TOP BLOKES
FOUNDATION

SUBMISSION TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON LAW AND SAFETY

INQUIRY INTO MEASURES TO COMBAT RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Prepared by Top Blokes Foundation

6 February 2026



TOP BLOKES
FOUNDATION

WE BELIEVE...

Young males are catalysts for positive change. They have a unique perspective that can help solve some of the societal issues that we grapple with. Their voice is valuable and they make meaningful contributions.

When young males are healthy, engaged and well, they influence others around them to do well too.

Young males have the capacity to learn, can embrace change with open minds and are the solution to their own success.

Young males want to be invested in. They rise to the opportunities to become the best versions of themselves. They deserve the opportunity to harness their potential and become top blokes.

The future for young males is exciting. Our society is becoming more inclusive, attentive and caring to help young males grow into their full selves.

Building strong foundations today forges a positive path for the leaders of tomorrow.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Top Blokes Foundation (Top Blokes) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the New South Wales (NSW) Parliamentary Inquiry into Measures to Combat Right-Wing Extremism in NSW. This submission focuses on the vulnerability of young males aged 10–24 years to recruitment into right-wing extremist groups, drawing on Top Blokes' frontline experience delivering long-term, community-based programs to over 25,000 young males across NSW and Queensland.

Across multiple NSW and Commonwealth-funded programs, Top Blokes has worked with young males identified by schools as experiencing social isolation, disengagement from education, mental health challenges, exposure to harmful online content and difficulty forming a positive sense of identity. These factors are consistently identified in both research and practice as increasing vulnerability to extremist recruitment and are particularly pronounced during adolescence and early adulthood.

Evaluation data from Top Blokes programs demonstrates measurable improvements in social connectedness, critical thinking, help-seeking, empathy and pro-social behaviour. These outcomes align with known protective factors against radicalisation and provide evidence that prevention-focused, community-led approaches can reduce risk among young males.

This submission outlines how right-wing extremism can manifest among young males in NSW and recruitment dynamics. It also highlights our experience delivering effective and evidence-based mentoring programs to young males that reduce risk, strengthen protective factors and support disengagement from extremist pathways.

OUR SUBMISSION MAKES THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Ensure NSW strategies for countering right-wing extremism prioritise long-term prevention and early intervention approaches that challenge socially dominant forms of masculinity and address social isolation, disengagement from education and exposure to online misinformation among young males.
2. Engage practitioner organisations with frontline experience in the design, implementation and review of NSW strategies to combat right-wing extremism.
3. Support programs that equip young males to critically analyse online content, including extremist narratives, misinformation and algorithmic influence.
4. Invest in long-term, community-led programs that work with young males aged 10-24 to strengthen social connection, identity development and critical thinking as a preventative measure against right-wing extremism.
5. Ensure the NSW Government meaningfully consults with young males to understand their lived experiences, recruitment dynamics and protective factors, and to incorporate their insights into

the design, implementation and evaluation of measures to combat right-wing extremism in New South Wales.

We hope that sharing these insights and recommendations gives the Committee a deeper insight into the experiences of young males and guidance on how we can work together to prevent their recruitment to right-wing extremist groups.

We welcome the opportunity to speak to the Committee about our submission.

Regards,



Melissa Abu-Gazaleh
Founder and Managing Director

ABOUT TOP BLOKES FOUNDATION

Top Blokes provides safe and supportive spaces for young males to meaningfully connect, explore their identities, develop critical thinking skills and build their knowledge and resilience.

In 2025, we supported over 3,100 young males across New South Wales, through programs delivered in over 140 schools.

Top Blokes group mentoring programs are informed by frameworks for promoting positive and healthy masculinities, improving mental health and harm minimisation. Programs are delivered by qualified Youth Workers in New South Wales and Queensland.

Top Blokes' mission is to challenge and nurture males to be their best selves.

Top Blokes' vision is for more young males to lead healthy and safe lives.

Top Blokes has three programs that we deliver in schools and with community partners such as workplaces and community organisations:

- 10-13 program: run in primary schools over one school term
- 14-17 program: run in high schools over two school terms
- 18-24 program: run with community partners over 10-20 weeks

Graduates from these programs can become members of our Grad Club, which offers them ongoing support and opportunities for personal and leadership development, as well as to stay connected with like-minded males.

Top Blokes has a Youth Ambassador Council, comprised of 11 young males who have participated in Top Blokes programs. The Youth Ambassador Council provides lived experience advice and guidance on Top Blokes programming, operations and strategies, and engages in advocacy activities.

