ICMEC Australia

Federal Pre-Budget Submission 2026–27

Building national frontline capability to respond to online child sexual exploitation and AI-enabled harm

The International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC) Australia is a specialist not-for-profit organisation that strengthens Australia's ability to prevent and respond to online and technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. We operate at the intersection of frontline practice and national policy, helping governments and systems respond to rapidly evolving digital risks with practical, coordinated solutions.

Our work focuses on strengthening national capability where it matters most – supporting those who respond to child exploitation and abuse related harm first, while ensuring policy, regulation, and technology design are informed by real-world operational experience.

ICMEC Australia works across government, law enforcement, academia, the not-for-profit sector, and industry to:

- Strengthen responses to online child sexual exploitation and emerging technology-enabled harms.
- Translate research, intelligence, and operational insights into practical training, tools, and guidance for frontline workforces.
- Design and deliver system-wide capability uplift, rather than isolated or one-off interventions.
- Provide trusted policy and strategic advice to governments on child safety, digital regulation, and AI-related reform.

SaferAI for Children Coalition

Since 2024, ICMEC Australia has convened the SaferAI for Children Coalition to address the growing risks posed to children by AI.

The Coalition is a practical mechanism for bringing cross-sector expertise into government decision-making, rather than an advocacy forum alone. It brings together expertise from law enforcement, child protection, academia, and not-for-profits to ensure that Australia's AI policy and governance settings are informed by child-centred, evidence-based perspectives.

ICMEC Australia's role is to act as a conduit between frontline experience and national decision-making – translating what is being seen in police stations, schools, and communities into clear, practical input for AI governance, regulatory reform, and technological development. The Coalition works to prevent emerging AI safeguards from being engineered in isolation from operational realities, and grounds development in real-world child protection risks.

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Executive summary

A targeted investment to strengthen national child safety outcomes

Technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse is increasing in scale, complexity and speed across Australia. Frontline services in every jurisdiction are now encountering harms such as online grooming, sexual extortion, and AI-enabled abuse, often before specialist units are involved. These technology-driven crimes cut across policing, child protection, education, health, and community services, placing growing pressure on systems that were not designed for these rapidly evolving digital threats.

At present, there is no nationally consistent baseline capability to help frontline general duties police and call-takers recognise and respond to technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation at first contact. Nor is there a standing, child-focused mechanism to ensure that emerging AI safety and governance settings are informed by operational child protection expertise. This leaves a critical strategic gap between national policy ambition and frontline system capability.

A coordinated national capability uplift is therefore essential. The initiatives outlined in this proposal do not duplicate existing programs. Instead, they establish practical, scalable infrastructure that is currently missing at the national level and that sits appropriately within the Commonwealth's leadership role in coordination, standards, and system capability.

ICMEC Australia is seeking $6.6 million over three years to deliver two integrated national initiatives that close critical capability gaps while also building long-term system resilience. These initiatives directly support the government's child safety and Artificial Intelligence (AI) safety agendas and are designed to adapt as technology-enabled offending continues to evolve.

What Commonwealth investment will deliver

1. **Child Abuse Response Training for Frontline Police ($5.8m)**

A nationally consistent training program to equip general duties officers and call-takers to recognise, triage, and respond to online child sexual exploitation and technology-facilitated harm at first contact. The program is scenario-based, operationally grounded, and designed to scale across all jurisdictions. The pilot was launched in December 2025 and is already informing content, delivery modes, and jurisdictional integration, with national rollout planned to be co-designed alongside policing agencies and federal government agencies who oversee child protection.

2. **Strengthening the SaferAI for Children Coalition ($0.8m)**

An uplift to the SaferAI for Children Coalition, an established cross-sector mechanism with 26 member organisations, to provide structured, child-centred input into AI policy, standards, safety evaluations, and guidance. This supports the Australian AI Safety Institute and implementation of the National AI Plan by ensuring that AI governance settings explicitly account for child exploitation risks and fast-evolving AI-enabled offending.
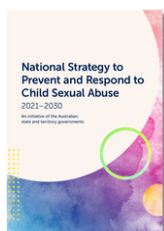
Key outcomes for the Australian Government

Together, these initiatives will:

- Lift **national frontline capability and improve system readiness** across all jurisdictions.
- Deliver **consistent, safe responses for children and families** regardless of where they live or which service they access.
- Provide a **national child safety lens for AI governance**, complementing the Australian AI Safety Institute and broader digital safety reforms.
- **Improve system efficiency** by equipping frontline police to manage online harm earlier and safer at first contact, reducing avoidable escalation and pressure on specialist services.

