

# Noting paper:

## WRITTEN BRIEFING TO THE EPIDEMIC RESPONSE COMMITTEE

<b>To</b>	Epidemic Response Committee		
<b>From</b>	John Ombler, All of Government Controller	<b>Date</b>	30/03/2020

### Standing up the national response to COVID-19

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1. In the two months since the National Security System was first established in response to COVID-19 (January 27), there have been several significant and fast paced actions taken to ensure the leadership and organisation of the national response to COVID-19 is appropriately configured for the magnitude of the event. These actions have been taken to:
  - respond to the growing magnitude of the challenge that COVID-19 presents to New Zealand and New Zealanders
  - respond to a strategic shift from mitigation or “flatten the curve” approach to the current stamp it out and elimination strategy
  - broaden and deepen the national effort to increase the pace of delivery for a series of critical interventions and measures.
2. The scale and fast pace of the COVID-19 challenge has required us to evolve our operating model and ways of working across government. This has included the development of a new leadership structure for the response, led by myself (Annex A refers). My role is to provide leadership and co-ordination to ensure a consistent and coordinated approach to the all-of-government response across the statutory and non-statutory roles listed in paragraph 4 below.
3. I was appointed by and am accountable to the Chief Executive of DPMC, who is also Chair of the Officials’ Committee for Domestic and External Security Coordination (ODESC), which is responsible for providing strategic direction and coordination for all-of-government responses.
4. The leadership team consists of:
  - Dr Ashley Bloomfield with his statutory powers as Director-General of Health as detailed in the NZ Health Act 1956
  - Sarah Stuart-Black with her statutory powers as Director of Civil Defence and Emergency Management in accordance with the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act
  - Mike Bush providing coordination of the operational response and drawing on the generous support from both the public and private sector
  - Dr Peter Crabtree providing oversight and coordination of the all of government strategy and policy

5. At a national level the Ministry of Health is the lead agency for the public health response, and at a regional level the local District Health Boards are the lead for the public health response. Civil Defence Emergency Management is in support for all other consequences of the emergency response.
6. The National Crisis Management Centre (NCMC) was activated on 16 March 2020 to ensure effective coordination across agencies. As a reflection of the current situation and the need to incorporate social distancing and other preventative measures, the NCMC is operating from two different locations – at the Ministry of Health, and an office building on Lambton Quay.
7. Establishing this leadership structure and the NCMC also will assist ODESC with the ability to respond to a concurrent national security event, such as a major earthquake, from the usual NCMC location in the Beehive if needed.

## **Strategy and policy**

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8. COVID-19 has presented a challenge of unprecedented fast-moving uncertainty and risk. We have had to adapt the Influenza Pandemic Plan (IPaP) to the particular epidemiology of COVID-19, which in itself is still being studied, and also to the particular context of New Zealand. Our modelling will continue to evolve as data and evidence emerges.
9. We have made a key strategic shift from a strategy of mitigation to one of stamping it out and elimination. We do not want to end up in a scenario of widespread outbreaks which would significantly overwhelm the health system, as we have seen in Italy, Spain and other countries that have experienced extensive outbreaks. Our current strategy centres around breaking the chain of community transmission through tougher public health measures, in particular intense physical distancing and travel restrictions, which are set out in Alert Level 4.
10. The strategy does incur significant economic and social disruption, but if we are successful at eliminating COVID-19 from New Zealand we will have better economic and social outcomes. Widespread outbreaks would lead to major health, economic and social impacts for New Zealand.
11. Current support initiatives include (but are not limited to):
  - Support for workers, families and businesses
  - Increases to public health funding for the immediate response
  - A doubling of the Winter Energy Payment
  - Wage subsidy scheme to ensure businesses and workers stay connected
  - A six-month deferred mortgage scheme for affected home-owners
  - A Business Finance Guarantee and business tax measures
  - Rent freezes and a ban on terminations of tenancies or evictions other than in exceptional circumstances

## **Operational response**

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12. As noted above, we have had to be flexible in adapting our usual operating model to adapt to the COVID-19 challenge. Operating models that are suited to business-as-usual endeavours are not generally suited to the challenge confronting us now.

