



Australian Government



PROMOTING  
POSITIVE  
**BODY  
IMAGE**

A STATEMENT BY THE  
**HON KATE ELLIS MP**  
MINISTER FOR YOUTH

# Promoting Positive Body Image among Young Australians

A statement by the Hon Kate Ellis MP, Minister for Youth, in response to recommendations from the National Advisory Group on Body Image

## Introduction

As Minister for Youth I am pleased to outline a significant investment by the Australian Government and genuine action on the critical issue of body image.

The impact of this issue, particularly on young Australians can be devastating. Negative body image can affect young people's confidence, wellbeing and overall quality of life. It can also contribute to the development of serious health concerns, such as eating disorders, depression and anxiety disorders, self-harm and social isolation.

Young Australians themselves have repeatedly told us that body image is an important issue to them. Body image was identified as a major concern for young people for the fourth consecutive year in the 2009 National Survey of Young Australians by Mission Australia. For 15-19 year olds surveyed, body image was their number one concern.

It is vital that we recognise the serious implications of negative body image and take action to promote positive body image among young Australians. There is no simple fix for the problem of negative body image. However, this complexity is not an excuse for inaction.

The Government's commitment to taking action on body image led to the establishment of a National Advisory Group on Body Image in 2009. The Advisory Group consisted of representatives from the health sector, the media and fashion industries, academia, young people and relevant non-government organisations.

I asked the Advisory Group to provide me with advice and recommendations on how best to tackle this challenging issue. I would like to acknowledge and thank the members of the Advisory Group for their time and hard work in taking on this role, and for the thoughtful and expert approach they brought to their report and recommendations (available at [www.youth.gov.au/bodyimage.html](http://www.youth.gov.au/bodyimage.html)).

The Advisory Group's report included important messages for approaching action in this area, including the desire to promote the positive and be supportive of people and organisations in taking steps on this issue. Real progress will not be achieved if we allow ourselves to become engaged in a blame game. Developing partnerships with key stakeholders, including relevant industry, community and education organisations, was a central theme of the Advisory Group's report.

By working together, we can take meaningful action to build the resilience of young people to body image pressures and create an environment which is more supportive of their emotional development and wellbeing. We can make a difference to the lives of thousands of young people across the country affected by this issue.



Kate Ellis  
Minister for Youth

## Response — Key Initiatives

The National Advisory Group on Body Image identified two key areas in which to focus efforts in relation to body image: 'industry and popular culture' and 'individuals and their immediate social environment'.

The Australian Government will prioritise action in both of these areas through a significant investment of \$500,000 in Australian Government funding will support new initiatives to promote positive body image among young Australians.

These initiatives aim to build young people's resilience to negative body image pressures whilst promoting leadership and positive cultural change on this issue in the fashion, media and advertising industries.

The initiatives outlined here will lay a strong foundation for further work into the future, continuing to draw on the advice and recommendations provided in the Advisory Group's report.

### Individuals and their immediate social environment

One of the most important things that governments can do to build the resilience of young Australians in this area is to provide access to the information and skills training needed to combat negative body image pressures. The Advisory Group's report emphasised the crucial role of the education environment in supporting positive body image among young people.

In response to this advice, Minister Ellis raised this issue with State and Territory Government Ministers for Education and Youth through the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) in April this year. MCEECDYA acknowledged that promoting positive body image is an important aspect of government efforts to support young people's health and wellbeing and that the education environment provides a key opportunity to foster positive body image.

For its part, the Australian Government will provide significant funding to The Butterfly Foundation for a major expansion of their body image education services. As a national charity that supports Australians suffering from eating disorders and negative body image issues, The Butterfly Foundation is ideally placed to undertake this important work.

With the Government's support, The Butterfly Foundation project will result in new training and workshop materials being delivered to approximately 2,500 educators around the country – directly benefiting around 100,000 young people. The materials will cover topics such as media literacy and self esteem and be targeted for specific age groups. Education and health experts will guide a pilot and evaluation of the resources ahead of them being rolled out across the country.



The Butterfly Foundation project will also include a focus on the development and delivery of body image resources for post-school education settings, such as higher education institutions. This focus responds to the Advisory Group's advice that these are also important environments to target.

