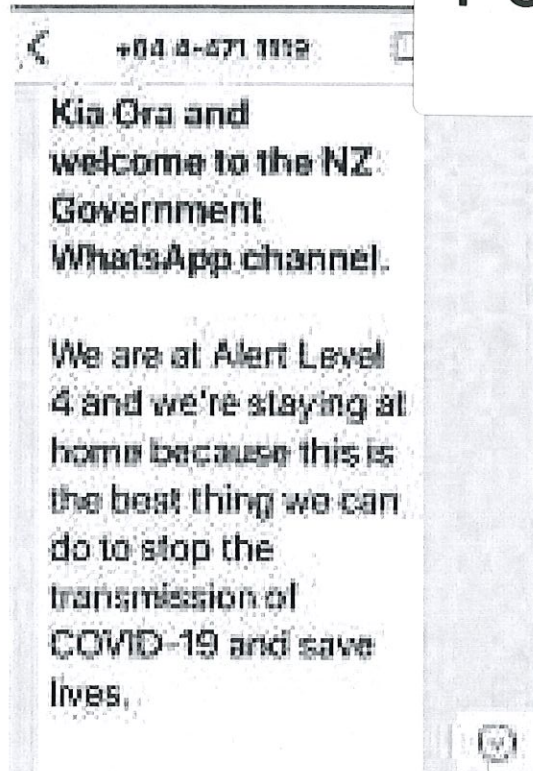


# Coronavirus: Was the Government's WhatsApp channel worth the \$672,000 price tag?

Georgia Forrester 05:00, Aug 31 2020

Forrester, 2020



COVID-19 timeline/  
2 April 2020

SUPPLIED/STUFF

A screenshot of the Government's WhatsApp channel that was used earlier this year during the first Covid-19 outbreak.

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Among the \$36b allocated from the Covid Response and Recovery Fund was \$672,000 for a Government's WhatsApp channel. It's no longer in use.

The channel was launched by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, and then-Health Minister Dr David Clark on April 2. At this stage, the country was already in lockdown at alert level 4.

In a press release at the time, Ardern said people were craving access to timely, accurate information and the WhatsApp channel was another way they could provide that "by harnessing technology as part of the fight".

Our priority is to keep New Zealanders safe and get them the information they need to protect themselves and their loved ones," Ardern said.

This method allowed Kiwis who didn't regularly use other information channels, such as email, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or the Government's official website, to stay informed during the first Covid-19 wave.

MORNING REPORT/RNZ

Aucklanders are being asked to wear a face covering when outside the home, and the rest of the country is advised to wear one when in a confined public space, like when using public transport or a supermarket.

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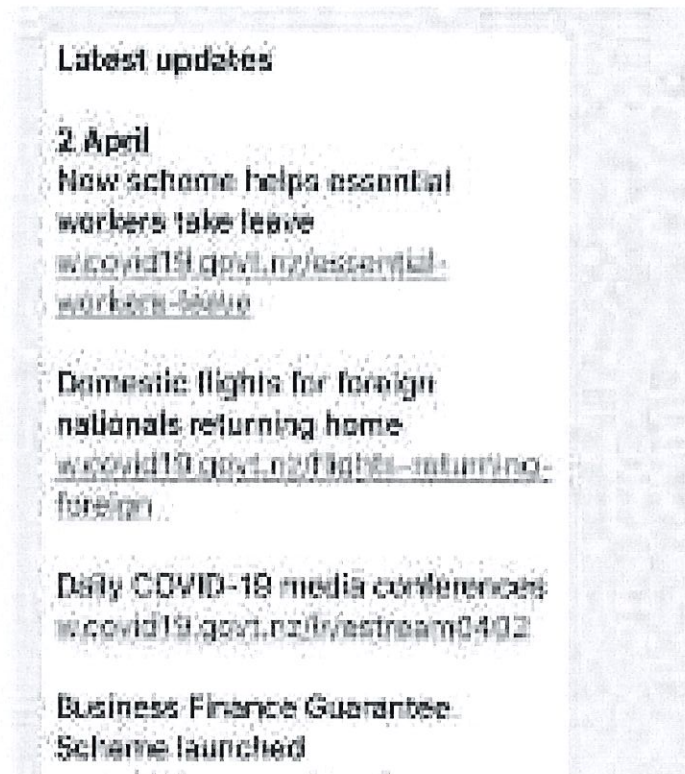
An All-of-Government Covid-19 response group spokesman said that early on, a significant focus was placed on making sure New Zealanders had access to the most up-to-date information. This was achieved through using a number of channels to share information, including WhatsApp.

#### Keeping Kiwis in the know

More than 50,490 people signed up to the WhatsApp channel, but far fewer than that used it each day.



During alert level 4, the daily average user base was around 6000 people. While at alert level 2, about 1500 people used it each day, the spokesman said.



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News and updates were sent out via the WhatsApp channel from April – June 2020.

The type of information published in the channel included; the latest news, updates and case information. It also shared a range of advice about travel, health and financial support, and information around the symptoms of Covid-19. It was updated regularly, the spokesman said.

Was all the money used?

According to the spokesman, all of the allocated funding was used.

"The \$672,000 in funding, backed by the Covid-19 Response and Recovery Fund, supported the rapid deployment of the channel to meet New Zealand needs.

"This included platform development and maintenance, meeting security requirements and providing multi-language translation," he said.

