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8 May 2025

s 9(2)(a)

Ref: H2025064719

Tēnā koe s 9(2)(a)

### **Response to your request for official information**

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to the Ministry of Health – Manatū Hauora (the Ministry) on 5 April 2025 for information regarding the Disinformation Assessment and Response Team (DART).

To provide a response to your request, the Ministry would need to reinstate inactive inboxes and search through a very large volume of correspondence of former Ministry staff. This would have placed an unreasonable degree of strain on the relevant business unit and would interfere with the day-to-day workings of the Ministry. I considered whether charging or extending the time to compile the information would enable us to respond, however I did not believe it would be in the public interest to do so.

Nor do I consider that refusing your request in full under section 18(f) of the Act (on the grounds that the requested information could not be made available without substantial collation) is in either of our interests. The Ministry is therefore providing you with information regarding DART to address the topics you have expressed a particular interest in. This ensures the efficient use of Ministry resources and timely delivery of this response. Hopefully it provides you with information that is helpful to you.

For information on DART's function while in operation, please refer to the following link: <https://fyi.org.nz/request/19329/response/75703/attach/7/H202208104%20Response.pdf>.

Each part of your request is addressed in turn.

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1. *All training manuals, operating procedures, briefings, internal strategy documents, or evaluation reports used or produced by DART from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2023.*

I refer you to an OIA response that addresses this part of your request:

<https://fyi.org.nz/request/22480/response/86277/attach/3/H2023024715%20Response.pdf>.


I also attach two methodology documents that outline the framework used by DART to identify misinformation and disinformation:

- Types of false information document – released in its entirety.
  - Resist Gender Education Content Assessment – relevant excerpts released under section 16(1)(e) of the Act.
2. *All documentation outlining criteria, keyword lists, metadata flags, or monitoring protocols used to identify vaccine “misinformation,” “disinformation,” or “hesitancy,” especially in relation to:*
    - a. *Pregnancy, breastfeeding, myocarditis, or long-term safety concerns*
    - b. *Social media groups or content like Health Forum NZ*

Please refer to the following OIA responses, which contain references to the keywords you cite:

- [www.health.govt.nz/system/files/2022-06/h202117410\\_redacted.pdf](http://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/2022-06/h202117410_redacted.pdf)
  - <https://fyi.org.nz/request/16233/response/62117/attach/3/H202109584%20Response%20Letter.pdf>
  - [www.health.govt.nz/system/files/2022-02/h202116974\\_response\\_0.pdf](http://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/2022-02/h202116974_response_0.pdf)
  - [www.health.govt.nz/system/files/2023-03/h2023019062\\_response.pdf](http://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/2023-03/h2023019062_response.pdf)
  - [www.health.govt.nz/system/files/2022-10/h2022012274\\_response.pdf](http://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/2022-10/h2022012274_response.pdf)
  - [www.health.govt.nz/system/files/2023-06/h2023021507\\_response.pdf](http://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/2023-06/h2023021507_response.pdf)
3. *Internal discussions or correspondence about:*
    - a. *Suppression of user-shared data (e.g., FDA vaccine inserts or Pfizer hotline guidance)*
    - b. *Engagement with external agencies (e.g., DPMC, CERT NZ, Netsafe)*

s 9(2)(a)



In relation to question 3b, *‘[DART’s] internal discussions or correspondence about engagement with external agencies’*, providing this information would require a significant amount of work for the reasons noted in the second paragraph of this letter regarding the use of section 18(f).

In accordance with section 13 of the Act, I refer you to the following OIA responses that capture DART’s communications with external agencies. The most direct and complete account of DART’s internal discussions about engaging with external agencies is reflected in the communications with external agencies themselves. Please refer to the following links:

- <https://fyi.org.nz/request/20988-communications-between-dart-and-cert-nz#incoming-79851>
- <https://fyi.org.nz/request/20989-communications-between-dart-and-netsafe#incoming-79850>
- <https://fyi.org.nz/request/21344-dart-communications-mentioning-the-bfd#incoming-81242>

4. *Any legal or ethical evaluations regarding surveillance of public commentary or content moderation operations involving DART.*

DART's practices were guided by a framework that balanced considerations such as privacy, transparency, and public interest. Please refer to the documents referenced in response to question 1. DART regularly engaged with other agencies to ensure consistency in approach in addressing mis- and disinformation.

