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2 August 2022

Harold

By email: [fyi-request-19329-a2892a82@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-19329-a2892a82@requests.fyi.org.nz)  
Ref: H202208104

Tēnā koe Harold

### **Response to your request for official information**

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to Manatū Hauora (the Ministry of Health) on 20 June 2022 relating to the COVID-19 Disinformation Assessment and Response Team (DART). Manatū Hauora notes this is a follow-up request to the response you received to OIA H202206192.

DART was initially established as part of the Manatū Hauora National Immunisation Programme (NIP) as most disinformation occurring in New Zealand Aotearoa is associated with COVID-19. The team transferred into the Manatū Hauora Communications and Engagement unit on 1 June 2022.

DART acts as a clearinghouse for reporting on disinformation. DART receives reports of disinformation through a variety of forms, including leaflets, digital items, weblinks and reports from social media. While most instances are brought to the attention of Manatū Hauora by members of the public or external parties, others are generated internally through monitoring by the social media team. For example, if the team notes disinformation on a post on our channels, or information they consider is harmful, this is reported to the DART team. The DART team passes on information where needed.

DART does not collect personal information (though it does note when a report indicates a public figure) and does not have access to private groups or pages. It uses only open-source data to assess an item, and it cannot assess items that may be private. Since its establishment, the team has made referrals to the Medical Council, the Department of Internal Affairs, Netsafe, Worksafe and the New Zealand Police. There have also been referrals made to other parts of Manatū Hauora, as well as to Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand (formerly district health boards). DART also works with Netsafe to bring to its attention examples of sites and other social media sources where disinformation is reported to platforms like Facebook.

Information in response to each part of your request is outlined below. Please also refer to Appendix 1 for an overview of documents identified in scope of your request.

- 1) *A copy of the position description for the manager of DART*
- 2) *Copies of any other position descriptions for roles within DART*

Manatū Hauora created two position summaries for DART in July 2021. These position summaries were for a Principal Advisor and a Senior Advisor and are attached as Documents 1 and 2. DART roles were not formally advertised and were filled through an Employment Agreement Request for Non-Advertised Vacancies, as per the Manatū Hauora recruitment process for fixed-term roles of less than six months. The criteria set by Manatū Hauora for the roles were sent to our All-of-Government contractor recruitment partners.

*3) The number of FTEs employed in DART*

There are three fulltime equivalent employees. Each is on a fixed-term contract that ends in December 2022.

*4) Copies of any Memoranda of Understanding or other formal agreements that set out the relationship between DART and any other agency*

This part of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Act, as the information requested does not exist.

*5) Copies of any internal memos on the topic of the establishment of DART. For the avoidance of doubt, by "internal memo" I am referring to this type of document published on the Ministry website:*

[https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/20220210 - cv tag recommendations for decision to use novavax.pdf](https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/20220210_cv_tag_recommendations_for_decision_to_use_novavax.pdf)

A May 2021 memo entitled *COVID-19 Vaccine and Immunisation Programme - Proposal to provide a tactical response to COVID-19 vaccine disinformation* has been identified within the scope of this part of your request. This is released to you as Document 3. Please note that although the signature blocks in this memo are not complete, this was the final version of the document.

*6) A list of all other such memos on the topic of DART, including the title of the memo and date*

Manatū Hauora has not identified any further documents within the scope of this part of your request. Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act, as the information requested is not held by Manatū Hauora and there are no grounds for believing it is held by another agency subject to the Act.

Under section 28(3) of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: [info@ombudsman.parliament.nz](mailto:info@ombudsman.parliament.nz) or by calling 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Manatū Hauora website at: [www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests](http://www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests).

Nāku noa, nā



Sarah Turner  
**Deputy Director-General  
Government and Executive Services**

**Appendix 1: List of documents for release**

<b>#</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Document details</b>	<b>Decision on release</b>
1	July 2021	Position Summary – DART Senior Advisor	Released in full.
2	July 2021	Position Summary – DART Principal Advisor	
3	31 May 2021	Memo - COVID-19 Vaccine and Immunisation Programme - Proposal to provide a tactical response to COVID-19 vaccine disinformation	

# Immunisation & Vaccine Programme

## Position Summary

<b>Position:</b>	<b>Disinformation Assessment and Response Team (DART) Senior Advisor</b>
<b>Location:</b>	Wellington
<b>Reports to:</b>	Tactical Response Team (Disinformation) Team Leader
<b>Direct Reports:</b>	1
<b>Indirect Reports:</b>	0
<b>Role status:</b>	5 Months Fixed Term/Secondment

**Position Purpose:** The Senior Advisor for the Disinformation Assessment and Response Team (DART) will be responsible for managing the end to end process of reported cases of false or misleading information. Working with the team analyst and subject matter experts to validate false information, the senior advisor will triage and manage individual cases by assessing the risk and potential impact of the disinformation before determining what options are available. They will work closely with the team communications lead to ensure that reliable information is developed and communicated to the audience affected as well as follow up any required reporting actions to other government agencies.

