



## Netsafe submission on the Draft Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2025-2030

### About Netsafe

1. Netsafe is New Zealand's independent, non-profit online safety charity. Taking a technology-positive approach to the challenges digital technology presents, we work to help people in New Zealand take advantage of the opportunities available through technology by providing practical tools, support and advice for managing online challenges.
2. We are an independent non-profit organisation adjacent to Government and law enforcement, supported by the public and private sector and with a focus on online safety. Netsafe provides free support, advice and education seven days a week through a helpline, our website and face to face service delivery across New Zealand
3. Netsafe is also the Approved Agency under the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015 (HDCA). One of the purposes of the HDCA is to deter, prevent, and mitigate harm caused to individuals by digital communications. Netsafe's functions as the Approved Agency are set out in section 8 of the HDCA. Those functions include:
  - a. to receive and assess complaints about harm caused to individuals by digital communications
  - b. to investigate complaints
  - c. to use advice, negotiation, mediation, and persuasion (as appropriate) to resolve complaints
  - d. to establish and maintain relationships with domestic and foreign service providers, online content hosts, and agencies (as appropriate) to achieve the purpose of the Act
  - e. to provide education and advice on policies for online safety and conduct on the Internet.
4. Netsafe received over 6000 HDCA reports in FY23/24. These included complaints about disclosure of sensitive person information (including non-consensual intimate image abuse, online threats, intimidation, harassment and cyberbullying and over 70 which involved explicit incitement to suicide. Netsafe's comments are focused on our

experiences dealing with online harms as both a not for profit agency and as the Approved Agency under the HDCA.

5. Netsafe very much supports a multi-faceted approach to suicide prevention that prioritises accessible support, workforce development, early intervention, and improved data collection. However, we would like to highlight an area that appears underrepresented or at least not explicitly mentioned in the draft plan and that is the critical role of social media and online spaces in both suicide risk and prevention.
6. Online interactions and social media are central to many people's lives, especially young people. While the online world offers connection and support, it also exposes users to risks such as bullying, incitement to self-harm, and potential contagion effects. We know that cyberbullying and online harassment can lead to feelings of isolation and may exacerbate mental health issues. Given the breadth of social media's influence in daily life, we think the Action Plan should explicitly recognise and address these online risks.
7. While the Action Plan rightly focuses on awareness and community support, resourcing explicit initiatives around social media could deepen this impact. For example:
  - a. Public education campaigns on cyberbullying's consequences, including the legal implications under the HDCA, could help prevent harmful online behaviours.
  - b. Additional resources that address online safety for young people, their families, and schools with a particular suicide prevention lens would create a clearer understanding of how to manage online risks and where to go for support.
  - c. Further resourcing to train educators and schools to identify and address cyberbullying and other online harms would support at-risk students.
8. We also know that social media may have a role in amplifying contagion risks after a publicised suicide. This Action Plan should consider whether partnerships with Online Content Hosts (OCHs) and other support organisations would enhance prevention efforts. Actions could include collaborative agreements with OCHs which establish partnerships to monitor and, where necessary, moderate high-risk posts; or establishing cross agency protocols for quickly addressing harmful posts that may endanger vulnerable users.
9. To fully understand and mitigate risks within online spaces, we also think further research funding should be allocated to examine social media's effect on mental health and suicide risk. This evidence-based approach would inform and strengthen future policies and interventions in the digital landscape.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

**Netsafe**

**1 November 2024**