

# **A secure notification service for government:**

Design research.

Preliminary research highlights.

May 2025

# Executive summary:

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The survey shows there is clear public demand and motivation for an all-of-government app that centralises the delivery of notifications. This is particularly the case for people who deal a lot with government agencies, such as busy families.

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The qualitative forum suggests that, in addition to receiving notifications, it's important the all-of-government app allows post-notification actions to be taken easily, either within the app or within a few clicks/taps (e.g. providing information or making payments).

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A simple, intuitive system/UX that reduces reliance on other more cumbersome notification and communication methods will be critical for the success of the app. If the app only adds more complexity to existing processes this will reduce motivation to engage.

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Features that make it easy to see exactly what action is required and reminders that help to avoid missed deadlines will be important value adds.

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Perceived security of the app is essential for building confidence and trust. A key driver for perceived security is the quality of the UX, design and download process – high quality user experiences with obvious government branding will support confidence.

# Inability to easily take action after receipt of a notification is often the major source of frustration.

## Key pain points with the current notifications system (unprompted)

### Most significant (raised by majority of participants)

- Inability to respond directly to a notification / receiving a notification that tells you to go elsewhere to see the information and/or take action.
- "Vague" or overcomplicated messages where the required action is unclear.
- Inability to speak to a helpful person / long waits on the phone.

### Other common issues (raised by smaller numbers of participants)

- Lack of consistency across government agencies (no consistent processes, platforms, identify, tone or language).
- Feeling like you always need to double check if it's a scam.
- High volumes of SMS scams.
- A lack of reminders – too easy to read and forget.



"The most frustrating thing about receiving notifications from government agencies is having to login to another platform."

"The most frustrating thing about receiving notifications from government agencies is when they use overly formal language or long emails that make it hard to figure out what you actually need to do."

## What works well with the current systems? (unprompted)

- Self service apps (esp. MyIR) that give clear summaries of your situation and make taking action simple.
- Not being asked to click links in emails and text messages. Feels more secure when you don't need to click a link.
- When agencies have helpful call centre staff and short wait times (not all agencies) - ability to speak to a real human quickly and easily when there is a problem.
- When the letter is attached to the email notification (not all agencies do this and when it isn't done it is a major source of frustration).

## Why do notifications get missed? (unprompted)

### Most frequent issues

- Email gets buried in a busy inbox.
- 'Read and forget' with no follow up reminder (sometimes read and forget happens because an extra log in step post notification means the actual message never gets read).

### Less frequent issues

- Spam filter (emails).
- 'It's always bad news' / perceived negative connotations with government notifications – creates aversion to engaging.
- Changed address.
- Too many non-action notifications creates fatigue / complacency / reduces engagement.



"I prefer to receive an email. It is how I usually organise my life/bills/responsibilities; and where all my important info/tasks are stored/sent."

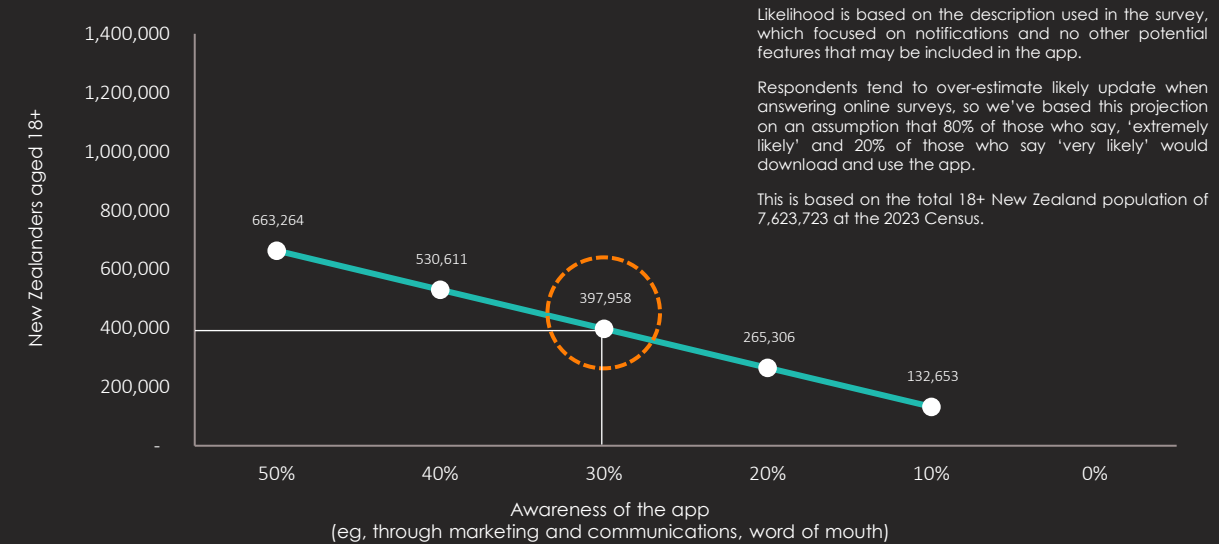
"Text first – it's quick, easy to see, and I don't have to dig through emails. Email's fine for detailed info, but for reminders or anything time-sensitive, a text works best. I'm more likely to see it straight away."