13. Usual bureaucratic divisions and ways of working are untenable in this context and as a result have fundamentally shifted. Officials in line ministries have adopted processes from the New Zealand Police to drive faster pace of operational responsiveness and clear accountabilities of work stream leads. The public and private sector are cooperating through the Operational Command Centre of the NCMC. The intent is to also build the capacity of Health to direct, if not deliver, operational responses that are scalable and adaptive including contact tracing and testing.

## Strategic communications

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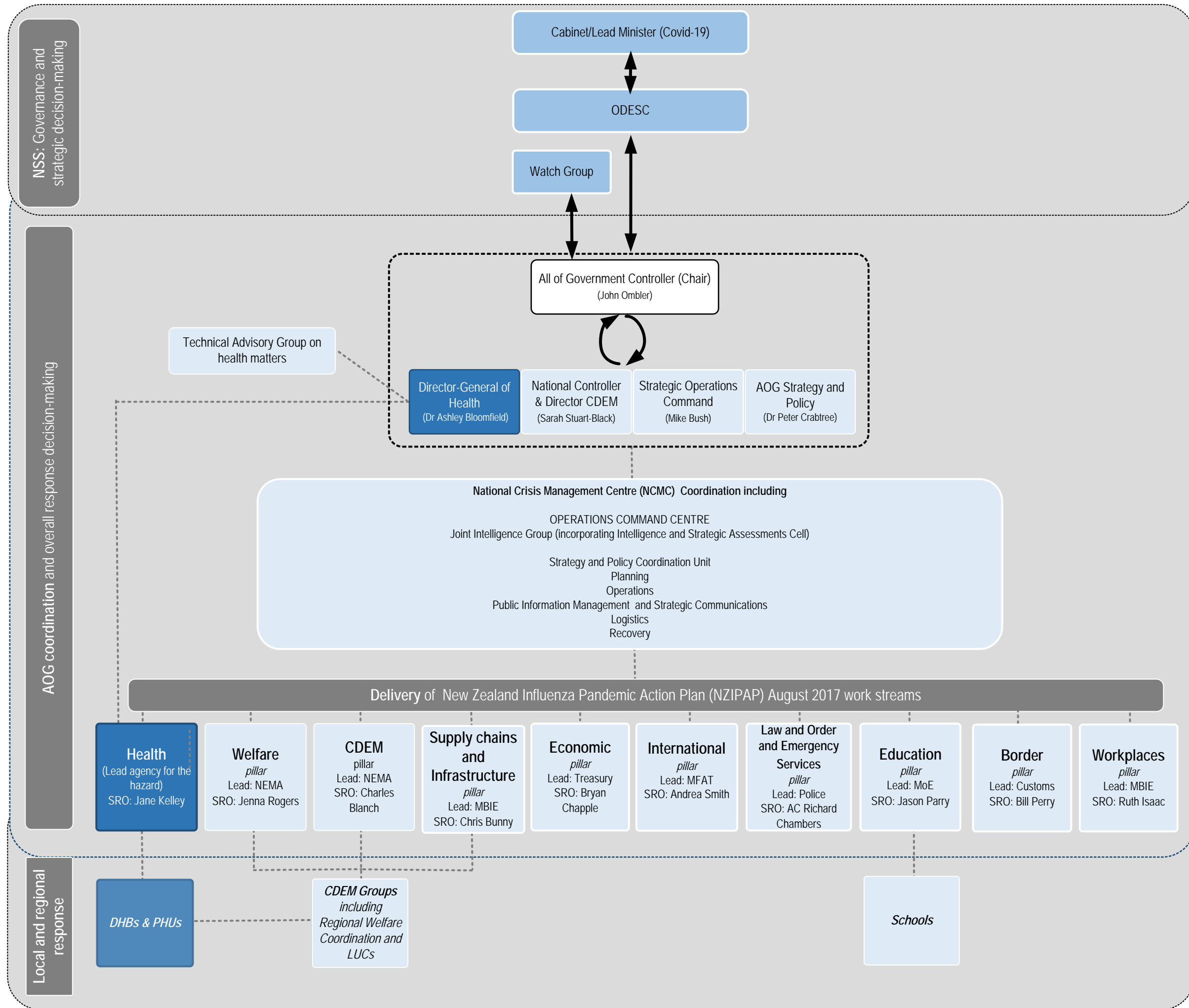
14. A clear and positive communications strategy with the New Zealand public is essential to the success of our strategy and underpins our operational response. This is an unprecedented event for New Zealand, and therefore has required a unique response from a communications perspective.
15. As part of the NCMC a national Public Information Management Team was established that has three teams - campaign/channels, media, and strategic communications - who support the delivery of messaging across government and out to the public.
16. From early on, the delivery of an integrated, nationwide campaign was required to provide New Zealanders with the right information was a priority. A new '*Unite Against COVID-19*' campaign was developed and launched within a week, with a new website and new social media channels.
17. The campaign spans print, digital, television, and online media, with a key focus on being the single source of information, linking through to other government related websites where appropriate. The campaign has also been able to activate a significant influencer networker who have worked with the campaign team to spread key messages and influence the public to make the right decisions.
18. As previously stated, the response to COVID-19 is wider than a health response, and requires an all-of-government coordinated response. The media and strategic communication teams focusses first on how we coordinate the communications actions across the response, both in the short and the long term, and secondly how we ensure we are communicating updates on the response, including through regular all-of-government media stand ups.
19. A significant focus for the whole communications approach continues to be on providing advice to our Māori and Pasifika communities, as well as to our at-risk and vulnerable communities.

