

Canada Policy Testimony 4/15/2026

Introductions

Thank you, Chair Smith and Deputy Chair Dasko for the chance to testify. Our statements here do not represent the opinions of our employers or funders.

Background

We are part of an interdisciplinary team of researchers working to understand the risks and harms of AI chatbots being used for therapy, mental health, and emotional support.

Our work has been covered by outlets from the New York Times to the Financial Times to USA Today and appears in peer-reviewed publications cited by hundreds of other researchers.

The Problem

Some of the safety issues of AI we have heard about exist today.

Many people are turning to AI chatbots like ChatGPT for therapy, life advice, and emotional support.

While AI chatbots hold great promise, many people--adults and children--have come to harm after interacting with them.

Jon Ganz, age 49, became obsessed with Google Gemini and believed he was using it to make scientific discoveries and predictions. He has been missing since he drove into a heavy storm in April 2025.¹

Zane Shamblin, age 23, used ChatGPT extensively, and it repeatedly encouraged him to break off contact with his family and affirmed his suicidal ideation. He died in July after talking to ChatGPT for hours.²

There are also cases of teen suicides and AI chatbots, as with Adam Raine in California in April 2025.³

People can also experience harm from chatbots in ways other than death.

You may be familiar with the case of the delusional spiral Allan Brooks of Ontario experienced after interacting with ChatGPT.⁴ (This is sometimes described as "AI Psychosis")

¹ <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/ai-chatbot-disappearance-jon-ganz-1235438552/>

² <https://www.cnn.com/2025/11/06/us/openai-chatgpt-suicide-lawsuit-invs-vis>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/26/technology/chatgpt-openai-suicide.html>

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/08/technology/ai-chatbots-delusions-chatgpt.html>

Our Research

As academic researchers, we work to understand what is leading to these harmful interactions with chatbots in order to build a world in which people can safely benefit from AI.

We have run many experiments to test chatbots like ChatGPT in simulation.

And we have also analyzed thousands of pages of real chat logs from people who reported psychological harms from chatbots.

In our research and that of our colleagues, we have found that:

(1)

AI chatbots are overly agreeable (sycophantic). They are likely to agree with you even when you are wrong, or when you have delusional thinking that is disconnected with reality.

(2)

Almost all of our participants believed that their AI chatbots were conscious, that they had personalities, or had extraordinary capabilities.

These false beliefs about the sentience and capabilities of AI chatbots formed core parts of their subsequent delusional spirals with and excessive use of AI companions.

(3)

We have been forced to do research with limited data. It has been very difficult to get data from AI companies, so we have had to turn to users directly to contribute their conversations.

Still, only a few dozen people of the likely hundreds or thousands having these difficult experiences have reached out to us.

Without an independent analysis of a broad sample of interactions, we cannot know how common these harms are nor how to prevent them.

Recommendations

Canada has already taken important first steps on AI governance — including this Senate study, federal guidance, and the creation of the Canadian AI Safety Institute — but significant legislative gaps remain, especially for therapeutic and companion chatbots.

There is "currently no AI-specific legislation before the House of Commons"⁵

We urge that any regulations should:

1. ensure chatbot design that reduces or prevents AI sycophancy and parasocial relationships.
 - a. Chatbot companions (designed for intimacy) should be separately regulated, especially for minors.
2. restrict AI from representing itself as sentient, as a person or possessing person-like qualities like emotions, or as having extraordinary capabilities
3. institute reporting requirements for private companies to publicly disclose performance evaluations and safety protocols (such as their mental health crisis referral processes)
 - a. AND/OR designate a trusted third-party evaluator for AI chatbots

Additionally, all subjects in our study who experienced harm from AI companions were adults. This highlights the urgent need to protect adults as well as minors from unsafe and manipulative AI chatbot companions. We urge that any regulations protect all people, not just minors.

Thank you.

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