# Around four in ten New Zealanders say they'd download and use a secure notification app, if it became available.

This could represent up to around 400,000 downloads, if 30% of the 18 year and over population were made aware of the app once it had been developed and released.

With some of the additional features discussed during the qualitative forum, uptake could be even higher.

Potential downloads (by awareness of the app)



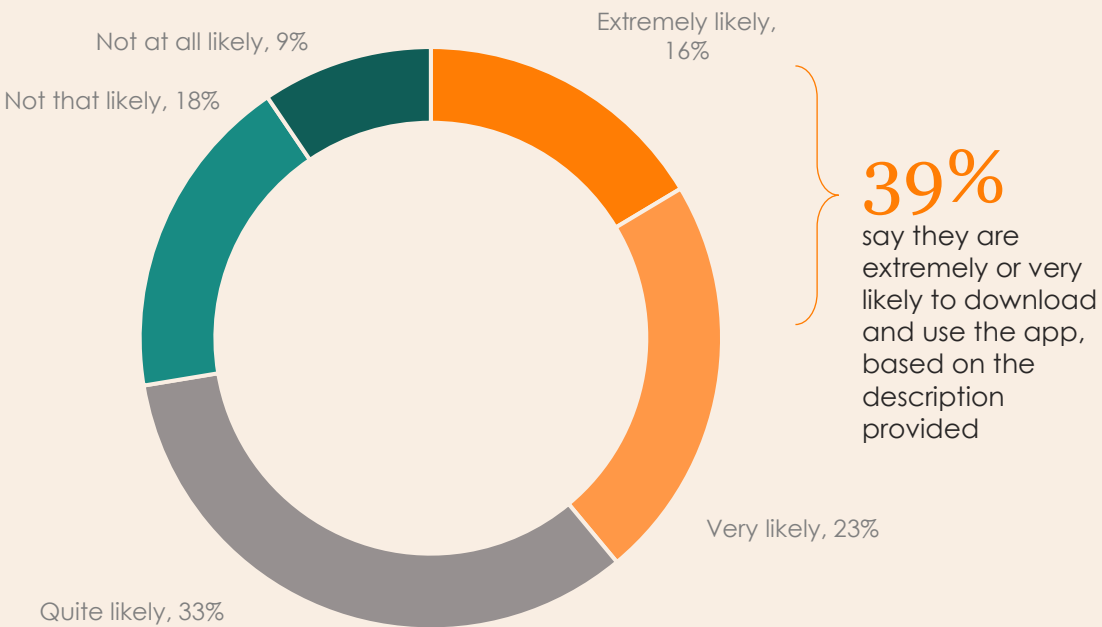
## Description used in the survey:

A government agency is thinking about designing a new mobile app so people can receive communications from a range of government agencies in one place.

Once the app has been set up on your mobile device, you would receive a notification when there is something for you to do or read.