The monitoring of open-source and publicly available information such as news and open social media is a normal part of Ministry's work to understand public sentiment, address concerns and refine our public messaging. The data which DART assessed was open-source and related to the public health response to COVID-19. This activity is not surveillance. The objective is not to infringe upon privacy, but to safeguard public safety during the pandemic.

The Ministry is not responsible for addressing mis- and disinformation across the digital landscape. Responsibility for limiting and addressing disinformation online lies with other agencies and organisations. For example, Netsafe plays a key role in providing guidance and advice around online safety and managing content while the Digital Safety Group (Te Tari Taiwhenua | Department of Internal Affairs) is involved in broader regulatory measures related to online harm (including disinformation).

You may be interested in the publicly available research report into COVID-19 information environment and misinformation environment in New Zealand which touches on the harms of the spread of disinformation: [www.dpmc.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2023-06/proactive-release-covid-19-infodemic-sep22-kantar.pdf](http://www.dpmc.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2023-06/proactive-release-covid-19-infodemic-sep22-kantar.pdf).

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](mailto: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](mailto: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 Ministry website at: [www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests](http://www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests).

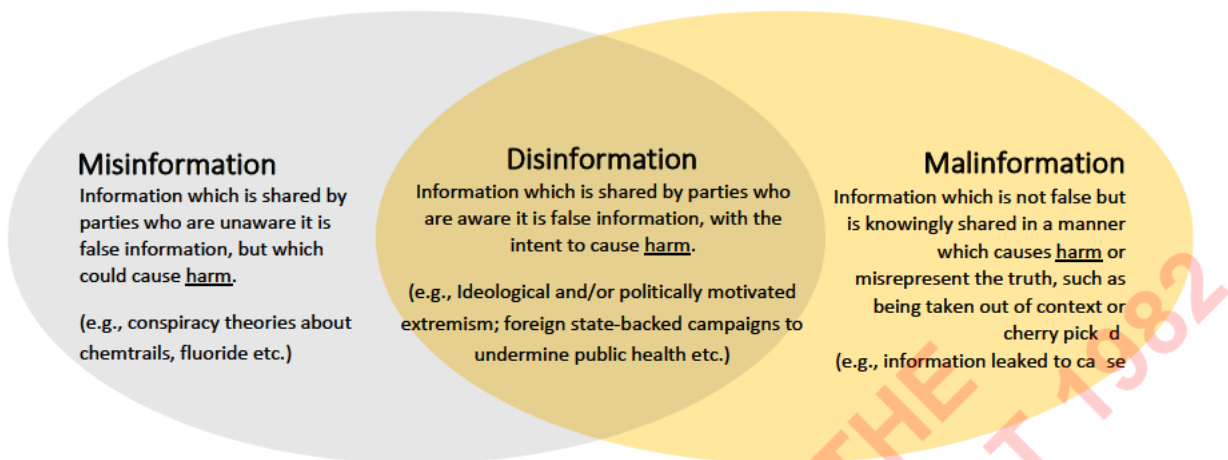
Nāku noa, nā



Sarah Turner  
**Deputy Director-General**  
**Government and Executive Services | Te Pou Whakatere Kāwanatanga**

## Types of False Information

**False information** is the overarching term for the three specific types of information that are false and can cause harm which are **Disinformation**, **Misinformation**, **Malinformation**



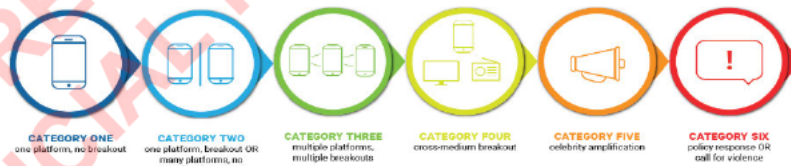
## The Breakout Scale

The **Breakout Scale** is designed to assess the impact and spread of misinformation using measurable and replicable evidence. It does this by tracking the spread of disinformation across platforms and communities and by measuring if an item of disinformation remains on/in one platform or community or travels across multiple platforms and communities.

The scale is divided into six categories which measure its spread in three dimensions – on social media, in mainstream media and in real life using factors which can be compared across different items of disinformation.

