

7 November 2024

Rt Hon Christopher Luxon  
Prime Minister  
Private Bag 18888  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington 6160

Dear Rt Hon Christopher Luxon,

***COVID-19 Nation Dates: A New Zealand timeline of significant events during the COVID-19 pandemic***

Each year, the McGuinness Institute team builds an annual work programme based on where we see gaps in New Zealand's research and public policy. We choose our projects based on where we think we can provide value through an independent, non-partisan approach – often analysing long-term policy impacts that go beyond the three-year election cycle.

In 2024, our goal was to publish a second edition of our book *COVID-19 Nation Dates: A New Zealand timeline of significant events during the COVID-19 pandemic* (enclosed). The *Nation Dates* book series aims to provide the public with a record of our past in an accessible, well-referenced format (learn more at [nationdatesnz.org](http://nationdatesnz.org)).

Updating *COVID-19 Nation Dates* has been a very substantial piece of work, resulting in a hefty second edition of over 500 pages. The Institute's research into COVID-19 in New Zealand has been ongoing since the pandemic began, with our small team collating media articles, investigating press releases, undertaking interviews, contacting academics and epidemiologists, meeting with public servants and submitting OIA requests to different government organisations. The more we tried to find non-partisan records of the history of this time, the more we realised there was a lack of accessible, unbiased information on what happened in New Zealand. Online sources and media were constantly changing, so this book attempts to paint a solid picture of a very liquid narrative.

*COVID-19 Nation Dates* aims to help the reader gain insights into pandemic management by recording the impacts of COVID-19 on our country between January 2020 and September 2024. This was a unique, intense time, with many significant public policy decisions made under immense pressure. As public policy enthusiasts, we observed how agile the decision-makers were, often relying on incomplete information, and we wondered who was recording and tracking the implications. As the pandemic progressed, we were disappointed that, despite the huge impacts on public life, events were not always well documented. This book attempts to create a well-referenced, accessible record of what happened over this time. The objective is to help us consider the past critically so we can improve our policies for the future.

**Recommendations**

We recognise that Government and officials are currently undertaking work to help New Zealand become pandemic-ready (see list on page 17 of the book), but we do not believe this task is being treated with the necessary urgency or Parliamentary oversight. This point was reemphasised by the Auditor-General in his letter to the Health Select Committee on 1 November 2024. To this end, we have attached a table that lists our recommendations for consideration by Parliament. They are separated into the three pillars of public policy: institutions, instruments and information.

Importantly, we support calls to reinstate the Epidemic Response Committee (see p. 161 of the book) and for New Zealand to establish an independent 'national IHR authority' as part of a package of amendments to come into force under the International Health Regulations (2005) on 19 September 2025. The COVID-19 pandemic illustrated that pandemics are not just a health issue but require a whole-of-society response. For this reason, we suggest a separate select committee should be established to provide the necessary Parliamentary oversight.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes,

Wendy McGuinness  
Chief Executive