Technology-facilitated harms against children are increasing in both scale and complexity, while frontline and policy systems continue to adapt to rapid technological change. Child sexual abuse has widespread and long-term impacts across Australian society, affecting a significant proportion of the population over their lifetime and placing sustained pressure on multiple service systems.
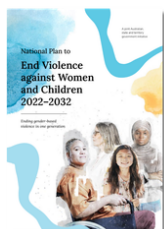
The initiatives outlined in this proposal provide targeted national infrastructure that is not currently in place, filling a clear strategic and operational gap. This is a time-limited, cost-effective investment designed to deliver both immediate capability uplift and enduring national capacity. It supports the Commonwealth's leadership role in coordination and leadership in areas where harms are cross-jurisdictional and technology-driven.

This proposal directly supports implementation of existing Commonwealth strategies and reforms, including:

National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse

The Child Abuse Response Training for Frontline Police supports this Strategy's commitment to strengthening frontline law enforcement capability to recognise and respond to technology-facilitated child sexual abuse, particularly at first contact when early action can shape safer outcomes.

National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children

This proposal supports the objective to "ensure frontline services provided by states and territories are coordinated, integrated and appropriately resourced with a skilled and qualified workforce," improving consistent first responses and referral pathways for child victim-survivors of online abuse, regardless of where they seek help.

National AI Plan & Australian AI Safety Institute

Supports the *Safety* pillar of the National AI Plan, including "Action 7: Mitigate harms" and "Action 8: Promote responsible practices," by ensuring child exploitation risks inform national AI safety policy and evaluation. This proposal would also contribute child protection expertise to the work of the Australian AI Safety Institute.

Budget request

ICMEC Australia seeks **$6.6 million** over three years (2026–27 to 2028–29) to deliver the two integrated national initiatives outlined in this submission: the National General Awareness Training Program for frontline police and the SaferAI for Children Coalition.

Summary of Commonwealth Investment (in $m, 2026–27 dollars)*:
*Exclusive of indexation and subject to refinement through Commonwealth budgeting processes.

	2026–27	2027–28	2028–29	Total
1. Child Abuse Response Training for Frontline Police				
1.1 Training delivery and workforce engagement	0.9	1.2	1.1	3.2
1.2 Digital development and learning resources	0.6	0.3	0.2	1.1
1.3 Evaluation, data, and continuous improvement	0.05	0.15	0.2	0.4
1.4 Program coordination and national secretariat	0.35	0.38	0.37	1.1
Subtotal – Child Abuse Response Training for Frontline Police	*1.9*	*2.03*	*1.87*	*5.8*
2. SaferAI for Children Coalition				
2.1 Coalition secretariat and coordination	0.25	0.3	0.25	0.8
Total Commonwealth investment	*2.15*	*2.33*	*2.12*	*6.6*

Indicative breakdown by funding category

1. Child Abuse Response Training for Frontline Police
1.1 Training delivery and workforce engagement – $3.2 million

- Design and delivery of face-to-face and virtual training for frontline police across all states and territories.
- Engagement with police leadership and professional development units to integrate training into existing frameworks across Australia.
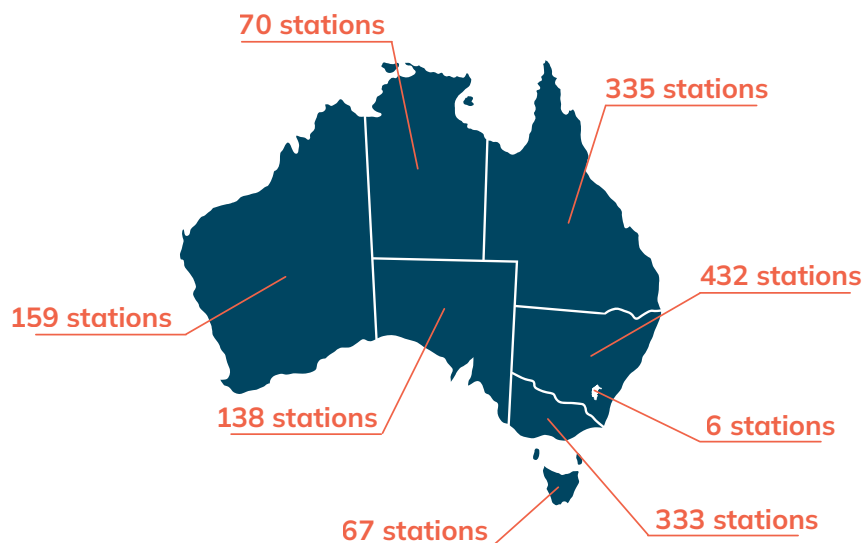
70 stations

