



13 September 2024

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Ref: OIA-2024/25-0098

Dear [REDACTED]

Official Information Act request relating to information on Covid-19 public health campaigns

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request received on 29 July 2024. You requested:

- 1. Please advise who or what agency or department within New Zealand Government was responsible for the promoting, advertising and marketing of New Zealand's COVID-19 public health response including but not limited to promotion, messaging and advertising of the COVID-19 jabs.*
- 2. Please supply the budget allocations for all parts of the promoting, advertising and marketing of New Zealand's COVID-19 public health response including but not limited to promotion, messaging and advertising of the COVID-19 jabs to the public through all media and information channels.*
- 3. Please provide details of all persons within Govt being Ministers, Health care experts and any other experts that signed off and or authorised the final drafts of any promoting, messaging content, advertising and marketing of New Zealand's COVID-19 public health response including but not limited to promotion, messaging and advertising of the COVID-19 jabs to the public through all media and information channels.*
- 4. Please provide details of who or what agency or department within New Zealand Government was responsible for liaising with social media platforms for all parts of the promoting, advertising and marketing of New Zealand's COVID-19 public health response including but not limited to promotion, messaging and advertising of the COVID-19 jabs to the public in the online setting.*
- 5. Please provide detail of who or what agency or department within New Zealand Government was responsible for liaising with social media platforms and monitoring and mediating or regulating information, mis information or dis information related to COVID-19, NZ Govt health response to COVID-19, views on vaccination, or reports posted online complaining of adverse reactions to the COVID jabs.*
- 6. Please provide the instructions, taskings and or directives as well as any framework or guidelines used to evaluate or categorise social media postings, given by NZ Govt or any of its advisors to any individual, agency or department tasked with liaising with social media platforms and monitoring and mediating or regulating information, mis information or dis information related to COVID-19, NZ Govt health response to COVID-19, views on vaccination, or reports posted online complaining of adverse reactions to the COVID jabs.*
- 7. Please provide the budget allocations to any entity engaged by the NZ Govt or its experts to regulate, mediate, monitor, censor, counter or otherwise deal with information considered false, mis information or dis information around the topic of COVID-19, COVID-19 jabs or the safety and efficacy of these jabs, or reports of adverse reactions from the jabs.*
- 8. Please confirm whether or not any agency, individual, dept, organisation or contractor was authorised or approved to use trolling tactics to counter alternate views online in relation to COVID-19, COVID-19 jabs, NZ Govt and its agencies response to COVID-*

19, reporting of adverse events due to COVID-19 jabs on social media, or any differing views from NZ Govt on COVID-19.

- 9. Please advise if the message frames people were using on their profile photos on social media platforms such as Facebook, promoting vaccination with messages such as "I'm vaccinated for my whanau" and other similar such messages related to Covid - 19 vaccination were a NZ Government or associated agencies initiative. If so please advise details about who, or what agency or department specifically was responsible for co-ordinating this project and again who gave final sign off or approval for the messages used.*

On 14 August 2024 you were advised that parts of your request for information about COVID-19 public health campaigns is more closely connected to the functions of the Ministry of Health (MoH). Specifically, questions 5, 6 and 7 can be answered by the MoH and they will respond to you directly with any information they may hold.

On 20 August 2024, we wrote to you extending the time limit for response by 14 working days, to 13 September 2024. The additional time was needed because your request necessitated a search through a large quantity of information, and consultations were needed before a final decision was made on your request. I am now in a position to respond.

Background

In December 2020 the COVID-19 Response Group (Group) was established as a business unit of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), continuing the work of the National Crisis Management Centre following the centre's deactivation on 30 June 2020. This Group was led by the Deputy Chief Executive COVID-19 All-of-Government Response (DCE COVID-19 Response Group). The Group acted as a central COVID-19 response function responsible for oversight, integration and coordination across the response system as a whole. The Group was responsible for assurance to Ministers and the identification of opportunities for continuous improvement in New Zealand's response.

I have interpreted your questions to relate to the Unite Against COVID-19 campaign, led by DPMC and the COVID-19 Vaccine campaign which was led by MoH and delivered by DPMC through the Unite Against COVID-19 channels.

DPMC led the development of the Unite Against COVID-19 campaign from April 2020 until 16 November 2022, when the responsibility transferred to Health New Zealand (Te Whatu Ora). DPMC was responsible for delivering the COVID-19 Vaccine campaign through the Unite Against COVID-19 campaign channels from 1 March 2021 to 30 June 2022 with MoH retaining responsibility from 1 July 2022.

