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Senator Catryna Bilyk
Chair
Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senator Bilyk

Inquiry into Cyber-Safety for Senior Australians

National Seniors Australia welcomes the Committee's consideration of cyber-safety for senior Australians and wishes to offer comment on the issues being considered by the Committee.

By way of background, National Seniors Australia is the country's largest organisation representing the interests of those aged 50 and over, with around a quarter of a million members nation-wide. This broad-based support enables National Seniors to provide a well informed and representative voice on behalf of its members and contribute to public education, debate and community consultation on issues of direct relevance to older Australians.

We note that internet usage among older Australians is growing rapidly and many are among the early adopters of new cyber-technology. However, our research and feedback from NSA members indicate that some older Australians still have high levels of concern about cyber-safety, to the extent that they are either limiting the ways in which they use the internet, or not using it at all.

The report *Older Australians and the Internet: Bridging the Digital Divide*, released in September 2011 by the National Seniors' Productive Ageing Centre, focussed on older Australians who never or rarely use the internet and identified the barriers facing them in accessing the internet. It also suggested the kind of support needed to overcome these barriers. A copy of this report is enclosed and the original research study on which it was based can be accessed in full at www.productiveageing.com.au.

Significantly for the Committee's work, the research showed that concerns about security and viruses were the third most significant barrier to older people using the internet, trumped only by 'confused by the technology' and lack of knowledge and skills. Of those surveyed, 64 per cent were deterred by concerns about security and viruses (74 per cent said they were confused by the technology and 76 per cent cited lack of skills as a barrier). By comparison, the next most significant barrier was lack of knowledge about what the internet actually does, a barrier for 56 per cent of respondents.

In similar vein, participants in a 2010 community forum 'Older and Online' organised by National Seniors identified internet security as an issue of ongoing concern they wished to explore further.

As noted in our response to the Legislative Issues Paper on Personally Controlled Electronic Health Records (PCEHR), privacy and security are 'make or break' issues for older Australians in relation to PCEHR. PCEHR will only be able to deliver the anticipated benefits for patients, healthcare providers and the healthcare system if all parties have a high level of trust and confidence in the entire system. The creation of such trust and confidence will be significantly influenced by the extent to which the issues, including privacy and security, are appropriately addressed.

The internet has become an essential tool for living and current online technologies can be specifically tailored to suit the needs of older people. The potential for the internet to benefit older people can only be expected to expand. However, to encourage more older Australians to use the internet, they need additional support to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to do so safely and with confidence.

National Seniors believes that providing up-to-date information about the range of cyber-safety issues specifically tailored for older people would greatly assist in building their confidence and knowledge. While there is a great deal of information already available online about cyber-safety, we note that much of it tends to be narrowly focussed (such as the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's website, SCAMwatch).

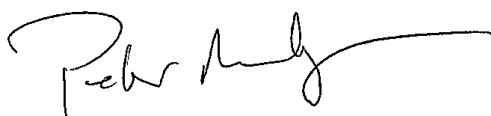
In our view, the Australian Communications and Media Authority's cyber (smart:) site (www.cybersmart.gov.au), designed for use by school age children, teachers and parents, provides a useful model of comprehensive, targeted information on cyber safety. Such a website designed specifically for older people, in tandem with a telephone hotline for those not yet confident in using web-based information, could also be of use to a wider audience.

In summary, awareness and education are integral to addressing older people's fears and concerns about online technologies. National Seniors proposes:

1. More targeted government-sponsored cyber-security and safety campaigns,
2. More government-sponsored training courses and materials which allow for and address older people's lack of basic skills and high levels of anxiety, and
3. A hotline and website providing information on cyber-safety issues, such as virus protection, scams and privacy protection.

If you have any questions about our submission, please contact Dr Sarah Macneil, Senior Policy Advisor, on (02) 6230 4588.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Matwijiw
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