



Government Digital Services briefing

Hon Kris Faafoi
Minister for Government Digital Services

Copy to: Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister

Title: Update on the investigation of CovidCard to improve contact tracing

Date: 30 June 2020

Key issues

Progress in the assessment of the CovidCard to improve contact tracing has been made but further work is required on the proof of concept.

The Government Chief Digital Officer is leading the completion of the proof of concept work, in consultation with the Ministry of Health (MoH), and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE). The aim is to complete this work by late July 2020.

In parallel, MBIE will lead the development of design options for implementing CovidCard.

The CovidCard could provide opportunities to improve contact tracing but at this stage it is still an unproven high-cost technology with uncertain outcomes.

Action sought

Note the contents of this briefing

Timeframe

At your convenience

Contact for telephone discussions (if required)

Name	Position	Direct phone line	After hours phone	Suggested 1 st contact
Michael Woodside	Director, Policy	9(2)(a)	9(2)(a)	✓
Nigel Prince	GCDO COVID19 Response Lead	9(2)(a)		

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Cohesion reference [4UAZY7VS6QRJ-168030080-814](#)

Ministerial database reference GDS202000192

Purpose

1. This briefing provides an update on work to investigate the feasibility of using the CovidCard to enhance contact tracing.

Background

2. New Zealand is pursuing an elimination strategy for COVID-19 and we have made remarkable progress. However, this is against the background of a growing global pandemic with over 150,000 new cases per day. Where new cases are discovered through testing, contact tracing is critical to identifying contacts of a person infected with COVID-19.
3. On 20 April 2020, Cabinet noted that officials are assessing the use of a Bluetooth-enabled card to support contact tracing and will report back to the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Justice, and the Minister for Government Digital Services [CAB-20-MIN-0175]. On 13 May 2020, the Social Wellbeing Committee noted that a report-back to Cabinet with recommendations in relation to the consumer app Bluetooth assessment, and the Bluetooth-enabled card proof of concept, was planned for June 2020 [SWC-20-MIN-0043]. Progress in the assessment and proof of concept has been made but further work is required.

The Public Private Partnership group has produced a report recommending deployment of the CovidCard

4. As directed by Cabinet, the Government Chief Digital Officer (GCDO) has worked with the Public Private Partnership group (PPP) to investigate a Bluetooth-enabled CovidCard to support contact tracing. The PPP has:
 - conducted a small-scale test of a prototype CovidCard in the Nelson Hospital that indicated it could work at a technical level, but further testing is required to determine if the CovidCard is a feasible solution; and
 - produced a report that recommends the government consider deploying the CovidCard nationwide in advance of relaxing border settings. Their report states the CovidCard would take six months to deploy from a decision to do so, at a cost of \$98.5 million in the first year and \$64 million in the second year.

We are further assessing the feasibility and value of the CovidCard

5. The first phase of further work involves the GCDO leading the completion of the proof of concept, which we aim to complete by late July. This involves commissioning Defence Technology Agency (DTA) to verify technical feasibility (including a possible further larger scale closed trial in a Defence Force setting), and undertaking an independent assessment of the potential contribution of CovidCard to managing the R value. The GCDO will consult with the Ministry of Health (MoH), and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE).
6. In parallel, MBIE will lead the development of design options for implementing CovidCard. This will include policy settings (such as whether wearing a CovidCard should be mandatory, and in which settings), any legislative changes, and any governance arrangements that would be required. It will also include operational

deployment options and costing. MBIE will consult with MoH, the Ministry of Justice and the GCDO.

7. The second phase, led by MBIE, will involve advice on whether to proceed with CovidCard and how to implement it. If Ministers decide to proceed with CovidCard, MBIE will lead implementation.

The CovidCard presents opportunities and risks

8. The CovidCard could provide an opportunity to complement manual tracing to make contact tracing faster and more accurate, which would support efforts to manage COVID-19 without having to go into lockdown. The CovidCard would automatically record close contacts without requiring people to know each other or remember any information about who they have been near. Importantly, it could be used by people that do not have smartphones and/or do not use apps.
9. However, at this stage the CovidCard is still an unproven high-cost technology, with a moderate to high degree of uncertainty around outcomes and value to the end to end contact tracing process. Risks for the CovidCard include the following:
 - The CovidCard has a long implementation time, so it could not be deployed for any outbreaks in the near future;
 - A large-scale distribution effort would be needed to ensure New Zealanders can access the card;
 - It is uncertain whether New Zealanders would wear the CovidCard as intended (PPP report recommended a lanyard for the CovidCard to be most effective), particularly if people perceive the threat of COVID-19 as low;
 - The CovidCard and associated systems would need to be integrated into existing contact tracing systems, including processing false positives (which are currently at about 10 percent);
 - The Government would likely have to bear the costs associated with producing and distributing the card to encourage high uptake in the general population – requiring the user to bear even a proportion of these costs would likely be a major disincentive to it being used; and
 - The cards are designed to last 12 months and, once distributed, cannot be updated to enhance the card or fix faults, unlike a mobile application.

Next steps

10. The indicative timeframes for completion of proof of concept work is late July 2020. We will update on progress with this and provide further advice on other next steps, including reporting back to Cabinet, at a later date.

Recommendations

11. We recommend that you:
- a) **note** that progress in the assessment of the CovidCard to improve contact tracing been made but further work is required on the proof of concept;
 - b) **note** the Government Chief Digital Officer is leading the completion of the proof of concept work and aims to complete this by late July 2020;
 - c) **note** that the Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment will lead the development of design options for implementing CovidCard; and
 - d) **note** that the CovidCard could provide opportunities to improve contact tracing but it is still an unproven high-cost technology with uncertain outcomes.



Michael Woodside
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