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NZ's draft Code of Practice for Online Safety and Harms now available for feedback

Netsafe has today unveiled the draft Aotearoa New Zealand Code of Practice for Online Safety and Harms for public feedback.

Over the last four months, Netsafe has been leading the development of the Code that brings industry together under a set of principles and commitments to provide a best practice self-regulatory framework aimed at enhancing Kiwi's safety and reducing harmful content online.

Developed in consultation with a broad range of digital platforms, the Code was socialised amongst key stakeholders, including the Government, Māori cultural consultants, and civil society organisations ahead of the public feedback period so that their initial input was considered. Consultation workshops will be held after the submission period closes.

"This Code has been developed with some of the biggest global tech companies and makes the safety of New Zealand internet users of paramount importance," said Martin Cocker, Netsafe's outgoing CEO.

"This Code achieves a balance of robust measures that also protects the privacy, freedom of expression and political communication Kiwis expect when they use digital services," added Sean Lyons, Netsafe's Online Safety Operations Centre Manager.

As more digital platforms seek to address harmful content, this code provides a blueprint for best practice. While it is recognised that many of the platforms are already undertaking a great deal of work to address harmful content, disinformation and misinformation, this Code is intended to hold Signatories to account and to provide a framework for greater transparency and oversight of those efforts in New Zealand.

Uniquely, the Code creates a role for an Administrator - Te Rangapū Whakatutuki - with powers to sanction Signatories should they fail to meet their commitments. It will also establish a complaints mechanism for the public and outline a requirement for regular review and evolution of the code - taking into account the views of a multi stakeholder group, including Māori representatives.

Meta (Facebook, Instagram), Microsoft, Google (YouTube), Twitter, TikTok, and Twitch (by Amazon) have all been involved in the development of the Code alongside Netsafe.

"Protecting people from harm without undermining freedom of expression or the benefits of the open internet is a complex challenge. While we have strict policies against harmful content, we agree that more is needed to be done across the industry to ensure that we're approaching online safety in a transparent way and being held to account. We've been consulting with Netsafe and the broader industry to ensure this Code both protects these freedoms while addressing the need to remove harmful online content," said Nick McDonnell, Head of Public Policy for Meta New Zealand & Pacific Islands.

"We work hard to protect users from harmful content and over the past years, we've invested heavily in systems that are designed to raise authoritative information, remove violative content, and reduce the spread of harmful misinformation. We continue to invest in the policies and systems while also holding ourselves to the highest level of accountability and

transparency. Our work here is ongoing and we will continue to refine and make investments while also consulting with Government, industry bodies and non-profits to ensure that our products and services offer a safe, secure and helpful experience for all Kiwis. We've worked with Netsafe for over 15 years to consult across industry issues, and we look forward to continuing this constructive approach," says Ross Young, Head of Government Affairs and Public Policy, Google NZ

"TikTok's mission is to bring joy and inspire creativity for our users in New Zealand and across the globe. To help foster an online environment which places safety at the centre for individuals to express themselves freely and creatively, we have been consulting with Netsafe and the broader industry to ensure this Code meaningfully promotes online safety and systemic approaches to addressing harmful online content," said Brent Thomas, Director of Public Policy, TikTok Australia and New Zealand.

The Code also sees digital platforms reinforce their commitments to reducing the risk of harm from disinformation and misinformation by adopting a wide range of measures.

Additionally, signatories will release reports on their efforts under the Code, which will further help the understanding of misinformation and disinformation, and harmful content and contribute to future regulatory systems for online content.

The public feedback period is open from now until Wednesday, 2 February 2022. People can read the draft Code and find out how to make a submission at netsafe.org.nz.

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Media contact

Angela Boundy, Senior Marketing and Communications Manager
+64 27 228 3930 | angelab@netsafe.org.nz

About Netsafe

Netsafe is an independent non-profit organisation with an unrelenting focus on online safety. We keep people of all ages safe online by providing free support, advice, and education. Visit netsafe.org.nz for useful resources or call 0508 NETSAFE for help with an online incident.

Under the Harmful Digital Communications Act, Netsafe has a statutory responsibility to establish and maintain relationships with domestic and foreign service providers and online content hosts. Steering the Online Safety Code of Practice into reality is another way Netsafe delivers on its commitment to help keep Aotearoa safer online.