



## **Proactive Release**

The following items have been proactively released by the Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister:

**Decision paper: Ensuring Childcare for Essential Workers**

**Minute of Decision: Ensuring Childcare for Essential Workers**

# Decision paper:

## ENSURING CHILDCARE FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS

<b>To</b>	Ad Hoc Cabinet Committee on COVID-19 Response		
<b>From</b>	Cheryl Barnes, NCMC	<b>Date</b>	24/03/2020

### Purpose

1. This note sets out an approach to ensuring the availability of childcare for the children of essential workers during the 4-week lock-down period from midnight Wednesday 25 March 2020. It seeks Ministerial decisions to enable the approach:
  - a. Classifying some individual and government-subsidised early learning and out of school care providers as essential workers; and
  - b. Government providing direct funding to subsidised providers.

### Comment

2. The Government has decided that from midnight, Wednesday 25 March, all schools and childcare providers will be closed.
3. Essential workers are required to work during this period, to ensure that services (including health services) continue to be provided.
4. This creates a risk to the delivery of essential services, if these workers who are parents are not able to work.
5. The scale of the issue is unknown. We will have information shortly about the number of children who presented at school and early learning services today – when only the children of essential workers are permitted to attend. It is likely that this is the outer bound of the number, given that many will work out an arrangement from Thursday. Some parents who are not essential workers may also have sent children to school/services while they put other arrangements in place, or start working from home themselves.
6. This note proposes an approach for managing this issue, and in particular, providing for those who are unable to find a solution themselves. It requires Ministerial decisions to enable it.

### Proposal

7. The proposal below takes into account public health guidance – in particular, advice to limit all means of transmission of infection. It does this in balance with a need to accept some level of risk in the interests of ensuring that essential services can continue to operate.
8. It is proposed that:

- a. The default and preferred option is that people are able to manage this themselves. This could include:
  - i. managing within their own household (e.g. where healthy adults under 70 are able to assist)
  - ii. a person or other household outside the family home is identified as part of the self-isolated group. This needs to be done by midnight Wednesday, and the group must remain the same for the whole four weeks. The group needs to be limited to minimise the risk of spread.

Public health advice is that does not present a significant increase in risk, so long as guidance about contact outside the group and social distancing is followed. No safety checking of carers is possible in this approach.

9. There are likely to be instances where self-management is not possible. The fall-back options in this circumstance are:
  - a. people are unable to work (not desirable, given the impact on services)
  - b. care can be provided for children within their home by a third-party (e.g. a nanny)
  - c. care can be provided for children at a venue outside their home (e.g. by a registered OSCAR or licensed homebased childcare provider).
10. Further detail is set out below on how these services can be arranged, and the decisions needed to enable them.

#### **Self-organised childcare provided within the home**

11. In-home care would be organised and paid for by the household without any government intervention. The carer becomes part of the self-isolation unit; and carers would be limited to providing care for one family only.
12. The **decision** needed to enable this is for childcare providers of essential workers to be classified as essential workers – as providers of essential social services.

#### **Government-coordinated childcare**

13. Provision could be made for care options drawing on licenced home-based childcare providers. The parameters here are: keeping human to human contact as limited as possible; using licensed homes within a licenced home-based provider network; needing to provide for a range of child ages; child safety.
14. This could be done in two ways: in-home care or care in small centres (such as community centres, which providers currently use).

##### *Option one – in home care*

- a. The Government signals that a small number of licenced home-based providers who are already contracted and subsidised to provide care can be drawn on.

- b. The Ministry of Education has contacted the three largest licenced homebased providers, and initial soundings are that they are willing to assist (PORSE, Barnados, Edubase).
- c. Essential workers would contact one of these agreed providers directly, and work with them to identify where support can be provided. The Ministry of Education would monitor capacity gaps.
- d. For in-home care, the carer becomes part of the self-isolation unit and carers would be limited to providing care for one family only.
- e. It is recommended that the government agree to directly fund these services. This reflects that we need essential workers to be able to work, and that they would otherwise incur additional costs to do so (which could act as a disincentive, and lead people to prefer to stay at home).

*Option two – small community centres*

- 15. Options for care in small community centres includes via OSCAR and Kelly Sports, who are already subsidised by MSD. Again, initial soundings suggest that these providers are keen and willing to assist, and could do so from Thursday.
- 16. As above, it is recommended that government agree to directly fund these services.
- 17. Setting up small centres would also require an exemption from isolation requirements, and so is a decision for Ministers.

**Communications**

- 18. A communications plan to communicate these arrangements to sectors and providers is being developed, pending the decisions above. Communications would be via the Covid-19 website and direct messages to public sector chief executives.

**Recommendation**

---

- 19. I recommend that you:
  - a. **note** the need to ensure childcare availability for the children of essential workers during the lock-down period
  - b. **note** that the numbers of people involved, and therefore the costs, will be clarified as soon as possible.
  - c. **note** the proposed approach to providing childcare for these workers: self-management as a preference, with options available for those unable to do so
  - d. **agree** that individual childcare providers can be classified as essential workers, where they are working solely for one family as part of the family's self-isolation unit
  - e. **agree** to directly fund government-subsidised providers via government agencies (OSCAR services, via MSD; PORSE, Barnados and other subsidised providers via the Ministry for Education)
  - f. **agree** that where providers can provide childcare in small groups in venues (such as community centres) that these venues are exempted from isolation requirements.

Proactively Released



# Meeting of the COVID-19 Ministerial Group

## Minute of Decision

---

*This document contains information for the New Zealand Cabinet. It must be treated in confidence and handled in accordance with any security classification, or other endorsement. The information can only be released, including under the Official Information Act 1982, by persons with the appropriate authority.*

---

### Ensuring Childcare for Essential Workers

The group of Ministers with Power to Act on COVID-19 matters [CAB-20-MIN-0130] convened on 25 March 2020 at 10.30am and, in accordance with their Power to Act:

- 1 **noted** the need to ensure childcare availability for the children of essential workers during the lock-down period;
- 2 **noted** that the numbers of people involved, and therefore the costs, will be clarified as soon as possible;
- 3 **noted** the proposed approach to providing childcare for these workers, namely: self-management as a preference, with options available for those unable to do so;
- 4 **agreed** that individual childcare providers can be classified as essential workers, where they are working solely for one family as part of the family's self-isolation unit;
- 5 **agreed** to directly fund government-subsidised providers via government agencies (OSCAR services, via the Ministry of Social Development; and PORSE, Barnados and other subsidised providers via the Ministry of Education);
- 6 **agreed** to enable the Ministry of Education and other agencies to contract with other providers as necessary, for one-on-one care only.

Michael Webster  
Secretary of the Cabinet

---

**Distribution:**

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern (Chair)  
Rt Hon Winston Peters  
Hon Kelvin Davis  
Hon Grant Robertson  
Hon Chris Hipkins  
Hon Carmel Sepuloni  
Hon Dr David Clark  
Hon James Shaw

**Officials:**

Office of the Prime Minister  
Chief Executive, DPMC  
Chief Executive, Ministry of Health  
Commissioner of Police  
All of Government Controller

Copied to officials via email