



The election is coming and so are the **PROMISES, PROMISES**

The federal election is due on May 21, and more of the policies and promises of the major parties are gradually emerging.

Children and Media Australia (CMA) hasn't expected policies that affect children and their media environment to be high on their agendas, but there's been a few relevant announcements, and policies found in recent weeks.

Coalition Minister for Communications, [Paul Fletcher says](#), if re-elected the Coalition would *"strengthen and modernise Australia's classification system better to protect viewers of screen content, especially children.... the Morrison Government is committed to ensuring the classification scheme reflects the modern world to inform parents properly about potentially harmful content consumed by their children.... Ensure there is appropriate classification and labelling of screen content that sexualises children, depicts suicide or shows violence against women.... includes introducing a minimum classification rating for computer games that simulate gambling or use gambling-like game mechanics such as 'loot boxes'"*.

This is commendable – so far as it goes. We are still waiting for more detail. What CMA, with the backing of its parent surveys, has been arguing for years, is that what's needed is a [research- and age-based system](#). The National Classification Scheme (NCS) needs a restructure that includes replacing the classification categories (G, PG, M etc).

It needs much more than increasing the list of elements taken into account in each category (eg violence, simulated gambling, sexualisation, suicide. Parents tell us [PG is a poor guide](#).



Paul Fletcher

Fletcher's announcement has [attracted some criticism](#) of the length of time it's taken the Government to act on the finding of the 2019/20 Classification Review and the Inquiry into loot boxes.

The latter inquiry was conducted in 2018 by the Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications. In its March 2019 response, the government merely noted that the research on gambling-related harms experienced as a result of interaction with loot boxes in games is in its infancy and that further research is required.

Independent Tasmanian Andrew Wilkie MP has commendably kept the heat on the

government to act.

An important piece of information that we presently lack is whether all the State and Territory governments, which have to provide unanimous support for any changes to the NCS, have agreed, or will, with what the LNP has proposed.

CMA has asked but has yet to receive replies from the ALP and The Greens re their policies on classification, but other related policies are here:

- ALP- [ABC and SBS](#), [Free TV sport](#);
- The Greens-[screen industry](#), [media diversity](#).

We'll all know more next month.

EDITORIAL: *Simulated gambling, sports betting and children.* | P2

Remember when...
Proud achievements from
CMA's 65-year history.

In 1975, the SA branch in Adelaide, launched Australia's first ever biennial international Children's Film Festival. Successful films from those festivals were purchased and added to the national organisation's library.

small screen

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editorial

Developing brains, youth
gambling and media

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ACCM BOARD MEMBER



One of the things we know about children and teenagers is that their brains are still developing. The parts of the brain that work automatically – that cause us to feel emotions, remember things, fight or flee when threatened, and seek rewarding things – are usually fully developed around the age of three. However the parts of the brain that we have conscious control over – those where we manage our emotions, control our impulses, think through consequences, solve problems, plan for the future and manage our behaviour - aren't fully developed into the late twenties, and possibly even the early thirties for males.

The teenage years are a time of particular vulnerability to enjoyable or rewarding online activities that also have the capacity to cause harm. This is because adolescents have greater freedom, but also have pubertal changes and social/peer pressures to deal with, and actively seek pleasurable activities without a fully developed capacity to think through consequences, manage risky behaviours, manage emotions or manage impulses.

Designers of online platforms know this, and see the teen market as an important one with plenty of money to spend online. Thus many online products are designed to part young people from their money using techniques that prey on these vulnerabilities. Persuasive designs elements that keep young people at screens, often at unhealthy levels, are one case in point, although not the specific focus of this editorial. A particularly concerning trend involves elements in screen products that involve gambling or gambling-like behaviours. Because of their vulnerabilities, it has been estimated that older teenagers are four times as likely to develop a gambling problem than adults. That is,

whereas about 1 in hundred adults may meet criteria for a gambling disorder, about one in 25 older teenagers, or one in every classroom, may have a

gambling problem. This may surprise readers, as this issue is mostly well hidden. Most adolescents are very reluctant to tell adults when they have a problem because they are afraid of the consequences. For example, gambling under 18 is illegal and they may have stolen money to gamble with.

To understand this issue, it is important to know that an activity where someone wins by chance is not gambling until they can win actual money. Then it becomes gambling and is regulated.

If someone pays money for a game of chance, such as slot/poker machine apps or casino type apps or loot boxes, even a great deal of money, it is not considered gambling if the person is then paid out in tokens or other non-monetary rewards. Such activities are not regulated.