The six categories are:

- **Category One:** one platform, no breakout
- **Category Two:** one platform breakout; many platforms, no breakout
- **Category Three:** multiple platforms, multiple breakouts
- **Category Four:** cross-medium breakout
- **Category Five:** celebrity amplification
- **Category Six:** policy response; call for violence



Further information about the Breakout Scale can be found here (<https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-breakout-scale-measuring-the-impact-of-influence-operations/>).

## Excerpt of Resist Gender Education Content Assessment (June 2022)

### DART Website Assessment Criteria

These assessment criteria are based on NewsGuard's rating process criteria<sup>i</sup> but have been modified to suit disinformation content.

#### Section One - Content Criteria

- Website and Social Media does not repeatedly publish false content (22 Points)
- Gathers and presents information responsibly (18 Points)
- Regularly corrects or clarifies errors (12.5 Points)
- Handles the difference between information content and opinion content responsibly (12.5 Points)
- Avoids deceptive titles or headlines (10 Points)

#### Section Two – Transparency Criteria

- Website discloses ownership and financing (10 Points)
- Reveals who is in charge, including possible conflicts of interest (7.5 Points)
- The site provides the names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information (7.5 Points)

### DWAC Terminology

**A Pattern** – ongoing, consistent, deliberate

**Advocacy Organisation** - an organisation that campaigns on a particular issue

**Agenda** - the underlying intentions or motives of a particular person or group

**Clear Credible / Scientific Evidence** – evidence such that a reasonable person would be unlikely to make these claims.

**Conflicts of Interest** – factors which may have an impact on the impartiality of an individual, group or organisation

**Credible Sources** – free from bias and backed up with evidence

**Evidence that the Site Regularly Corrects Errors** – this could include but is not limited to action and accompanying statements to indicate that error has been noted and corrected

**Factual** – based on generally accepted facts

**False Information** – information which is misleading or false

**Information Content** – content which is primarily designed to inform the reader about a topic or event. Includes news, research, and scientific articles, etc

**Not-for-Profit** – an organisation for which activities are not carried out for the profit or gain of the members. Legally distinct from a charity in New Zealand (<https://www.ird.govt.nz/roles/non-profits>)

**Opinion Site** – a website that presents a view or judgement about something, that is not necessarily based on fact or knowledge

**Opinionated Content / Language** – content or language which frames the message to conform with the authors bias or opinion and is therefore not neutral. Can include negative terms or references

**Point of View** – a particular attitude or way of considering a matter.

**Prominently** – disclosed on the site in such a way that the average user would be able to find it easily

**Recent Months** – six months or since previous assessment / or a representative sample pulled from the last six months if content levels are too high to assess fully

**Relevant Biographical Information** – information that clearly indicates the identity of the individual as well as background information relevant to the content they produce (political views, opinions, etc.)

Thematic Analysis

Each thematic on a website is assessed as a triplet of themes, consisting of a high level, middle-level, and low-level theme, or level 1, 2 and 3 themes.

A level 1 or high-level theme is a very broad overarching topic like Health, Politics or Mistrust.

A level 2 or middle-level theme is a broad subtheme of a high-level theme. For example, level 2 themes under the high-level theme Health could be COVID-19 or Public Health.

