



# Advances in digital technology outpacing efforts to address online harms: expert panel report

## News Release

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Rapidly evolving technologies are creating challenges for those seeking to keep people safe while protecting their rights and freedoms, according to a new expert panel report from the Council of Canadian Academies (CCA). While the internet and communications technologies are essential and often helpful, they also enable malicious actors to harm people and communities. Addressing these harms requires both legal and non-legal approaches that can keep pace with technological change and protect privacy and human rights.

“Digital technologies have become necessary for accessing virtually all essential services, making everyone, even those not actively online, susceptible to cyber-related crimes and harms,” said Jennifer Stoddart, O.C., C.Q., Ad.E., Chair of the Expert Panel. “But their proliferation has had a profound impact on privacy, an essential component of personal security and dignity.”

Police are often hindered in their ability to investigate criminal activities that take place online, and grapple with outdated organizational structures, a massive volume of digital evidence, and inadequate resources. Additionally, the justice system is facing considerable challenges applying existing legal frameworks to harmful online behaviours. Not all online harm stems from unlawful behaviours, however, and regulation isn’t the only means to keep people safe in the digital age. In some cases, non-legal approaches can be more effective and responsive to the needs of victims and survivors.

Beyond government interventions, cyber-enabled harms can also be addressed through community support, educational programs, and corporate social responsibility. Fostering a safer online ecosystem is a collective responsibility that will involve civil societies, policy makers, law enforcement agencies, and the private sector. Cooperation and coordination across jurisdictions is also essential, particularly given how quickly harms can evolve and cross borders.

“For those who have experienced online abuse or other harms, the effects can be life-altering,” said Eric M. Meslin, PhD, FRSC, FCAHS, President and CEO of the CCA. “Comprehensive evidence on the challenges and opportunities related to the regulation, prevention, investigation, prosecution, and countering of cyber-enabled crimes and harms will be essential to addressing the issue.”

Public Safety Canada asked the CCA to examine leading practices that could help reduce risks to public safety related to the use of digital technologies while respecting human rights and privacy. *Vulnerable Connections* examines how harmful and criminal activities have evolved as a result of digital technologies, the resulting challenges this causes for policy-makers and law



enforcement, and possible opportunities in regulation, prevention, and investigation of cyber-enabled harm.

Visit [www.cca-reports.ca](http://www.cca-reports.ca) to download the report.

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