



Netsafe response to Draft HIV Action Plan – 12 September 2022

Netsafe is New Zealand's independent, non-profit online safety organisation and is the Approved Agency under the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015 (HDCA). One of the purposes of the HDCA is to deter, prevent, and mitigate harm caused to individuals by digital communications. Netsafe's functions as the Approved Agency are set out in section 8 of the HDCA. Those functions include:

- to receive and assess complaints about harm caused to individuals by digital communications
- to investigate complaints
- to use advice, negotiation, mediation, and persuasion (as appropriate) to resolve complaints
- to establish and maintain relationships with domestic and foreign service providers, online content hosts, and agencies (as appropriate) to achieve the purpose of this Act
- to provide education and advice on policies for online safety and conduct on the Internet.

We know certain segments of the nation's population are disproportionately impacted by online harm. Māori, ethnic minorities, those from LGBTQIA+ communities and people experiencing technology facilitated intimate partner violence are more likely to experience harm than others.

Netsafe has conducted research into the online experiences of the nation's LGBTQIA+ communities. The study found that around a quarter of people who don't identify as heterosexual have received harmful digital communications. In 2018, 13 percent of respondents were physically threatened online, but this jumped to 21 percent in 2020. The figures were much higher than for people who identify as heterosexual, with three percent and eight percent respectively experiencing these. Our full report can be found here

<https://netsafe.org.nz/rainbow-factsheet/>

Netsafe fully endorses the draft HIV action plan. Netsafe notes the shame and stigma associated with online bullying, harassment and misinformation, the shame and stigma users may experience e.g. on online dating platforms (see e.g. <https://niceaf.org>) and the risk this presents in realising the objectives of the HIV action plan.

Netsafe notes the need for better education, in particular for young people, in safely using online dating apps or websites to arrange casual and often anonymous sexual encounters.

Netsafe will seek to play its part in an effort to achieve the objectives of the HIV action plan, whether through online safety education and advice, in partnering with organisations such as Safe Spaces Alliance, Body Positive and Indian Origin Pride New Zealand or in seeking to resolve complaints about harmful digital communications.