If you received a notification through the app, you could be sure it was a genuine communication from a government agency.

## Likelihood to download and use



Source: Q2 How likely would you be to download and use an app like this, if it became available?

Base: All New Zealanders (n=1,000)

When we explored what would be required to create confidence in app security, it was clear that 'professional feeling' UI/UX are important in driving heuristics around security.

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**The common themes were:**

- App store entry looks legitimate, official branding, clean presentation, high quality visuals and wording, plenty of reviews. 'Developer name' is obviously NZ government.
- Secure feeling download and set up process. E.g. a notification via a secure platform, need to authenticate via a trusted platform (real me?), email confirmations from secure looking email addresses that are well formatted and look legitimate.
- Well presented privacy and security statements during download. Look and feel clean and congruous with overall UI/UX.
- Clean, slick professional UI/UX – like a banking app. If it's 'clunky' it feels more 'dodgy'.
- Simple but effective secure log in processes – slick 2FA and/or phone's in-built facial/fingerprint recognition.
- Regular updates and 'bug fixes'.
- No adverts.



"Official branding - government logos, Two factor authentication or real me login, No third party ads, Login history and notification of unusual login activity"



"Everything is authentic e.g. logos, terms and conditions"



"It should have NZ Government as the agency offering the app in the playstore. Not some other company I've never heard of."



The way you have the option of RealMe to log in to your government portals which also takes an additional two-factor authentication if you're using a untrusted device which is a feature I love.



Official emails/notifications coming from the previous format (i.e. physical letters, emails, websites) confirming that this app was the correct one to download. Receiving a link via said official websites directly to app to ensure it's the correct one.

## The ability to **easily take action within the app** or within a few clicks was the **most desired feature**.

Almost all participants spontaneously suggested that this would significantly improve the utility of the app.



"Well if it's is only to send notifications that doesn't feel overly helpful. I want to be able to receive the notification and action the issue straight away either via a separate link in the notification etc"



"I would be more motivated to use the app if: You could reply or take action straight from the app (like updating info, confirming appointments, or checking balances)."



"I would definitely download and use this app if I could access all government agencies and tasks through the one application and it was easy to use, make payments etc



"Keep it simple - sure you could add in-message contact options like email/0800/chatbot buttons or whatever, but the app itself need to focus on displaying and managing the communications."

Increasing frequency of spontaneous mentions



### There were a range of other feature suggestions that came up consistently across the sample:

- A **web-portal** version of the app. So the same service could be accessed from a PC/laptop. A lot of people do their government services via laptop so would value having all their government notification in one place on the laptop.
- Intuitive **archiving and search** function. Being able to quickly and easily search through historical notifications, see actioned vs not actioned, filter by agency.
- **Reminders** for actions not yet completed. People suggested increasing frequency the closer to the deadline it was.
- A **calendar of upcoming deadlines** or action dates (e.g. rego due, License renewal due, GST return due etc.) – so these dates can be seen in advance before even receiving a notification.
- **Managing notification preferences** to be able to control if SMS/emails are sent on top of push notifications. Or to be able to set up regular reminders for non-actioned notifications.
- Opportunity for **two-way communication** (e.g. live chat with an agent, scheduling of a call back from a call centre agent, or even live chat with a smart AI chatbot)
- Easy **access to secure information** (e.g. IRD number, kiwisaver balance)
- **Identity verification** (e.g. when making an application with the bank)
- Ability to use the app **data free**. There was a suggestion that the government could work with mobile service providers to make using the app possible even when people had run out of data.



"I would like to think there would be a web portal also, older people often find mobile devices tricky to use compared to something with a keyboard and mouse."

"Compatibility with laptop - I think cross functionality is important if it is going to send me to somewhere else to download letters etc If I am going to download letters for future reference I want them on my laptop as easier to file and use for future purposes on a bigger screen. "

"A simple way to "pin" messages at the top of the list, and being able to flag messages as "I need to do something about this" would be pretty fundamental"

"Calendar that had your important dates. Tax returns filed by, rego's due etc"