

# Aide-Mémoire

## Cabinet Papers: Updates on the COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy and Immunisation Strategy and Programme and Support for Pacific Access and Roll-out

<b>Date due to MO:</b>	26 November	<b>Action required by:</b>	N/A
<b>Security level:</b>	IN CONFIDENCE	<b>Health Report number:</b>	20202009
<b>To:</b>	Hon Andrew Little, Minister of Health 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 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> See Minister's Notes | <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn |  |

Comment:

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# Aide-Mémoire

## Update on the COVID-19 Immunisation Strategy and Programme and Support for Pacific Access and Roll-out

**Date:** 26 November 2020

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**To:** Hon Andrew Little, Minister of Health  
Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister for COVID-19 Response  
Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall, Associate Minister of Health

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**Security level:** IN CONFIDENCE      **Health Report number:** 20202009

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**Details of Meeting** 2 December 2020

**Cabinet Committee** Cabinet Business Committee

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

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

The **Vaccine Strategy paper** provides an update on the COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy, current purchasing, and projected expenditure. In August, Cabinet established a \$600 million contingency to cover initial costs of vaccine purchases, therapeutics and the immunisation programme [CAB-20-MIN-0382 refers]. Cost estimates have been revised and Cabinet is now being asked to approve the appropriation of the remaining \$277.85 million of the tagged contingency into a new multi-category appropriation, plus additional new funds of \$450m for vaccine purchasing and \$357m for the Immunisation Programme. This funding will enable us to build our portfolio of vaccines and support delivery of a COVID-19 immunisation programme.

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 information about a draft 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 **Pacific Access paper** seeks approval for a multi-year funding envelope of up to \$75m 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 is about ensuring we can purchase the right vaccines and the Immunisation Strategy and Programme 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 paper seeks to put in place mechanisms to support Pacific countries to access and distribute COVID-19 vaccines.

## Talking points

### *Introduction: Overview*

- This Government is committed to both the health response to COVID-19 and the economic recovery from its wide-reaching impacts. The purchase and distribution of COVID 19 vaccines in New Zealand and the Pacific is a key part of our work to achieve 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.
- This is why Cabinet agreed the COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy in May 2020. The objective of the Vaccine Strategy is to *ensure access for New Zealand to a safe and effective vaccine in order to implement our preferred immunisation strategy at the earliest possible time.*
- A tagged contingency of \$600m was established in August 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.
- These three papers represent the next set of decisions we need to take to implement our agreed approach, including significant financial decisions.

### *The Vaccine Strategy Paper*

- We have been proactive in ensuring that we will be able to access vaccines, even in an environment of global competition. Our current approach is to spread our risk by entering into a range of different agreements to pre-purchase vaccines. This “portfolio approach” was approved by Cabinet in August.
- COVID-19 vaccine purchasing and the Immunisation Programme consumables and administration are funded through a common

tagged contingency set up in August. This contingency was intended to cover advance purchases of vaccines over the election and government formation period.

- Since August we have further developed our portfolio approach and purchasing pathways, including entering into Advance Purchasing Agreements with vaccine developers. We have also done significant work to more fully understand the likely nature and scale of any COVID-19 Immunisation Programme, which will likely be the largest and most complex immunisation campaign ever undertaken here. 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 to appropriate the remaining \$277.85 million of the tagged contingency into the MCA, plus new funds of \$450m for vaccine purchasing and \$357m for the Immunisation Programme.

#### *The Immunisation Strategy Paper*

- The Immunisation Strategy paper outlines progress on our strategy for COVID-19 immunisation and gives assurance that we can successfully deliver the largest immunisation programme in New Zealand, learning from previous immunisation experience.
- A safe and effective vaccine provides the best opportunity to protect individuals from COVID-19. Once enough individuals are immune, the virus will be unable to spread through the community. In this way a vaccine can support both the health and the economic response to COVID-19.
- The COVID-19 Immunisation Strategy is being developed in parallel with vaccine procurement and is evolving rapidly. The COVID-19 Immunisation Programme is supported by strong governance arrangements.
- We have learnt from previous immunisation experience, especially the 2020 Influenza Immunisation Campaign. A National Immunisation Solution is under development that will give us accurate, real-time information about who has received the vaccine.
- The Immunisation Programme will uphold and honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations, through our governance arrangements and strong community partnerships, and by leveraging off the Updated COVID-19 Māori Health Response Plan.