So, how are media producers contributing to this youth gambling problem? There are many ways. A large number of video games have gambling-like elements. Some require payment, some don't, but all give a reward by chance, and they typically have a very generous reward schedule – it is easy to win. The same is true for gambling-like apps such as casino games. Using these products makes the concept of gambling familiar for young users, may create a favourable impression of gambling, would usually cause dopamine release at the anticipation of a possible reward, may instil the false belief that gambling is likely to pay off on the same high reward schedule, and may de-sensitise the user to the notion of paying for a chance at a reward. All of these factors can potentially increase the likelihood of developing a later gambling problem.

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The transmission of gender stereotypes through televised patterns of nonverbal bias.
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A further issue relates to the use of 'loot boxes' in video games: virtual containers with unknown contents that are typically rewards – gold, loot, skins/ customisations and so on. These are sometimes purchased with money and sometimes gained through gameplay. They are attractive to young players because the contents could be highly desirable ultra rare or very valuable items. Thus a great deal of money is spent each year by gaming youth to purchase loot boxes in a range of games (including a number of very popular games such as Halo 5 and Roblox), in the hope of gaining a desired reward by chance.

A bunch of scientific studies have examined loot boxes, and determined that they have the key elements of gambling. For some years independent MP Andrew Wilkie has championed the regulation of games with loot boxes, and with a looming election that may be close, this issue is now on the radar. In my view, the next government needs to look carefully at the media classification system and the ways it informs parents of potential harms, at how gambling advertising, including for sports betting, is regulated, and at the impact of gambling-like components of apps and video games on children and teens, with a view to how these too can be regulated.

UK: Kelloggs sues British government over new high fat, high sugar cereal

Kelloggs which produces a range of breakfast cereals, including Cocopops, Cornflakes, Nutri-Grain and Crunchy Nut [has launched legal action against the UK government](#) whose new rules prohibit some cereals high in fat,

salt, sugar and salt (HFSS) from being prominently displayed on supermarket shelves.

The rules come into force from October as part of the government's plan to tackle childhood obesity.



US: Unilever will stop marketing food and drinks to children

Unilever says it will [stop marketing food and beverages to children under 16 years old](#), across both traditional media and social media. It will not be collecting or storing data on children under 16 and will not use influencers, celebrities or social media stars who are under the age of 16 or primarily appeal to children under the age of 16.

US: Designer for Disorder: Instagram's pro-eating disorder bubble

[A report](#) prepared by US consumer group Fairplay and [Reset Australia](#) documents ways that Instagram grows and promotes an and promotes an extensive pro-eating disorder 'bubble'. In addition to being profitable, the authors say this bubble is also undeniably harmful. Algorithms are profiling children and teens to serve them images, memes and videos encouraging restrictive diets and extreme weight loss.

US: Microsoft exploring paid ads in games

Microsoft, which owns Xbox and soon an extensive mobile gaming network under new acquisition Activision Blizzard, [recently surpassed 25 million subscribers](#) in its 'Netflix for Gaming'-style subscription Game Pass. [According to Insider](#), Microsoft is identifying adtech companies and agencies to

[work out in-game ad inventory](#). Recent research suggests that [93% of media buyers intend to run in-game advertising by 2025](#).

US: Despite changes by Apple, large companies are still able to track users across apps

Almost a year on from Apple rolling out [new mobile settings](#) to prohibit apps from tracking iPhone users (using the devices' Identifier for Advertisers) without their explicit consent, [a new study](#) finds that while cross-app tracking has been curtailed, the new settings are hardly foolproof.

UK: Children and parents: media use and attitudes report 2022

This [OfCom report](#) looks at media use, attitudes and understanding among children and young people aged 3-17. It also includes findings on parents' views about their children's media use, and how parents of children and young people aged 3-17 monitor and manage their children's use, and is intended as a resource for industry, policymakers, academics and the general public

AUS: End gambling ads on TV and in sport [says Ambassador Tim Costello](#)

"Our kids are growing up being exposed to all these gambling ads, making it seem to them that gambling is a normal part of sport.

Some of the ads even make it look like without gambling you can't enjoy sport — that's not on" Join the campaign.

AUS: How to preserve our privacy in an AI world.

[This article in The Conversation](#) is an edited extract from [Machines Behaving Badly: the morality of AI](#), by [Toby Walsh](#), Professor of AI at UNSW, Research Group Leader, UNSW Sydney, which was recently published by La Trobe University Press on May 3rd 2022.

AUS: 24 hr movement guidelines for children and young people review process

The purpose of [this paper](#) was to describe how the updated Australian *24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Young People (5 to 17 years): an integration of physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep* were developed and the outcomes from this process. A requirement of this update was the incorporation of a 24-hour approach to movement, recognising the importance of adequate sleep.

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