

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Australian businesses join forces to drive action on child safeguarding

**22 February:** National not-for-profits, Australian Childhood Foundation and YMCA Australia (The Y) have partnered to establish the Australian Child Safeguarding Business Coalition ('the Coalition') to drive action on child safeguarding across Australian businesses and improve outcomes for young people.

In establishing the Coalition, extensive research and market analysis has been conducted over the past 12 months. International management consultancy, Nous Group, developed the 'Case for Change' report, which highlighted that Australia is one of the fastest growing markets for child sex abuse material in the world and that the prevalence of child sexual abuse online is also growing.<sup>i</sup>

According to Australian Childhood Foundation CEO, Dr Joe Tucci, "Child sex abuse and exploitation is an issue that demands everyone's attention and action. For decades, our research has demonstrated that the community actively avoids the problem of child abuse. One in six respondents did nothing when faced with a child they believed was being abused."<sup>ii</sup>

With seed funding from Westpac Group's Safer Children, Safer Communities program, the Coalition will work collaboratively to assess risks to children and young people, develop policies and practices and share resources to help enhance organisational child safeguarding within their businesses.

The role of businesses in child safeguarding is significant. The Y's Executive Director of Safeguarding, Phil Doorgachurn says, "Businesses may inadvertently be putting the safety of children and young people at risk through their products and services, marketing and distribution methods and relationships with, and investments in local communities. We are delighted that already, Westpac, TikTok, IHG Hotels & Resorts, The GPT Group and TBWA are joining with us to establish the Coalition."

Westpac's Chief Sustainability Officer Siobhan Toohill recognises the role of businesses. "We have a responsibility to children who are some of the most vulnerable members of our community. Supporting the Coalition means we can work with other organisations who share our interest and commitment to safeguarding children. If we get it right for our children today, we are setting up our communities to be safer into the future."

General Manager at TikTok Australia, Brett Armstrong, welcomes the Coalition's approach to continuous improvement "At TikTok, the safety of our community is our top priority, and we know there is no finish line when it comes to online safety."

"We also understand that younger people, in particular, need support to stay safe online. Through this Coalition, we hope to be able to continue building on our own work to continually improve safety and do what we can to support other Australian businesses to do the same."

CEO of leading Australian property company The GPT Group, Bob Johnston, sees participation as a natural decision. "Safety is central to everything we do at GPT. Millions of families, young people and children visit our assets every single day, and we are committed to ensuring we are doing everything within our power to respect their human rights and protect them from potential harm."

IHG Hotels & Resorts SVP Managing Director for Japan, Australasia & Pacific, Leanne Harwood, said, “The coalition is a brilliant initiative that tackles an incredibly important issue in our community. IHG already has a strong track record in this area, and we hope that the tourism expertise we bring to the Coalition will play a role in improving children’s rights and safety.”

Managing Director of TBWA\Melbourne Ricci Meldrum said, “Bringing together a diverse representation of Australian businesses, all at varying stages of awareness on the role we can play in helping to protect children against abuse, has been eye opening. It has also been critically important in aligning our shared ambitions and defining the Coalition’s parameters.”

University of Sydney Professor and Director of the Research Centre for Children and Families, Amy Conley Wright, says “The corporate sector has the opportunity to innovate and lead in keeping children safe and protected. The purpose of this work is to document the child safeguarding initiative and feed learnings back, to continue amplifying change and point the way for other social justice initiatives.”

The Coalition invites expressions of interest from businesses and organisations that may wish to join. Expressions of interest can be made to Brigitte McGuire, National Executive Manager of the Childsafe Business Initiative, at [childsafebusiness@childhood.org.au](mailto:childsafebusiness@childhood.org.au).

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<sup>i</sup> Nous Group (Nous), ‘Case for Change’ Report, The Australian Business Coalition for Safeguarding Children

<sup>ii</sup> Tucci, J. and Mitchell, J. (August 2021). Still unseen and ignored: Tracking Community Knowledge and Attitudes about Child Abuse and Child Protection in Australia. Australian Childhood Foundation, Melbourne.