



10 January 2025



Ref: OIA-2024/25-0555

Dear 

**Official Information Act request relating to advice and support provided to Chris Hipkins during the COVID-19 response in 2021**

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request received on 6 January 2025. You requested:

*The Hon Christopher Hipkins was the Minister of 'COVID-19 Response' in October 2021. I am wanting some clarity as to the structure that supported Minister Hipkins in his 'COVID-19 Response' role at this time. For example,*

- *Did Minister Hipkins have a 'ministry', or a 'department' or a 'business unit' or something else to assist him in his role?*
- *How many personnel were in this structure that provided this supporting role?*
- *Was there a 'chief executive' responsible to provide advice to the Minister, and if so, who was the chief executive?*
- *If not, who was responsible for providing advice to the Minister, and what was their name and position in the public service?*

For clarity, my response below addresses the multiple points of your request together.

In November 2020, Rt Hon Chris Hipkins was appointed the Minister responsible for the COVID-19 response.

On 1 July 2020, the COVID-19 Group (the Group) was established as a business unit of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), following the deactivation of the National Crisis Management Centre on 30 June 2020. The Group was led by the Deputy Chief Executive, COVID-19 (DCE COVID-19 Group). The Group acted as a central COVID-19 response function, and was responsible for oversight, integration and coordination across the response system as a whole. The Group was responsible for providing assurance to Ministers and identifying opportunities for continuous improvement in New Zealand's response.

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic was an all-of-government response, and we are therefore unable to identify a sole individual responsible for advising the Minister. A large number of agencies and groups were involved in the response, with a list of key groups of the all-of-government response to COVID-19 published here: <https://oag.parliament.nz/2022/covid-19/appendix2.htm>

It is worth highlighting that DPMC led the development of the Unite Against COVID-19 campaign from April 2020 until 16 November 2022, at which time this responsibility was transferred to Health New Zealand (Te Whatu Ora). DPMC was responsible for delivering the COVID-19 Vaccine campaign through the Unite Against COVID-19 campaign channels from 1 March 2021 to 30 June 2022, with the Ministry of Health (MoH) retaining responsibility from 1 July 2022.

All information for the COVID-19 Vaccine Campaign was managed and authorised by MoH. As part of the transformation of the health and disability system, as of 1 July 2022 the functions previously under MoH's National Immunisation Programme were transferred to Health New Zealand (Te Whatu Ora).

A number of resources regarding the all-of-government COVID-19 response have been published by MoH, which you can find here: <https://www.health.govt.nz/strategies-initiatives/programmes-and-initiatives/covid-19/managing-covid-19-in-new-zealand>

You may also be interested in the recently published report from Phase One of the All of Government COVID-19 Royal Commission of Inquiry, which explores the lessons learned following the pandemic: <https://www.covid19lessons.royalcommission.nz/reports-lessons-learned/>

Lastly, in 2022, the Auditor-General undertook an audit of the co-ordination of the all-of-government response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and has published their findings here: <https://oag.parliament.nz/2022/covid-19>

You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision under section 28(3) of the Act.

This response will be published on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's website during our regular publication cycle. Typically, information is released monthly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

Yours sincerely,



Annabel Ritchie  
**Acting Executive Director, Strategy, Governance and Engagement**