

5 September 2025

Audrey Sonerson
Director-General of Health and Chief Executive
Ministry of Health
PO Box 5013
Wellington 6140
New Zealand

Dear Audrey,

Our OIA 2025/11 – *Pandemic Plan (Interim update – July 2024)*, follow-up on recommendations and the National Reserve Supply

Background

The McGuinness Institute is concerned that, given it is now five years since the COVID-19 pandemic, we have failed to put in place changes to strengthen our ability to withstand the next pandemic. Over the previous five-year period, we have also seen a significant decrease in experience of pandemics in the House (only 40% of MPs who were in the House in March 2020 now remain; 36% of the Epidemic Response Committee remain; and 25% of the COVID-19 Ministerial Group remain). This means when New Zealand faces another pandemic, most MPs in Parliament will be reliant on the changes the current Government makes to legislation, institutions and instruments (such as the pandemic plan). This is one of eight OIAs sent as part of our Project *PandemicNZ*, the remainder are available on our website [here](#).

We note that the 2017 pandemic plan was updated in July 2024, with further plans to review it again following the completion of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 Lessons Learned – Te Tira Ārai Urutā. See excerpts of the *New Zealand Pandemic Plan A framework for action (Interim update – July 2024)* in Box 1 and 2 below.

Box 1 – Excerpt of the *New Zealand Pandemic Plan A framework for action (Interim update – July 2024)* (p. 2)

Comments

The Ministry of Health – Manatū Hauora first published the New Zealand Influenza Pandemic Action Plan in 2002, and last updated it in 2017. In the years since the plan was first published, it has undergone substantial revision, due to lessons learnt from the influenza A (H1N1) 2009 pandemic, the evolving and ongoing potential threat from H5N1 influenza and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic, which started in 2020.

This plan will continue to evolve. In particular, we will review it again following the completion of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 Lessons Learned - Te Tira Ārai Urutā. Further changes to the New Zealand health system announced by the government may also result in changes to this plan.

New in this version

This version of the New Zealand Pandemic Plan updates the *New Zealand Influenza Pandemic Plan: A framework for action* (Ministry of Health 2017). It represents the first part of a two-stage review process. This version follows a limited interim review undertaken during 2023 and early 2024. Changes here reflect the health system reforms of 2022, some aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic response and also changes in terminology, legislation, agencies' names, population-based calculations and references to publications and websites.

This version does not address the full range of lessons identified during the COVID-19 pandemic and has not updated the roles of other agencies outside the health sector. Much content has therefore been retained from the 2017 plan and predates COVID-19.

We plan to undertake a further, more substantive review, including of the roles of other government agencies, in 2024 /25. This timeline will allow for consideration of findings from the Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 - Te Tira Ārai Urutā and other relevant work, such as the development of a strategy for the national quarantine capability, reviews of New Zealand pandemic-related legislation, review of the New Zealand COVID-19 Strategic Framework and amendments to the International Health Regulations 2005 (WHO 2006) amendments to the IHR were adopted at the World Health Assembly in May 2024 and in due course New Zealand may choose to accept them).

We also note that in November 2024 the Phase 1 report was published, and that the Phase 1 inquiry was broader and longer in duration than Phase 2. The Phase 2 report is not due until next year, but is narrower (covers three topics) and shorter (covers February 2021 to October 2022); as a consequence it does not inquire into New Zealand's response to the early stages of the pandemic.

Lastly, we note Ministers and officials are no longer appearing publicly before the Commissioners undertaking the Phase 2 inquiry.

We are writing to see if you would be able to answer the following eight OIA questions.

New Zealand Pandemic Plan A framework for action (Interim update – July 2024)

The McGuinness Institute has the following seven OIA questions that relate directly to the *New Zealand Pandemic Plan A framework for action (Interim update – July 2024)* and one OIA that relates to the National Reserve Supply (NRS):

1. Given that the *New Zealand Pandemic Plan A framework for action (Interim update – July 2024* 'does not address the full range of lessons identified during the COVID-19 pandemic' (see Box 2 above), can you advise why these lessons were not addressed? Can you also provide a full list of these lessons?
2. Can you advise what the process from *interim* to *final* will be? In particular:
 - a. Will there be an opportunity for the public to engage with this process and provide feedback?
 - b. Have other departments been consulted when reviewing lessons? If yes, which departments have/will be consulted?
 - c. How will MOH engage with stakeholders throughout this process?
3. Given that the Royal Commission of Inquiry is due to provide their final report by [February 2026](#), is there an estimate for when the final pandemic plan will be published?

4. Has any consideration been given to renaming the plan to 'New Zealand Pandemic Strategy'?

Follow-up on recommendations

Attachment 1 is an excel that contains a consolidated list of recommendations from both the Phase One of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 Lessons Learned – Te Tira Ārai Urutā (Sheet 2, Table 1 of the excel) and the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) (Sheet 3, Table 2 of the excel). Sheet 1 contains a key, as well as provides links to the documents where the recommendations were sourced from.

We are interested in knowing to what extent particular recommendations have been implemented. Can you please:

5. Complete the attached excel, in particular Columns E-H of Sheet 2, and Columns C-F of Sheet 3.
6. Provide the report of progress against the recommendations of Phase One of the Royal Commission (mentioned in Recommendation 39b of the Royal Commission).
7. Advise whether MOH will be producing a report on progress against the Phase One recommendations for tabling in Parliament (mentioned in Recommendation 39c of the Royal Commission).

National Reserve Supply (NRS)

Note our complaint to the Ombudsman remains outstanding, see the correspondence on our website [here](#). [Note: If you changed your mind and will now publish the content and quantities of NRS items, please let us know as we will cancel the complaint]

8. Can you provide a copy of Cabinet Papers, review report/s, or discussion papers that discuss the content and the process for selecting the content of the National Reserve Supply (NRS) since January 2020?

If you have any questions or require any further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact myself or Arne Larsen (copied in).

Kind regards,



Wendy McGuinness
Chief Executive

Attachments

1. 20250904 COVID-19 recommendations (Excel)