

Office of the Minister of Internal Affairs

Chair

COVID-19 Ministerial group

Supporting parents and caregivers to create a safe online environment for children and young people

Proposal

1. This paper proposes a public awareness campaign to provide parents and caregivers information to help them create a safe online environment for children and young people, as they spend more time at home and online during the COVID-19 situation

Relation to government priorities

2. This proposal contributes to the Government response to supporting New Zealanders during the COVID-19 situation. It also contributes to the Government's priority of improving child well-being.

Executive summary

3. The upsurge in time children and young people spend online due to the COVID-19 situation increases the risk of exposure to online threats, including online grooming, online bullying and viewing inappropriate content. Some agencies and organisations currently offer advice to parents and caregivers on online safety, but this information is distributed across different sites and not all parents are aware that this support is available.
4. I propose a cross-government public awareness campaign to provide parents and caregivers with information to help them create a safe online environment for children and young people who are spending more time at home and online. The campaign aims to help parents and caregivers address online harm that may have already occurred during the lockdown and to mitigate likelihood of future harm and provide the tools to deal with it when it occurs. The campaign will provide simple and clear messages for parents and caregivers and point them to a trusted and comprehensive source of resources. It will support existing work in this space, such as online safety messages from the Ministry of Education as part of its rollout of Chromebooks and laptops.
5. The campaign needs to be rolled out quickly to help reduce the likelihood of children and young people being exposed to online harm. Should Cabinet agree, the Department of Internal Affairs aims to launch this campaign in May 2020.

Background

Children and young people are facing increased risk of online harm

6. New Zealand is currently at Alert Level 4 for COVID-19. This means everyone, except those providing essential services, are required to stay home to reduce the transmission of the virus. Many New Zealanders are spending more time online as they work from home, support loved ones, stay informed and keep themselves and their families entertained. Information from Chorus shows that total Internet traffic has increased significantly under lockdown, with a 40 per cent average daily increase per connection.

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7. On Wednesday 15 April 2020, Term 2 for schools started and many children are taking lessons and studying online. The Government is rolling out support to enable children to learn and study from home. Even as we transition from Alert Level 4, it is probable that some distance learning will occur, and children and young people's online habits may have changed over this period of isolation.
8. The Internet is helping us and our children stay connected and continue with work and studies. However, this upsurge in time spent online also increases the risk of exposure to online threats. Agencies and organisations working in the area of online safety have detected an increase in harmful online activity that affects everyone, like scams and misinformation.
9. Children and young people or teenagers also face specific risks of online harm including malicious activity that targets children. This includes:
 - 9.1 online grooming - the *Pandemic profiteering – how criminals exploit the COVID-19 crisis* report recently published by Europol states that there are "postings in dedicated forums and boards by offenders welcoming opportunities to engage with children whom they expect to be more vulnerable due to isolation, less supervision and greater online exposure."
 - 9.2 online bullying - cyberbullying and other modern forms of harassment and intimidation, such as sending or publishing threatening or offensive material and messages. These can have a devastating and lasting impact on people, especially children and teenagers.
10. There is also an increased probability that children and young people will take additional risks when online for longer periods at home, like accessing or viewing inappropriate content such as online pornography. The largest online pornography site (Pornhub) has shown an increase in usage in New Zealand, and other countries, as we moved into Alert Level 4, compared to an average day.
11. Unsupervised use of video chatting, online gaming and live streaming platforms can open children up to being contacted directly by people they do not know. These systems often allow the easy capture of information that can be used to bully or harass children later. While these risks are always present, the prevalence of these platforms has grown rapidly and the risk of children using these technologies unmonitored in a household has increased. Over this period, children will have likely grown their online presence and knowledge of these technologies.
12. Online harms can have significant impacts on mental health and wellbeing, particularly for older children and teenagers. Parents and caregivers need to understand online risks and how to support their child to have a safe online experience.

People are looking for more information about online safety

13. Agencies and organisations in the online safety area have developed guidance and tools, such as Netsafe's Online Safety Parent Toolkit and the Office of Film and Literature Classification's material about how to talk with young people about pornography. The Department of Internal Affairs also has guidance on its website on Child Online Safety, because of its enforcement role in countering online child sexual exploitation. However, there is no single portal to find and access this information.
14. People are looking for information about online safety for children and young people. Visitors to Netsafe.org.nz are up 70 per cent compared to the same period last year while visitors to its *7 tips for Parents and Whanau* page are up 240 per cent.

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15. Unlike many countries, New Zealand has multiple agencies holding responsibility for different aspects of online activity.¹ This means information is currently distributed across different sites and not all parents are aware of the range of support available.

S.9(2)(b)(ii)

A public awareness campaign would help parents and caregivers access information and tools to support children and young people

16. I propose a cross-government public awareness campaign to provide parents and caregivers with a single point of information to help them create a safe online environment for children and young people as they spend more time at home and online. The campaign will be over multiple channels (for example, it may include television, radio, online social media) to reach as many parents and caregivers as possible.
17. The campaign will be designed to target different communities across New Zealand, including those with different language and accessibility needs. Campaign material appropriate for Māori and non-Māori children, in English and Te Reo Māori, will be developed.
18. The campaign aims to provide support and information for parents and caregivers to:
- 18.1 respond appropriately where children and young people have already experienced harmful online content during the lockdown; and
 - 18.2 help keep their children and young people safe from harmful online content as they continue to spend more time online due to restrictions in place as part of the COVID-19 response.

