



## CORPORATE OFFICE

Level 2  
32 Oxford Terrace  
Christchurch Central  
**CHRISTCHURCH 8011**

Telephone: 0064 3 364 4134  
[Kathleen.Smitheram@cdhb.health.nz](mailto:Kathleen.Smitheram@cdhb.health.nz)

6 July 2022

9(2)(a)



### **Official Information Act request CDHB 10889 and WCDHB 9708**

I refer to your email dated 7 June 2022 requesting information under the Official Information Act from Canterbury DHB and West Coast DHB regarding our Communications and Media staff.

The Canterbury and West Coast DHBs' TransAlpine Communications Team provides 24/7 services for emergency response communications and from 6am until 11pm for more general media queries. Staff provide communications advice and services for both District Health Boards.

The demand for a wide range of communications services is at a consistently high level year-round and unforeseen events such as the earthquakes in North Canterbury in 2016, junior doctors strikes in 2017 and 2019, nurses' strike in 2018 and 2021, the Port Hills fires in February 2017, Canterbury floods in 2017, the Measles outbreak at the beginning of March 2019 followed by the terrorist attacks on 15 March 2019, the flood in the new outpatient building at the end of March 2019 and COVID-19 from 2020, along with strikes by hospital midwives, pharmacists, medical imaging technologists and psychologists, all require significant input from the communications team to ensure the public and all stakeholders are kept informed.

Since the 2010/11 earthquakes, the demand for communications services has increased significantly – in accordance with the major changes and transformation taking place in our health systems and the major new building construction and repair programmes underway in Canterbury and on the West Coast. This increase in demand is also fuelled by the growing expectation from media and the public for more and better proactive communications, and a faster response to events that affect them.

During periods of peak demand, we engage contractors to help with elements of our work and this includes communicating all of the changes associated with new ways of working in new facilities, as well as organising events such as site and building blessings, staff and public open days, ministerial and VIP visits and formal opening events. Each of these events are often major projects which are led by communications team members.

There was significant media interest in many aspects of Canterbury DHB's activities in the aftermath of the earthquakes and terror attacks. Much of the interest focused on mental health and wellbeing, Canterbury's integrated health system along with damage and repairs to our hospital buildings, new facilities, finances, new home and community-based services; parking issues and solutions such as the park and ride scheme.

Additionally, COVID-19 has had a profound impact on the workload of the Communications Team during the past two years. From driving campaigns to educate and encourage vaccination, to promoting various restrictions/traffic light settings and supporting the communication of this in Canterbury and West Coast communities COVID-19-related communications and media enquiries continue to dominate the workload of all Communications Team members.

Over the past two years we have had to repeatedly stand up a PIM (Public Information Manager) function for two DHBs. This involves having comms staff working 12 to 14-hour shifts, seven days a week. With a small core communications team, we have engaged contractors to help with other essential work from time to time.

Like the rest of our community, communications staff are also impacted by having to isolate at home as close contacts, and when infected with COVID-19, or caring for sick dependants – in most cases staff continued to work from home when they were recovering.

It is also worth noting that the Communications Team received support from two Environment Canterbury communications staff during 2020/21 at no cost, to assist with Allied Health Scientific and Technical (APEX union) strike communications while Canterbury DHB staff were focused on the COVID-19 emergency coordination centre response.

The Executive Director, Communications for Canterbury DHB has also been assisting Southern DHB in recent months.

Keeping more than 11,000 DHB staff and around 23,500 wider health system staff informed about what is happening in our health systems, together with the wider community are important aspects of our work and keeps the TransAlpine communications team extremely busy.

The ability to adapt quickly to change and rapidly disseminate new information throughout our health system and to other stakeholders has never been more important. Vaccination information and eligibility for free shots; where to get tested and locations to collect RAT tests have been incredibly important communications for our communities during the pandemic.

We are proud to have won a number of PR and Communication awards for our work and more importantly receive positive feedback from our colleagues and other agencies for the quality of work we do. Earlier this year we produced a household mailer [Getting through together – Caring for someone with COVID-19 at home](#) – we received unprecedented volumes of positive feedback from grateful members of our community.

Responses to your questions are as follows.

I would like to request the following information from your organisation, for each financial year: 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and for the partial year of 2022 to date:

**1. Number of FTE communications/media staff employed in each year (this includes all internal and external communications staff/content producers and social media staff)**

Year	TransAlpine Communications Team*
2016/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6.3 FTE Canterbury</li> <li>• 1 FTE West Coast</li> </ul>
2017/18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5.7 FTE Canterbury</li> <li>• 0.8 FTE West Coast</li> </ul>
2018/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6.5 FTE permanent Comms staff in Canterbury</li> <li>• 1 FTE West Coast based permanent Comms staff</li> <li>• 1 FTE 12 month fixed-term Mental Health Comms ended September 2019</li> </ul>
2019/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6.18 FTE permanent Comms staff in Canterbury</li> <li>• 1 FTE West Coast based permanent Comms staff</li> <li>• 1 FTE fixed term Comms person for ISG and Labs Project communications – ended on 17 July 2020</li> </ul>
2020/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5.12 FTE permanent Comms staff in Canterbury</li> <li>• 1 FTE West Coast based permanent Comms staff</li> <li>• 0.2 FTE fixed term Comms staff for COVID-19 Vaccination Team</li> </ul>
2021/22 to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5.29 FTE permanent Comms staff in Canterbury</li> <li>• 1 FTE West Coast based permanent Comms staff</li> <li>• 2.73 FTE fixed term Comms staff for COVID-19 Vaccination Team</li> </ul>

\*The Canterbury and West Coast DHB transalpine communications team provides services for both DHBs.

**2. The salary range paid to communications staff in each year.**

Providing this information would breach the privacy of individual staff and is therefore withheld under Section 9(2)(a) of the Official Information Act 1982.

