

Budget Sensitive

Office of the Minister of Education

Office of the Minister for Social Development and Employment

COVID-19 Ministers Group

COVID-19: Government's response to increased ongoing demand for access to food and other essential wellbeing items

Proposal

- 1 On 27 August 2021, Cabinet agreed to reprioritise funds from Vote Education's Outcomes for Target Students Groups to Vote Social Development [CAB-21-MIN-0343 refers] in order to meet increased need for food access and other essential wellbeing items following the emergence of the COVID-19 Delta variant in Aotearoa New Zealand. This funding was intended to cover needs over the two-week period to 10 September 2021. This funding was part of a response from government agencies that saw \$69 million released by government agencies to meet the increased need for food and other essential wellbeing items.
- 2 This joint paper seeks agreement to further reprioritise and transfer funds of \$7 million from Vote Education's Outcomes for Target Student Groups MCA to Vote Social Development, to meet the ongoing need for food access and other essential wellbeing items. It also proposes new funding of \$4.5 million to be drawn from the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund to cover allocated funding from this past week to avoid further reprioritisation from MSD's Community Resilience and Recovery Fund which needs to continue to be made available for immediate recovery efforts resulting from this latest resurgence.
- 3 It is proposed that this funding covers the two-week period from 11 September 2021, while Auckland is expected to remain at Alert Level 4 or 3.

Relation to government priorities

- 4 This proposal supports the Government's objective to keep New Zealanders safe from COVID-19 and targets policy responses to the immediate impacts of resurgence-related restrictions on particular groups.

Executive Summary

- 5 Restrictions put in place as part of the public health response to contain the spread of the Delta Variant of COVID-19 in the community has resulted in a surge in demand for support to access food and other essential wellbeing items – particularly for the Pacific community.
- 6 Although some supermarkets, particularly in Auckland, are experiencing pressures due to self-isolation requirements (closures for deep clean and staff shortages), the overall food supply system is functioning well. However, the increased infectiousness of the Delta variant and the larger number of close

IN CONFIDENCE

contacts, has impacted the operations of essential services and workplaces, such as supermarkets.

- 7 The large number of people self-isolating along with other factors, such as increased utility costs for families unable to work or go to school during higher Alert Levels, has led to pressure points in the welfare response that are being more acutely felt with the current outbreak, compared to previous outbreaks, particularly in Auckland.
- 8 To respond to the surge in demand across Aotearoa New Zealand, government agencies have provided additional support. This support has been targeted towards those requiring access to food and other essential wellbeing items. It has also included support for households that are self-isolating.
- 9 Since 17 August 2021, a total of \$69.31 million¹ in additional funding has been released by agencies to meet the increased need for support to access food, essential wellbeing items, whānau support, support for Pacific, and Māori and Iwi-led responses. This is in addition to funding that was available for recovery and food-related support activities prior to 17 August 2021.
- 10 Of this total, the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) has released \$15.4 million to support access to food and other essential wellbeing items, with \$10 million of this already distributed to communities.
- 11 The majority of the additional funding released by government agencies has been targeted to the needs of those living in Auckland. However, some increased support has also been provided to the Wellington, Te Tai Tokerau and some remote communities.
- 12 Additional funding is required to meet the demand for food and other essential wellbeing items for the two-week period from 11 September 2021, while Alert Level 4 (and possibly Alert Level 3) restrictions remain in place for Auckland. In order to allow enough time for more funding to be allocated, and food to be purchased and delivered for 11 September 2021, a decision is required as soon as practical.
- 13 Given the reprioritisation that has already occurred within MSD, MSD cannot further reprioritise from within its baseline. We recommend that \$6.1 million of the underspend from the Ministry of Education's Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches programme is reprioritised and transferred from Vote Education to Vote Social Development to assist in meeting the surge demand for food and other essential wellbeing items over the next two weeks. This is in addition to the \$3.2 million that was transferred to Vote Social Development as part of the reprioritisation decision agreed to by Cabinet on 27 August 2021 [CAB-21-MIN-0343 refers].

¹ On 2 September the Associate Minister of Health announced funding of \$26 million to support Pacific communities, including through Pacific health and disability services, scaling up mobile outreach and Pacific community vaccination services, and improving engagement and communications to reach specific ethnic groups within the Pacific community.

- 14 We also propose that an additional \$5.4 million in funding allocated by MSD over this past week to respond to food access in rural and remote areas, Community Connectors and for iwi to address critical unmet need, is covered through a further transfer of \$0.9 million remaining underspend in the Ministry of Education's Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches programme and a draw down on the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund (CRRF).
- 15 The rapid public health response required to contain the spread of the Delta Variant of COVID-19 has highlighted the need to ensure an equally rapid welfare response. MSD will continue to work with key agencies across the system to ensure that support is coordinated and targeted to areas and populations with the greatest need.
- 16 Officials will provide Ministers with further advice over the coming weeks on any changes to arrangements that may be needed to ensure the welfare response to any future re-emergence of COVID-19 in Aotearoa New Zealand is rapid, coordinated, and efficient.

