

Aide-Mémoire

Cabinet Papers: *Update on the COVID-19 Immunisation Strategy and Programme, COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy: Update on Vaccine Purchasing and Support for Pacific and Global Vaccine Access and Roll-out*

Date due to MO:	4 December 2020	Action required by:	N/A
Security level:	IN CONFIDENCE	Health Report number:	20202009
To:	Hon Andrew Little, Minister of Health		
Copy to	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister for COVID-19 Response Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall, Associate Minister of Health		

Contact for telephone discussion

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Minister's office to complete:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Approved | <input type="checkbox"/> Decline | <input type="checkbox"/> Noted |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Needs change | <input type="checkbox"/> Seen | <input type="checkbox"/> Overtaken by events |
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Comment:

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Cabinet Papers: *Update on the COVID-19 Immunisation Strategy and Programme, COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy: Update on Vaccine Purchasing and Support for Pacific and Global Vaccine Access and Roll-out*

Date: 4 December 2020

To: Hon Andrew Little, Minister of Health

Cc: Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister for COVID-19 Response
Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall, Associate Minister of Health

Security level: IN CONFIDENCE

Health Report number: 20202009

Details of Meeting 7 December 2020

Cabinet Committee Cabinet

Purpose of Proposal This note provides you with information and advice in advance of Cabinet's consideration of three Cabinet Papers on the COVID-19 response:

- *Update on the COVID-19 Immunisation Strategy and Programme ("Immunisation Strategy paper")*, your paper together with Minister for COVID-19 Recovery and the Associate Minister of Health.
- *COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy: Update on Vaccine Purchasing ("Vaccine Strategy paper")*, brought by the Minister of Research, Science and Innovation, Minister for COVID-19 Recovery, Minister of Health, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.
- *Support for Pacific and Global Vaccine Access and Roll-out ("Pacific Access paper")*, from the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The **Immunisation Strategy paper** outlines progress on New Zealand's strategy for COVID-19 immunisation and gives assurance that we can successfully deliver the largest immunisation programme in New Zealand to date, learning from previous immunisation experience. It also provides anticipated delivery schedules and information about a Sequencing Framework for use if there are not enough vaccine doses available to vaccinate everyone who wants it immediately. This is likely to be the case during the early phases of delivery.

The paper seeks Cabinet agreement to a set of principles to guide our approach to COVID-19 immunisation. It also seeks agreement in principle to a Sequencing Framework which will be a living document, updated as new evidence and information comes to hand.

Updated modelling estimates COVID-19 Immunisation Programme costs of \$423.28 million to December 2021, with \$66.3 million already drawn

down from *the Minimising the Health Impacts of COVID-19 – Tagged Operating Contingency*. The Vaccine Strategy paper seeks to appropriate the outstanding \$357 million.

The **Vaccine Strategy paper** provides an update on the COVID-19 vaccine purchasing approach, current purchasing, and projected expenditure. In August 2020, Cabinet established a \$600 million contingency to cover initial costs of vaccine purchases and the immunisation programme [CAB-20-MIN-0382 refers]. Cost estimates have been revised and Cabinet is now being asked to increase the existing tagged contingency by \$450 million for vaccine purchasing and to appropriate an additional \$357 million to support the Immunisation Programme.

The **Pacific Access paper** seeks approval for a multi-year funding envelope of up to \$75 million to support Pacific and other developing countries to access and roll-out COVID-19 vaccines. This amount will be reprioritised within Vote Official Development Assistance.

These papers are being considered together because they are linked – the Vaccine Strategy paper is about ensuring we can purchase the right vaccines and the Immunisation Strategy paper is about ensuring we can successfully deliver any safe and effective vaccines we purchase. Both are essential to our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Pacific Access paper seeks to put in place mechanisms to support Pacific countries to access and distribute COVID-19 vaccines.