335 stations

432 stations

159 stations

138 stations

6 stations

67 stations

333 stations

Image 4: Map of approx. no. of police stations across Australia by state/territory

1.2 Digital development and learning resources – $1.1 million
- Development and maintenance of nationally consistent digital learning modules and resources.
- Alignment with jurisdictional learning management systems.
- Ongoing updates to reflect emerging platforms, offender behaviour, and AI-related risks.

1.3. Evaluation, data and continuous improvement – $0.4 million
- Independent evaluation of impact on frontline practice, confidence, and detection rates.
- Development of common indicators and reporting tools to track outcomes across jurisdictions.
- Continuous improvement cycle to refine training content based on evidence and frontline insight.

1.4. Program coordination and national secretariat – $1.1 million
- National coordination, jurisdictional liaison, and governance support.
- Stakeholder engagement with law enforcement, government agencies, and cross-sector partners.
- Alignment of training materials with national policies, regulatory frameworks, and emerging threats.

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2. SaferAI for Children Coalition

2.1 Coalition secretariat and coordination - $0.8 million

A small secretariat to coordinate cross-sector working groups and provide structured child-safety input that supports the Australian AI Safety Institute and implementation of the National AI Plan, including:
- Translating research and operational insight into practical inputs for AI policy, standards, and safety evaluation activities.
- Developing child-centred guidance, risk frameworks, and red-teaming exercises.
- Producing practical resources for families, educators, and communities on AI-related child-safety risks and protective strategies.

All costings are time-limited, scalable, and designed to complement existing Commonwealth and state investments in digital safety, frontline capability, and AI governance.

The problem

National capability gaps in responding to online harm

Online child sexual exploitation is increasing across every jurisdiction, with 82,764 reports of online sexual exploitation received by the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) in the 2024-25 financial year – a 41% increase from the previous year. Offending is becoming more technologically sophisticated and harder to detect. Children are being targeted through sexual extortion, AI-generated abuse material, and automated grooming across multiple platforms and devices. eSafety reported a 43% increase in public reports about illegal online content in the same period, with an overwhelming 85% of these concerning CSAM.

This volume is increasingly overwhelming triage and organisational capacity, swamping resources and increasing the risk that actionable reports are delayed, missed, or not connected to appropriate pathways. Harms are also becoming more technically contingent, with frontline workers often unclear on how technologies (including interactive AI tools) can contribute to coercion, grooming dynamics, or concerning sexualised behaviours, and therefore unsure what questions to ask or what actions to take.

This risk environment is evolving faster than frontline capability:

- **First-contact workforces are underprepared.** General duties police and call-takers often lack practical training to recognise early indicators of technology-facilitated harm or respond safely when concerns are raised.
- **Responses are inconsistent nationally.** Capability and practice vary widely between states and sectors, leading to uneven outcomes where the response a child receives depends on where they live and who they disclose to.
- **Gaps drive escalation and system pressure.** Missed or minimised early indicators can lead to repeat presentations and escalation into acute responses, including specialist policing, child protection involvement, and mental health interventions, as well as missed opportunities for safe referral pathways.
- **Existing reforms depend on frontline capability.** Strengthening frontline skills and tools will support effective delivery of national child safety strategies and help ensure reforms keep pace with emerging AI-enabled harms.
- **The threat is national, but capability remains localised.** Technology-facilitated abuse is inherently cross-border and national in character, but responses are still heavily localised and inconsistent.

Without a coordinated Commonwealth-led capability uplift, the gap between the speed of offender innovation and the system's ability to respond will continue to widen.