The public awareness campaign will provide parents and caregivers with advice and tell them where to get more information

19. The campaign will provide simple and clear tips for parents and caregivers to help them deal with and prevent online harm. These tips will focus on how parents and caregivers can approach children and young people from different age groups. For younger children (12 years and younger), the advice will focus on parents actively engaging and managing what they are watching, reading and playing online. For teenagers (13 years and older), the advice will focus on parents helping them develop skills to manage and deal with what they see online.
20. The public messaging will point parents and caregivers to a trusted and comprehensive single source of resources through a web page on www.govt.nz. The page will include advice about different types of online harm and links parents and caregivers to the appropriate sources of information, guidance and tools (for example, to the Netsafe website about online bullying).

¹ Australia has an e-Safety Commissioner and the United Kingdom has Ofcom.

The public awareness campaign will be a collaborative effort between government, non-government agencies and the private sector

21. The campaign will be led by the Department of Internal Affairs in collaboration with a group of non-government organisations, and private sector organisations working together to prevent online harm.² This group will bring a wide range of expertise that will help ensure the campaign is effective. The group will also work with the private sector to promote tools like parental filters.
22. The campaign will complement and promote the online safety steps the Ministry of Education has taken as it rolls out learning from home, with the provision of over 1700 laptops and 950 Chromebooks. These steps include:
 - supporting the Network for Learning crown company to provide parents and caregivers with a free filtering service for their child's device. This filter will block websites containing known cyber threats like phishing scams, malicious content and virus, while also filtering out the content deemed the worst of the web.
 - encouraging parents and whānau to supervise their children's online activities and using available information for parents and children about staying safe online.
23. The Five Countries Ministerial Group³ is also working with major technology companies to develop a joint COVID-19 online safety campaign focused on addressing child sexual exploitation and abuse. While this is a separate campaign with a narrower focus, the Department of Internal Affairs will ensure the campaigns align with one another.

The public awareness campaign needs to be rolled out quickly to help parents, children and young people

24. Children and young people have increased their online use since the country went into lockdown on 25 March and as Term 2 started on 15 April 2020. This is likely to continue during the transition from learning at home to going back to school. Therefore, the campaign needs to be rolled out quickly to help prevent children and young people being exposed to online harm and provide support where they have already experienced online harm.
25. Should this proposal be approved, the campaign would be rolled out as per the schedule set out in *Table 1* below.

Table 1 - Timetable for campaign

Activity	Time period
Commission external consultant for campaign	Mid-April 2020
Launch new webpage on www.govt.nz	Mid-April 2020
Roll out public messaging across multiple channels	May 2020

² The group preventing online harm is a collaborative cross agency group with a core group of the following agencies: the Department of Internal Affairs, Office of Film and Literature Classification, Computer Emergency Response Team, and the New Zealand Police.

Other agencies and organisations that work with the group as required include the Office of the Privacy Commissioner, Ministry of Education, the High Tech Crime Group, Netsafe, Vodafone, Network for Learning, the Domain Name Commission and Facebook.

³ The Five Countries Ministerial Group is focused on reducing online harm and consists of New Zealand, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States.

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26. The campaign is focused on helping parents and caregivers create a safe online environment during the COVID-19 situation and beyond, and managing the consequences of online harm that may have already occurred. There may also be an opportunity to provide more direct support to children and young people. For example, showing the animated series *Into the Cloud* developed by the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children.⁴
27. The Department of Internal Affairs will work with the Ministry of Education to investigate launching a phase two of the public awareness campaign targeted directly at children and young people. S.9(2)(f)(iv)

Consultation

28. The following agencies were consulted on this paper: Oranga Tamariki, Ministry for Women, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry for Pacific Peoples, New Zealand Police, Te Puni Kōkiri, Ministry of Justice, the Office of Disability Issues, Ministry of Health, Ministry for Culture and Heritage, the Ministry of Youth Development, the Treasury and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet **
29. The following organisations were consulted to develop this proposal due to their membership or involvement with the group preventing online harm: The Office of the Privacy Commissioner, the Office of Film and Literature Classification, the Computer Emergency Response Team, New Zealand Police, Netsafe, Vodafone, Network for Learning, the Domain Name Commission and Facebook

Financial implications

30. To rollout phase one of the public awareness campaign directed to support parents and caregivers, I seek \$1.5 million new funding as part of the process for COVID-19 related expenditure. This funding would be used for the design, delivery and evaluation of the campaign. Given that the public awareness campaign needs to be launched quickly to provide support to parents and caregivers, this is an urgent matter that needs to be considered S.9(2)(f)(iv)
31. The funding for phase one of the public awareness campaign is required urgently and accordingly cannot be deferred to Budget 2021. The proposed campaign is part of the wider government response to COVID-19 and is aimed at protecting children and young people from the risks of online harm, including malicious activity or viewing inappropriate content online, such as pornography.
32. While I anticipate to fully utilise the \$1.5 million sought to rollout phase one before 30 June 2020, given the uncertain circumstances associated with COVID-19, there is a possibility that a portion of the \$1.5 million may need to be carried forward into 2020/21. I therefore seek Cabinet's agreement to in-principle expense transfer of any underspend against this initiative to 2020/21, should this be required to fully deliver phase one of the awareness campaign.

