



# ELECTION 2023

Netsafe's advice on improving online safety

A photograph of a person sitting and using a tablet computer. The person is wearing a patterned blue and white shirt. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a wooden chair and some greenery.

# Netsafe initiatives at a glance

Multiple actions are required to address online harm. Netsafe recommends the Government prioritise the following three actions which, together, will positively impact on the lives of New Zealanders.

## 1. Support NGO-led anti-scam initiatives

Increasingly sophisticated scams are having a profound impact on citizens. They require immediate assistance and ongoing support. Current Netsafe support is unfunded.

## 2. Increase online safety protections for young people

Young people are particularly vulnerable to cyberbullying and online abuse. There are inadequate protections for them.

## 3. Upgrade the Harmful Digital Communications Act to respond to new harms

This 2015 law does not explicitly prohibit tech-facilitated abuse using AI. The law needs reform to protect New Zealanders.



# 1.

## Support NGO-led anti-scam initiatives

In most like-minded jurisdictions scammed citizens have access to NGO-provided anti-scam support funded by government and industry. The volume and sophistication of scams are escalating, so much so that it is becoming increasingly difficult for citizens to distinguish between scams and legitimate communications. Scammed citizens need immediate assistance followed by support to rebuild their online lives. Netsafe provides this service, but it is unfunded. While government agencies and industry recognise the scam problem there has been limited progress in advancing a one-stop solution.

### **Netsafe recommends:**

- urgently working with Netsafe and NGO partner IDCare to develop and fund anti-scam initiatives.

# 2.

## Young people: increase online safety protections and reinstate media literacy in schools

Young people are particularly vulnerable to cyberbullying and online abuse which can have rapid and devastating impacts on them. More services are required to educate and support young people and their digital lives.

### **Netsafe recommends the Government:**

- update and improve online safety and media literacy curriculum in schools. Re-examine the decision to remove media literacy from Curriculum Level 1. This is necessary because the age of criminality under the Harmful Digital Communications Act applies from the age of 10 years
- boost Netsafe funding (from Health budgets) to enable the establishment of dedicated health triage and telephone services to provide support for anyone experiencing technology-facilitated abuse and online harm
- improve access and support for victims of cyberbullying and their families. This could include mental health support such as counselling
- invest in anti-cyberbullying programmes in schools and improve reporting pathways to Netsafe
- fund research to address content that sexualises children or depicts self-harm and suicide violence against children.



### 3. Upgrade the Harmful Digital Communications Act to respond to new harms

Advances in AI technology allow the creation of deep fake or synthetic intimate images depicting real people in situations and scenarios that are not real. These can then be shared online and used for threats or blackmail. New Zealand law does not explicitly prohibit tech-facilitated abuse using AI. There is an urgent need to review and update the Harmful Digital Communications Act to protect citizens from AI-generated abuse while at the same time modernising interventions to provide for restorative justice. Citizens must be educated about the law changes while the implementation of new measures requires in-depth research.

#### **Netsafe recommends a review of the Act that will consider:**

- prescribing harm types or harm principles by Regulations under the Act
- making clear that posting intimate visual recordings without consent clearly covers synthetic or deep fake images where a victim could be identified
- amending forms and processes used by the Approved Agency and the District Court to be more victim-centric
- whether there is a need for restorative justice solutions to be piloted or tried as alternative dispute resolution solutions
- addressing an absence of mechanisms under the Act when content resurfaces after settlement has been reached
- how the Act should deal with third-party harm where the individual making a complaint is not the subject of the harmful digital communication.

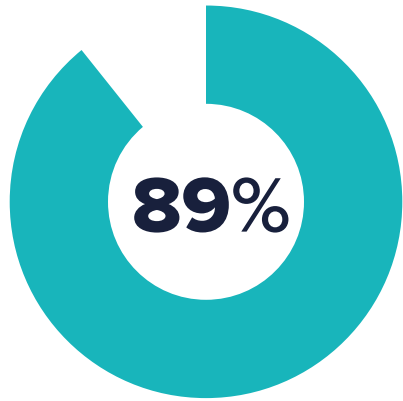
#### **Netsafe recommends:**

- that any law change is backed up by education and research.



## Online harm is on the rise

Online harm is on the increase, due to the continued rise in social media use and the adoption of new and varied social media platforms.



Today 89% of New Zealanders use some form of social media.

**28,253**  
reports

Over the past year, Netsafe received 28,253 reports of online harm. This was up 20 per cent on the previous year. Further statistics at [netsafe.org.nz/our-work/netsafe-media-releases](https://netsafe.org.nz/our-work/netsafe-media-releases)



**Nearly 4 in 10 New Zealanders** experience unwanted digital communication which negatively impacts their daily lives. For more research outcomes visit [netsafe.org.nz/advice/netsafe-lab](https://netsafe.org.nz/advice/netsafe-lab)

## About Netsafe

Netsafe is recognised by New Zealanders, NZ Police, CERT NZ and social agencies as an experienced and skilled not-for-profit supporting people suffering online harm. Netsafe provides a range of services to help keep people safe online. This includes a free seven-day-a-week social media helpline, a dispute resolution scheme, community presentations, online resources for parents and victims of harm online, campaigns and advocacy, and an online learning management system for schools. Netsafe is tasked under the Harmful Digital Communications Act (HDCA) to support people suffering online harm. The critical aspect of this work is that it is focused on the individual, on personal harm and we are a free, independent and accessible service to assist individuals to resolve complaints between one another and with the internet industry.