National system response

Alignment with other reforms

Australia is strengthening its national approach to child safety through reforms across digital regulation, early childhood, education, policing, and AI governance. Initiatives such as the social media minimum age restrictions are important, but in isolation cannot address the full range of technology-facilitated risks. Children encounter harm, increasingly amplified by AI-enabled tools and platforms, across childcare settings, schools, youth services, homes, and police stations. The way the frontline responds must reflect this reality.

A comprehensive system response requires connected action across key settings, including:

- **Early childhood environments**, where early risk indicators and emerging behaviours may first be observed.
- **Schools and tertiary settings**, where children and young people spend significant time online and disclosures frequently occur.
- **Technology and social media platforms**, including AI developers, whose products shape the digital environment and risk landscape.
- **Police and justice systems**, to ensure that when harm is disclosed or detected, the response is timely, consistent, and child-centric.

ICMEC Australia's proposal strategically focuses on two nationally significant gaps that sit at key leverage points within the system:

- A policing-specific capability uplift at first contact, where children and families often first engage formal systems
- A child-focused AI safety, governance and advice mechanism to ensure emerging technologies are addressed upstream at a national policy and standards level

These initiatives sit alongside and reinforce existing efforts, including:

- **Early childhood capability uplift and ECEC reform** underway through the University of South Australia's Centre for Child Protection and broader Commonwealth ECEC reforms.
- **National leadership on online child safety** led by the eSafety Commissioner, the ACCCE, and the National Office for Child Safety.
- **National AI safety architecture**, including the establishment of the Australian AI Safety Institute and the National AI Plan

By strengthening these two missing capability layers – frontline policing response and child-focused AI safety coordination – the proposal helps connect and operationalise broader reforms, contributing to a more coherent national child safety system rather than a set of disconnected initiatives.

Why?

The case for Commonwealth investment

A nationally consistent response is essential to ensure children receive safe and appropriate support regardless of where they live. Funding this capability through individual state and territory processes would entrench fragmentation and lead to uneven frontline practice, leaving safety outcomes dependent on jurisdictional capacity rather than national standards.

Commonwealth investment enables the establishment of a baseline national capability in areas where harms are cross-jurisdictional, technology-driven and rapidly evolving. It supports consistency, coordination, and credible shared infrastructure that cannot be efficiently developed through isolated state-level initiatives.

This proposal is designed to plug directly into existing national systems and deliver system-wide benefits:

- **Built with national expertise**: Developed in collaboration with agencies responsible for child protection coordination and specialist investigation, ensuring operational relevance and alignment with national structures.
- **Designed to remain current**: Content and guidance will be maintained and updated as platforms, offender behaviour and AI-enabled risks evolve, supporting a sustained national capability rather than a one-off intervention.
- **High return on a contained investment**: Strengthening frontline responses improves early identification and management of serious harm, reduces avoidable escalation into specialist and crisis services, and enhances the impact of existing Commonwealth investments in digital safety, regulation and research.
- **Supports existing policing arrangements**: Complements specialist teams in every jurisdiction, including Joint Anti-Child Exploitation Teams (JACETs), by uplifting consistent frontline capability, improving the consistency and quality of frontline referrals sent to specialist teams.

Together, these features ensure that Commonwealth funding delivers scalable, nationally consistent capability that strengthens – rather than duplicates – existing reforms across child safety, digital safety and AI governance.

Strategic opportunities for national leadership and public visibility

In addition to delivering practical improvements in frontline capability and outcomes for children and families, these initiatives create clear opportunities for constructive public communication about technology-facilitated abuse. Any public visibility would be grounded in genuine delivery, supporting measured and credible messaging that reinforces community confidence in the Government's priorities in child safety, online safety, and emerging technology governance.

This proposal presents clear deliverables across portfolios and jurisdictions. For the Commonwealth, it is an opportunity to lead national coordination, implement the National AI Plan and digital safety reforms, and prioritise a child-centred approach to technology governance. For state and territory governments, it delivers frontline capability uplift and improved investigative pathways, resulting in tangible benefits for local communities and families.

By strengthening capability at the local level and aligning it with national frameworks, Australia will continue to demonstrate leadership on the global stage in AI safety, online safety regulation, and prevention of technology-facilitated crime. This proposal is operational and capability-focused, but it also supports increased public confidence in system responses and provides bipartisan, cross-jurisdictional opportunities to demonstrate visible progress in protecting children in a rapidly evolving digital environment.