While Top Blokes does not deliver explicit counter-terrorism programs, our work directly addresses the early risk conditions that underpin vulnerability to right-wing extremism, including loneliness, lack of belonging, identity disruption and exposure to online misinformation.

In recognition of this, Top Blokes has received funding from the NSW Premier's Department under the Strengthening Social Cohesion Community Grants aimed at improving social cohesion and preventing violent extremism. With this funding we are reaching over 300 young males across the Sutherland Shire, Penrith, Hawkesbury, Lake Macquarie and Campbelltown LGAs.

In 2025, two Top Blokes Graduates were appointed to the Youth Ambassador Council for a Safer Australia, which is tasked with advising the Department of Home Affairs on youth perspectives on countering violent extremism policies and programs.

UNDERSTANDING RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM IN NSW

RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM AMONG YOUNG MALES EMERGES THROUGH DESIRE FOR BELONGING, IDENTITY AND IS FACILITATED BY ONLINE PATHWAYS AND MISOGYNY - NOT IDEOLOGY ALONE

Right-wing extremism is characterised by ideologies that promote exclusionary, hierarchical or supremacist views based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender or national identity. These ideologies often frame social change, diversity and gender equality as threats, and may legitimise hostility or violence in response.

Compared to other forms of extremism, right-wing extremism among young males is often decentralised, informal and algorithm-driven. Recruitment is rarely explicitly tied to ideology and can instead be gradual and relational, drawing young males in through content that validates anger, reinforces stereotypes, normalises misogyny and frames identity in oppositional terms. These can resonate with young males and act as 'soft entry points' for those seeking connection, certainty or validation.

Young males long for meaningful connections. They have told us they struggle to find 'organic' opportunities for meaningful social connection and need facilitated access to them. Many will search for connection and community online, which places them at risk of encountering and engaging with extremist content, particularly when it is easily accessible and offers simple explanations for complex personal or social challenges they may be facing.

This pathway makes early identification challenging and underscores the importance of prevention and early intervention approaches that focus on underlying risk factors rather than ideology alone. Prevention and early intervention must focus on strengthening identity, belonging and critical thinking before extremist beliefs become entrenched.

THE LINK BETWEEN ONLINE MISOGYNY AND RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM

Evidence and practice wisdom indicate that online misogyny and gendered narratives can act as a gateway to right-wing extremism. In an analysis of the relationship between misogyny and violent extremism, Phelan et al. (2025) found that 'misogyny is a shared expression amongst different actors in the right-wing spectrum...[and]...creates a linking identity factor and a common line of communication across different geopolitical environments, facilitating both narrative connections and common understanding'.

Top Blokes' frontline staff report that right-wing narratives most commonly surface in discussions about online behaviour, peer pressure, racism and gender norms. These narratives often appear

normalised or minimised by young males, particularly when encountered through social media platforms or gaming environments.

Top Blokes programs actively support young males to explore their sense of identity outside of socially dominant forms of masculinity and to consider how societal expectations of males impact their relationships with females. Top Blokes youth workers role model diverse masculinities and respectful relationships and communication between genders. For many young males, a Top Blokes workshop is their first opportunity to deeply reflect on their self-identity.

Evaluation data indicates that this is one of the strongest areas of change for them as a result of their participation in Top Blokes programs. In 2025, 85.1% of young males who completed the 10-13 Program and 14-17 Program reported that Top Blokes made them think differently about what it means to be a man.

> **Being a man means whatever you want it to mean. You don't have to fit into a box or let the media or society dictate that for you. Since that workshop, my mental health has improved so much, and I feel more confident in owning who I am."**
>
> - TOP BLOKES GRADUATE

> **My favourite session was healthy relationships because it's important knowing the risks or unhealthy habits or things in a relationship as you are going to eventually try to have a long healthy relationship."**
>
> - TOP BLOKES GRADUATE

> **What is right for you could be wrong for someone else, it's ok to be different and celebrate that instead of using difference as a tool that divides us. I'm more accepting now and I think it's made it easier for other people to accept me."**
>
> - TOP BLOKES GRADUATE

SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS CREATE CONDITIONS THAT EXTREMIST GROUPS EXPLOIT

We refer the Committee to Report No. 65 of the Standing Committee on Social Issues on the prevalence, causes and impacts of loneliness in NSW published in August 2025. The report describes the relationship between loneliness, social isolation and vulnerability to extremism. Loneliness and social isolation are significant risk factors for radicalisation, which have serious consequences for individuals and communities.