\*Note: we have provided the total number of communications staff and the total amount paid to these staff in the answers to Questions 1, 3,4 and 9. We believe this satisfies any public interest in this matter.

You may, under section 28(3) of the Official Information Act, seek a review of our decision to withhold information by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz); or Freephone 0800 802 602.

**3. Number of communications/media contractors used in each year**

**4. Total sum paid to communications contractors in each year**

Year	TransAlpine Communications Team contractors*	Total salary costs (contractors)*
2016/17	2 Comms contractors for facilities project communications	\$260,163
2017/18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 Comms contractors for facilities project for the full 12-month period – one working full-time and 0.5 on facilities.</li> <li>• In addition, during the year three Comms contractors helped cover the following roles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ a senior media advisor vacancy for Canterbury DHB [6</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	\$354,918

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>months]</li> <li>○ a senior communications advisor role for West Coast DHB [4 months]</li> <li>○ content writing and photography for new Canterbury &amp; West Coast DHB websites. [4 months part-time].</li> </ul>	
2018/19	1.5 FTE Comms contractors working on facilities communications.	\$219,524
2019/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A total of two contractors were employed during the period to assist with facilities communications and facilities-related events.</li> <li>● A total of seven contractors were engaged to assist with providing a 24/7 Emergency Response communications service during COVID-19.</li> </ul>	\$261,605
2020/21	A total of three contractors were employed during the period to assist with covering a Senior Media Advisor vacancy and the COVID-19 emergency coordination centre response.	\$140,258
2021/22 to date	<p>A total of six contractors have been employed in this period to date, to assist with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● communications and engagement for a care in the community hub</li> <li>● the emergency coordination centre response for the West Coast</li> <li>● backfilling staff supporting the COVID-19 emergency response</li> <li>● COVID-19 vaccination communications, to support covering vacancies in the team</li> <li>● Health New Zealand and immunisation communications.</li> </ul>	\$83,857

*\*The Canterbury and West Coast DHB transalpine communications team provides services for both DHBs.*

**5. A breakdown of positions and numbers employed in each role (i.e. how many media advisors, senior media advisors, internal communications, managers, social media producers/managers)**

Position	2016/17*	2017/18*	2018/19*	2019/20*	2020/21*	2021/22*
Senior Communications Advisor	5	4	5	5	4	5
Communications Advisor	1	1	2	2	1	1
Senior Media Advisor	1	1	1	1	1	1
Team Leader	1	1	1	1	1	2
Communications Coordinator	-	-	-	-	-	1
Executive Director Communications	1	1	1	1	1	1

*\*please note, figures for the numbers employed in each role relate to people not FTE.*

*\*\*due to the size of the team, all senior communications advisors work on internal and external communications and engagement, along with events, project support comms and social media.*

**6. How many media queries received in each year**

We do not have an electronic system to record all media queries, so cannot give exact figures as the information requested does not exist in a document and this information could not be provided without

substantial collation and research. Your request for this information is therefore declined under Sections 18(f) of the Official Information Act 1982.

Many media enquiries are received out of hours and over weekends, and we would respond to thousands of media responses each year. These can range from a 'condition update' of the status of a patient in hospital, to a complex series of questions on mental health data and DHB finances.

Information is also released via our Facebook page (posts and live stream media briefings, such as during the measles outbreak and terror attacks) twitter account, weekly e-newsletter the CEO Update, proactive media releases and WellNow, our community magazine. When there is an adverse event such as the mosque terror attacks, earthquakes or COVID-19 outbreak, we can respond to hundreds of media enquiries in just a few days as well as deliver media briefings and arrange one on one interviews. For example, one outbreak alone, such a measles, or a COVID-19 outbreak at an aged care facility can be full time work for more than one or two comms team members at any time.

Canterbury DHB employs one full time media advisor, and this role together with the Executive Director of Communications, team leader and senior communications advisors, provide media responses 24/7 during emergencies, and from 6am to 11pm at other times - including weekends and public holidays.

#### **7. How many interview requests received in each year**

We do not have an electronic system to record all interview requests and the outcome of the request, therefore, this information is not available without substantial collation and research. Your request for this information is therefore declined under Sections 18(f) of the Official Information Act 1982.

#### **8. How many media interviews given, and to which media organisations and when.**

We do not have an electronic system to record all interview requests and the outcome of the request, therefore, this information is not available without substantial collation and research. Your request for this information is therefore declined under Sections 18(f) of the Official Information Act 1982.

#### **9. Total salary costs for communications staff each year**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total salary costs (staff + contractors) *</b>
2016/17	\$941,136
2017/18	\$1,074,779
2018/19	\$1,060,145
2019/20	\$1,166,556
2020/21	\$1,039,282
2021/22 to date	\$1,313,407

*\*The Canterbury and West Coast DHB transalpine communications team provides services for both DHBs.*

#### **10. In each year, how many communications staff paid a salary more than \$100,000 per annum and \$200,000 per annum**

Providing this information would breach the privacy of individual staff and is therefore withheld under Section 9(2)(a) of the Official Information Act 1982.

\*Note: we have provided the total number of communications staff and the total amount paid to these staff in the answers to Questions 1, 3,4 and 9. We believe this satisfies any public interest in this matter.

You may, under section 28(3) of the Official Information Act, seek a review of our decision to withhold information by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz); or Freephone 0800 802 602.

I trust that this satisfies your interest in this matter.

Please note that this response, or an edited version of this response, may be published on the Canterbury DHB website and West Coast DHB website after your receipt of this response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RLS', with a long horizontal line extending to the right underneath it.

Ralph La Salle  
**Senior Manager, OIAs**  
**Waitaha Canterbury / Te Tai o Poutini West Coast.**