- 1. Please advise who or what agency or department within New Zealand Government was responsible for the promoting, advertising and marketing of New Zealand's COVID-19 public health response including but not limited to promotion, messaging and advertising of the COVID-19 jabs.*

This part of your request is refused under section 18(d) of the Act, as the information is publicly available here: Question 50 of DPMC's Annual Review 2022/23 sets out information on the two campaigns, including the funding source, for each year from 2020/21. [DPMC Annual Review 2022/23 \(www.parliament.nz\)](https://www.parliament.nz/dcms/assets/attachment/123456789/Annual-Review-2022-23-Question-50.pdf)

- 2. Please supply the budget allocations for all parts of the promoting, advertising and marketing of New Zealand's COVID-19 public health response including but not limited to promotion, messaging and advertising of the COVID-19 jabs to the public through all media and information channels.*

This part of your request is refused under section 18(d) of the Act, as the information is publicly available here: DPMC's Annual Review Appendices set out information on the two campaigns, including the funding source, for each year from 2020/21. [DPMC Annual Review 2022/23 Appendices \(www.parliament.nz\)](http://www.parliament.nz) / [DPMC Annual Review 2020/21 Appendices \(www.parliament.nz\)](http://www.parliament.nz)

3. *Please provide details of all persons within Govt being Ministers, Health care experts and any other experts that signed off and or authorised the final drafts of any promoting, messaging content, advertising and marketing of New Zealand's COVID-19 public health response including but not limited to promotion, messaging and advertising of the COVID-19 jabs to the public through all media and information channels.*

All information for the Unite Against COVID-19 campaign was authorised by the Deputy Chief Executive, COVID-19 Response.

All information for the COVID-19 Vaccine Campaign was managed and authorised by MoH. As part of the transformation of the health and disability system, as of 1 July 2022 the functions previously under the Ministry of Health (Manatū Hauora) National Immunisation Programme were transferred to Health New Zealand (Te Whatu Ora).

You were informed on 12 September 2024 that question [3] was partially transferred to Health New Zealand (Te Whatu Ora) and they will respond to you directly.

4. *Please provide details of who or what agency or department within New Zealand Government was responsible for liaising with social media platforms for all parts of the promoting, advertising and marketing of New Zealand's COVID-19 public health response including but not limited to promotion, messaging and advertising of the COVID-19 jabs to the public in the online setting.*

DPMC contracted OMD to provide social media advertising services as part of its media-buying services. In addition, DPMC staff managed the Unite Against COVID-19 social media channels directly.

5. *Please provide detail of who or what agency or department within New Zealand Government was responsible for liaising with social media platforms and monitoring and mediating or regulating information, mis information or dis information related to COVID-19, NZ Govt health response to COVID-19, views on vaccination, or reports posted online complaining of adverse reactions to the COVID jabs.*

I have interpreted your question to be for information held by DPMC relating to work on disinformation during the COVID-19 response.

DPMC hired a 'Senior Analyst Disinformation' which was a short-term position which no longer exists. The primary outputs of the position were to understand and advise on any areas for improvement to ensure a connected government approach to the provision of accurate information and ensure that the public was well supported in building resilience to disinformation.

6. *Please provide the instructions, taskings and or directives as well as any framework or guidelines used to evaluate or categorise social media postings, given by NZ Govt or any of its advisors to any individual, agency or department tasked with liaising with social media platforms and monitoring and mediating or regulating information, mis information or dis information related to COVID-19 , NZ Govt health response to COVID-19, views on vaccination, or reports posted online complaining of adverse reactions to the COVID jabs.*

DPMC commissioned its media buying agency OMD to provide listening reports compiled by a third party, Annalect. These reports categorise the social media response and are publicly available therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(d) of the Act.

The reports are available at the following link: [UAC-Social-Conversation-Analysis-Part-1-May-31-1-June-to-June-10-2020-release-document.pdf \(dpmc.govt.nz\)](https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/UAC-Social-Conversation-Analysis-Part-1-May-31-1-June-to-June-10-2020-release-document.pdf)

7. *Please provide the budget allocations to any entity engaged by the NZ Govt or its experts to regulate, mediate, monitor, censor, counter or otherwise deal with information considered false, mis information or dis information around the topic of COVID-19, COVID-19 jabs or the safety and efficacy of these jabs, or reports of adverse reactions from the jabs.*

Please refer to question 5.

8. *Please confirm whether or not any agency, individual, dept, organisation or contractor was authorised or approved to use trolling tactics to counter alternate views online in relation to COVID-19, COVID-19 jabs, NZ Govt and its agencies response to COVID-19, reporting of adverse events due to COVID-19 jabs on social media, or any differing views from NZ Govt on COVID-19.*

This part of your request is refused under section 18(g) of the Act, that the information requested is not held by the department and we have no grounds for believing that the information is either held by another department or Minister of the Crown or organisation, or by a local authority.

9. *Please advise if the message frames people were using on their profile photos on social media platforms such as Facebook, promoting vaccination with messages such as "I'm vaccinated for my whanau" and other similar such messages related to Covid -19 vaccination were a NZ Government or associated agencies initiative. If so please advise details about who, or what agency or department specifically was responsible for co-ordinating this project and again who gave final sign off or approval for the messages used.*

DPMC provided a range of Unite Against COVID-19 campaign collateral for use by members of the public. See response to question 3.

You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision under section 28(3) of the Act. This response will be published on DPMC's website during our regular publication cycle. Typically, information is released monthly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

Yours sincerely



Clare Ward
Executive Director
Strategy, Governance and Engagement Group