



# COVID-19 Independent Continuous Review, Improvement and Advice Group Minutes

<b>Date</b>	Tuesday 10 August 2021	
<b>Time</b>	4.00-5.30pm	
<b>Venue</b>	Room 9.01 TSB, Level 1 / Zoom	
<b>Attendees</b>	Sir Brian Roche (Chair) Debbie Ryan Dale Bramley Philip Hill Rob Fyfe Amber Bill (DPMC) Natasha D'Costa (DPMC) James Correia (DPMC)	<i>Item 1 only</i> Griere Cox (DPMC) <i>Item 2 only</i> Chloe Kincaid, Natasha D'Costa (DPMC)
<b>Minute taker</b>	James Correia	
<b>Apologies</b>	Louise Cox (DPMC)	

## Item 1: Reconnecting New Zealanders Programme Update

- Griere Cox, Chief of Staff at the Department for Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) provided an overview of the progress of the Reconnecting New Zealanders Programme (the Programme), in advance of the dedicated public forum hosted by the Prime Minister on Thursday, 12 August.
- Griere notified the COVID-19 Independent Continuous Review, Improvement and Advice Group (the Group) of a Cabinet paper on the Programme presented last week, and that the next major milestone will be in October. s9(2)(f)(iv)  
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 [REDACTED] She informed the Group that plans are in place to move toward the pilot phase, which will allow vaccinated individuals to self-isolate outside of Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ) facilities.
- Reporting has begun on Reconnecting New Zealanders, and Griere reaffirmed that this can be provided to the Group when available. She noted that DPMC is introducing an additional work-stream on health system capacity to ensure resilience in light of shifting circumstances

and policy settings. Griere updated the Group on the status of border sprint work, due to begin on Monday, and invited the Group to participate.

- Participants conveyed the need for greater clarity surrounding the timeline on Reconnecting New Zealanders, and changes to the border and customs arrangements more generally. Griere noted prior advice from Sir David Skegg and the COVID-19 Strategic Public Health Advisory Group that specific dates should be avoided, due to the need to manage public expectations in a constantly changing public health environment and in view of emerging strains of the virus.

- s9(2)(f)(iv)

The Group noted that these discussions reflect a broader disconnect between the public health and economic discourses, which is giving rise to challenges.

## **Item 2: Community Panel - Overview**

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- Natasha D'Costa, Manager Governance and Engagement DPMC, and Chloe Kincaid, Senior Advisor Engagement Panels DPMC, provided a summary of the first iteration of the Community Panel (the Panel). This was held on Wednesday, August 4.
- Chloe recalled that the Panel is designed to ensure that insights and experiences arising from diverse communities across Aotearoa are reflected in the system response. She conveyed that the central focus of the introductory meeting was to establish relationships and create a baseline foundation of knowledge on which to build in future panel discussions. The substantive content of this first meeting included a mixture of familiar and unanticipated insights, ranging from differences in internet connectivity to the particular difficulties faced by disabled populations in conforming to expected public health behaviours (e.g. scanning on public transport, access to essential support networks during isolation).
- The Group discussed opportunities for aligning its activities with the Community Panel's work programme and underlined that issues of equity and assistance are critical to the resilience of the system. Natasha commented that DPMC is currently developing a working paper on accessibility, which provides an organising principle for bringing together the practical experiences expressed by various stakeholders and can support the health equity work-stream. Dale mentioned a survey of the challenges confronted by disabled populations during lockdown, which could provide useful background for this.
- The Panel members represent communities such as rural, youth/aged, disabled, Māori, Pacific, LGBTQ+ and other ethnic and religious groups, and will meet on a monthly basis.

### **Item 3: Disclosures of Interests and Confirmation of Minutes**

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10. There were no new disclosures of interests and the minutes from 13 July 2021 were confirmed without amendments.

### **Item 4: AOG Readiness Workshop – Delta Scenario**

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11. Brian briefly presented the key messages emerging from the Delta scenario planning discussions, which were conducted within the context of the All-of-Government Readiness Workshop held on 9 August.
12. Brian highlighted that the central theme arising from the workshop was the need to ensure system responsiveness, preparedness and capacity in confronting emerging, more transmissible and infectious variants of COVID-19. In this respect, contact tracing pace and capacity was consistently mentioned. It will also be critical that health system capacity (e.g. availability of ICU beds) is assured, in support of continued readiness.
13. To ensure readiness, the following key themes were raised across the Group:
  - a. The need for scenario planning to extend beyond Delta, and encompass other variants likely to arise in future;
  - b. That capacity constraints are particularly pronounced in primary and emergency care, particularly in terms of health infrastructure and labour force;
  - c. The possibility of training vaccinators in other areas of pertinence to pandemic preparedness and responsiveness.
14. Brian noted that the readiness work represents an entry point for the Group to pose questions to ensure that the system continues to be responsive to broader needs. The Secretariat noted they are maintaining a repository of such questions.