Solution 1 – Child Abuse Response Training for Frontline Police

The Child Abuse Response Training for Frontline Police is designed to build a baseline capability across frontline police to recognise, triage, and respond to online child sexual exploitation and related technology-facilitated harms. It will:

- Equip general duties officers, helpline call-takers, and volunteers in community-facing roles with practical skills to identify risk, ask the right questions, and take appropriate action when children disclose online harm.
- Establish a nationally consistent foundation of knowledge and practice, reducing variability between jurisdictions.
- Align policing responses with capability uplift underway in early childhood, schools, and community sectors, so children receive consolidated support regardless of where they seek help.

Context across the wider system

Children and families do not experience harm in silos – they disclose wherever they feel safest, including to police, schools, early childhood services, youth workers, and community organisations. Commonwealth-led initiatives have begun to uplift capability in education and early childhood, but without a policing-specific uplift, gaps in early identification and triage will persist.

A national training program for frontline police ensures that:

- Early police responses keep pace with reforms in other sectors.
- System performance is not undermined by uneven policing capability across states and territories.
- Victim-survivors, their families, and extended support systems (such as schools) receive appropriate responses and are directed to relevant support services.
- Police will be equipped to respond to an increased volume of referrals arising from improved screening and capability uplift in schools and early childhood settings.

Program design

The program will be built around scenario-based, operationally-grounded modules, delivered by former specialist child exploitation investigators and updated regularly to reflect emerging threats, including AI-facilitated harms.
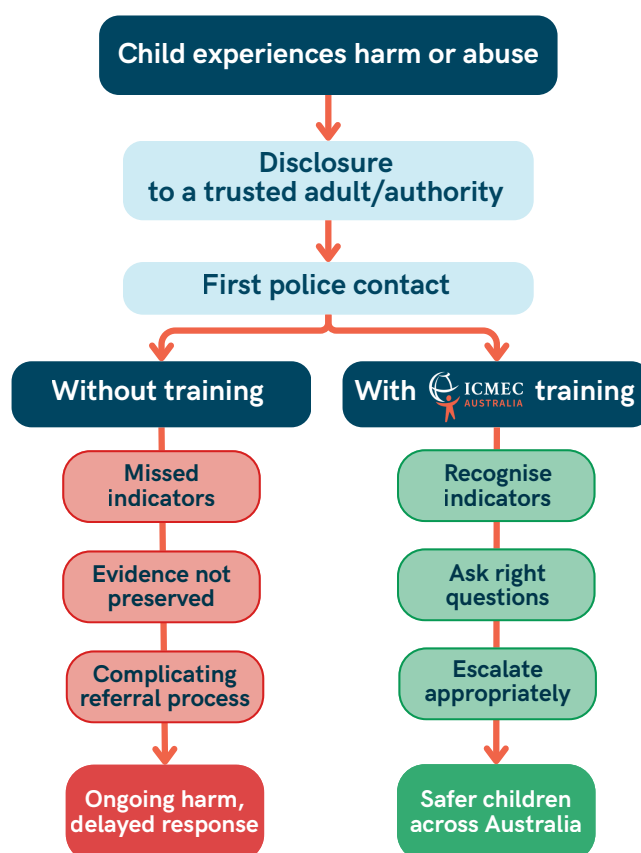

Image 1: How frontline police training improves child safety outcomes

A pilot program is already underway with a large state policing agency (launched 11 December 2025). Feedback from the pilot, including officer testimony and observations from specialist teams, is being used to refine core content, delivery modes, and jurisdictional integration ahead of national rollout. This ensures the national program will be informed by real-world experience and tailored to the operational realities of frontline policing.

The national rollout will be co-designed with state and territory policing agencies, specialist units, relevant federal agencies, and jurisdictional training commands to ensure strong alignment with existing systems and procedures.

Core content includes:
- What online child sexual exploitation looks like in practice, including sexual extortion and grooming.
- How offenders use mainstream and emerging technologies, including AI tools.
- Current offender behaviour and tactics.
- Emerging trends in offender behaviour and tactics.
- Child-centred responses to disclosures and supporting families.
- Understanding the impact of online child sexual exploitation.
- Psycho-social wellbeing for police members and volunteers.