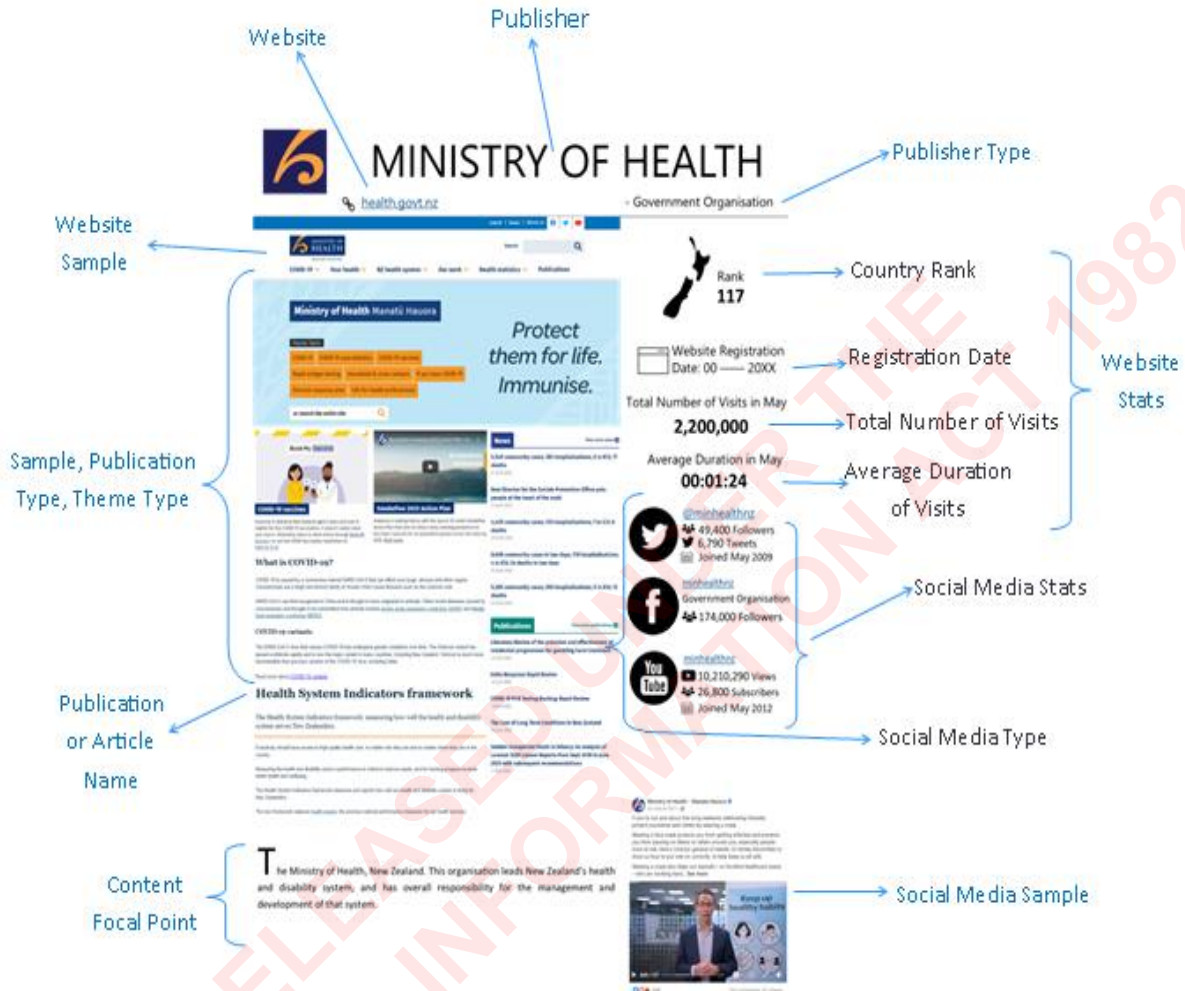
A level 3 or low-level theme is much more specific. For example, a level-three theme for a piece of content relating to COVID-19 could have the level three themes Vaccine Injuries, Mask Health, Lockdowns or Vaccine Passports.

To assess a website, the lowest level themes of the content of the website is found through scanning. Each of these is then linked to both a level two and a level three theme, to form a triplet of themes. For example, if a website claimed that the COVID-19 vaccine could cause cancer, a level three theme would be Vaccine Injuries. As it is about the COVID-19 vaccine this would be associated with the level two theme COVID-19, and as it is relating to health it would be associated with the level one theme Health.

Any level three theme can be associated with any level one and two themes; for example, a level three theme like Vaccine Mandates could fall under the level one theme Politics if the content displays ideological opposition to mandates, under Health if the content was sceptical about the effectiveness of vaccine mandates on stopping the spread of COVID-19, or under Mistrust if the content claimed the mandates were an attempt to control the population.

Appendix II – Digital Data

A visual explanation of how to read the data is included below. This shows the range of information, data and analysis and includes samples of content from the page and related social media and web links; a description of the site; traffic data which includes country rank and date the website was created/registered; social media links and other identifying information such as website logo.



<sup>1</sup>NewsGuard, <https://www.newsguardtech.com/ratings/rating-process-criteria/>, Accessed 12 August 2022