Needs relating to access to food and other essential wellbeing items remains more acute than previous lockdowns

- 17 Restrictions put in place as part of the public health response to contain the spread of the Delta Variant of COVID-19 in the community has resulted in a surge in demand for support to access food and other essential wellbeing items, particularly for the Pacific community. This demand is putting pressure on supermarkets, food banks, and other community providers.
- 18 The Delta Variant of COVID-19 is more transmissible and infectious than previous variants, and much larger numbers of New Zealanders are being required to self-isolate. As of 7 September, 37,971 people have been identified as a close contact, with the majority located in Auckland. In comparison, there were 1,500 close contacts identified in New Zealand's August 2020 COVID-19 outbreak.
- 19 Although some supermarkets, particularly in Auckland, are experiencing pressures due to self-isolation requirements (closures for deep clean and staff shortages), the overall food supply system is functioning well. However, the increased infectiousness and larger number of close contacts, has impacted the operations of essential services and workplaces, such as supermarkets.
- 20 The Pacific community in Auckland has been particularly affected by the current outbreak of COVID-19 and, therefore, self-isolation and Alert Level 4 restrictions. Pacific families made up over half of those having to self-isolate, resulting in entire support networks not being able to activate and mobilise.
- 21 The Ministry for Pacific Peoples has engaged with over 3,000 Pacific community groups, including Pacific church leaders, providers and individuals since Alert Level 4 restrictions commenced on 17 August 2021. Pacific providers are reporting a surge in requests and referrals for support, especially with access to food, hygiene products, personal protective equipment (PPE), wellbeing support – particularly amongst young Pacific

people – and connectivity costs. Some providers have reported difficulties meeting demand.

- 22 Alert Level 4 and 3 restrictions impact on earning capacity, and this can amplify pre-existing income and poverty inequities. Anecdotal evidence from providers who have received increased funding, such as food banks, indicates that those seeking support are often low income earners who have experienced a reduction in work hours as a result Alert Level restrictions, or are struggling to make up the income difference if they are receiving the wage subsidy – which may only cover a proportion of an employee’s income.
- 23 Additionally, families who are typically reliant on food in schools programmes for support are now having to absorb this cost and have limited options for accessing food and essential wellbeing items.
- 24 In practical terms, there were 31,371 Special Needs Grants (SNGs) granted for food for the week ended 3 September 2021. Although this is the lowest since the commencement of Alert level 4 and 3 restrictions on 17 August 2021, it is still 40 percent higher than before restrictions commenced. The decrease in food grants during the week ending 3 September 2021 was mostly in regions outside of Auckland – likely due to drop in Alert levels. SNG grants for food in Auckland remain higher than normal levels (prior to 17 August 2021).

Government agencies’ response has generally met immediate needs in the short-term

- 25 To respond to the surge in demand across Aotearoa New Zealand, government agencies have provided additional support to iwi, food, social service, and Whānau Ora providers through baseline funding and additional funding.
- 26 This additional support has been targeted towards those requiring support to access food and other essential wellbeing items, particularly in Auckland. It has included the provision of food and wellbeing packs to those in self-isolation and increasing the accessibility and distribution of food through food banks and other food providers. Support has also included the provision of other essential wellbeing items, such as period products and hygiene packs.
- 27 An overview of agencies’ responses to emerging needs since 17 August 2021 is outlined in Appendix One. In summary, Since 17 August 2021, a total of \$69.31 million in additional funding has been released by agencies to meet the increased need for support to access food, essential wellbeing items, whānau support, support for Pacific, and Māori and Iwi-led responses. This funding includes:

27.1 \$28.0 million from Te Puni Kōkiri²

² This includes exceptional funding for Māori organisations bridging gaps between services and funding for Whānau Ora Commissioning Agencies. Under the Whānau Ora approach with Commissioning Agencies, support needs are determined by whānau themselves, so there is some flexibility in how the funding will be applied to

IN CONFIDENCE

27.2 \$15.4 million from the Ministry of Social Development³

27.3 \$0.3 million from the Ministry of Education

27.4 \$1.0 million from Te Arawhiti, and

27.5 \$4.9 million from the National Emergency Management Agency⁴.

28 This is in addition to the funding that was available for recovery and food-related activities prior to 17 August 2021, such as \$32 million for the MSD Food Secure Communities programme, and the \$20 million allocated to the Ministry of Health through Budget 2020 to provide wrap around services, including food and accommodation for COVID-19 cases and eligible contacts with higher or complex needs in the community. It is also in addition to the Community Connectors Service (\$41.3 million over two years from Budget 2020) and the \$36 million for the Community Capability and Resilience Fund (CCRF) for community initiatives that support the rebuild and recovery from COVID-19.

29 In the last week there has also been a reprioritisation of \$26 million by the Ministry of Health to support Pacific communities, including through Pacific health and disability services, scaling up mobile outreach and Pacific community vaccination services, and improving engagement and communications to reach specific ethnic groups within the Pacific community.