## Attachments

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- Annex A**      COVID-19 National Response Structure
- Annex B**      COVID-19 Mitigation versus suppression

# COVID-19 National Response Structure



## All of Government Controller

Heads the leadership team and will act as the pivot point between the national security system and the operational and strategic response. The AoG Controller is the chief advisor to the National Security System (NSS) on the response to COVID-19, and is responsible for providing assurance to Government, the private sector and New Zealanders.

## Strategic Operations Command

Leadership and coordination of operational response. This role will lead the Operations Command Centre of the NCMC.

## Director-General of Health

DG Health is responsible for :

- overseeing the public health response
- ensuring health information and advice flows from the Ministry of Health to work streams to support efficient response and policy decisions
- undertaking their health protection role as detailed in the New Zealand Health Act 1956, and
- ensuring those undertaking functions on behalf of the DG Health fulfil their roles/responsibilities in a transparent and accountable way (e.g. medical officers of health).

## AOG Strategy and Policy

Providing oversight and leadership of the strategy and policy responses to COVID-19, and also for ensuring efficient coordination and high quality outputs of cross-agency work.

## National Controller and Director CDEM

Director CDEM is responsible for:

- ensuring the emergency management system responds seamlessly and in accordance with the CDEM Act, and
- ensuring the NCMC and related systems are available and functional for the duration of the COVID-19 response

## The Operational Command Centre (OCC)

As part of the NCMC, the OCC will drive the required all of government collaboration through horizontal work streams. The OCC will be run out of the Vodafone Building on Lambton Quay and be co-located with the Joint Intelligence Group.

## COVID-19 Mitigation versus suppression

- Our strategy is focusing on keeping COVID-19 out, stamping it out and slowing it down.
- Our aim is to prevent widespread outbreaks. Allowing widespread outbreaks (ie trajectories along the orange and blue curves ('flattening the curve')) will significantly overwhelm the health system.
- The strategy centres on border restrictions, intense testing, aggressive contact tracing, and stringent self-isolation and quarantine.
- Physical distancing will also be required to varying degrees as we continue along this path.
- We can call this a **suppression** strategy.
- Should outbreaks occur, a suppression strategy aims to reverse epidemic growth through tougher public health measures – eg by more intense physical distancing and travel restrictions.
- The aim is to ensure that health system capacity is not exceeded through strengthening public health measures.
- When cases fall, public health measures can be eased slightly.
- This cycle repeats itself (refer **squiggly green line**).
- However, we must still prepare for times when capacity of the health system is exceeded by having 'surge' options.
- A suppression strategy does incur significant economic and social disruption. Longer periods of physical distancing, including school closures, will be required.
- However, many lives will be saved and more people remain well so are able to operate the economy and the health care system.
- We would need to maintain this approach until a vaccine is developed, which is *at least* January 2021, and/or the global pandemic has passed.
- This approach is distinct from a **mitigation** strategy, which focuses on reducing the size of the peak (ie moving from the orange curve to the blue curve).

