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2 October 2023

AI

By email: fyi-request-22821-ef59a46f@requests.fyi.org.nz
Ref: H202303092

Tēnā koe AI

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to Manatū Hauora (the Ministry of Health) on 5 August 2023 as a follow up to information provided to you under reference: H2023025401.

Firstly, I would like to apologise for the delay in communicating a decision on your request. Manatū Hauora values the importance of timely communication but also wanted to ensure that our response was accurate and thoroughly considered, which took some time.

Many of the key people in the referenced document are no longer active staff members of their respective agencies. Consequently, identifying details of the meetings in question was a difficult and time-consuming process, involving consultation with agencies including the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) and Te Whatu Ora – Health New Zealand.

Please accept our apologies for the delay in communicating a decision on your request and any inconvenience or frustration this may have caused.

For ease of reference, I am addressing the following matters in this letter: the meetings referenced in DPMC's response of 13 January 2023 (OIA-2022/23-0399 refers), the Ministry's OIA response of 14 June 2023 (H2023025401 refers) and your follow-up request on 5 August 2023.

In your correspondence of 5 August 2023, you stated:

I made this OIA request (ref: H2023025401) because a previous OIA request to DPMC showed a meeting between Stuff and DPMC and Ministry of Health and Medsafe communications teams on the subject of Covid vaccine mis/disinformation in June 2021, and a follow up meeting between only the government teams followed it. Here is the link: <https://aus01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Ffyi.org.nz%2Frequest%2F21354-information-supporting-the-stuff-the-whole-truth-project&data=05%7C01%7Coiagr%40health.govt.nz%7C70c0e57872004f10083508db95468de7%7C23cec7246d204bd19fe9dc4447edd1fa%7C0%7C0%7C638267902488116702%7CUnknown%7CTWFPbGZsb3d8eyJWljoimc4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6I>

As noted in DPMC's response, "during the period that DPMC was responsible for strategic communication and coordination and communications to address COVID-19 mis and disinformation, officials met with the Stuff project team."

From time to time, different parts of Manatū Hauora (such as Medsafe and our clinical teams) would be engaged in reviewing some of the Project's content to ensure factual accuracy. Our records indicate that the following attendees were present at the 18 June 2021 meeting.

- A DPMC official
- Two members of the COVID-19 Vaccine Immunisation Communications Team²
- Two representatives from Stuff NZ
- A Ministry for Pacific Peoples official.

Manatū Hauora OIA response (H2023025401)

In the response provided to you, you were advised that your request had been interpreted as:

...referring to meetings between the Manatū Hauora Communications Team, the teams in the COVID-19 Vaccine Programme, and media organisations Stuff and the NZ Herald between 1 June 2021 to 1 February 2022 [on the subject of mis- and disinformation on COVID vaccines].

As there were no Manatū Hauora Communications team members present or invited to the above-mentioned meetings (10 and 18 June 2021), or any other meetings within the requested timeframe (1 June 2021 to 1 February 2022), Manatū Hauora stands refused your request for email communications under section 18(e) of the Act, as they did not exist.

However, as part of the search conducted for information relating to your current request, and as mentioned above, it has been brought to the Ministry's attention that the COVID-19 Vaccine Immunisation Communications Team was involved in meetings with Stuff NZ. This function is now the responsibility of Te Whatu Ora.

Manatū Hauora has consulted with Te Whatu Ora regarding your request pursuant to section 13 of the Act, to ascertain whether that agency holds any further information that may be of assistance to you. Te Whatu Ora has advised that they are unaware of any additional information held by their agency that falls within scope of your request. You may wish to contact Te Whatu Ora directly if you would like to make a request for any information held by the former COVID-19 Vaccine Immunisation team. They can be contacted at hnzoia@health.govt.nz.

Your follow-up request (H202303092)

Turning to your subsequent request for:

...any further meetings or email communications with Stuff pertaining to this meeting or on the subject of Covid related mis/disinformation.

Attached as Document 1 is a copy of a media log created by the Manatū Hauora Communications team, which outlines media queries from Stuff on the topic of dis/misinformation. This is being released to you with a small amount of information withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act, to protect personal privacy. I have considered the

² The COVID-19 Vaccine Immunisation Communications Team transferred to Te Whatu Ora (Health New Zealand) as part of the health system reforms in July 2022.

countervailing public interest in releasing information and consider that it does not outweigh the need to withhold at this time.

No further information has been identified within scope of your request.

I hope that you find this information helpful. If you wish to discuss any aspect of your request with us, including this decision, please feel free to contact the OIA Services Team on: oiagr@health.govt.nz.

Under section 28(3) of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by calling 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Manatū Hauora website at: www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests.

Nāku noa, nā



Elisabeth Brunt
Acting Deputy Director-General
Government and Executive Services | Te Pou Whakatere Kāwanatanga