Training will have nationally consistent core content, with flexibility for jurisdictions to integrate local procedures and contacts.

Image 2: Trainer presenting at pilot program launch

General Awareness Training pilot launch

In December 2025, ICMEC Australia launched the pilot of this scenario-based training program for frontline police. Delivered within a police station setting in partnership with a state law enforcement agency, the training provided practical tools aligned with the real-world cases officers are increasingly encountering, demonstrating a scalable model that could be expanded nationally with targeted Commonwealth investment.

Delivery model

The training will use a blended learning model to maximise reach and sustainability:
- Face-to-face and virtual workshops for frontline officers and call-takers.
- Short, modular digital learning that can be integrated into existing police training platforms.

This design ensures scalability across all police jurisdictions, including regional and remote areas, and supports ongoing refreshers as threats and technologies evolve.

Outputs

- 40,000 frontline officers, helpline call-takers, and volunteers will be trained in total across Australian police jurisdictions.
- A suite of nationally consistent digital learning modules and operational resources, with flexibility for applicability to each jurisdiction.
- A common national language, framework, and indicators for identifying, recording, and escalating technology-facilitated harm against children, supporting consistent practice and comparable national reporting.
- Independent program evaluation through tertiary sector partnerships, using shared indicators, participant feedback, and pre- and post-training measures to assess changes in frontline knowledge, confidence, and practice, with findings reported nationally.

Outcomes

- Earlier and more accurate identification of online child sexual exploitation.
- Reduced preventable escalation into crisis responses and specialist units.
- More consistent practice across police stations, regardless of location.
- Stronger alignment with capability improvements in schools, early childhood, and community sectors, reducing gaps across the national child-safety ecosystem.
- Continues to build on Australia's reputation as a leader in child safety.

> *In my role as a Victim Identification specialist, I see every day how rapidly the crime type of technology-facilitated exploitation of children is growing and changing, and how AI is adding a significant layer of complexity to that change. In that context, practical, current training for frontline law enforcement is essential. Over the past 3–4 years, I've worked alongside ICMEC Australia and seen the value the organisation creates for the sector, identifying emerging issues early, convening the right conversations, and translating that into real capability on the ground. ICMEC Australia bridges the gap between frontline policing through to specialist areas like Victim ID, so matters are recognised and escalated faster and more consistently across agencies. I would recommend ICMEC Australia for continued investment to scale this work nationally.*
>
> **– Victim Identification Officer, ARGOS, Queensland Police Service (QPS)**

Solution 2 – Strengthening the SaferAI for Children Coalition

AI is rapidly reshaping the online environment in which Australian children live, learn, and connect. Generative AI, chatbots, and AI-manipulated imagery are all changing how abuse material is produced, concealed, and distributed – and how children are targeted, coerced, and harmed. These risks are evolving quickly and require coordinated, child-centred governance at a national level.

The National AI Plan, launched on 2 December 2025, identifies safety as one of its three core pillars. Ensuring that children are explicitly considered within national AI safety settings is essential to delivering on that pillar. The SaferAI for Children Coalition provides a direct and practical mechanism to deliver on this requirement.

Convened by ICMEC Australia since March 2024, the Coalition is a national cross-sector network that:
- Brings together child-safety experts, technologists, academics, industry partners, law enforcement, and community organisations.
- Provides structured, independent advice on AI-enabled risks to children.
- Ensures that real-world harms and frontline experiences inform AI policy, standards, and risk frameworks.

In 2025, expanding on the leadership of the SaferAI for Children Coalition, ICMEC Australia convened two targeted roundtables in July and September that helped put AI-enabled child harm, including nudify apps, firmly on the community agenda, framing it as a national child safety priority. ICMEC Australia supports the positive steps taken by the government and eSafety to restrict these abusive technologies, including enforcement action that resulted in major nudify services withdrawing access in Australia.