Talking points

Introduction: Overview of the three papers

- This Government is committed to both the health response to COVID-19 and the economic recovery from its impacts.
- The purchase and distribution of COVID 19 vaccines in New Zealand and the Pacific is a key part of achieving these aims.
- A vaccine could mean that we can start moving towards a future where COVID-19 is a managed disease that our health and economic systems can accommodate.
- A tagged contingency of \$600m was established in August 2020 to fund the initial purchases of vaccines and consumables required for the Immunisation Programme. At that time, it was noted that total costs would eventually be higher than this.
- I support the recommendations in these three papers. Together, they represent our best efforts to understand, quantify and respond appropriately to the variety of risks and benefits associated with accessing a safe, effective vaccine for COVID-19 as soon as possible.

The Immunisation Strategy Paper

- The Immunisation Strategy paper outlines progress on our strategy and COVID-19 Immunisation Programme and gives

assurance that the government can successfully deliver the largest immunisation programme in New Zealand, learning from previous immunisation experience.

- Preparations are underway so that the COVID-19 Immunisation Programme can be ready to be implemented from March 2021.
- The COVID-19 Immunisation Strategy is underpinned by Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the Elimination Strategy principles of equity and wellbeing.
- Robust governance structures are in place and include external advisory groups, with strong Māori and Pacific provider representation, as well as senior leadership groups within the Ministry of Health.
- The COVID-19 immunisation programme is guided by the following principles:
 - the COVID-19 vaccines we deliver will be free and safe
 - we will sequence the roll-out as COVID-19 vaccines become available
 - the sequencing of access must be needs based
 - we will continue to have strong border settings and roll-out strategy until we are confident that the New Zealand population is sufficiently protected.
- At present there are no vaccines approved for use in New Zealand against COVID-19. All those we are purchasing are still in development and although promising, still need to meet Medsafe's requirements for safety and effectiveness before they will be used in our COVID-19 Immunisation Programme.
- The approval process for a new medicine (including vaccines) includes an assessment of a dossier of data covering non-clinical, clinical and manufacturing studies. This independent regulatory process provides surety and transparency.
- Medsafe is working to make the regulatory process as efficient as possible. Australia is operating a similar process and is also expecting that COVID-19 immunisation could potentially begin from March 2021.
- Sequencing Framework (for which agreement is being sought in principle) to use any vaccine to:
 - respond to the key risks based on the transmission or epidemiological scenario
 - promote equitable outcomes by protecting Māori, Pacific peoples, older people, disabled people and other population groups at particular risk of the negative health impacts of COVID-19

- maximise value, by getting the most from the resources available
 - encouraging uptake in order to achieve population immunity.
- The COVID-19 Immunisation Programme is comprehensive and includes:
 - a communications and engagement strategy
 - distribution, inventory management and immunisation scheduling
 - post-market monitoring of uptake to enable the Ministry of Health to adapt its approach as it learns more.
- The Ministry of Health has learnt from previous immunisation experiences and is making a variety of changes and improvements to ensure the COVID-19 Immunisation Programme is a success.
- Already, significant changes to the immunisation system are being implemented to enable the successful delivery of the COVID-19 Immunisation Programme, such as the development of:
 - an inventory management system for COVID-19 vaccines to ensure the Ministry of Health has accurate information about where vaccines are located, and
 - the National Immunisation Solution that will give us accurate, real-time information about who has received the vaccine.
- The COVID-19 Immunisation Programme will uphold and honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi in a variety of ways, including through:
 - robust governance that includes external advisory groups with strong Māori and Pacific provider representation as well as senior leadership groups within the Ministry of Health
 - partnering with Māori communities and organisations including Māori health providers
 - leveraging off the recent success of the Updated COVID-19 Māori Health Response Plan.
- The Ministry of Health has work underway to ensure that service design responds to the needs of all New Zealanders, including groups that the system has historically failed.
- There is also work underway to identify trusted spokespeople to ensure the messages about the benefits of receiving a COVID-19 vaccine are well understood by the community.
- We are also using the COVID-19 Immunisation Programme as an opportunity to create a legacy and make meaningful

improvements to the immunisation system, which will have long-term public health benefits.

