

NSW

COVIDSafe app: Privacy concerns misplaced says developer

One of Australia's biggest app developers has defended the government's COVIDSafe app, saying anyone with a smartphone has far bigger worries when it comes to data security.

Gillian McNally, The Daily Telegraph

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People worrying about downloading the COVIDSafe app have already likely traded away far more data on Facebook and Google, says one of Australia's biggest app developers.

Anushka Bandara, co-founder of Elegant Media, said most people have apps on their phones that are sourcing, gathering and sending far more detailed and extensive information about them to unknown sources, things the government's new tracing app doesn't do.

"I can't believe Barnaby Joyce is banging on about why he won't be downloading and using COVIDSafe," Mr Bandara said.

"Google and Facebook track your movements, who you are with and where you have gone.

"They even track what sites you are visiting, which businesses you are shopping from and which medical centre you've visited.

"These apps are far more powerful and intrusive than COVIDSafe. COVIDSafe gathers very little information about you at all.

"If you don't want to share your information with anybody, throw your smartphone away and buy a Nokia 1100."



📷 The COVIDSafe app has been downloaded heavily since its release yesterday.



📷 Anushka Bandara co-founder of Elegant Media

While more than two million Australians have downloaded the COVIDSafe contact tracing app since its launch this week, many remain unconvinced by its safety and privacy protection.

The smartphone app does not use geolocation, but tracks people's Bluetooth connections. If they have come into contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case, health authorities inform the phone user so they can isolate before spreading the virus. It aims to supplement the work of about 7000 healthcare workers doing contact tracing nationally.

Aside from issues around the app's basic effectiveness especially on iPhones, concerns about how the government will use the data remain the biggest worry for many.

Some critics say authorities should have waited until legislation could be taken to federal parliament in May, making misuse of the data collected via the app a jailable offence.



Co-Founder and CO-CEO of Atlassian, Mike Cannon-Brookes, has also come out in support of the app and urged tech companies to help the government iron out any glitches.

Others want the source code to provide more transparency on its security. The health department expects to publish the code within a fortnight once the Australian Cyber Security Centre gives it the OK.

Mr Bandara, who has studied the app, and whose company builds apps for government departments including Defence, as well as start-ups and businesses, said while he understood concerns about giving data to government, much of the debate was based on misinformation.

The government had made a determination that data won't be shared with any other organisation, law enforcement or departments like Centrelink.

Nor was there geo-location, [despite hoax texts circulating this week](#) telling users they had breached social isolation measures by travelling 20km from home.

“All it does is inform you whether you have come into contact with someone who has COVID-19, and if so, ensures you are informed so you can see a doctor or stay home in quarantine,” he said.

“It doesn't track any data, and I feel when it comes to privacy concerns, health and wellbeing are more important,” he said.

“Using COVIDSafe is important for individual health and the welfare of the whole country. I encourage people to use it. It is an app for good.”