- We may need to sequence access to the vaccine if we do not have sufficient doses to make it available to everyone immediately. An approach is proposed, 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.
- At present there are no approved vaccines for COVID-19. All those we are purchasing are still in development and although promising, may not turn out to be safe and effective. This means that not every vaccine we are purchasing now will be eventually deployed. Decisions on which will be used will be made against a decision-making framework that is to be developed. My paper proposes a report-back on this work early next year.
- We will be supporting vaccine access for the Pacific, and this is 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.
- Implementation timeframes are still uncertain, as this is dependent on when a vaccine is ready for use, but we are ensuring that we are ready for many eventualities. We are actively managing a number of risks, and developing clear and effective communications.
- Financial implications of the Immunisation Programme are considered in the Vaccine Strategy paper.

*Pacific Access paper*

- Minister Mahuta's paper seeks agreement to reprioritise \$75m 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. This will ensure that we can support a safe, stable and resilient Pacific where our interests and influence are safeguarded.
- I recommend that you 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.

**Our advice**

*Background to the three Cabinet papers*

Cabinet agreed the COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy in May 2020 [CAB-20-MIN-0229.01 refers]. The objective of the Vaccine Strategy is to *ensure access for New Zealand to a safe and effective vaccine in order to implement our preferred immunisation strategy at the earliest possible time.*

In August 2020 Cabinet agreed to a purchasing and funding strategy for COVID-19 vaccines [CAB-20-MIN-0382 refers]. The key approach approved was the "portfolio approach" whereby we will seek to purchase vaccines from a range of technology platforms and developers with different delivery timetables in order to maximise the likelihood we will have access to a safe and effective vaccine as early as possible.

At this time Cabinet invited report-backs in November 2020 on expenditure and commitments against the tagged contingency and any new relevant information about likely future expenditure and the development of an immunisation strategy, including a prioritisation framework. The Vaccine and Immunisation Strategy papers being considered at this Committee meeting respond to this report-back.

*Vaccine Strategy Paper (Joint Ministers, being led by Minister Woods)*

We have worked closely with the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment (MBIE) on their preparation of this paper and endorse its contents.

*Immunisation Strategy Paper (Joint Ministers, being led by Minister Little)*

The Ministry of Health led the preparation of this paper and have worked closely with MBIE and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade to ensure alignment between the three papers. on the development of these papers.

*Financial recommendations*

The initial contingency was established to cover only initial purchases, particularly during the election and government formation period.

New funding is being sought for vaccine purchasing now because the remainder of the tagged contingency will not cover deals for vaccines currently being negotiated. The cost of this could be that we have insufficient volumes of vaccines or lack choices about which vaccines to deploy, and this results in it taking longer to safely reach the point at which our other public health controls (eg. border settings) can be adjusted.

In addition, cost estimates have also been adjusted upwards for the Immunisation Programme to December 2021, based on more detailed analysis and modelling. Additional funding for the Immunisation Programme may be required after that, depending on how the current unknowns resolve, for example, around vaccine characteristics which effect implementation such as course length, the length of immunity conferred, and storage requirements.

*Pacific Access Paper (Minister Mahuta is responsible Minister)*

The Ministry of Health provided feedback on Minister Mahuta's paper and we support its recommendations as an appropriate way to address the presenting issues.

We note that 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 Organization and others, will occur as more detailed information becomes available. This further assessment will cover such matters as regulation, monitoring and adverse event surveillance for New Zealand-supplied vaccine, and how suppliers will be indemnified, as well as risk assessment for immunisation programmes.

