

Growing number of Kiwis affected by sextortion as Netsafe and ignite launch new victim support

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The increasing number of New Zealanders left distressed by online sextortion, image-based abuse and tech facilitated harm will now have access to free counselling and wellbeing support, through a new pilot partnership between online safety organisation [Netsafe](#) and digital wellbeing platform [ignite Aotearoa](#).

Designed to close a gap Netsafe says has become increasingly apparent as serious forms of online abuse have grown, the **Digital Harm Support Pathway** pilot will provide wraparound support for victims reporting harm, with up to three funded sessions via ignite's network of professional counsellors nationwide.

Netsafe research has found 8% of New Zealanders have personally experienced sextortion, while another 13% knew somebody who had, with 35% of victims reporting the impact on their mental wellbeing was moderate to severe.

Netsafe Chief Executive Brent Carey said the organisation's frontline teams were increasingly seeing the human consequences behind the statistics.

"People come to us frightened that an intimate image will be sent to their family, their friends, their school or their workplace. Some are being blackmailed for money. Others are being stalked or have intimate images shared without their consent," Carey said.

"Getting an intimate image removed or stopping an online threat doesn't necessarily remove the fear, shame or anxiety caused by what happened.

"We can try and solve the immediate online incident, but we don't want to then leave someone alone with the psychological impact."

Netsafe's previous case analysis has found sextortion can result in severe emotional distress, including depression and suicidal thoughts.

The programme is believed to be a New Zealand first and represents a shift towards connecting practical online-safety intervention with wellbeing support for people experiencing serious digital harm.

"Netsafe does an incredible job assisting in online harm incidents, but its role is deliberately non-clinical, and until now there has been no consistent, funded pathway for those left carrying the psychological weight of what happened to them," said Sarina Finucane, Director of ignite Aotearoa.

"There is a real support gap here. These are people dealing with blackmail, stalking and intimate images shared without their consent which can be extremely distressing. Funded sessions with a counsellor who understands digital harm can have a huge impact on a victim's recovery."

“The partnership between ignite and Netsafe means people don’t have to go looking for the right kind of help at the moment they are least equipped to search for it - no GP referral waitlist, or finding the money for private counselling. They can move straight from reporting the harm to accessing support”.

The programme is being run as a pilot initially and is being funded with assistance from Datacom. Outcomes will be tracked to measure improvements in participants’ wellbeing, confidence and ability to manage digital harm, with the results to be used to build the case for a permanent, funded and scaled service.

“We know there is a huge need for this support. These types of abuse are a growing trend in Aotearoa and not often easily recognised regarding the high emotional impact on those who experience it. We are really pleased to be working with Netsafe to upskill our providers in support for online harm and offer this first of it’s kind support service in New Zealand” said Finucane.

The launch follows the Government’s [\\$10 million investment](#) in mental health telehealth services, a signal that low-barrier digital support is increasingly seen as the way New Zealand closes its access gap.

Carey said the initiative reflected how online-safety services needed to evolve alongside the harms New Zealanders were experiencing and a modern health system.

“For nearly three decades Netsafe has helped New Zealanders when something goes wrong online. We have to think not only about the platforms getting harmful content down or resolving an incident, but about the person who is left behind.”

“We want this pilot to tell us whether joining those two pieces of support together leads to better outcomes for victims.”

Anyone experiencing online harm can contact Netsafe on 0508 NETSAFE or at netsafe.org.nz/report.

ENDS

Note to Eds:

Netsafe received 53,691 reports of online harm in the two years to March 2026 – more than 2,000 every month.

Sextortion is a form of blackmail in which someone is tricked or pressured into sharing intimate images, then threatened with having them sent to family, friends or employers unless they pay or provide more. Image-based abuse covers the wider sharing, or threatened sharing, of intimate images without consent, including by former partners.

About ignite:

ignite is a Christchurch-based digital wellbeing platform backed by Emerge Aotearoa Trust, one of New Zealand’s largest non-government mental health organisations.

ignite connects people with vetted support providers – from counsellors and psychologists to career coaches, nutritionists and rongoā Māori practitioners – across 19 languages.

Operating as a social enterprise, ignite reinvests all profits back into mental health support and charitable outcomes. The platform is used by universities, corporates, insurers and community organisations across New Zealand.

For more information visit www.ignite.org.nz

About Netsafe:

Netsafe is New Zealand's independent, non-profit online safety organisation, providing free support, advice and education to help New Zealanders stay safe online. Netsafe is the Approved Agency under the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015, acting as the primary entry point for people experiencing online harm.

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