

**CHILD & YOUTH HEALTH**  
**Social Media**  
**Risks and Restrictions**

May 2026



# Methods and Summary

There is increasing research about the impacts of social media and excessive screen time on the health of children and youth. Bans and restrictions being considered around the world, and here in Manitoba.

Doctors Manitoba consulted physicians about the risks, as well as potential policy options to address the risks, including an age-based ban. This report summarizes physician perspectives on emerging evidence on these issues, as well as potential policy responses.”

## Methods

Doctors Manitoba invited physicians to complete a survey, which was open from April 30, 2026 to May 15, 2026 with 242 responses. Over 60% of the responses included family physicians, pediatricians, and psychiatrists, with a variety of other specialties also contributing their medical views.

## Summary

Physicians agree social media and excessive screen time are significant risks to the health of children and youth, placing this ahead of other health concerns such as substance use (alcohol or drugs), physical inactivity, inadequate nutrition, and injuries.

Over 9 in 10 physicians agree with banning social media and AI chatbots for children and youth. More than two thirds of physicians agree the ban should include ages 16 and younger, with some believing the ban should also include age 17.

While an age-based ban is the preferred policy option, physicians also see the potential of removing addictive elements such as infinite scroll, more robust content moderation, restricting advertising, and stronger digital literacy education.

# Background

Social media, AI chatbots, and excessive screen time are increasingly being identified as a major health risk by researchers, physicians, and other experts.

Chief Provincial Public Health Officer, Dr. Brent Roussin, flagged the issue in the [2025 Health Status of Manitobans Report](#), noting a “growing challenge in youth mental health” linked to widespread and early social media use, with concerns about bullying, social comparison, and exclusion. Excessive screen time among youth is also associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety, and psychological distress.

The U.S. Surgeon General issued a [formal advisory](#) calling social media’s impact on youth mental health an urgent public health concern requiring immediate action.

[The Canadian Paediatric Society](#) has gone further, arguing it is no longer adequate to put the burden only on families, calling instead for platform safeguards and government standards.

Some jurisdictions are responding to emerging research:

- Australia implemented a [full social media ban](#) for anyone under 16. France is [pursuing a similar ban](#) for children under 15, along with several other EU members.
- Brazil [introduced restrictions](#) including age verification, removing addictive elements, and parental consent.
- China requires platforms to offer “minor mode” with content filtering, screentime limits and curfews.
- Several other countries are [considering restrictions or bans](#) to limit access and reduce risks for children and youth.

In Canada, about 75% of adults support a full ban for those under 16 according to a [national poll](#) earlier this year. The federal government [is now considering](#) a ban.

Most recently, the Manitoba government indicated it [will pursue a ban](#) on social media and AI chatbots.

