

[Note: These were initial, draft terms of reference for discussion about a 'virtual reporting cell' that was never established. An initial proposal to set up an an interagency group to report on nationally significant COVID-19 disinformation was not pursued. These draft terms of reference were never finalised or considered further.]

Virtual triaging and reporting cell: COVID-related mis/disinformation and risks to the COVID-19 response

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Purpose

To provide a structure and process for bringing together, synthesising and reporting information to the Prime Minister and relevant Ministers and senior officials regarding the impact of mis/disinformation on public safety and the associated effect of COVID-19 response measures on social cohesion.

Membership

The core of the virtual cell will comprise staff from **NZ Police (NIC)**, **Ministry of Health (DART)** and **DPMC (NAB)**. **CTAG**, the **COVID-19 Group Insights and Reporting Team** and DPMC's **National Security Policy Directorate (NSPD)** should also be on the distribution list for this work.

Agency	Contact
NAB	s9(2)(g)(ii)
DART	s9(2)(g)(ii)
NZ Police	s9(2)(g)(ii)
COVID-19 Group Insights Team	s9(2)(g)(ii)
CTAG	s9(2)(g)(ii)
DPMC (NSPD)	s9(2)(g)(ii) (until 31 January 2022)

Governance / Oversight

The Interagency Group on COVID-related misinformation, chaired by the Assurance and Continuous Improvement team within the COVID-19 Group at DPMC, will maintain close contact with the virtual cell. The virtual cell will provide updates to the Interagency Group during its fortnightly meetings, and work with the Chair to ensure the process remains fit for purpose.

Triaging process

In addition to information that has been collected directly, agencies currently receive information via CERT (public reporting of COVID-related misinformation), Te Pūnaha Matatini (insights reports based on analysis of a range of groups across key social media platforms), ISD, GDI and a number of other sources.

The Interagency Group will ensure that the virtual cell receives all of this material directly, and has access to a range of NZ Police reporting.

Analysts from NZ Police, NAB and DART will work collectively on extracting the key points from available information to enable summary reports for senior leaders. While this can be largely done

via email, members of the virtual cell should also aim to have coordination meetings on a regular basis to ensure everyone is looking at the same inputs and is comfortable with the broad assessments.

Reporting

Using this range of information, the virtual cell will produce a fortnightly report to the COVID Chief Executives' Board, the PM and relevant Ministers. In between these fortnightly reports it will also look to provide interim reports to COVID response agencies. These may be on an 'as required' basis for fast-moving developments, and could also take the form of verbal updates.

Commented [GM[1]: Something about burden sharing in the drafting

The purpose of these reports will be to provide timely, accurate and contextualised information on the misinformation environment surrounding the COVID-19 response, and to ensure visibility of potential or emerging public safety or national security risks.

The fortnightly reports will be triple badged (Police, Health and NAB) with each contributing agency having ensured that reports are approved through their internal processes in a timely way. The reports will be sent out by NAB through their usual distribution channels.

Commented [GM[2]: Something about sign-out processes

Referrals

Where issues arise in the course of the cell's work that may cross criminal and public safety thresholds, Police will ensure escalation through its usual processes, working with other agencies as required. CTAG will be included in distribution to ensure visibility of potential terrorism or violent extremism risks.

Where other referrals may be required (e.g. where material may be in breach of the terms and conditions of social media platforms or advertising standards), further work is required to determine the most appropriate central place for this function to sit. As an interim step, DART will work with the COVID-19 Group to take the lead on these referrals and will escalate issues to the interagency group as required.

Privacy and handling considerations

The virtual cell will need to take care to ensure that the privacy of individuals is maintained when collecting, receiving or sharing information. All reports should be marked **In Confidence** and treated in strict accordance with the protective security requirements and the Privacy Act (2020).

In the absence of an information management tool that can be accessed across agencies, DART/NAB (TBC) will be the central repository for information received and produced by the virtual cell.

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