****The Ministry of Education was also consulted and provided feedback on this paper.**

⁴ Into the Cloud is an animated series where each episode focuses on a different element of online safety, from strategies for handling online bullying to recognising and reporting unsafe/inappropriate interactions and content. The series is aimed at children up to 10 years old.

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33. The Department of Internal Affairs has reviewed options for reprioritising funding from within Vote Internal Affairs 2019/20 baseline to fund costs associated with the campaign. It is unable to identify reprioritisation options while maintaining current service delivery and a committed programme of works. It is also deploying significant resources into the COVID-19 response to support local government, communities and the Government Chief Digital Officer's response. This effort may require the Department of Internal Affairs to reprioritise resources away from other programmes.

Population implications

34. Different population groups have varying experiences of online harms, including unwanted digital communications that may cause harm. We have identified groups at risk that would benefit from this proposal.

Population group	How the proposal may affect this group
Children	The proposal's purpose is preventing online harm to children and young people as this group faces specific risks from accessing or viewing inappropriate content such as online pornography, and malicious activity that targets children such as online grooming.
Women	Girls would benefit from prevention of online harm as research from Netsafe and the Ministry for Women shows that girls are more likely to receive unwanted digital communications and be adversely impacted than boys. Girls experience many of the same forms of harassment and abuse online as they do elsewhere.
Māori and Pacific people	Māori and Pacific people would benefit from prevention of online harm as research from Netsafe and the Ministry for Women shows that Māori and Pacific teens are more likely to report receiving unwanted digital communications.
Disabled children	Disabled children would benefit from prevention of online harm. Disabled children, such as children with learning impairments, may be an attractive target group that can be more easily manipulated than non-disabled children. Disabled children are also subject to higher levels of online bullying and harassment, subjecting them to them to higher levels of harm in online environments.

35. No inconsistencies with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Human Rights Act 1993 have been identified.

Climate implications

36. The Ministry for the Environment has been consulted and confirms that the Climate Impact Policy Assessment requirements do not apply to this proposal as the threshold for significance is not met.

Legislative implications

37. There are no legislative implications for this paper.

Impact analysis

38. Regulatory Impact Analysis is not required for these proposals.

Publicity

39. I will announce the public awareness campaign prior to its launch.

Proactive release

40. I intend to publish this Cabinet paper and related Cabinet decisions on the Department of Internal Affairs' website, subject to any redactions, pursuant to Cabinet Office circular CO (18) 4.

Recommendations

The Minister of Internal Affairs recommends that the COVID-19 Ministerial group:

1. **note** the increased time spent online by children and young people during the COVID-19 lockdown and afterwards increases their exposure to online threats;
2. **agree** to a public awareness campaign of up to \$1.5 million that will:
 - 2.1 provide parents and caregivers with advice on how to help children and young people manage online threats; and
 - 2.2 direct them to a page of the www.govt.nz website with a comprehensive source of resources;
3. **agree** to increase funding by \$1.5 million in Vote Internal Affairs in 2019/20 for a public awareness campaign to help create a safe digital environment for children and young people;
4. **approve** the following change to appropriations to meet the costs associated with the public awareness campaign to help create a safe online environment for children and young people, with a corresponding impact on the operating balance and net core Crown debt:

Vote Internal Affairs Minister of Internal Affairs	\$million – increase/(decrease)				
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 & Outyears
Multi-Category Expenses and Capital Expenditure: Regulatory Services MCA Departmental Output Expense: Regulatory Services (funded by revenue Crown)	1.500	-	-	-	-

5. **agree** that the proposed change to appropriations for 2019/20 above be included in the 2019/20 Supplementary Estimates and that, in the interim, the increase be met from Imprest Supply;
6. **agree** that the expenses incurred under recommendation 4 above be charged against the COVID-19 Response Recovery Fund established as part of Budget 2020;
7. **agree** in-principle to transfer from 2019/20 to 2020/21 any underspend in the above appropriation with financial amount to be confirmed as part of the 2020 October Baseline Update once the audited accounts for 2019/20 are available;
8. **note** the public awareness campaign will be a collaborative effort between government, non-government and the private sector;

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9. **note** the public awareness campaign will be designed to reach different communities across New Zealand including those with different language and accessibility needs and will include campaign material appropriate to Māori and non-Māori children, and in English and Te Reo Māori;
10. **note** that the Department of Internal Affairs aims to launch this public awareness campaign in May 2020;
11. **note** that the Department of Internal Affairs will work with the Ministry of Education to investigate launching a phase two of the public awareness campaign targeted directly at children and young people; and
12. **S.9(2)(f)(iv)** [REDACTED]

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Tracey Martin

Minister of Internal Affairs

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