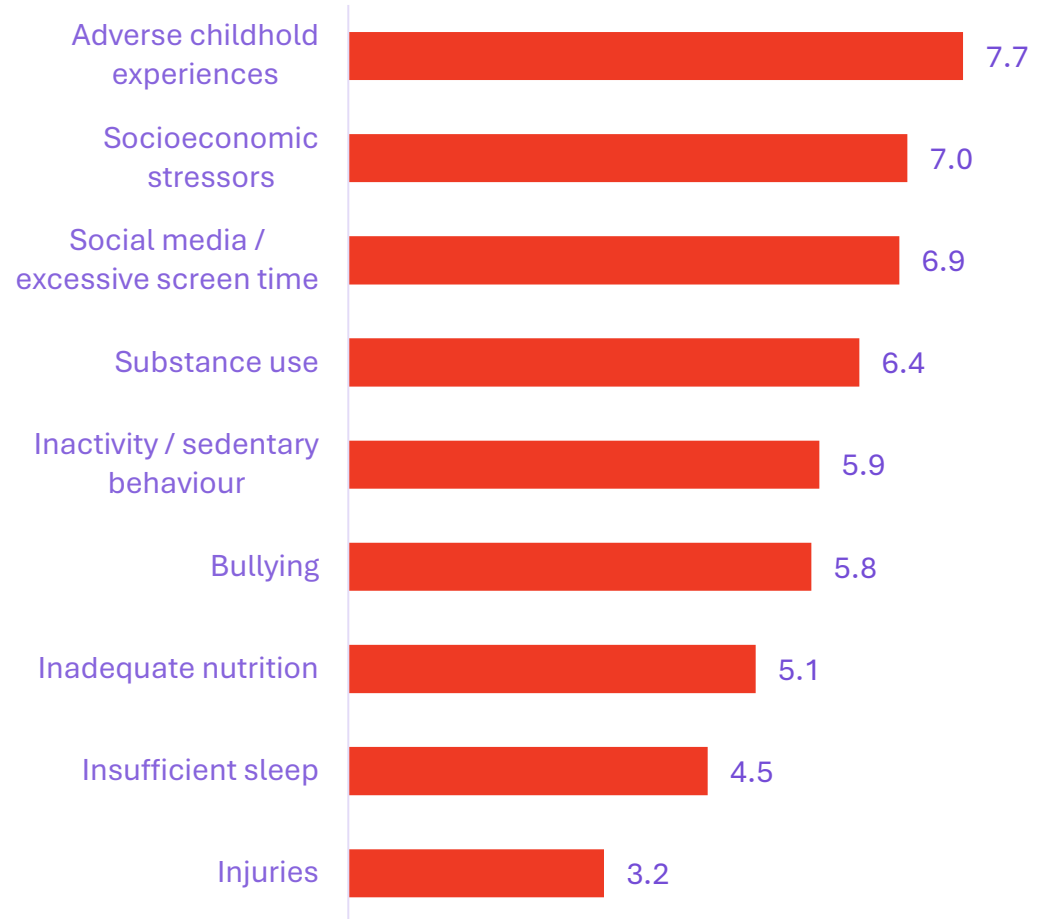
# Social Media and Other Health Risks

Physicians were asked to rank the top risks to the health and well-being of children and youth. Social media and excessive screen time were ranked as higher risk, behind only two others:

- Adverse childhood experiences such as trauma, neglect or violence.
- Socioeconomic stressors such as poverty, housing or food insecurity.

Other risks, such as substance use, inactivity, bullying, and injuries were ranked lower.

