

Kia ora koutou

With just 1 active case of COVID-19 left in New Zealand, and no new cases detected for 13 straight days, it's time for us to pause and recognise what we have achieved as a health sector.

Our Covid-19 Elimination Strategy is straightforward: keep it out, find it and stamp it out. We are now very close to eliminating domestic transmission of COVID-19 in New Zealand, and this is a result of the significant efforts and sacrifices by all New Zealanders.

At the beginning of the outbreak, none of us knew how it would play out. We acted early and hard calling on the whole health and disability sector to prepare for the worst, while making decisions designed to protect our health workforce and services. DHBs reorganised their hospitals and patient schedules, GPs and nurses pivoted quickly to remote consultations, and health professionals not currently in the workforce put their hands up and said of course they'd help if needed.

Health and disability workers all around the country have been instrumental in encouraging New Zealanders to do the right things to protect themselves and each other. At the same time, you were on the front lines supporting the health and wellbeing of your patients, customers and clients and, given the uncertainty that took courage.

Much has changed over the last couple of months - we've proved our ability and willingness to protect the health of New Zealanders, and I am proud of all that we have achieved together. There is still much to do, and we need to continue to stick together.

Âwhina app

We are continuing to support health and disability workers to get the information they need about COVID-19 through new mobile app Âwhina, developed by the Ministry of Health.

The app has useful information that can be quickly accessed, like the latest case definitions, clinical care pathways or Personal Protective Equipment guidance. Âwhina lets you get this information anywhere, anytime, and notifies you when it's updated.

We developed this tool with feedback from people working in the health sector, and by learning from approaches taken in other countries to get information about COVID-19 to health workers.

While it's currently being used to share information about COVID-19, we expect the app will be able to share other health information in the future.

Âwhina is free to download from the Google and Apple app stores. For more information, visit www.health.govt.nz/awhina.

Health and Disability review

The Minister of Health has now received the final New Zealand Health and Disability System Review report.

The Review looked at the overall function of the health and disability system and whether the system is balanced towards wellness, access, equity, and sustainability. You can find out more about the background to the Review on the [Health and Disability System Review website](#).

I have also received a copy of the report and am currently reviewing it and considering what advice the Ministry will provide to Government. The report will be considered by Cabinet at some point over the next few weeks.

I will keep you informed as this work progresses about what it might mean for the health and disability sector.

COVID-19 vaccine strategy

Last week the Government announced a contribution of \$37 million to local and global efforts to develop a vaccine against COVID-19, and to explore the potential to manufacture vaccines in New Zealand. This is significant support both for the international community, and for research and production here at home.

Of the \$37 million, \$15 million will go to international research efforts, \$10 million to domestic research, \$7 million to vaccine alliance GAVI to distribute vaccines to developing countries, and \$5 million is set aside to manufacture the vaccine if that becomes possible.

A taskforce overseeing the vaccine strategy implementation includes representatives from the Ministry of Health, Medsafe, PHARMAC, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. It will be supported by a science and technical advisory group.

NZ COVID Tracer app

Over 495,000 New Zealanders have downloaded the NZ COVID Tracer app since it was released, and more than 21,000 official QR posters have been generated. It's encouraging to see so many people, businesses and organisations getting in behind the app to support contact tracing in New Zealand.

The app is designed to work with the official QR codes generated through MBIE's [Business Connect](#) service. If you are unable to generate your official QR code posters through Business Connect, we may be able to do this for you – just email the team at tracingapp-feedback@health.govt.nz. We will phone you to verify your identity and will ask you to complete a template with:

- the name of your business/organisation and the NZBN (if any)
- address information for each of your premises
- an email address for each premises (ie, the person who will print the poster)

We are continuing to develop NZ COVID Tracer to include new features and address feedback from the public. The next update for release next week will enable New Zealanders to receive a notification if they have been in the same place at the same time as someone who has COVID-19 and will let them electronically transmit their digital diary to the National Close Contact Service when needed.

Ngā mihi nui

Dr Ashley Bloomfield

Director-General of Health