### **Item 6: Report Back on Meeting with MIQ**

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15. Rob provided an update on the MIQ discussions which took place in the context of the COVID-19 Chief Executives Board (CCB) meeting, held on Tuesday, August 3.
16. Rob and Brian met with Megan Main, Andy Milne and Brigadier Rose King from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), to discuss Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ). The following items figured prominently in their discussions:
  - a. Questions of system improvement and readiness can be disrupted by more urgent matters (e.g. closure of the Trans-Tasman bubble), which can impact forward-planning;
  - b. MIQ has introduced a cohorting (or group intake) system in response to public health advice, and in order to reduce the risk of in-facility transmission;
  - c. MIQ is experiencing continuing issues in keeping pace with returnee demand/expectations for access to - or departure from - New Zealand.

17. The Group acknowledged that the lack of infection leakage into the broader population serves as a testament to the effectiveness with which MIQ is functioning. Nevertheless, the border bottlenecks within the system present significant difficulties to travellers. In response, the Group raised the possibility of alternative pathways to MIQ, greater private sector participation, tapping into under-utilised accommodation, and quarantine hotels at the point of departure (e.g. in Dubai/Singapore).
18. There is widespread interest in developing a plan that enables a solution for vaccinated people to circumvent MIQ, while acknowledging that this will involve non-zero risk in terms of public health. The Secretariat noted that this is one of the key questions investigated in the Reconnecting New Zealanders pilot phase, on which further details are expected on Thursday.

### **Item 7: Report Back on Meeting with Minister Hipkins**

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19. Brian provided a brief overview of his meeting with Minister for COVID-19 Response.
20. There was discussion on the expectation that the residual impacts of COVID-19 will last 5-10 years and what this may mean for the system, including institutional arrangements and responsibilities.

### **Item 8: Any other business**

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21. Discussions centred on the risks of exposure to COVID-19 among workers at the Port of Tauranga, and the status of saliva testing for infection.
22. Regular updates are available on the border workers testing register, the Ministry of Health (MOH) is reviewing the response, and a more wide-ranging report on COVID-19 and the maritime border is forthcoming.
23. The Group reaffirmed the need to explore why vaccination rates among port workers were so low, from which transferrable lessons may emerge. Brian noted that this may be partly due to the employment status of workers, who are frequently on casual contracts that make it hard to establish vaccination obligations and monitor compliance.
24. Rob noted that saliva testing is currently under discussion at the Ministry for Primary Industries. He welcomed the prospect of gaining clarity on testing targets, which are central to accountability. s9(2)(f)(iv)

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**Action register – Live actions**

	Date of meeting	Action	Responsible owner	Comments
1	15 June 2021	Brian and the Secretariat will discuss the idea of inviting Dame Karen Poutasi to a future meeting to discuss the vaccine roll out in the context of equity.	DPMC Secretariat	On hold until it aligns with the Group's work programme
4	15 June 2021	Write up the scope of the proposed NSW conversation and share with the Group	DPMC Secretariat	On hold while NSW are dealing with the current outbreak.
8	13 July 2021	Follow up with Graham MacLean on the Group's continued engagement with the System Readiness and Planning team's work.	DPMC Secretariat	Completed
9	27 July 2021	Set up meetings with Urutā and other Auckland community representatives.	DPMC Secretariat/Debbie/Dale	Completed
10	27 July 2021	Follow up with the Ministry of Health on the Surveillance Strategy peer review and response	DPMC Secretariat	Completed – MOH attendance at Group meeting deferred until 7 September
11	10 August 2021	Revert to the Group on the updated vaccination strategy	DPMC Secretariat	
12	10 August 2021	Assess agendas of CICRIAG and Community Panel for synergies, and revert to Group	DPMC Secretariat	
13	10 August 2021	Summarise inputs from Delta scenario planning and share with Group	DPMC Secretariat	
14	10 August 2021	Develop key questions of system responsiveness, preparedness and capacity to ask MOH	Group, led by Dale	Questions completed and working to get these answered.