## Physician Ranking of Health Risks for Children and Youth



# Strong Support for Ban

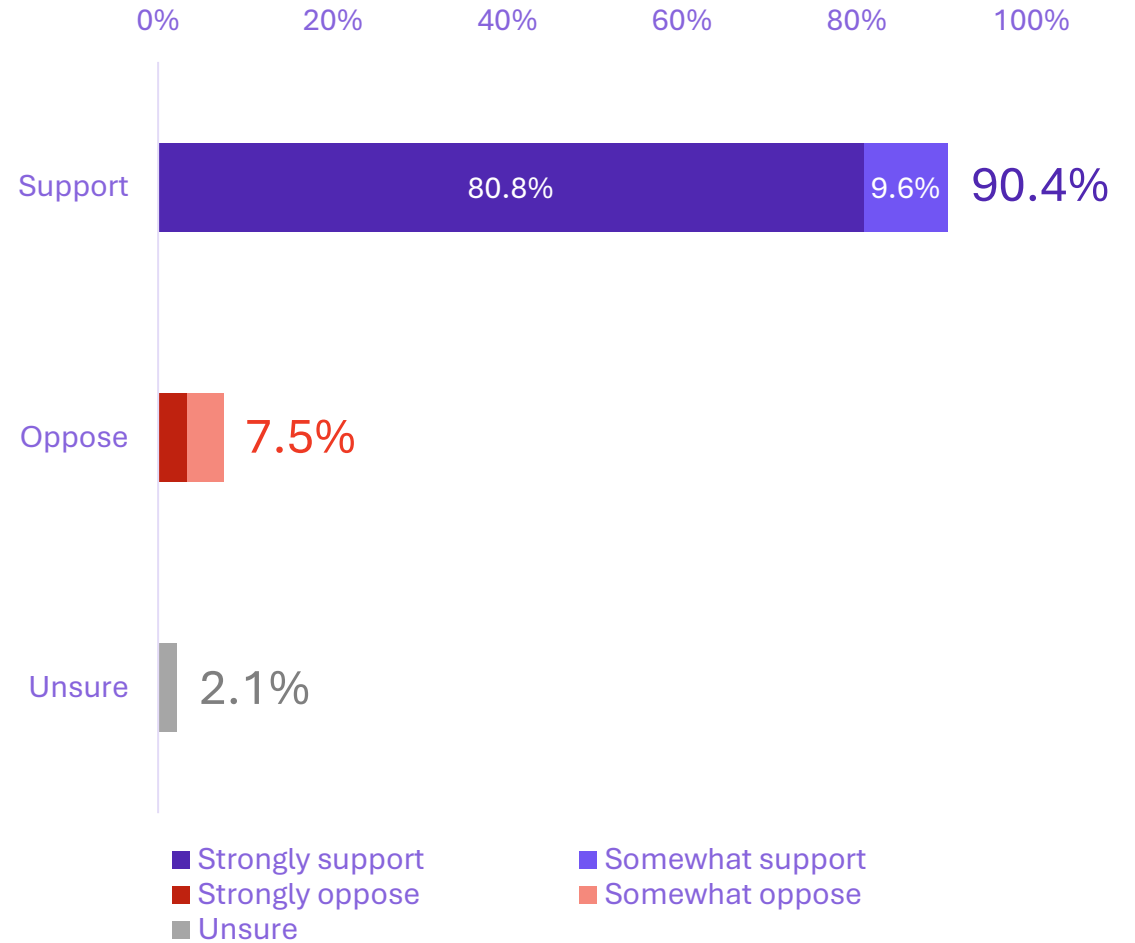
Given the health risk, it is no surprise over 90% of physicians support banning social media and AI chatbots for children and youth.

Among those opposed, the common reasons include:

- Skepticism about Manitoba’s ability to ban major international digital apps.
- A belief that a ban alone is not enough to reduce the harms and prepare youth for eventual access.
- Concern that bans could face legal, ethical or privacy hurdles to implement.

Some physicians also pointed out that social networks, with risks removed, can offer benefits as youth get older, such as reducing isolation and fostering peer connections.

Physician Support for Social Media Ban



# Comments Reflective of Physicians' Views

These comments were typical of the strongest themes from physician feedback: support for a ban, and thoughtful comments about additional measures that are also necessary to address the risks social media poses.

“We completely missed the boat on regulating social media, and it has served to make tech companies rich and society worse. It’s time to take back control.”

“Bans are a good start, but there has to be strong public education to parents and children about how to not fall into the traps and ills of the internet.”

“Social media leads to addictive behaviour affecting mental health and brain development, not unlike substance use or gambling on which we already have age restrictions.”