### Key responsibilities:

- Work closely with policy and operations teams to develop robust processes.
- Work closely with analyst on emerging disinformation narratives that may impact the vaccine programme.
- Formalise a triage process for managing emerging disinformation narrative based on risk profile.
- Develop case management protocol to ensure all cases are fully investigated and options for treatment are briefed to the vaccine comms manager/programme leadership.
- Develop appropriate response playbook to include communications and measure the impact of the treatment.
- Evolve the standard operating procedures in line with the emerging disinformation landscape.
- Stand in for the team leader as required.

### Person Specification:

- This role will attract someone who enjoys being part of shaping a new team.
- The ideal candidate will be excited about shaping a newly created role within a fast-moving team.
- They will have case management experience and be able to develop a methodology to record and track actions.
- They should have a good understanding of the role of strategic communications.
- Self-motivated, independent, quick learner.
- Effective diplomatic skills, good judgment, and discretion.
- Strong writing and editorial skills.

# Immunisation & Vaccine Programme

## Position Summary

<b>Position:</b>	<b>Tactical Response Team (Disinformation) Principal Advisor</b>
<b>Location:</b>	Wellington
<b>Reports to:</b>	COVID-19 Vaccine and Immunisation Programme Communications Manager
<b>Direct Reports:</b>	1
<b>Indirect Reports:</b>	0
<b>Role status:</b>	5 Months Fixed Term/Secondment

**Position Purpose:** The Principal Advisor for the Tactical Response Team) will be responsible for facilitating and coordinating all activities for the team. This role will focus on establishing the team in the initial stage by developing and delivering activities in response to emerging COVID-19 vaccine disinformation risks. They will oversee the analysis of reporting, case management, triage and the appropriate response. They will also evolve the standard operating procedures in line with the emerging disinformation landscape.

### Key responsibilities:

- Work closely with communications and engagement, policy and operations teams to develop robust processes.
- Oversee disinformation analysis and work with wider government specialists on developing best practice to ensure that the team are able to determine emerging disinformation concerns.
- Formalise a triage process for managing emerging disinformation narrative based on risk
- Develop case management protocols to ensure all cases are full investigated and options for treatment are briefed to the vaccine comms manager/programme leadership. profile.
- Develop, or work with internal teams to develop, tactical communications responses to address disinformation activities of material concern.
- Oversee the response and related communications and measure the impact of the treatment.

### Person Specification:

- This role will attract someone who uses their skills and expertise to lead a cross-functional team, inspiring a sense of shared purpose in achieving insights led outcomes
- Ability to brief high impact work to a senior leadership audience
- The ideal candidate is will be excited about shaping a newly created role within a fast-moving team and is a natural leader
- They should have a minimum of three years of experience in government or relevant project management experience
- Strong communication skills with an understanding of the role of strategic communications
- Self-motivated, independent, quick learner
- Effective diplomatic skills, good judgment, and discretion
- Strong writing and editorial skills
- Ability to remain calm under pressure.

## COVID-19 Vaccine and Immunisation Programme

### PROPOSAL TO PROVIDE A TACTICAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19 VACCINE DISINFORMATION

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**Date:** 31 May 2021

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**To:** COVID-19 Vaccine Implementation Programme – Steering Group

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**From:** Ministry of Health COVID-19 Vaccine and Immunisation Programme - Head of Communications

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**Subject:** Proposal to provide a tactical response to COVID-19 vaccine disinformation

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#### Purpose

1. The outcome sought from this brief is approval to initiate a capability within the COVID-19 Vaccine and Immunisation Programme to better understand the disinformation landscape and develop an agile response to emerging narratives which are assessed to be misleading or false and risk impacting the success of the programme.

#### Context

2. When the information environment is deliberately confused this can threaten public safety, fracture community cohesion and undermine the public acceptance of science's role in informing health policy such as the vaccine programme. Our primary objective in countering disinformation is to give the public confidence in information available to them so that they are equipped to make fully informed decisions.
3. Current research<sup>1</sup> indicates that 38 percent had encountered what they believed to be misinformation. The main sources were social media (65 percent) followed by friends or family (32 percent) then mainstream media (25 percent). 61 percent who had seen misinformation indicated they would look for official information to verify it. Nine percent of those who had seen something they thought was misinformation would not get a vaccine if the misinformation they saw actually alarmed them; this increases to 15 percent for people who identify as disabled.
4. There is an existing communications approach to counter COVID-19 mis- and disinformation which is delivered through our current communications and engagement channels. However, more robust insights and an agile response will enable a more tailored and timely approach.

