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Netsafe and Global tech companies act to tackle digital harms and enhance online safety

Netsafe, NZTech and five of the world's leading technology companies have collaborated on a joint agreement that sets a benchmark for online safety in the Asia Pacific region.

Today, Meta (Facebook and Instagram), Google (YouTube), TikTok, Twitch and Twitter have signed into existence the Aotearoa New Zealand Code of Practice for Online Safety and Harms.

The first-of-its-kind Code obligates tech companies to actively reduce harmful content on their relevant digital platforms and services in New Zealand.

Netsafe new CEO Brent Carey says the Code is a self-regulatory effort that has been designed with input from civil society groups, interest groups and will be monitored by a new multi-stakeholder governance group.

"Digital platforms kept everyone connected during Covid, but unfortunately there was a spike of more than 25% of harmful content reports. There are too many kiwis being bullied, harassed, and abused online, which is why the industry has rallied together to protect users."

Carey says cooperation between the six companies and various stakeholders has been essential in establishing an online safety framework for New Zealanders.

Graeme Muller, CEO of NZTech, New Zealand's peak technology association which will take over the establishment and administration of the Code said, "This unique collaborative approach toward creating a better digital environment for all Kiwi's is just the start and as more organisations join and sign up to the Code we will be in a much better place as a country to ensure our experience on the Internet is as safe as possible."

The Code builds on solid online safety principles from New Zealand, Australia, and the EU, including bringing to New Zealand the same regime on mis and disinformation currently in operation in Australia.

Carey says the framework outlines the collective and voluntary commitments to safer online spaces. On top of being closely evaluated, each company will publish annual reports about their progress in adherence with the code, be subject to sanctions for breaches of their Code commitments and take part in a public complaint's mechanism.



“The reports provide an opportunity for consumers to protect their interests and the public to scrutinise action being taken by a company if it fails to meet its commitments under the Code.”

Feedback on the code was gathered over an extensive 10-week consultation period with civil society, government, and the public, collecting a wide range of feedback for consideration.

Graeme Muller said, “The Code will be a living document, it can be amended biennially, and we hope the governance framework will enable it to evolve alongside local conditions, while at the same time respecting the fundamental rights of freedom of expression.”

The Code coincides with New Zealand’s Netsafety Week which takes place from 25 to 29 July. The overarching theme of the week “Diversity Matters, Online Safety Done Together” focuses on understanding different communities’ online safety perspectives and encouraging respectful relationships online.

“We continue to work with our stakeholders to grow awareness of the Code and welcome more tech companies, including more Kiwi companies, to become a signatory of the Code.”

“We are constantly finding responsive ways to keep pace with the potential threats posed by technology and bridge regulatory gaps. Everyone deserves to be safe online and industry codes are one means to support that to happen. Ultimately addressing these important issues while protecting freedom of expression, will require a whole of society approach and we think this Code is a step in the right direction.”

-ENDS-

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 free resources and to report incidents of online harm.

About NZ Tech



NZTech is a not-for-profit, non-governmental (NGO) membership funded organisation. We represent 20 tech communities and over 1000 members from across the New Zealand technology landscape who collectively employ more than 10 percent of the workforce.

NZTech's mission is to support a values-led, nationally connected tech community that is collectively lifting equity, sustainability and prosperity for all in Aotearoa, by creating jobs, export growth and impact through tech for good.

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Editors Notes

"We've long supported calls for regulation to address online safety and have been working collaboratively with industry, government, and safety organisations to advance the Code. This is an important step in the right direction and will further complement the government's work on content regulation in the future. We're looking forward to working with the stakeholders to ensure the Code sets in place a framework to keep Kiwis safe across multiple platforms by preventing, detecting, and responding to harmful online content." - Nick McDonnell, Head of Public Policy for Meta, New Zealand and Pacific Islands

"Over the past years, we've invested heavily in policies and systems that are designed to remove violative content, raise authoritative information, and reduce the spread of harmful misinformation. We also hold ourselves to the highest level of accountability and transparency. In Q2 2022, YouTube removed over 3.8 million videos for violating our Community Guidelines, 91% of which were first flagged by machines rather than humans. Our work here is ongoing and we will continue to refine and invest, while also consulting with Government, industry bodies and non-profits to protect the YouTube community. We look forward to continuing our constructive approach having worked with Netsafe for over 15 years to consult across industry issues." says Ross Young, Head of Government Affairs and Public Policy, Google New Zealand.

"TikTok welcomes the introduction of the Aotearoa Code of Practice for Online Safety and Harms. As the first of its kind in New Zealand, the code provides an inclusive, self-regulatory framework committing signatories to meet crucial safety and transparency outcomes for tackling harmful online content." – Tik Tok spokesperson