

BUSINESS

Covid 19 coronavirus: Nick Mowbray: Lack of priorities reveals worrying signs from the Government

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A daily wrap of all the main developments in the Covid-19 Delta outbreak as New Zealand is plunged into lockdown for the fifth time. Video / Mark Mitchell / Brett Phibbs / Michael Craig

NZ Herald
By: Nick Mowbray

OPINION:

The New Zealand Government can take a lot of lessons from its Covid leadership.

Firstly, and most importantly, leadership should always get in the weeds and into the detail on the mission critical matters. The best business leaders in the world are always on the dance floor, not on the balcony.

Less time on PR. More time on solving problems and practical decision making. More time being proactive not reactive.

As a case in point, last year we held grave concerns about our ability to fight for vaccine priority.

It later transpired that our health minister never once spoke to Pfizer and that the Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern shockingly **only spoke to Pfizer** in March this year for 15 minutes, and again on July 8 a few days after a crucial shipment of 150,000 doses of the vaccine had arrived in New Zealand.

It shows a fundamental misunderstanding of prioritising the single most important thing for the country and stands in stark contrast to other countries' leadership. It is the reason we rank last in the OECD for rollout.

It reminded me of last year when it emerged David Clark, who then was in charge of running MIQ, had never actually set foot in one. At the time it was full of problems.

Helicopter management simply does not work. It's a "hit and hope" approach.

Leaders need to first understand at a macro level what needs to be prioritised and then move swiftly into action, getting into the detail, solving problems and building actionable frameworks. Unfortunately this government's record reads poorly in this regard.

I now hope we are not making the same mistakes on booster shots. We need to be negotiating and fighting hard for them now at the highest levels of Government (whether that's the 2.00 booster or current one).

We have had 18 months to work out solutions and staff up for the following:

1. Mobile vaccination centres;
2. More MIQ capacity (we are only using 2.5 per cent of hotel rooms);
3. Increased capacity at ICUs (still not addressed, we rank nearly last in OECD as it is);
4. Saliva testing (still not in place);
5. A mandatory Covid tracer app as good as Australia's (their app is world-class; a green tick has to be shown to get in anywhere); and
6. Vaccinating essential workers – including ports/borders/frontline and supermarket staff.

Unfortunately I fear a lack of understanding at a macro level. A good example was the wage freeze on nurses for three years in complete disregard to mass inflation (consumer/houses/assets) - so basically a wage reduction.

No one is more mission-critical than nurses. We need every single one. Our health system is already vastly understaffed regardless of Covid. We should be prioritising our health professionals now more than ever.

Would NZer's prefer that the Government paid out hundreds of millions of dollars in wage subsidies to massively profitable large multinationals or give our health professionals a long overdue pay increase in the middle of a global pandemic ? (Not to mention a raft of other questionable capital allocation decisions).

What does this tell us about the Government's ability to prioritise what's important? It is extremely worrying.

Complacency kills companies. It's also what got New Zealand into this spot. Like in business if you don't keep moving, evolving, improving and being proactive every single day you get left behind and eventually you lose.

NZ's Covid response flat-lined a long time ago.

I hope our Government is learning from this and evolves so we can move quickly join the world again.

- Nick Mowbray is an entrepreneur and co-founder of Zuru Group.