Evidence presented to the inquiry, including evidence from Top Blokes, suggests that loneliness weakens social cohesion and can drive individuals to seek belonging and purpose in groups, including extremist movements.

The inquiry noted that isolation can make individuals more susceptible to ideological thinking, a vulnerability that populist and extremist actors actively exploit by amplifying feelings of marginalisation and fear of "others".

While loneliness alone does not cause radicalisation, it can increase vulnerability by intensifying grievance, identity uncertainty and the search for belonging, conditions that extremist actors actively exploit.

Young males are particularly at risk, as adolescence is a period when identity, belonging and connection are still forming (Sanci, Webb and Hocking 2018). If a young man is socially isolated and/or lonely, this may contribute to their radicalisation and involvement in violent extremism (Lowe 2020).

RECOMMENDATION

Ensure NSW strategies for countering right-wing extremism prioritise long-term prevention and early intervention approaches that challenge socially dominant forms of masculinity and address social isolation, disengagement from education and exposure to online misinformation among young males.

IMPACTS OF RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM IN NSW ON COMMUNITIES AND YOUNG MALES

EARLY SIGNS OF RADICALISATION ARE FIRST VISIBLE IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY SETTINGS

When young males adopt exclusionary or extremist views, impacts are often first visible in schools and community settings. These can include increased hostility, withdrawal from diverse peer groups and normalisation of harmful language.

Schools partnering with Top Blokes have raised concerns about increases in racist gestures, racist language, misinformation and polarised thinking among male students. Some schools are reporting an increase in young males wearing military style clothing. Students that are disengaged or marginalised appear especially prone.

> **"Boys who have expressed radicalised views are often isolated from the rest of the group, like they are in their own bubble. We have noticed that sometimes they also wear different clothing, military style clothing. We work alongside the school where we can to support these boys.**
>
> **They can often seem isolated from the rest of the group and everyone usually says that well since they are not taking drugs or partying, they're fine. But they are hanging out with different groups online.**
>
> **But it can be hard to truly identify because they often know not to share too much of their true beliefs. They will only share if they know that others accept and also share the same views."**
>
> - TOP BLOKES GRADUATE AND YOUTH WORKER

Left unaddressed, these behaviours can escalate and contribute to broader patterns of harm, including violence, antisocial behaviour and disengagement from education or employment.

Evaluation data from Top Blokes programs shows that prior to participating in a Top Blokes program, many participants report low social connectedness and difficulty managing anger or peer pressure. These are factors that can undermine social cohesion if left unaddressed.

EXTREMIST NARRATIVES REINFORCE EMOTIONAL SUPPRESSION, ANGER AND DISENGAGEMENT AMONG YOUNG MALES

For young males, engagement with right-wing extremist content can limit emotional expression, discourage help-seeking and reinforce rigid identity narratives. It can also exacerbate mental health challenges, particularly where extremist narratives reinforce shame, anger or entitlement.

Young males participating in Top Blokes programs demonstrate improvements in emotional literacy and resilience. Data from 2025 shows:

- 84% report an improvement in managing disagreements and conflicts.
- 83% report that Top Blokes help them understand what is important to them in life.
- 75% report an improvement in controlling emotions.
- 71% report thinking more about risks before taking them.
- Improvements in help-seeking behaviour.
- Improvements in knowledge of upstander behaviour.

> **[Top Blokes showed me] how to deal with life challenges and be resilient during times that have a lot of struggles. Thinking about the risks and how to be smart before I act."**
>
> - TOP BLOKES GRADUATE

> **Top Blokes taught me that standing up against your mates when they are doing bad things can be good. I learnt how to stop bad peer pressure."**
>
> - TOP BLOKES GRADUATE

Teachers and parents/carers are also seeing the change, consistently reporting improved behaviour, increased help-seeking and stronger peer relationships among participants following program completion.

RECOMMENDATION

Engage practitioner organisations with frontline experience in the design, implementation and review of NSW strategies to combat right-wing extremism.

TRUSTED ADULT RELATIONSHIPS AND CRITICAL CONVERSATION DISRUPT EXTREMIST RECRUITMENT PATHWAYS

Top Blokes' practice experience highlights that online recruitment from extremist groups is often indistinguishable from general content consumption. Young males frequently report encountering extremist-adjacent content framed as jokes, conspiracy theories or "alternative viewpoints".