SaferAI for Children Coalition

26 Members

14 Meetings

2 Papers

Since the Coalition's formation in March 2024

Image 3: Panel discussion at 2024 SaferAI for Children Summit

> As an academic researcher, I have found the SaferAI for Children Coalition to be a vital connection point between research and practice. ICMEC Australia has done a wonderful job of bringing together a broad range of stakeholders across industry, academia, government, and law enforcement into a cohesive, action-oriented alliance. This initiative, with its regular meetings, has increased members' understanding of the evolving challenge, ensuring that insights can directly inform actions, policy responses, and areas for investigation by researchers.
>
> By hosting events such as the 2024 SaferAI for Children Summit and the 2025 'Child Safety in the Age of AI' national roundtable at Parliament House, ICMEC Australia has had a strong impact in elevating the challenges AI is enabling, in addition to highlighting the benefits AI can bring in preventing harm. Their leadership has successfully pushed for regulatory and legislative responses to keep pace with technological change to safeguard children from emerging AI-enabled harms.
>
> **– Dr Joel Scanlan, CSAM Deterrence Centre**

Outputs

- National child-centred AI safety guidance for government, regulators and industry.
- Practical child-safety risk assessment tools for AI testing, evaluation, and benchmarking, informed by research and operational insights.
- Contributing child-safety-focused standards and risk frameworks to ensure AI systems are assessed for their potential to facilitate harm to children.
- Practical resources for parents, educators, and communities on AI-related child-safety risks and protective strategies.
- A cross-sector mechanism to coordinate responses to emerging AI-related threats, including new modes of sexual extortion, AI-generated CSAM, and abuse-enabling tools.
- National briefings and roundtables that build public and sector understanding of AI-related child-safety risks and strengthen community and industry awareness.

Outcomes

- Improved identification and mitigation of AI-enabled harms to children, including sexual extortion and AI-generated CSAM, and technology-facilitated abuse.
- Stronger government and regulatory capability to assess, monitor, and respond to child-safety risks in AI systems.
- Improved industry practices, including increased adoption of safety-by-design and clearer expectations for risk mitigation across the AI sector.
- Better informed and more resilient communities, with parents, educators, and frontline organisations better equipped to support children's safe use of AI.
- Faster, more coordinated national responses to emerging AI-related threats through sustained cross-sector collaboration.

Early insights

Pilot training and Coalition work

The first phase of activity across both the training program and the Coalition has already generated clear signals about where capability uplift is most needed and how frontline systems are responding.

- **Frontline demand signal**: Insights from the Australia New Zealand Child Protection Working Group of law enforcement leaders highlight that officers want guidance that is practical, technology-specific, and directly relevant to the cases they encounter. Participants noted that content on sexual extortion, AI-generated material, and concealed online networks improved their ability to recognise patterns they had previously been unsure how to categorise.
- **Training pilot (launched 11 December 2025)**: Initial insights from our state pilot agency suggest that targeted training will be able to strengthen frontline readiness by building confidence in recognising indicators, clarifying actionable intelligence thresholds, and improving understanding of appropriate escalation pathways.
- **National pull**: Multiple jurisdictions have approached ICMEC Australia seeking access to tailored capability uplift, indicating that the gap is nation-wide and existing frameworks need an uplift to keep pace with online offending.

Coalition engagement also reinforces the need for a coordinated approach:

- **Cross-sector participation**: The Coalition continues to attract a wide range of organisations, reflecting growing recognition that AI-related child harm cannot be addressed by any single sector.
- **Fragmentation risk**: Coalition discussions have identified that current responses to AI-enabled offending are fragmented, with agencies and organisations developing approaches in isolation. This results in duplication, delays, and gaps in visibility. Members have highlighted the need for a central mechanism to synthesise risk, share insights, and support consistent national decision-making.

When considered together, these insights point to a system that is motivated to improve and well positioned to benefit from structured national support required to keep pace with evolving online and AI-enabled threats. They provide a strong foundation for scaling the national initiatives proposed in this submission.

Our track record
An effective, evidence-based approach

ICMEC Australia's model is already delivering operational impact that government agencies alone cannot achieve. Our work provides specialist capability, cross-border coordination, and technology-driven expertise that strengthens national responses to online child sexual exploitation.

Specialist OSINT (Open-Source Intelligence) capability uplift for Australian police:

In November 2025, ICMEC Australia partnered with OSINT Industries to deliver open-source intelligence training to two state policing agencies. including specialist child exploitation and sex crimes teams. Without ICMEC Australia's sponsorship, the officers would not have otherwise had access to the training. The training covered operational OSINT foundations for law enforcement, methods for tracking offenders across platforms, and supporting victim and offender identification. Feedback was highly favourable, highlighting the direct and immediate impact on investigative capability.

