



Proactive Release

The following documents have been proactively released by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), on behalf of Minister of Health, Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall:

COVID-19 Briefings November 2022

The following documents have been included in this release:

Title of paper: 11112022 COVID-19 Consultation Practices and Requirements

Title of paper: 14112022 DPMC COVID-19 Transition - Strategy and Policy Coordination

Title of paper: 23112022 Government Appointments - COVID-19 Response and Associate Minister of Health

Title of paper: 25112022 Vote Prime Minister and Cabinet: COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund Quarter 1 report

Title of paper: 30112022 Future of the Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group

Title of paper: 30112022 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet: Annual Review Pre-Hearing Questionnaire 2021 / 22 - COVID-19 Response portfolio

Some parts of this information release would not be appropriate to release and, if requested, would be withheld under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Where this is the case, the relevant section of the Act that would apply has been identified. Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

Key to redaction codes:

- Section 9(2)(a), to protect the privacy of individuals; and
- Section 9(2)(f)(iv), to maintain the confidentiality of advice tendered by or to Ministers and officials.



Coversheet

Briefing: Future of the Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group

Date:	30/11/2022	Report No:	DPMC-2022/23-628
		Security Level:	IN CONFIDENCE
		Priority level:	Normal

	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall Minister for COVID-19 Response	agree to recs	7/12/2022
	sign letters	15/12/2022

Name	Position	Telephone		1 st Contact
Alice Hume	Head of Strategy & Policy COVID-19	+64 4 912 0591	s9(2)(a)	✓
Jack Manning	Policy Advisor	N/A		

Minister's Office

Status:

Signed

Withdrawn

Comment for agency

Attachments: Yes/No

Briefing

Future of the Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group

To: Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall
Minister for COVID-19 Response

Date	30/11/2022	Security Level	IN CONFIDENCE
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Purpose

1. This briefing seeks your decision on the future of the Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group.

Recommendations


We recommend you:

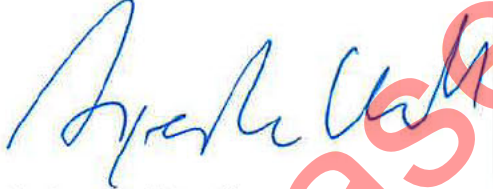
1. **note** that the current term of the Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group (SPHAG) is due to expire on 30 December 2022 unless otherwise extended.
2. **agree** that the SPHAG will be disbanded at the conclusion of their current Terms of Reference on 30 December 2022
3. **note** the SPHAG are scheduled to hold their final meeting on 14 December 2022.
4. **sign** the attached letters to thank members for their service during their tenures and send to members following their final meeting on 14 December 2022.
5. **note** that officials will work with your office to send the thank you letters following SPHAG's final meeting.
6. **note** that you could explore reconstituting a similar group or transitioning the SPHAG's functions into an existing expert advisory group with Manatū Hauora officials in the new year.

YES / NO

7. **agree** to proactively release this report, subject to any appropriate withholding of information that would be justified under the Official Information Act 1982.

YES / NO


Alice Hume
Head of Strategy & Policy
COVID-19
...../...../.....


Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall
Minister for COVID-19 Response
4, 12, 22
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Background

2. The Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group (SPHAG) was established in March 2021 to provide independent advice to the Minister for COVID-19 Response. The advice sought from this group has related to specific areas of the response where improvements could be made, and ensuring our ongoing response was informed by the best available expert advice and scientific evidence.
3. On 27 July 2022, the Cabinet Appointment and Honours (APH) Committee noted your intention to extend SPHAG for a period of six months [APH-22-MIN-0139]. The current membership includes Professor Nikki Turner as Chair, as well as Dr Maia Brewerton, Dr Ella Iosua, Professor David Murdoch, Professor Patricia Priest and Associate Professor Matire Harwood.
4. The current term of the SPHAG is due to expire on 30 December 2022. We had previously flagged the upcoming expiry of SPHAG's membership in discussions with your Office in October.
5. In total, the SPHAG has provided ten commissioned pieces of advice, including most recently their advice on New Zealand's vaccination priorities ^{s9(2)(f)(iv)} [REDACTED]. All but two of the SPHAG's advice notes have been proactively released. The final two pieces of advice will be proactively released in due course.

We recommend that you do not extend SPHAG beyond its current term

6. The global and domestic context in which the COVID-19 response is operating has changed significantly since the inception of the SPHAG. We do not consider that, from an All-Of-Government perspective there is a clear and ongoing need for a COVID-19 specific strategic advisory group to continue.
7. At your meeting with the SPHAG on 2 November 2022, you indicated the most recently commissioned advice from the group would be the final advice required from them. The SPHAG provided this advice to your Office on 18 November 2022, and no further commission to the SPHAG has been made.
8. Given your indication that the group's most recent advice was likely their last commission, we have not canvassed member interest to continue their tenure. At this stage, it is likely too late to progress an extension ahead of the expiry date, as this would require an APH process.
9. For these reasons, we recommend that you do not extend the SPHAG beyond its current term.

It may be possible to utilise existing health expert groups for future advice on the COVID-19 response

10. The all-of-government policy lead for advice on COVID-19 will transition to Manatū Hauora by the end of March 2023. Following this transfer of function DPMC will have no capacity to support the SPHAG secretariat function.
11. If you wish to retain ongoing strategic public health advice in relation to the COVID-19 response, the functions of the SPHAG could be incorporated into an existing reference group or reconstituted as a new advisory group within Manatū Hauora, given the wide range of existing health advisory and expert groups.

Next steps

- 12. The SPHAG is scheduled to have a further meeting, on 14 December 2022.
- 13. Subject to your agreement to disband the SPHAG, officials will work with your office to ensure that the members and Chair of the group receive a formal thank you for their service, after their final meeting. Draft copies of these thank you letters are provided in Attachment A.
- 14. If you are interested in reconstituting a similar group or transitioning the SPHAG's functions into an existing group, we suggest you explore this in the new year in consultation with officials from Manatū Hauora.

Attachments:	Title	Security classification
Attachment A:	Letter pack: Acknowledgement of service to the Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group Withheld in full under section 9(2)(a) of the Act	In Confidence

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