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Anti-hacking advice for general practice on its way



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Te Whatu Ora primary health chief information security officer Nancy Taneja says the agency wants to build confidence among general practice to respond to cyber incidents [Image: Supplied]

An information pack will contain process, readiness and response advice, checklists and lessons learned

Te Whatu Ora is trying to help general practices beef up cyber security by gauging how prepared they are and giving them advice.

The agency will be running regular cyber incidence and response hui with general practices, pharmacies, PHOs, allied health professionals, Māori and iwi providers, and other community and healthcare groups.

It follows a big attack on Pinnacle Midlands Health Network on 28 September last year. Malicious actors accessed a third-party IT server and took health information from about 2016 to 2022 together with some of Pinnacle's corporate information.

Te Whatu Ora held its first cyber security hui on 25 January, with 25 people from general practice attending virtually. The agency's primary health sector chief information security officer, Nancy Taneja, gave a presentation covering incident response planning, possible scenarios, and support and resources.

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“The focus was on readiness and response to the business impact of a major cyber incident,” says Ms Taneja via email. “This was an informationsharing session, and we received positive feedback from attendees about the workshop,” she says.

The agency will be sharing with general practices an information pack that contains process, readiness and response advice, checklists and lessons already learned.

Ms Taneja expects attendance will increase as the agency builds relationships and works with healthcare providers across the country.

“A key focus of our work programme in the primary and community healthcare sector is to build confidence and awareness among providers to manage and respond to any cyber security incident,” she says.

Te Whatu Ora ran a cyber security maturity assessment between 17 October and 25 November last year, and 120 primary and community healthcare providers responded. Among the respondents were PHOs, GPs, pharmacies, allied health professionals and Māori and iwi providers.

Ms Taneja says she is pleased that at least 100 questionnaires were completed, the number needed to make assumptions about common cyber security risks in the sector. The data are being analysed and results are expected soon. They will be used to help Te Whatu Ora work better with the sector and develop cyber security services. She says it has been an excellent opportunity to build relationships and work directly with healthcare providers.

In August 2019, Tū Ora Compass experienced a major cyber incident where the health records of up to a million people were potentially exfiltrated. There was also a ransomware attack on Waikato DHB in May 2021 which targeted hospital computer and phone systems to obtain information related to patients, staff and finances.

In December 2021, the Government announced a three-year \$75.6 million package, the national cyber security uplift programme, to protect the health system from such attacks.

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