The Ministry is in regular communication with the six Polynesian Health Corridors countries whose health systems have close ties with New Zealand's health system. These conversations have helped to support the COVID-19 health response, including preparation for vaccines, and will also help inform suitability assessment. This does not imply that it will take longer than suitability assessment for New Zealand – the intention is to be able to offer vaccines equitably to Pacific countries, at similar times to New Zealand communities. However, some particular assurances will be needed for safe delivery to Pacific populations.

Ashley Bloomfield  
Director-General of Health  
**Ministry of Health**

## **Appendix: Cabinet Papers - Background Information and Summaries**

### **COVID 19 Vaccine Strategy: Update on vaccine purchasing**

#### *Background*

In May 2020, Cabinet agreed the COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy [CAB-20-MIN-0229.01 refers]. The objective of the strategy is to ensure access for New Zealand to a safe and effective vaccine, in order to implement our preferred immunisation strategy at the earliest possible time and contribute to a range of health, economic and other outcomes. Vaccines will be in high demand and supply limited.

#### *Purchasing*

Our strategic approach to achieving these goals has been to enter into a range of purchasing agreements for vaccines that are currently under development, through two major pathways: Advance Purchase Agreements direct with manufacturers and participation in the COVAX Facility<sup>1</sup>. We need safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines that can sustain a wide-reaching immunisation programme, and the portfolio approach spreads our risk. All vaccine candidates are still in development and may not turn out to be safe and effective, and there is still uncertainty about the duration of immunity that may be conferred by COVID-19 vaccines.

Negotiations for the vaccine portfolio are expected to be completed in coming months. An additional approximately \$450m is required to purchase the appropriate core portfolio.

The Minister of Finance has agreed a new multi-category appropriation (MCA) be set up, and the paper seeks to appropriate the remaining \$277.85 million of the tagged contingency into the MCA, plus additional new funds of \$450m for vaccine purchasing and \$357m for the Immunisation Programme. The tabled Vaccine Strategy paper provides detailed financial implications.

### **Update on the COVID 19 Immunisation Strategy and Programme**

#### *Purpose*

This paper provides an update on progress on our strategy for COVID-19 immunisation and gives assurance we can successfully deliver the largest immunisation programme in New Zealand to date, learning from previous experience, particularly the 2020 Influenza Immunisation Campaign.

#### *Background*

This Government has two key overarching priorities regarding COVID-19: to continue the health response to keep New Zealanders safe from the virus; and to drive the economic recovery. The COVID-19 Immunisation Strategy will support the health response and the Elimination Strategy by enabling the best use of any approved vaccines, while upholding and honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations and promoting equity. Over time, this could support the economic response to COVID-19 as well. This can be achieved because COVID-19 vaccines will offer individual protection to at-risk individuals initially and, over time, some form of population immunity can be achieved as more people are immunised. Other public health measures will continue to be an important part of New Zealand's approach to managing the risks associated with COVID-19.

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<sup>1</sup> The Facility is a multilateral initiative to ensure fair and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for countries across the world, administered by GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance.



### *Progress on a COVID-19 Immunisation Programme*

Key workstreams include sequencing and defining populations to ensure the right people get access to the right vaccine at the right time; workforce planning; distribution and inventory management; and post-market monitoring. This will help us achieve the purpose of the Immunisation Strategy, which is to make best use of any vaccines. The COVID-19 Immunisation Strategy will honour and uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations through several mechanisms, including governance, community partnerships, and by linking to the COVID-19 Māori Health Response Plan.

A robust information collection and monitoring platform is essential for the safe and effective operation of an immunisation campaign of this scale and scope. The National Immunisation Solution (NIS) is under development as a replacement for the current National Immunisation Register. It will enable us to have accurate real time information about who has received the vaccine. Funding for the NIS has been allocated and work is progressing at pace, with preparations underway in case COVID-19 vaccines arrive earlier than expected. An interim solution will be complete by January 2021 and will remain available for use until a minimum viable product is finalised by March 2021.

