

5 September 2025

Debbie Power
Chief Executive
Ministry of Social Development
PO Box 1556
Wellington 6140
New Zealand

Dear Debbie,

Our OIA 2025/15 – Questions on the COVID-19 Wage Subsidy, Phase 1 Inquiry Report and OAG follow-up on recommendations

Background

The Institute has recently published a final draft of [*Discussion Paper 2025/03 – Time to prepare: Lessons from the COVID-19 Wage Subsidy*](#). This discussion paper remains a final draft as we have a number of questions that we are hoping government departments might be able to answer. Please note the green font in the final draft of the discussion paper contains OIA information related directly to our OIA request to Treasury. This is because Treasury's OIA was the most extensive and complex. Other OIAs can be seen on the Institute's website (see our Table 1 [here](#)). This is one of eight OIAs sent as part of our Project *PandemicNZ*, the remainder are available on our website [here](#).

To bring this work to a close, we are hoping MSD might answer the following twelve OIA questions:

Cabinet material

1. Can you provide a copy of the cabinet paper titled 'COVID-19 financial support, Paper A: Business Continuity Package: Targeted wage subsidy scheme' that is referred to on p.1 of [*COVID-19 financial support, Paper A: Business Continuity Package: Targeted wage subsidy scheme*](#) (dated 15 March 2020)?
2. Can you confirm that the above-named cabinet paper was the first Cabinet paper that set out the initial design of what is now known as the wage subsidy scheme?
3. If earlier Cabinet papers exist that mentions (and possibly describes) the potential wage subsidy for the pandemic, can you provide copies of those papers?

Scheme design

4. Who was involved in the initial development of the wage subsidy scheme prior to the [*COVID-19 financial support, Paper A: Business Continuity Package: Targeted wage subsidy scheme*](#) cabinet paper on 15 March 2020?
 - a. What agencies/parties were involved in this early development of the subsidy between 1 February 2020 and 31 March 2020 (e.g. Treasury, MSD, MBIE, and IRD)?
 - b. Can you provide minutes and papers relating to any meetings between any of the parties mentioned directly above over the time period 1 February 2020 to 31 March 2020?
 - c. Can you provide any papers that explored the different job retention options (e.g. the pros and cons)?
5. When was ODESC and the National Crisis Management Centre briefed on the Wage Subsidy Scheme? Please provide a date and any papers MSD provided?
6. Can you provide copies of all cabinet material that relate to all five iterations of the Wage Subsidy Scheme in the discussion paper: [*Discussion Paper 2025/02 – How to Tell the Difference Between an Emergency and a Crisis and Why it Matters*](#) (see our Table A3.1 on p.54)? We note that the link ([here](#))

contains selected cabinet material that MSD has published, but we were after an extensive list and copies so that we can expand on our earlier work.

7. Has MSD implemented any of the recommendations from the Royal Commission of Inquiry's Phase 1 report of the [*Lessons from COVID-19 to prepare Aotearoa New Zealand for a future pandemic*](#)? Please explain with regard to the specific recommendation number, what has been implemented and what has not – and why.
8. What other measures, instruments or actions (in addition to those in Question 7 above) have been put in place for the next pandemic?
9. Has there been any discussion on creating an off-the-shelf job retention scheme, ready for implementation when New Zealand is faced with of the next emergency or crisis (e.g. earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, extreme weather events etc). See for example, Figure 1 (below) from [DPMC cabinet material](#).

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:

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

Thank you again for your help with the above. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in contact with myself or Arne Larsen (copied in).

Kind regards,



Wendy McGuinness
Chief Executive

Attachments:

1. [*Discussion Paper 2025/03 – Time to prepare: Lessons from the COVID-19 Wage Subsidy*](#)
2. [*COVID-19 Nation Dates: Additional Dates since September 2024*](#) (draft)
3. [*Discussion Paper 2025/02 – How to Tell the Difference Between an Emergency and a Crisis and Why it Matters*](#)
4. 20250904 COVID-19 recommendations (Excel)

Figure 1 (below) from [DPMC cabinet material](#)

Appendix B: Example modelled natural hazard risk scenarios

Table 1: Example modelled natural hazard risk scenarios

Modelled scenarios	Likelihood in the next 50 years	Modelled building/ infrastructure losses
Auckland volcanic eruption	10%	\$5bn–\$65bn (buildings only)
Large Taranaki eruption	1%	\$10bn–\$15bn
Hikurangi subduction zone M9.1 earthquake and tsunami	1%	\$144bn (buildings only)
Hutt River flood (above stopbank design event)	5%	\$5bn–\$10bn
Alpine Fault M8 earthquake	75%	~\$10bn
Cyclone Gabrielle equivalent event	80%	\$9bn–\$14bn (est. actual cost)