

13 March 2024

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Tēnā koe Liam

Your request for official information, reference: HNZ00037698

Thank you for your email on 9 February 2024, asking Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora for the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act):

I am writing to request information regarding the policies and guidelines you have in place pertaining to the use of social media by its employees during work hours.

My interest lies in understanding how the organisation ensures that such activities align with the responsibilities and conduct expected of public servants, particularly in relation to expressing political opinions that may reflect on the impartiality and integrity of the public service.

Specifically, I am interested in the following information:

- A copy of your current policies and guidelines on the use of social media by employees, especially regarding political commentary.*
- Descriptions of any training or advisories provided to employees about the use of social media and the expression of personal political views.*
- Descriptions of the processes and criteria used to determine whether an employee's social media activity is in breach of these policies.*
- The number of complaints or inquiries received in the past year related to employees' social media use, particularly in relation to political content during work hours, and the outcomes of these cases.*

I understand the importance of balancing transparency with privacy and am not seeking information that identifies individual employees or breaches privacy rights. My aim is to gain a clearer understanding of how you navigates the complexities of social media use among its staff, ensuring that the organisation's integrity and the public's trust are upheld.

Thank you for your attention to this request. I look forward to your response within the statutory 20 working days as prescribed by the Act.

Response

- A copy of your current policies and guidelines on the use of social media by employees, especially regarding political commentary.**

As part of our shift from district health boards to Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora, (Health NZ) there is a policy harmonisation programme underway to standardise existing organisational policies. Existing policies (such as those related to the use of social media) that applied to former district health boards and interim policies for national office staff continue to apply until national policies are formally approved.

We have attached in **Appendix 1**, the social media and related policies from Health NZ districts, and the interim policy that applies to national office staff.

The policies provide information such as the scope and purpose of the relevant policies, guidance and advice to staff on roles, responsibilities and expectations, and procedures to manage any breaches.

- Descriptions of any training or advisories provided to employees about the use of social media and the expression of personal political views.

Public servants are free to use social media in their private lives, in the same way as other citizens. The Public Service Commission's Standards of Integrity and Conduct, political neutrality obligations and their agency policies apply to all media communications outside work as with other forms of communication. There must be a clear separation between public servants' role at work, and their personal use of media.

We adhere to, and are guided by the Public Service Commission guidelines on the use of social media, available online: [Guidance: Use of social media for public servants - Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission](#). We have a published set of community guidelines on our website: [Media centre – Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora](#).

Our Code of Conduct outlines the standards of behaviour that are expected of our people and we reinforce the importance of maintaining standards of integrity and conduct through a range of information/advisory channels that include staff newsletters, messages to staff on topical issues (such as guidelines to staff on political neutrality at work over the pre-election period), inclusion of the Code of Conduct in induction material for staff, and other guidance information available in local intranets for people leaders and staff.

- Descriptions of the processes and criteria used to determine whether an employee's social media activity is in breach of these policies.

While the harmonisation process is underway and until a national policy on social media use is formally approved, our staff continue to be covered by their local policies. Specific information about processes and criteria to identify, monitor, report, manage, and resolve breaches are contained in copies of the policies in *Appendix 1*.

- The number of complaints or inquiries received in the past year related to employees' social media use, particularly in relation to political content during work hours, and the outcomes of these cases.

Please see the table below listing the number of complaints received relating to social media use. As these cases are employment matters, details such as information relating to the outcome of these cases have been withheld under section 9(2)(a) and 9(2)(ba)(i) of the Act, to protect the privacy of those involved and to protect information that is subject to an obligation of confidence.

Region/Directorate	Hospital area	Social media policy and related documents provided	Number of complaints received
National Office	Applies to National office staff	Interim Use of Social Media Policy	1
Northern	Te Tai Tokerau - Northland	Te Tai Tokerau Social Media Policy	None
	Waitematā	Waitematā Social Media Policy	None
	Te Toka Tumai - Auckland	Te Toka Tumai Social Media Policy	None
	Counties Manukau	Counties Manukau Digital Harm Safety Guide Counties Manukau Social Media Principles and Guidelines Counties Manukau Social Media Policy	None
Te Manawa Taki	Waikato	Waikato Media and Communication Policy	None
	Lakes	Lakes Social Media Policy	None
	Bay of Plenty	Bay of Plenty Social Media Policy	None
	Tairāwhiti	Tairāwhiti Media Policy	None
	Taranaki	Taranaki Communications and Media Policy	None
Central	Hawke's Bay	Hawkes Bay Social Media Policy	None
	Whanganui	Reference to media/social media in the DWHB Communications Procedure and its Code of Conduct	1
	MidCentral	Midcentral Communications and Media Policy	None
	Wairarapa	Wairarapa Social Media Policy	None
	Capital, Coast and Hutt Valley	Capital, Coast and Hutt Valley Guidelines for Social Media	3
Te Waipounamu	Nelson Marlborough	Nelson Marlborough Media and Social Media Policy	None
	Canterbury	Canterbury External Communication Policy Canterbury Social Media Guide for Medical practitioners Canterbury Nursing Council Social Media Guidelines	2

Region/Directorate	Hospital area	Social media policy and related documents provided	Number of complaints received
		Canterbury Social Media and Nursing guide Canterbury Social Media for former DHBs Canterbury Social Media Guide for former DHBs Canterbury Social Media in Government High Level Guidance Canterbury Tips for Social Media	
	West Coast	Covered by Canterbury's policy	None
	South Canterbury	South Canterbury Social Media Policy	None
	Southern	Southern Social Media Guidelines	2

How to get in touch

If you have any questions, you can contact us at hnzOIA@health.govt.nz.

If you are not happy with this response, you have the right to make a complaint to the Ombudsman. Information about how to do this is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or by phoning 0800 802 602.

As this information may be of interest to other members of the public, Health NZ may proactively release a copy of this response on our website. All requester data, including your name and contact details, will be removed prior to release.

Nāku iti noa, nā



Andrew Slater
 Chief People Officer
 People and Communications