Work will also be progressed by the Australian Government on the Advisory Group's 'checklist for **body image friendly** schools' to provide practical guidance for all schools on this issue. A poster promoting school environments that are **body image friendly** will be distributed by the Government to every primary and secondary school in the country. The poster will target the whole school community, including school leaders, teachers, students and parents and carers.

Education Services Australia (ESA) has been engaged to develop the poster, drawing on the checklist developed by the Advisory Group. ESA will also create supporting materials for teachers and school leaders. These resources will provide schools with expert guidance to enable them to embed positive body image policies and practices within their school environment. The work will be developed in consultation with education authorities and other stakeholders.

These initiatives are a significant investment in the development of evidence-based materials to help build young people's resilience to negative body image pressures and assist schools to be **body image friendly** and take action on this important issue.

### Industry and popular culture

Young people are constantly confronted with images in the popular media that are often unrealistic and heavily manipulated through digital technology. Some young people embark on extreme and harmful behaviours to try and emulate the ideal they see.

It is therefore vital that we engage with the fashion, media and advertising industries and work in partnership to drive positive, long-term cultural change to reduce body image pressures.

A major feature of the Advisory Group's report was the development of a Voluntary Industry Code of Conduct on Body Image. The Australian Government has accepted the recommendation of the Advisory Group to implement The Code.

The Code challenges the media, advertising and fashion industries to do the right thing by young people. It is an important call to action for all professionals in these fields to take further steps on this crucial issue.

The Code provides clear guiding principles and goals. Key decision-makers in these industries are urged to be open and innovative in considering how the Code's principles can be integrated into their business practices. It is time to move beyond a 'business as usual' approach and take concrete steps to embed the principles of the Code in the way these industries do business.

A copy of the Voluntary Industry Code of Conduct on Body Image is available at [www.youth.gov.au/bodyimage.html](http://www.youth.gov.au/bodyimage.html)

To encourage industry leadership and recognise genuine commitment and action to support positive body image, a new national **body image friendly** awards scheme will be launched. This initiative responds to the Advisory Group's recommendation that the Australian Government use industry awards to recognise best practice in regard to body image issues.

The **body image friendly** awards scheme will focus on initiatives targeting young people and will include two main categories. The first category will recognise organisations which demonstrate a meaningful and ongoing integration of **body image friendly** principles within their business practices and policies. The second category will recognise specific **body image friendly** initiatives or products, such as a campaign to increase young people's media literacy about digital retouching or a **body image friendly** event or magazine special.

A key feature of the awards scheme, which responds to the advice of the Advisory Group, is the creation of a recognisable **body image friendly** symbol. Award winners will be able to display this symbol for a set period as public acknowledgment of their leadership and achievement in this area.

Use of this symbol will also empower consumers by allowing them to show support for industry groups or businesses that have embraced the principles of the Code. This will provide consumers, and particularly young people, with the opportunity to make positive choices to reflect their support for businesses that take serious steps to promote positive body image.

While the awards scheme will be based on the principles and guidance contained in the Code, specific criteria for the awards will be developed in consultation with industry in the coming months. An expert panel, Chaired by Ms Mia Freedman, will guide and judge the awards. Ms Freedman brings significant magazine industry experience to this role and a demonstrated passion for the issue of body image. Importantly, the panel will include health and academic experts, other industry professionals, and young people.

The **body image friendly** awards and symbol, supporting the take-up of the Voluntary Industry Code of Conduct, will encourage and showcase real and positive change within these incredibly influential industries.



# FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The education and industry initiatives outlined here are major steps forward in promoting positive body image among young people. However, they are just the first steps in addressing an issue that affects hundreds and thousands of young Australians. A sustained effort to tackling this complex problem is needed.

The Australian Government has therefore committed to keeping body image on the agenda through its new *National Strategy for Young Australians*. A focus on body image is included under the Strategy's priority area of health and wellbeing. Direct action to promote **positive body image** will also build on current Australian Government investment to support and treat young people living with mental health disorders.

As highlighted earlier, Minister Ellis has also formally raised the issue of body image with State and Territory Government Ministers for Youth and Education Ministers agreed to working collaboratively to promote positive body image and to progress research on body image initiatives. This research will further ensure that government efforts into the future are underpinned by a strong evidence base.

Many people care passionately about the issue of body image. The collective efforts of young people, community organisations, teachers, youth workers, parents and governments, will ensure genuine progress to address negative body image and make a real difference in the lives of young Australians.

