



**DEPARTMENT OF THE
PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET**
TE TARI O TE PIRIMIA ME TE KOMITI MATUA

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Noting Paper

PUBLIC INFORMATION

To	Ad Hoc Cabinet Committee on COVID-19 Response		
From	John Ombler	Date	11/03/2020

Purpose

1. To note the activities underway to ensure coordinated and effective cross-government public information when responding to COVID-19. This paper is supported by the attached presentation outlining the public health information campaign 'Your health is in your hands'.

Comment

2. *The COVID-19 situation could lead to a variety of scenarios, most of which have significant health, social and economic impacts. Timely public information from all parts of government and civil society will be critical in managing and minimising these impacts.*
 - a. Clear and practical health guidance will need to be widely shared. Government agencies are well-connected to sectors they support, regulate or consult with, and all agencies will need to use their channels to ensure this guidance has the widest possible reach.
 - b. Leadership from across society will help maintain social cohesion during any outbreak or economic downturn. Agencies will need to use their influence to encourage stakeholder-led communications that promote commitment, solidarity and community support.
 - c. A wide range of services will support those affected by COVID-19. A clear single source of truth will make it easier for the public to access the information they need.
 - d. A pandemic response will affect different parts of society in different ways. Agencies will need to work with sectors and communities, including vulnerable population groups, to communicate the government's plan, understand the challenges these groups face, and provide practical support and advice.
 - e. A two-way communication approach is required. Agencies will need to listen to and learn from their stakeholders throughout the response.
3. *Communications are being coordinated by an all-of-government Public Information Management Function.*
 - a. A National Public Information Management team has been created as part of the move to a National Crisis Management Centre-led response. The team is responsible for cross-government communications coordination, the development of a National COVID-19 Communications Strategy, media management for the national response, reporting and insights, and the COVID-19 all-of-government brand and information portal.
 - b. Communications leads have been appointed for each of the 11 Pandemic Plan workstreams. Multi-agency communication groups within each workstream are collaborating on messaging, risk management and insights.

IN CONFIDENCE

- c. Each workstream is developing a communications plan, which initially prepares for the first three Pandemic Plan phases – Keep it Out, Stamp it Out and Manage it – and their health, social and economic impacts. These plans will support the National COVID-19 Communications Strategy, which is in development.
 - d. A Communications Protocol has been distributed widely across government agencies, with processes for coordinating media engagement and maintaining a single government portal (govt.nz/coronavirus), which was recently refreshed. The Protocol also details a set of principles to guide communications: Timely and transparent, focussed on facts, health-driven, empowering, and economically and socially inclusive.
4. *Public information resources have been stretched, but substantial increases are underway.*
- a. To date, the public information resources available have been focussed on macro-level communications, including media management and campaign development, micro-level advice for high-priority sectors (particularly in the health and tourism sectors) and audiences (particularly visitors from countries of concern). There has not been the capacity for substantial micro-level advice, reporting and insights, widespread social media engagement, or strategic communications planning.
 - b. The new National Public Information Management team will have 13 positions, with more likely over the medium term. This will ensure proper, strategic coordination of the all-of-government response. It will also alleviate pressures felt on other workstreams, through activities like a single insights and reporting function and coordinated translation services.
 - c. Within the Health workstream, eight short-term contract roles have been created to work alongside the permanent team. This expansion will see significant increases in public health information provision, social media engagement and campaign development.
 - d. Within the 10 other workstreams, all agencies are aware of the priority for dealing with COVID-19 and are dedicating substantial resources to the public information effort.
5. *These resources will see a widespread public information campaign designed to give New Zealanders practical advice and improve trust and confidence in the government's response.*
- a. A radio and social media advertising campaign is underway, providing health hygiene advice to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The next stages will include television advertising and different messages for different phases of a pandemic.
 - b. A significant increase in sector and audience-specific communications and engagement is planned, including reaching ethnic and vulnerable communities. As well as practical advice, the communications will provide greater detail on pandemic plan measures and when they are likely to be activated.
 - c. Other outcomes planned include a greater level of social media engagement and a clearer narrative that showcases the all-of-government response.

Recommendation

6. I recommend that you **note** the contents of this memorandum.