- We may need to sequence access to the vaccine if we do not have sufficient courses to make it available to everyone immediately.
- This paper proposes a sequencing approach, based on relative risks of different cohorts in different transmission scenarios, that will ensure that the right people are vaccinated at the right time with the right vaccine.
- The Sequencing Framework will be a living document that will be updated as information and evidence evolves. It identifies characteristics that, depending on the transmission scenario, could be used to prioritise different groups:
 - in a low or no transmission scenario, the objective is to prevent transmission so groups like the border workforce would likely be among the first to be immunised.
 - in a controlled outbreak, the objective is to reduce transmission and protect people closely connected to the outbreak, so close contacts would be among the first to be immunised.
 - in a scenario where we have widespread transmission, the objective is to protect those most vulnerable to negative health outcomes, so groups such as older people would be among the first immunised.
- Decisions on which vaccines will be used will be made against a Decision to Use Framework that is to be developed. I will report back on this work early next year.
- It is important to note New Zealand will be supporting vaccine access for the Pacific, as discussed in Minister Mahuta's accompanying paper.
- The Ministry of Health will work with Pacific governments on their immunisation planning, but Pacific governments will make final decisions.
- Decisions on the funding for the Immunisation Programme are considered through the Vaccine Strategy paper. My paper notes that the costs of the COVID-19 Immunisation Programme to 31 December 2021 are expected to be \$423.280 million, of which \$66.3 million has been drawn down already.
- Stakeholder engagement on the COVID-19 Immunisation Programme is already underway and, subject to your agreement, will intensify once Cabinet has considered my proposals.

- I have asked officials to provide further advice on eligibility, the approach to any co-payments and other related matters in early 2021.

Talking points to support papers led by other Ministers

The Vaccine Strategy Paper

(Brought by the Minister of Research, Science and Innovation, Minister for COVID-19 Recovery, Minister of Health, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.)

- COVID-19 vaccine purchasing and the Immunisation Programme are funded through a common tagged contingency set up in August 2020.
- This contingency was intended to cover advance purchases of vaccines and preparing for immunisation over the election and government formation period.
- Since August, the Government has further developed its portfolio approach and purchasing pathways, including entering into Advance Purchasing Agreements with vaccine developers.
- There has also been significant work to more fully understand the likely nature and scale of any COVID-19 Immunisation Programme, which will likely be the largest immunisation campaign ever undertaken. Costs have become clearer and we need to make new decisions.
- The Minister of Finance has agreed to the establishment of a new multi-category appropriation (MCA) called "*Implementing the COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy*". The Vaccine Strategy paper seeks Cabinet agreement to:
 - increase the tagged contingency by \$450 million for vaccine purchasing, and
 - appropriate \$357 million for the Immunisation Programme into the new MCA.

Pacific Access paper

(Brought by the Minister of Foreign Affairs)

- Minister Mahuta's paper seeks agreement to reprioritise \$75 million of existing funding within Vote Overseas Development Assistance to support Pacific vaccine access and immunisation efforts, with a primary focus on Polynesia and the Realm.
- The paper seeks Cabinet agreement to the Ministry of Health conducting an assessment on any New Zealand-sourced vaccines to ensure they are suitable for use in the Pacific.
- Preliminary assessment of suitability for the Pacific (such as amenable storage conditions) has been a factor in decisions on

quantities of the different vaccine candidates for advance purchase.

- Further assessment, undertaken in discussion with Pacific countries, the World Health Organisation and others, will occur as more detailed information becomes available. This further assessment will cover such matters as regulation, safe delivery, monitoring and adverse event surveillance for New Zealand-supplied vaccine, and how suppliers will be indemnified, as well as risk assessment for immunisation programmes.
- I support the recommendations in this paper, as they will ensure we can support a safe, stable and resilient Pacific where our interests and influence are safeguarded.

Ashley Bloomfield
Director-General of Health
Ministry of Health