

IMPROVING GOVERNMENT ALGORITHM TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Algorithms are an increasingly large part of everyday life in New Zealand. They have an essential role to play in supporting the delivery of government services to people in New Zealand and in ensuring that government policies are well-targeted and achieve their aims.

Technology is moving rapidly and advanced analytical tools, like algorithms, allow an exponential increase in the scale and scope of decision making. In this fast-moving environment, and following the COVID-19 pandemic, the government must ensure that data ethics are embedded in its work, and always keep in mind the people and communities being served by these tools.

In 2018 the New Zealand government undertook a review of how government agencies use algorithms to improve the lives of New Zealanders. *The Algorithm Assessment Report* aimed to ensure New Zealanders are informed about the use of government algorithms and the checks and balances that exist to manage their use.

The report drew on the *Principles for the Safe and Effective Use of Data and Analytics* developed by the Privacy Commissioner and the Government Chief Data Steward and made recommendations to improve transparency and accountability in government algorithm use.

The Government Chief Data Steward responds to new and emerging data issues, and ensures that government agencies have the capability and right skills to maximise the value of data.

This is achieved through setting data standards and establishing common capabilities, developing data policy, strategy and planning.

Responding to these recommendations, in 2020 the Government Chief Data Steward has:

1. Released the **Algorithm Charter for Aotearoa New Zealand** in which signing agencies make a public commitment to the transparent and accountable use of algorithms.
2. Ensured that government agencies can seek external advice from privacy, ethics, and data experts by continuing to convene the independent **Data Ethics Advisory Group**.
3. Continued work to ensure that data ethics are embedded at all levels of the government analytics workforce, through improvements in **training and professional development for data analysts and decision makers**.

The Government Chief Data Steward continues to work with other functional leads, government agencies, iwi Māori, and other organisations to increase government data transparency and accountability.