

Tech platforms in joint effort to stem virus misinformation

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The major US internet services are working jointly to stem misinformation about the coronavirus pandemic

The large US internet platforms have unveiled a joint effort to root out misinformation about the coronavirus pandemic, while Facebook

announced a \$100 million program to aid small firms impacted by the crisis.

A joint statement was issued late Monday by Facebook, Google, Twitter, Microsoft and Reddit along with Google-owned YouTube and Microsoft-owned LinkedIn.

"We are working closely together on COVID-19 response efforts," the joint statement said.

"We're helping millions of people stay connected while also jointly combating fraud and misinformation about the virus, elevating authoritative content on our platforms, and sharing critical updates in coordination with government healthcare agencies around the world.

"We invite other companies to join us as we work to keep our communities healthy and safe."

Separately Tuesday, Facebook announced it was offering \$100 million to help small businesses in 30 countries cope with the economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic.

The social networking giant said it will be giving cash grants and ad credits to as many as 30,000 enterprises.

"We've listened to small businesses to understand how we can best help them," chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg said on her Facebook page.

"We've heard loud and clear that financial support could enable them to keep the lights on and pay people who can't come to work."

In a related move, Facebook agreed to offer \$1 million to its partners in

the International Fact-Checking Network working on the COVID-19 related misinformation with a budget of \$1 million.

The money will consist of "flash grants" of up to \$50,000, according to the Poynter Institute, which has been coordinating the #CoronaVirusFacts Alliance in at least 45 countries.

Facebook noted that it had already taken steps to limit misinformation and harmful content about the pandemic, including banning ads intended to create panic or promote unproven cures.

The move comes amid an unprecedented global response to the pandemic as well as increased claims that the virus itself is a hoax.

Several countries have implemented effective lockdown measures to contain the outbreak, a move followed by some US cities and states.

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