Officers described the tools and methods taught as invaluable, noting that the training will fundamentally improve how they investigate and identify offenders, with direct application to live cases. The program materially contributed to the identification and arrest of key offenders, the disruption of suspected networks, and the progression of live cases during training, including a case involving the online distribution of child sexual abuse with satanic themes.

Australian Border Force investigator pilot training:

In August and September 2025, ICMEC Australia delivered three pilot training sessions with Australian Border Force investigators. The sessions focused on practical capability and workforce resilience – including managing child exploitation caseloads, working on child sex offender matters, and supporting personal and peer wellbeing. This pilot activity demonstrates ICMEC Australia's ability to deliver operationally grounded training to specialist Commonwealth law enforcement audiences, and to adapt content for broader rollout across an agency.

> *The partnership between ICMEC Australia and the Australian Border Force (ABF) has cemented itself as an unstoppable force in the fight against child exploitation. The training and insights provided by ICMEC Australia to ABF investigators nationwide was well received and provided investigators an opportunity to engage with an experienced, like-minded colleague who was able to openly share his experiences and provide fundamental skills to uplift the capability of investigators within the ABF. By providing a differing mindset and a new set of skills that have been adopted and incorporated into newly created Child Exploitation Team (CET) packages for broader release to our frontline officers, ICMEC Australia has been pivotal in supporting our international stakeholder engagement.*
>
> **– Child Exploitation Investigator, Australian Border Force**

Delivering public value and strengthening community outcomes

Benefits for children and families

- Safer, more consistent responses when children disclose online harm to police or other frontline services.
- Earlier identification of risk and more timely intervention, supporting shorter and less severe harm trajectories.
- Reduced trauma through child-centred practice, better referral pathways, and fewer system failures.
- More equitable access to protection, so that a child's safety is not determined by where they live or which service they approach first.

Benefits for law enforcement and frontline workforces

- Increased frontline capability, enabling general duties officers and call-takers to handle more cases safely at first contact.
- Reduced pressure on specialist units, allowing them to focus on the most complex investigations.
- Improved internal referrals, documentation, and evidence quality, supporting better investigative outcomes and prosecutions.
- A nationally consistent approach to triage and referral creates system efficiencies, enabling more scalable responses, greater predictability and consistency in decision-making, and improved accountability.
- Improved workforce wellbeing, with clearer guidance and tools to manage emerging harms and reduce avoidable backlogs.

Benefits for government and society

- Activation of existing national child safety and digital safety strategies through practical frontline capability uplift.
- Directly aligned with the National AI Plan, the Australian AI Safety Institute, the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children, and the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse, ensuring that AI governance and digital safety reforms are informed by operational child protection expertise.
- Strengthened digital safety infrastructure, making Australia more resilient in the era of fast-moving technological change.
- Avoided downstream costs across health, mental health, justice, education, and social services by reducing long-term impacts associated with child sexual abuse and untreated trauma.

Conclusion

A proven national capability ready to scale for children's safety

Online child sexual exploitation and AI-enabled harm are among the most urgent and complex child safety challenges facing Australia this decade. Offenders are adapting rapidly, and national systems must be able to respond faster, more consistently, and over the long term.

Important reforms are underway across social media regulation, early childhood, education, research, and AI governance. However, without a sustained uplift in frontline policing capability and a dedicated, child-centred approach within AI safety frameworks, gaps will remain that offenders are quick to exploit.

This submission proposes two practical, scalable, and evidence-informed initiatives that are ready to implement now: a National General Awareness Training Program for frontline police, and the SaferAI for Children Coalition to support child-centred AI safety and governance. Both initiatives are deliberately future-focused, recognising that evolving technologies and crime types require ongoing training, regular refresh, and adaptable delivery models, including online modules and repeat national rollout over time.

For an investment of $6.6 million over three years, the Australian Government can strengthen national policing capability and embed a child safety lens into Australia's AI safety settings, while reinforcing the impact of existing reforms. The result is a more consistent national response – so that every child, in every jurisdiction, can rely on safer first-contact support when they seek help.

This is a high-value, long-term investment that improves responses to serious crime, strengthens victim outcomes, and helps future-proof Australia's child-safety systems in a rapidly evolving technology environment.

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