



28 February 2023

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Ref: OIA-2022/23-0528

Dear [REDACTED]

Official Information Act request about misinformation or disinformation related to Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) request of 31 January 2023.

You have requested:

“Please provide the following information

1) all internal communications and analysis including meeting minutes, within DPMC about disinformation and misinformation including where these terms came from and when and how they should be used in the context of Covid or the PfizerVax

2) all external communications, advice and analysis between any representative of DPMC and any Minister, other government department, university entity or any researcher, media representative or other person about disinformation and misinformation including where these terms came from and when and how they should be used in the contexts of Covid or the PfizerVax

3) any reflection or analysis, meeting minutes, or other information about the legality or otherwise of labelling or trying to shame New Zealanders and/ or otherwise close down questioning of government Covid or vaccine policy, even after: a) it became patently obvious that the vaccine did not prevent infection, transmission, hospitalisation or reinfection so was not effective in the commonly understood sense, and/ or b) after it became obvious that it may cause serious adverse effects or even death, including myocarditis, pericarditis, vasculitis, clotting and other effects and safety signals reported by Medsafe, advisors to Medsafe, the CTAG committee, ISMB, the coroner and or other international advisors

4) information to show what steps have been considered and what steps have been taken to alert a) employers, b) iwi groups and other Maori and c) the public about the risks of the PfizerVax and it's lack of effectiveness to correct misleading impressions created by the governments "safe and effective" and do it for your whanau" media campaign

5) *information to show what has been spent on marketing the PfizerVax in NZ, when this was spent and why and the source of the funding.*

6) *any information to show steps being taken to internally hold elected representatives and/ or public officials to account for spreading misleading or deceptive information and/ or billing and labelling others who try to share information about Covid and/or the Covid vaccine to correct government misinformation.”*

I note that you have also sent your request to Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall, the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), the Ministry of Health (MOH), and Hon Andrew Little.

Please be advised that the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) will only be responding to your request to the extent the information requested is held by or more closely connected to the functions of DPMC.

Parts One and Two

On 13 February 2023, DPMC advised you that Parts One and Two of your current request, as it was framed, would be very difficult to meet without substantial research. This was because scoping would involve manually searching DPMC’s information management system to identify information within the scope of your request.

You then advised that you wish to limit the period of information for Parts One and Two of your request to 24 months, from 3 February 2021 to 31 January 2023. On further assessment, it was decided that this refinement was not necessary, and DPMC was able to scope these parts of your request without the refinement.

For clarity, DPMC has interpreted Parts One and Two of your request to be for all internal and external communications, analysis, and advice regarding “*where [the terms disinformation and misinformation] came from, and when and how they should be used in the context of Covid or the PfizerVax*”.

I can advise that the terms “disinformation” and “misinformation” were already defined dictionary terms at the time of the COVID-19 Response. There has not been any advice received or produced by government in relation to when and how to use the terms disinformation and misinformation in the contexts of COVID-19 vaccination or the use of the Pfizer vaccine.

Accordingly, I am refusing Parts One and Two of your request under section 18(e) of the OIA, as the documents alleged to contain the requested information do not exist.

The specific aspects of both the Unite Against COVID-19 and COVID-19 Vaccine Campaigns relevant to your request included a focus on false and misleading information and online harms.

I further advise that false and misleading information and online harms can be defined as follows:

- Misinformation: Information that is false but not created with the intention of causing harm.

- Disinformation: Information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organisation or country
- Mal-information: Information that is based on reality, and used to inflict harm on a person, organisation or country.
- Online bullying: When a person uses digital technology to send, post or publish content intended to cause harm to another person.

False and misleading information and online harms relating to the COVID-19 vaccination or Pfizer vaccine were significant, varied in content and via different mediums. Therefore, the focus of COVID-19 vaccine campaign communications was to ensure credible information was available and easy to access.

While the specific information you have requested does not exist, I note that we recently responded to similar requests from you which may be of further assistance. Accordingly, I am referring you to previous DPMC's responses in OIA-2022/23-0570; OIA-2022/23-0564; OIA-2022/23-0356; OIA-2022/23-0465; and OIA-2022/23-0347.

Further information about COVID-19-related misinformation is also publicly available on the Unite Against COVID-19 website, at: www.covid19.govt.nz/prepare-and-stay-safe/misinformation-scams-and-online-harm/. Alternatively, you may wish to refer to proactively released documents relating to COVID-19 at: www.covid19.govt.nz/about-our-covid-19-response/proactive-releases/, or www.dPMC.govt.nz/publications.

Part Three

DPMC has not provided any advice or communications about "*the legality or otherwise labelling or trying to shame New Zealanders and/or close down questioning of government Covid or vaccine policy...*" as you have suggested in your request.

As such, DPMC is refusing this part of your request under section 18(e) of the OIA, as the documents alleged to contain the requested information do not exist.

Part Four

DPMC has not provided any advice or communications in relation to your claim about "*the risks of the PfizerVax and it's lack of effectiveness to correct misleading impressions created by the governments "safe and effective" and "do it for your whanau" media campaign*".

On that basis, DPMC is refusing Part Four of your request under section 18(e) of the OIA, as the documents alleged to contain the requested information do not exist.

Part Five

DPMC has taken your request to refer to the advertising spend on the COVID-19 Vaccine Campaign. I can advise that this information is publicly available as part of DPMC's annual reporting.

Accordingly, this part of your request is refused in full under section 18(d) as the information you have requested is publicly available.

I have provided links to the information in the table below for ease of reference.

Item	Description	Link
1.	Annual Report 2020	www.dpmc.govt.nz/publications/annual-report-2020
2.	Annual Report 2021	www.dpmc.govt.nz/publications/annual-report-2021
3.	Annual Report 2022	www.dpmc.govt.nz/publications/annual-report-2022
4.	2019/20 Annual review of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet	www.parliament.nz/en/pb/sc/submissions-and-advice/all?custom=FINS_104457
5.	2020/21 Annual review of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet	www.parliament.nz/en/pb/sc/submissions-and-advice/all?custom=FINS_116496
6.	2021/22 Annual review of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet	www.parliament.nz/en/pb/sc/submissions-and-advice/all?custom=FINS_130099

Part Six

PMO has not taken any steps or actions as you have suggested in this part of your request, which is premised on Government producing misinformation.

As such, I am refusing Part Six of your request under section 18(e) of the OIA, as the documents alleged to contain the requested information do not exist.

You have the right to ask the Office of the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision under section 28(3) of the OIA.

This response may be published on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's website during our regular publication cycle. Typically, information is released monthly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

Yours sincerely



Katrina Casey
Deputy Chief Executive, COVID-19 Group