage harms after systems are deployed.

Safety-by-design should therefore be a core requirement for AI systems. Where AI systems may affect a person's safety, wellbeing or access to essential services, agencies should assess potential psychological and suicide-related risks as part of design, procurement and implementation. This would allow risks to be identified and mitigated before systems are scaled and ensure that efficiency gains do not come at the expense of safety.

Automated decision-making is already used across Commonwealth Government service delivery, including in social services, migration, biosecurity, aged care and veterans' entitlements.² The Office of the Australian Information Commissioner's (OAIC) 2026 review of 23 Australian Government agencies found opportunities to improve transparency about the use of automated decision-making and recommended greater proactive publication of information about the systems agencies use, the decisions affected and the policies governing their use.²

People interacting with Government services should be able to understand when AI is being used, what role it plays and how its outputs affect them. This should include clear notification, accessible explanations of AI-assisted decisions and meaningful mechanisms to review or challenge decisions. These requirements would give individuals a way to understand and respond to decisions that affect them, particularly where AI may influence access to health, welfare, justice or other essential services.

AI systems can produce inaccurate or inappropriate outputs, particularly when used to interpret complex human circumstances. The Report identifies that poorly validated AI tools used to identify or respond to distress may miss subtle cues, generate inappropriate responses or provide unhelpful advice.¹ AI should therefore augment rather than replace human judgement where decisions may affect a person's safety, wellbeing or access to essential services.

AI systems should be independently evaluated before deployment and monitored throughout their operation. Evaluation should consider accuracy, bias and unintended harms, with clear processes to intervene where a system is found to be unsafe or ineffective. Human decision-makers should retain the ability to question, override or disregard AI outputs, and responsibility for decisions informed by AI should be clear.

AI systems can involve the collection and use of significant amounts of personal information, creating privacy risks when they are deployed by Government. The OAIC recommends that organisations conduct due diligence when selecting AI products, including considering whether the product is suitable for its intended use, how human oversight can be embedded, potential privacy and security risks and who will have access to personal information.³

¹ Suicide Prevention Australia. (2025). *AI and Digital Safety Report*. <https://www.suicidepreventionaust.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Ai-Digital-Safety-Report.pdf>

² Office of the Australian Information Commissioner. (2026). *Automated decision-making and public reporting under the Freedom of Information Act*. <https://www.oaic.gov.au/freedom-of-information/information-commissioner-decisions-and-reports/foi-reports/Automated-decision-making-and-public-reporting-under-the-Freedom-of-Information-Act>

³ Office of the Australian Information Commissioner. (2025). *Guidance on privacy and the use of commercially available AI products*. <https://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/privacy-guidance-for-organisations-and-government-agencies/guidance-on-privacy-and-the-use-of-commercially-available-ai-products>

For people experiencing distress, concerns about surveillance or misuse of personal information can discourage engagement with digital services and support.¹ This concern is particularly significant in Government settings, where individuals may depend on Government services during periods of vulnerability. Strong privacy safeguards can help ensure that concerns about how personal information is collected and used do not create additional barriers to help-seeking.

AI systems can also reproduce or amplify discrimination when they rely on biased, incomplete or unrepresentative data.¹ This can create additional barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and other groups who may already experience inequitable access to services and are disproportionately impacted by suicide.

Co-design should therefore be embedded in the development of AI systems likely to affect these communities. This should involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people with relevant lived experience, community representatives and subject matter experts from the earliest stages of design. AI systems should also undergo appropriate bias, cultural safety and accessibility testing before deployment. AI-enabled services should be designed to support, and avoid deepening existing inequities.

AI also presents risks beyond Government decision-making and service delivery. The increasing use of AI in scams creates new opportunities for impersonation and manipulation. Online scams are a significant source of financial distress, and AI can be used to copy the voices of loved ones, celebrities and public figures to deceive people into sending money.¹ The Report also identifies sextortion as a form of online harm, including cases involving young Australians who died by suicide following sextortion scams.¹

Children and young people may be particularly vulnerable to AI-enabled digital harms. The Report identifies concerns about young people's exposure to harmful content and online harms, including bullying and sextortion.¹ Safeguards should therefore be age-appropriate and designed specifically around the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

AI governance should take a whole-of-system approach to preventing and responding to these harms. This should include measures to reduce the creation and dissemination of harmful synthetic content, improve transparency around AI-generated material, support timely reporting and removal of harmful content, and ensure that people affected by AI-enabled harms can access appropriate support. The Australian Government should also ensure that existing consumer protections, online safety and fraud prevention mechanisms remain capable of responding to AI-enabled harms as they evolve.

The Australian Government has an opportunity to ensure that AI adoption improves services while protecting Australians from potential harms. This requires practical safeguards that make safety, transparency, human oversight, privacy, inclusive design and harm prevention part of how AI is adopted and used across government.

Suicide Prevention Australia would welcome ongoing engagement with the Joint Select Committee as the inquiry progresses. If you require any further information, please contact Jason Delgado, Senior Data and Impact Analyst, at jason.d@suicidepreventionaust.org.

Yours faithfully



Nieves Murray
Chief Executive Officer
Suicide Prevention Australia