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Media release

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Internet porn: Children still at risk

“Children continue to be at risk of accidental exposure to violent and extreme pornographic materials on the Internet, and the Federal Government has done little to address this,” said Australia Institute Research Fellow Dr Michael Flood, giving a Keynote address at the *Internet, Media and Mental Health Conference* in Brisbane.

“A year after the Australia Institute released its report documenting that three quarters of 16 and 17 year-olds have been accidentally exposed to pornographic websites, the Government has done nothing to minimise children’s exposure to Internet pornography.”

Last year, the Institute’s reports on youth exposure to pornography and the failure of laws to control this exposure forced the Prime Minister to concede that changes to the Broadcasting Act were not working. He said that the review of the Act would consider tougher measures. It is understood that the review by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts was completed some months ago but has not been released.

“The Government’s inaction suggests that it is unconcerned about the harms children face from seeing pornography”, said Dr Flood.

“We know that young people who regularly consume pornography, especially violent pornography, are more likely to be tolerant of sexual violence and more sexually aggressive themselves. And younger children can be shocked and disturbed by premature exposure to sexually explicit images,” said Dr Flood.

“In the last year, access to pornography in Australia has become even easier, with both Internet phones and satellite TV channels broadcasting pornography. Children’s exposure to pornography, both accidental and deliberate, is sure to increase.”

“The Government appears unwilling to ask the online adult industry to get its house in order, to adopt measures to minimise children’s exposure such as age-verification technologies and ‘plain brown wrappers’ for sex sites. Nor has it been willing to get Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to filter their content.”

“The Government has put money into websites educating children about safer Internet practices. Educating children and their parents about what to do when they encounter pornography and other inappropriate material is important. But it’s just as important to stop pornography from appearing on kids’ computer screens in the first place,” said Dr Flood.