



Media Release

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One small step for Netsafe, one giant leap for online safety

As online harm continues to evolve at a rapid rate, online safety watchdog Netsafe is expanding with the launch of New Zealand's first-ever online safety and social media lab at <https://netsafe.org.nz/netsafe-lab/>.

Netsafe Lab will grow the organisation's technical, advisory and partnership operations to enable it to tackle the increase in online harm and help reduce the number of people in New Zealand being targeted by scams, online bullies, and misinformation.

Netsafe CEO Brent Carey says the constantly changing nature of online harm means the scale and intensity of the harmful content people are experiencing continues to ramp up.

"The Lab will analyse trends in online harm to paint a localised picture of what is happening in New Zealand compared to the rest of the world. From there we will develop new solutions to help keep people safe."

It has several key projects underway including – The Auditor – a partnership with Kindred Tech to build the capability to remove the risk of vicarious trauma affecting those who work to remove harmful material from online environments.

The lab is partnering with The Alan Turing Institute to analyse abusive content on social media. The project aims to understand how best to respond to online abuse and AI tools that detect and semi-automate counter-speech.

The lab is working with DDB NZ to revive Re:Scam, Netsafe's artificially intelligent email bot that replies to scam emails. The project will waste scammer's time with a never-ending series of questions.

Carey says previously New Zealand has relied heavily on overseas labs to develop new approaches to online harms.

"There has been a need for a New Zealand based civil society lab that can better connect with global initiatives and local expertise. The lab will have access to experts from around the world while working closely with specialists here in New Zealand."

"It's key to have programmes and resourcing in New Zealand to study the impacts of online spaces and places, content, and platforms to ensure we can develop local tools to minimise harm arising from local problems."

"By having the Lab located within Netsafe, it has access to twenty five years of history dealing with online safety issues, research and a broad number of actors from across the social media and online ecosystem. We see how online harm is occurring and then work with the public, universities, the public sector, businesses and all other like-minded organisations to stop the harm."



The lab will be overseen by former CEO of Data Ventures, Drew Broadley, as Chief Virtual Data Officer together with Netsafe Chief Online Safety Officer Sean Lyons.

Netsafe Lab is independent from government, law enforcement or any public authority but will work closely with Māori/iwi, the public sector, academics, the Police and other civil society groups to develop effective solutions to online harm.

Carey says the creation of the Lab is Netsafe's next iteration of its policy, research, data and technical functions.

"The Lab joins our newly rebranded Educator offering and product launch this month of NetSafe's online learning management platform for schools as the first two initiatives to be announced this year.

Both are part of wider expansion of Netsafe's offerings that includes multiple services and products being launched throughout 2023 and beyond which will attempt to tackle all the areas of online harm."

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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 about harm prevention and to report incidents of online harm.



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