Young males who lack critical digital literacy or trusted adults to discuss these ideas with are particularly vulnerable to gradual radicalisation. Top Blokes programs offer young males safe spaces to raise and discuss ideas and thoughts. Each Top Bloke program is facilitated by the same two mentors. Top Blokes youth workers describe their mentoring role as being a 'first ear' for young males:

> **"[Top Blokes workshops are] a healthy space for the boys to have their ideas challenged. Because I think for a lot of the young men that we work with, yeah, it's typically a first opportunity."**
>
> - TOP BLOKES YOUTH WORKER

Young males have told us that to be effective, mentors must be someone they trust and relate to. The relationship must feel strong and level so they feel able to ask any question they may have. Former participants we have spoken to describe their mentor as the first trustworthy adult in their life, setting the tone for their interactions with other adults post-program and improving their likelihood of reaching out for help when they need it.

> **"[Top Blokes showed me how] to understand and be more comfortable discussing topics people are afraid to talk about like racism and immigration."**
>
> - TOP BLOKES GRADUATE

> **"The program helped me deal with people in social environments and see others as actual people."**
>
> - TOP BLOKES GRADUATE

RECOMMENDATION

Support programs that equip young males to critically analyse online content, including extremist narratives, misinformation and algorithmic influence.

COMBATTING RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM THROUGH PREVENTION PROGRAMS THAT TARGET YOUNG MALES

PREVENTION-FOCUSED, WELLBEING-LED PROGRAMS REDUCE RISK BEFORE EXTREMIST BELIEFS BECOME ENTRENCHED

Top Blokes' experience demonstrates that effective prevention programs share several key characteristics:

- Long-term engagement to achieve sustained change.
- Qualified, relatable mentors who model pro-social behaviour, a spectrum of masculinities and respectful relationships.
- Strengths-based framing rather than deficit or surveillance approaches.
- Safe spaces for discussion of identity, difference and online influence.

Across recent programs delivered under social cohesion and countering violent extremism funding, Top Blokes will support over 300 young males to June 2026. Evaluation outcomes so far include:

- 58-69% improvement in social behaviours and connectedness
- 66-75% improvement in critical thinking and decision-making
- Measurable reductions in antisocial behaviour and increased school engagement

Participant feedback indicates that these changes translate into greater empathy, reduced hostility and increased willingness to challenge harmful peer behaviour.

> **I learnt that everyone is a person and that they should all be treated equally regardless of the circumstances."**
>
> - TOP BLOKES GRADUATE

Top Blokes helped me with my racism and how to be more respectful of people from other cultures."

- TOP BLOKES GRADUATE

I learnt about cultural diversity – being able to put yourself in others shoes. It gave me a wide perspective on different topics and the way I see things."

- TOP BLOKES GRADUATE

[Top Blokes] helped me be more respectful and open minded."

- TOP BLOKES GRADUATE

I learnt that refugees had it not good and I feel bad for them."

- TOP BLOKES GRADUATE

Importantly, prevention programs for young males are most effective when framed around wellbeing, respect and leadership rather than extremism prevention. This approach increases engagement and reduces resistance among participants identified as being at higher risk.

RECOMMENDATION

Invest in long-term, community-led programs that work with young males aged 10-24 to strengthen social connection, identity development and critical thinking as a preventative measure against right-wing extremism.

Young males want to be involved in decisions about them that impact their lives. When young males feel safe and supported, they can share their experiences and viewpoints to influence policy and programming decisions. The Top Blokes Youth Ambassador Committee (YAC) is a strong example of this. Made up of 11 Top Blokes Graduates, the group meets regularly to review and advise on Top Blokes' strategy and operations. Their lived experience shapes our work. We urge the Committee to meaningfully consult with young males through this inquiry and beyond. We can support the Committee to connect with young males to achieve this.

RECOMMENDATION

Ensure NSW Government meaningfully consults with young males to understand their lived experiences, recruitment dynamics and protective factors, and to incorporate their insights into the design, implementation and evaluation of measures to combat right-wing extremism in NSW.

CONCLUSION

ADDRESSING SOCIAL ISOLATION AND IDENTITY DISRUPTION IS CENTRAL TO PREVENTING RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM

Right-wing extremism among young males in NSW is best understood as a risk emerging from social isolation, identity disruption and online exposure, rather than ideology alone. Evidence from Top Blokes' frontline practice demonstrates that prevention-focused, community-led programs can strengthen protective factors and reduce vulnerability before extremist beliefs become entrenched.

Practitioner organisations working directly with young males are well-positioned to inform effective, proportionate responses and should be recognised as critical partners in NSW strategies to combat right-wing extremism. Young males themselves are a critical part of this dialogue, and should be included in any analysis and decision-making about their lives.

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