### *Sequencing access to a vaccine*

The Immunisation Strategy paper also includes initial advice about the proposed approach to sequencing vaccine allocation. This will be needed if we do not have sufficient doses to make a vaccine available to everyone immediately. The proposed approach will ensure that the right people are vaccinated at the right time with the right vaccine while upholding and honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations. A methodology, principles and criteria are attached, which will support appropriate sequencing in three epidemiological scenarios: low/no transmission, controlled outbreaks and widespread transmission.

### *Access for the Pacific*

We will also ensure that Realm countries (Tokelau, the Cook Islands, and Niue) have access to a vaccine, and will support other Pacific countries (Sāmoa, Tonga and Tuvalu) to roll out successful immunisation programmes.

### *Implementation and risks*

Timeframes are uncertain because of the uncertainties around when safe and effective vaccines will be available. We are managing key main risks around supply chain; public perceptions of the vaccine; workforce; adverse health reactions; and new IT platforms in tight timeframes.

### *Financial implications*

We estimate that the Immunisation Programme will cost \$423.28m to December 2021. The Vaccine Strategy paper discusses the financial considerations including setting out how much of the funding made available initially remains, and how much new funding is required. It is proposed that all funding be appropriated into a new multi-category appropriation called "Implementing the COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy", within Vote Health.

## **Supporting the Pacific and Global Vaccine Access and Roll-Out**

### *Background*

Most Pacific nations have managed the risk of introducing COVID-19 exceptionally well but the strict border controls needed for this approach have inflicted severe economic damage particularly to tourism industries. Resultant unemployment and other social issues are on the rise. New Zealand wants to ensure early access to vaccines, in alignment with New Zealand's timing if possible, with full population coverage. Supporting Pacific access to a COVID-19 vaccine and Pacific immunisation efforts

are key objectives of the Vaccine Strategy. We have already taken steps toward this goal through our purchasing approach but we need to pursue multiple pathways to ensure Pacific access to a safe and effective vaccine. We also want to be able to reassure Pacific nations that they will not fall to the “back of the queue”, and do not need to consider sourcing unproven vaccines in an attempt to ameliorate the massive economic losses that they have incurred as a result of the pandemic.

Thus far we have contributed to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment (AMC), a global multilateral arrangement to pool resources to access a range of vaccine candidates, to support access for developing countries including Pacific nations. We have advocated for the eligibility criteria of the COVAX AMC be expanded to include most Pacific nations, and included the Realm’s population in New Zealand’s population for the purposes of COVAX allocations. We are working with regional agencies and partners through the World Health Organisation-led Joint Incident Management Team (JIMT), and preparing to implement a pandemic support package through the Health Corridors Programme.

#### *Proposals*

We need to be able to be adaptable and responsive as the situation changes. A flexible, multi-year envelope of \$75m is proposed to be reprioritised from Vote Overseas Development Assistance. This will be allocated to several initiatives including to the COVAX AMC and the WHO-JIMT and the Pacific Health Corridors Pandemic Preparedness Programme (to prepare for roll-out). We are also retaining the option to purchase up to 360,000 additional doses of at least one suitable vaccine candidate for Polynesia. This may cost between \$6 and \$25m. A public announcement will be made in the coming weeks.

Existing delegations will apply to initiatives that seek to use this funding, and any initiatives over \$25m will require approval of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Finance jointly.

#### *Ministry of Health role*

The paper also proposes a role for the Ministry of Health to approve the suitability of any vaccine for the Pacific. For example, Medsafe approval of vaccines may be conditional, such as requiring enhanced adverse event monitoring and surveillance since these are very new vaccines. Suitability assessment will include preparedness for use, monitoring and surveillance, workforce training and support, and other factors.

#### *Indemnity*

Pharmaceutical companies are requiring recipient countries to indemnify them against product liability claims. Officials are exploring the best way of handling this, which could involve establishing “back to back” arrangements for Pacific recipient countries to take on some or all of their indemnity. This issue needs to be resolved as if it is not there is a risk that we will not be able to pass vaccine doses on to the Pacific.