



Aide-Memoire

MEETING WITH THE COVID-19 INDEPENDENT CONTINUOUS, REVIEW IMPROVEMENT AND ADVICE GROUP

To	Hon Chris Hipkins	Report No	DPMC-2021/22/911
From	Amber Bill	Date	23/11/2021

Purpose

1. You are meeting with the COVID-19 Independent Continuous Review, Improvement and Advice Group (the Group) on Wednesday 24 November at 3.30pm.
2. This aide memoire provides you with a brief cover note for the attached draft letter from the Group which they would like to discuss with you. The draft letter sets out what the Group sees are the key priorities as we shift to the *COVID-19 Protection Framework* (the Framework).
3. They would also welcome discussion in terms of any priority areas of focus for them which may arise from the draft letter.

Background and context

4. Since its establishment in March 2021, the Group have provided you with continuous improvement advice on New Zealand's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. More recently in September this year the Group provided you with advice based on their observations of the current Delta outbreak and the impact of these on the *Reconnecting New Zealanders* programme.
5. Subsequent to the delivery of that advice, the Group has continued to focus on the *Reconnecting New Zealanders* programme in its broader context of both movement within New Zealand and across the international border, and in particular what is needed for the future as we move toward the implementation of the Framework.

What are the key priorities from the Group's perspective?

6. The Group's draft letter sets out the following areas where they see urgent progress is needed for a successful transition to the Framework.
 - a. Ensuring there is a pathway from Red to Orange (and Green) through resourced and deployable testing, tracing, isolation and quarantine with a clear chain of command.

ATTACHMENT A

Letter from Sir Brian Roche to Minister Hipkins: Key priorities as we shift to the COVID-19 Protection Framework

Refer to attached draft letter for discussion

We note that there was a considerable delay from the Minister for COVID-19 Response receiving the draft letter from Sir Brian Roche, Chair, in November, to it being finalised and signed in May. In late November 2021, the Group felt that the letter could be finalised early in the New Year, noting that regardless, the Minister had the opportunity to see the draft before Christmas. When the Group reconvened in the New Year, the focus was on providing real-time advice on Omicron given the increasing community cases. In May, on reviewing the letter, the Chair confirmed that no changes were needed and so it was finally signed then as a matter of administrative completeness.

Proactively Released

23 November 2021

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response
Parliament Building
WELLINGTON

Dear Minister Hipkins

Key priorities as we shift to the COVID-19 Protection Framework

We are rapidly moving toward the national implementation of the COVID-19 Protection Framework (the Framework). The virus is now spreading and will continue to spread across the country exposing previously "sheltered" communities and individuals to the virus. That will put pressure on an already stretched system plus demand performance from elements of the system who haven't been directly involved in the response to date. This presents risks which cannot be avoided but arguably can be mitigated.

There is much to do. Prioritisation and focus now are urgent and critical. We have identified what, in our view, are the key priorities for urgent action to best prepare for the shift to the Framework in the time that we have, recognising that these priorities cut across multiple activities.

1 Ensuring there is a pathway from red to orange (and green)

The design of the Framework demonstrates intent to shift from the Red level down to Orange and on to the Green level. To do this, it is critical to ensure the retention and deployment of the core public health measures. Testing, tracing, isolation and quarantine remain the core of the response and have to be resourced and deployable as needed with a clear chain of command. If the intention is to 'pull out the stops' to get out of the Red level as soon as possible, this is quite different from 'riding out the storm'. As such, when an area is at the Red level there should be increased core response activity alongside increased restrictions.

2 Community empowerment - "everyone should have a plan"

We have seen the strain placed upon the capacity and capability of services to care for those with COVID-19 in the home. This is not an easy problem to solve. We acknowledge that this is a significant issue, and therefore individuals, communities and whānau need to be ready. Resources must be in the right place to support people, so they know what they need to do and are enabled to do it. Communities, individuals and whānau need to be enabled and empowered to take some form of control over their own preparations for, protection from and response to the virus coming into their communities. Building a culture of shared individual responsibility is fundamental to this, and that includes resourcing communities and their providers.

3 Advice from Māori experts and health professionals and support of Māori health response (at health, iwi, hapū, whānau level)

Māori represent a disproportionately high percentage of cases in the current outbreak. With lower vaccination rates for Māori, further disproportionate impacts are anticipated with the shift to the Framework. An urgent focus on this is crucial and non-negotiable. Advice from Māori health experts and support for the Māori health response are fundamental to mitigating harm and meeting

obligations of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Innovative, community-led ways to maximise protection should be sought and encouraged.

Furthermore, there are other vulnerable groups, particularly the economically and socially disadvantaged, who will also require support. It is also important to not lose sight of the impact on the Pacific community. Pacific represented the highest number of cases at the outset of the current outbreak (and had the highest number of cases in the August 2020 outbreak). They remain strongly represented in hospitalisations with Pacific accounting for 39 percent of all hospitalised cases to date.

4 The system would benefit from the involvement of business and community groups

Our system is stretched with a fatigued workforce that is focussed in the moment and does not have the space for strategic anticipation. There is a wealth of knowledge, experience and willingness among our business and community groups, who will bring a fresh perspective and resources to a fatigued team. Two good examples of that were the Border Sprint work and the (at least temporary) deployment of Rapid Antigen Testing. We recommend the establishment of a taskforce to work with public sector entities to help stand up the systems needed to support the response.

5 Proactive surveillance testing will be critical to early detection

It is important there are a broad range of tools available within the testing framework. There is a lot that we can learn from overseas experience and this is a fast moving field – we need to be more open to trying things out. How different tools are best used within different contexts needs to be understood in terms of how they benefit the overall strategic goals (such as minimising deaths and long-COVID and limited economic damage).

6 The role of digital technology in supporting operations is fundamental

The role of digital technology must not be understated. The ability for society to function as seamlessly and efficiently as possible within the parameters of the Framework is underpinned by our digital solutions, particularly in how they support the public health response. There is a wealth of overseas lessons and existing technology that can be leveraged, and we urge that a special group be set up to help integrate digital solutions into the public health response.

We have set out in this letter what we view are the key priorities for urgent action to best prepare for the shift to the Framework. Aligned with the above areas is the issue of the capacity and capability of services to care for those with COVID-19 in the home (across the four domains of cultural, clinical, welfare and public health).

Over the coming weeks we face a transformational shift in our society as we move into the new paradigm of minimisation of and protection from COVID-19. The logistics of this shift should not be underestimated, and we suggest that capability is brought in from outside of the current system. The Delta variant does not respect timeframes and we are racing against a ticking clock. As such, we must be clear on the priorities, be able to strategically anticipate, and have clear performance, quality and monitoring systems in place. These are fundamental to ensure the system and New Zealanders are as ready as we can be in the time that we have for the increasing challenges we will face together.

Yours sincerely



Sir Brian Roche

On behalf of the COVID-19 Independent Continuous Review, Improvement and Advice Group