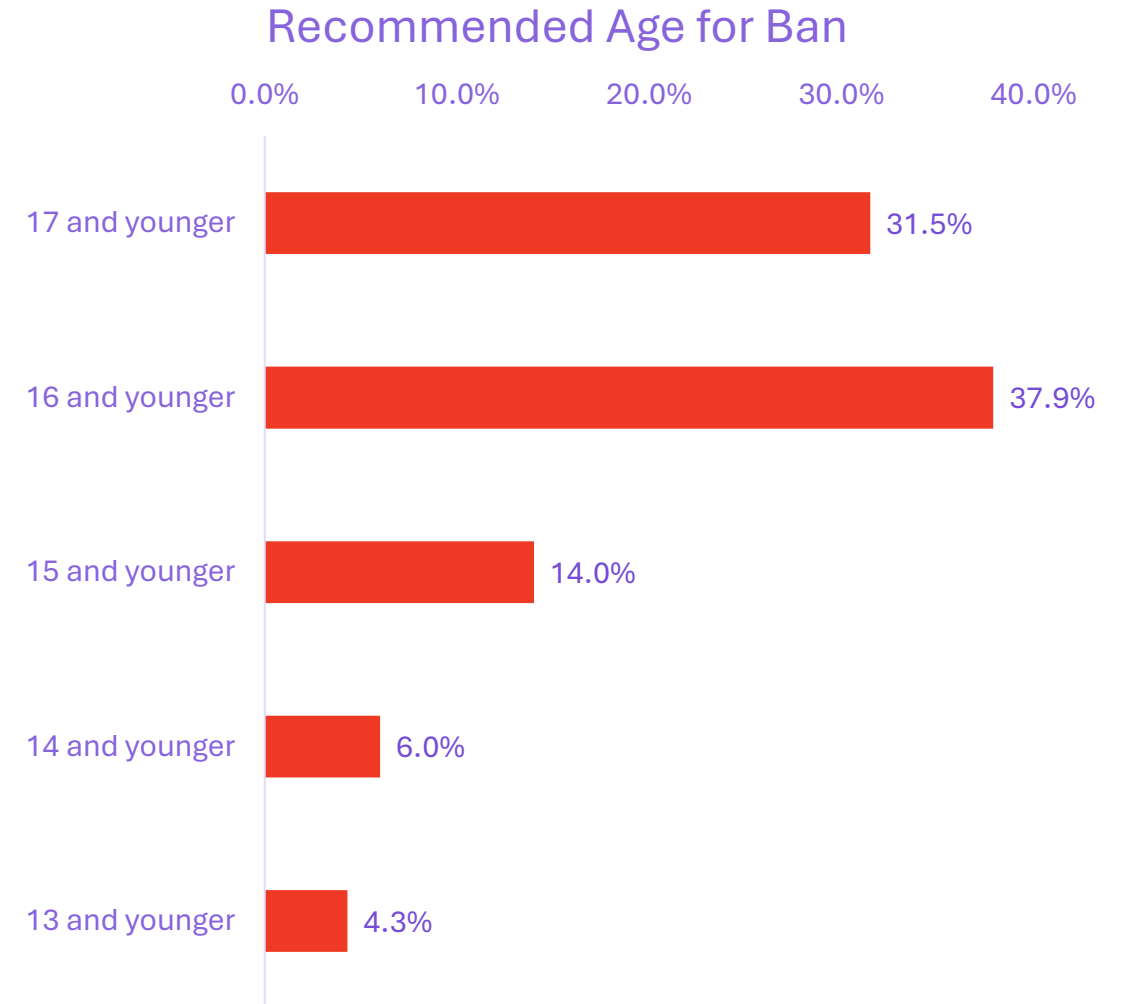
“Restrictions are necessary, but I think that AI and social media are not going anywhere and children will find ways to use it. We need to teach them safe and responsible use.”

“I fundamentally believe that social media is harmful, especially to developing minds. A ban is probably the best thing we can implement until society learns to use this medium safely.”

# Appropriate Age for Possible Ban

More than two thirds of physicians (69.4%) agree a social media and AI chat ban should include ages 16 years and younger. Some in this group recommend the ban should also include age 17.

Many physicians pointed out that as minors grow into teenage years, there must be more of an emphasis on education to ensure youth are prepared as they reach an age at which they can access these digital tools.



# Approaches to Reduce Social Media Risks

A social media ban is the preferred policy option to reduce the risks of social media among children and youth.

Physicians also identified other restrictions that could be explored in addition, or as an alternative, to a full ban. This includes the targeted removal of addictive elements such as infinite scrolling, as well as stronger content moderation and ad restrictions for minors.

Regardless of the policy option, many physicians agree children and youth should receive digital literacy education to help them learn about the risks and prepare for an age when they can access social media and AI chatbots with no restrictions.

Policy Options to Reduce Social Media Risks