#### Current Approach

5. Since the vaccination programme was initiated, CERT NZ has broadened its scope from scams and cyber security incident reporting to be the point for public reporting of false information. This

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-vaccine-research-insights>

reporting is then passed to the Ministry of Health. The vaccine public information campaign includes an information layer that can provide facts where there is an identified gap or prevalent misinformation; this is enhanced by a range of other content available through the Ministry, DHB, Ministry of Pacific Peoples, Te Puni Kokiri, Unite Against Covid-19 and other channels. The development of new forms of information (essentially addressing key points of safety, efficacy and operational rollout) will be a consistent work in progress throughout the vaccination campaign .

6. In addition to ensuring we have a strong information layer in our public information programme, we have taken ad-hoc tactical responses. For example, we currently have a strong information layer push underway in the Nelson region, to counter particularly heavy misinformation there and, with Group 3 underway, we are upweighting our information layer targeted to people aged 65 and over.
7. There is currently a toolkit in development to support the health sector and community leaders in addressing public concerns of misinformation as well as an engagement events in areas of prevalent misinformation (and vaccine hesitancy).
8. However the approach could be strengthened with more clear procedure and dedicated resourcing, as well as clearer accountability within CVIP for addressing misinformation. Accountability is currently split between operations and communications.
9. Principles
  - a. We must respect New Zealanders' rights to freedom of expression and association.
  - b. Timeliness. Agility and speed are crucial in countering disinformation.
  - c. Primary focus on disinformation though misinformation will also be in scope.
  - d. Our communications must be truthful, transparent, fair and accurate, enabling trust to be maintained with the New Zealand public.
  - e. Communications will be managed and signed off through existing processes.
  - f. The communications approach is based on an all of society response to mis- and disinformation which is enabled through engagement with key stakeholders such as education, media, technology and academia including [Te Pūnaha Matatini](#)

## Recommendations

10. It is recommended that the steering group agree to stand up a dedicated disinformation response team reporting to the CVIP Head of Communications that can carry out the follow tasks:
  - a. Receive reporting, monitor and develop insights on evolving disinformation incidents and narratives.
  - b. Build a database for reporting misinformation in Aotearoa and track emerging global narratives that may mislead New Zealanders.
  - c. Carry out risk and impact analysis of the disinformation.
  - d. Support the delivery of tactical communications to counter or respond to disinformation and ensure that reliable information is prevalent to all New Zealanders – this might include geolocated communications campaigns (to town level) responding to misinformation hotspots, utilisation of digital marketing techniques to push appropriate information to identifiably vaccine hesitant people, publicly calling out prominent items of misinformation.Note – standard operating procedures will be developed for steering group approval to guide this activity.

- e. Act on disinformation through levers of government such as reporting illegal activity to Police, Media Council complaints.
- f. Track outcomes.

11. It is recommended that the team is based on the following capabilities with the following required for minimal viable product, resource will come from the Ministry of Health.
- a. Team Leaders. Develop procedures and policy, manage reporting, complaints and coordinate activity across government agencies. Two team leader roles are currently being recruited.
  - b. Insights and analysis function. Expert analyst who can manage proactive and responsive analysis with connection into the Ministry’s Data and Insights and Behavioural Insights teams. Not currently resourced.
  - c. Strategic Communications planner linking into resources into the wider team. This is currently provided by a Principal Advisor seconded from the COVID-19 Group.
  - d. Access to Health subject matter expertise to enable verification of emerging narratives and responses. Not currently resourced.
  - e. Access to social sciences expertise to input to analysis and corresponding response. Not currently resourced.

**Additional considerations**

- 12. The development of a standalone communications campaign to help build New Zealander’s resilience to mis- and disinformation.
- 13. Role of COVID-19 Group leadership and cross system coordination including a focus on wider COVID-19 disinformation risks.
- 14. This model is evaluated as an enduring option in support of the wider government framework to build resilience to disinformation in Aotearoa and sits on the cross-government disinformation working group led by DPMC NSG.
- 15. Business process mapping began on 27<sup>th</sup> May to map existing processes and develop the processes required to fulfil the tasks at para 10.
- 16. In order to carry out robust insights, investment in technology solutions may be required.
- 17. This team may require scaling up should the impact of disinformation increase.

**Recommendations**

It is recommended that you:

1.	Note the content of the report	Including that standard operating procedures will be brought to Steering Group for approval to guide counter-disinformation activity.	Yes/No
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2.	Agree	That a new disinformation team is established in the Communications and Engagement team utilising existing resources.	Yes/No
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Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

[Name]

[Title]

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

[Name]

[Title]

RELEASED UNDER THE OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT 1982