

Media release

For immediate issue

## **Restricting access to pornography for young people is not the definitive solution to sexualised violence.**

In an era where digital landscapes dominate the lives of young people, fostering knowledge, resilience and digital literacy stands as paramount. Sexual Health Victoria (SHV), a leading authority in sexual health education, underscores the importance of providing young people with the tools to navigate the complexities of online content, particularly in the realm of pornography.

SHV recognises the failings of abstinence-only education in Relationship and Sexual Health Education (RSE) highlighting its unsuitability for addressing online sexual content education in the future. At the core of this effort lies the imperative to provide robust support for young people in navigating the intricate landscape of a sexualised online world, rather than simply disregarding its existence.

Samantha Read, Schools and Community Manager at SHV said promoting effective online literacy skills is not just a necessity but a responsibility.

"We're witnessing an unprecedented surge in online engagement, especially in accessing sensitive content like pornography. Our approach must transcend mere restriction; it must educate," said Samantha.

The experience of SHV educators over the past five decades highlights a fundamental truth: young people are adept at finding ways to bypass any technical restrictions particularly if they are motivated to do so.

RSE tackles numerous factors underlying gender-based violence, including entrenched gender norms and sexual violence. Providing the skills to make ethical choices, whilst understanding of their legal rights and responsibilities is critical.

SHV recognises the varied nature of the issue while acknowledging the significance of initiatives like the eSafety Roadmap for Age Verification as a positive step in the right direction. SHV asserts that a holistic strategy is imperative. SHV advocates for a paradigm shift towards proactive education, acknowledging that technical barriers alone are insufficient in curbing the impact that some pornography may have on a young person's behavior and expectations.

Recent studies underscore the prevalence of pornography consumption among Australian youth. According to research cited by the eSafety Commissioner, a staggering 75% of Australians aged 16-18 have accessed online pornography, with 39% encountering it before the age of 13.

Understanding the rationale behind young people's viewing habits of pornography requires a nuanced approach.

"It's not always about sexual gratification," said Samantha. "Curiosity, education, and even loneliness can play significant roles. We need open dialogue to truly grasp the dynamics at play."

To address these complexities, SHV advocates for a multifaceted approach centered to teach consent, respect and sexual health education. By integrating these principles into education curricula and fostering open conversations, SHV aims to cultivate a generation of responsible and respectful adults.

"Respect and consent education must be a cornerstone of our educational framework. We must empower young people to make informed choices, both online and offline," said Samantha.

SHV reaffirms its commitment to advocating for comprehensive sexual health education. By collaborating with a broad range of stakeholders, SHV's team is working every day to usher in a new era of digital literacy.

-ENDS-

For media inquiries or interviews, please contact:

**Soda Communications**

Bria Rechner

[bria@sodacommunications.com.au](mailto:bria@sodacommunications.com.au)

0434 211 480

### **About Sexual Health Victoria**

Sexual Health Victoria has been a leading provider of reproductive and sexual health care, education, and advocacy for over 50 years. SHV is an independent, not-for-profit, all-choice organisation dedicated to improving reproductive and sexual health and wellbeing for everyone in Victoria and beyond.

For more information about Sexual Health Victoria, visit [shvic.org.au](https://shvic.org.au).

### References:

eSafety Commissioner (2023a). Roadmap for age verification and complementary measures to prevent and mitigate harms to children from online pornography. Canberra: Australian Government.

eSafety Commissioner (2023b). Accidental, unsolicited and in your face. Young people's encounters with online pornography: a matter of platform responsibility, education and choice. Canberra: Australian Government.

Power, J., Kauer, S., Fisher, C., Chapman-Bellamy, R., & Bourne, A. (2022). The 7th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2021 (ARCSHS Monograph Series No. 133). Melbourne: The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University.