

16 August 2021

Matthew Hooton

By email: fyi-request-16118-7a5bf2e7@requests.fyi.org.nz

Ref: H202108639

Tēnā koe Matthew

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) on 19 July 2021 for:

“How many ICU beds there were in New Zealand on 1 January 2020, how many there were on 1 July 2021, and what steps the Ministry took to help achieve the improvement in these numbers to make New Zealand able to cater for more people requiring ICU care.”

Please note that the Ministry does not keep a regular count of ICU beds under normal circumstances. ICU bed capacity in New Zealand changes daily, depending on local need, planning, and staffing. While the DHBs are not currently required to report this data, it can be activated if needed as part of any increase in our COVID-19 response.

The Ministry can, however, provide an estimate of ICU beds available as of 29 April 2020, as at this time it began receiving daily updates from the District Health Boards (DHBs) on the number of ICU beds in each region. On 29 April 2020, there were 358 ICU-capable beds across the DHBs. ICU-capable beds are defined as beds in DHB or private hospitals, which could be staffed, and which could be fitted with a ventilator if required. This manual daily reporting ended in October 2020 as the COVID-19 situation was deemed relatively stable and daily reporting was no longer required.

The Ministry has also gathered information on ICU and high dependency bed capacity relating to infrastructure planning. Information was gathered from DHBs and the Australian and New Zealand ICU Society. From this information, in February 2021 it was estimated there were 284 ICU and high dependency beds in public hospitals. It is important to note that these numbers are not directly comparable with the information collected during the COVID-19 period, as they were collected for different purposes and the definitions differ.

During 2020, the Ministry undertook additional planning to support surge ICU capacity. This planning found that additional ICU capacity could be brought online if necessary. This capacity includes resourcing other beds to be ICU-capable and using beds in private hospitals. This would lift overall ICU-capable bed capacity to more than 550 beds. Options for surge planning remain in place with continued sector engagement. If there is ever an increase in need for ICU beds, such as an outbreak of the COVID-19 Delta variant, DHBs can adjust the configuration of their hospital units and add more ICU-capable beds as needed.

The Ministry is committed to improving asset management capability. Since 2018, the Ministry has invested around \$4.2 billion in health infrastructure. You can find more information about the Ministry's approach to improving DHB assets here: www.health.govt.nz/our-work/health-infrastructure-unit/asset-management-and-analysis.

I trust this information fulfils your request. Under section 28(3) of the Act you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by calling 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Ministry website at: www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests.

Nāku noa, nā



Robyn Shearer
Deputy Chief Executive
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