Allocation of funding to date by activity

30 Of the total \$69.3 million additional funding released by government agencies since 17 August 2021, \$40.9 million has been allocated to meet the demand for essential wellbeing items, as well as food. Essential wellbeing items provided through this funding include period products, connectivity (power and mobile data), household items, warmth, hygiene packs and wellbeing support. This funding will also assist communities to access COVID-19 vaccines and self-isolation accommodation.

31 The portion of the total allocated specifically to meet the increased access to food is \$8.5 million. This funding has increased capacity of food banks, food networks and other food related providers.

Allocation of funding to date by provider

32 Of the total \$69.3 million additional funding provided since 17 August 2021, \$30 million has been allocated by MSD and Te Puni Kōkiri to food, health, social service, and Whānau Ora Commissioning Agencies. This has included

address whānau needs. This is likely to be needed for kai, power, data, hygiene packs, but also wraparound support for whānau accessing multiple services, such as health and mental health supports, access to vaccination services, and so on.

³ This includes \$3.2 million transferred from Vote Education to Vote Social Development on 27 August 2021 [CAB-21-MIN-0343 refers].

⁴ This funding is only available for costs at Alert Levels 4 and 3.

IN CONFIDENCE

targeted funding for Pacific providers supporting Pacific communities in the Auckland region.

- 33 A further \$8 million has been allocated by MSD, Te Puni Kōkiri and Te Arawhiti to specifically meet the needs of iwi and Māori groups who are leading responses within their rohe. This includes support with communications outreach, iwi-led response planning, and support to distribute food, hygiene products, PPE and other essential wellbeing items.
- 34 Reimbursement of eligible welfare costs can be made under the National Emergency Management Agency \$4.9 million appropriation through Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) Groups, as per last year. However, access to this funding is regarded as a last resort option.

Population groups reached by funding to date

- 35 The current COVID-19 outbreak is largely concentrated in Auckland, and the impacts of restrictions and requirements to self-isolate are being most acutely felt in Auckland. Given this, the majority of the additional funding released by government agencies has responded to the needs of those living in Auckland. However, some increased support has also been provided to the Wellington and Te Tai Tokerau communities.
- 36 Funding provided to food banks, the New Zealand Food Network, and other food related providers will support the needs of most population groups impacted by the re-emergence of COVID-19. However, some population groups require further support, or targeted approaches and services, particularly those in Auckland.
- 37 MSD has established an approach informed by Pacific providers across Auckland to reach communities most at need. Three Pacific Food Secure Providers (Affirming Works, South Seas and The Fono) have merged to become a centralised food hub for other medium to small Pacific providers. MSD also have an additional Pacific provider (SIAOLA - Vahefonua Tonga Methodist Mission Charitable Trust) who are a National service, based in Auckland, with a special focus on supporting the Tongan community. Funding for MSD providers is weighted towards Māori and Pacific communities, reflecting their higher levels of food insecurity.
- 38 Auckland Emergency Management, Auckland MSD and Auckland District Health Board (DHB) have established a Welfare Triage Centre, which aims to identify unmet needs and provide a referral pathway to ensure the most appropriate agency is meeting this need, in a coordinated manner. Auckland Emergency Management and other agencies have provided increased staffing and are making outbound calls to people referred by MSD or the DHB as self-isolating and have welfare needs.
- 39 Approximately \$23 million of Te Puni Kōkiri's additional funding will target many needs of Māori and Pacific communities through Whānau Ora Commissioning Agencies. MSD providers also support Māori and Pacific communities.

IN CONFIDENCE

- 40 CDEM Groups are providing support to those who have no means of support available through other channels. This is mainly targeted to those living in rural or isolated areas of the country and those self-isolating.

Additional funding will be required to support ongoing needs if restrictions continue

- 41 As anticipated and signalled previously [CAB-21-MIN-0343 refers], the total \$15.4 million of additional funding released by MSD since 17 August 2020 is expected to be fully allocated by 10 September. Of this funding released by MSD, \$10 million has already been distributed to communities, with the remaining amount to be distributed at pace.
- 42 On 2 September 2021, MSD contacted approximately 170 food providers to gain a view of volumes and check on stock. From the information collected, MSD estimates that there were approximately an additional 97,000 food parcels provided since the week prior to 17 August 2021, and this number continues to grow daily.
- 43 It is anticipated that, with Auckland region remaining at Alert Levels 4 or 3, the surge demand for food parcels and wellbeing packs for the two weeks from 11 September, will be the same as that experienced since 17 August 2021. We expect that other regions transitioning to Alert Level 2 (Delta) from 11.59pm on 7 September will not experience the same type of surge demand. However, MSD will continue to monitor this situation to assess if any other support may be required.
- 44 On this basis, we propose that a further \$6.1 million is needed to continue to help address the expected surge demand in Auckland for the next two weeks. This is anticipated to include:
- 44.1 s 9(2)(j) [REDACTED]
- 44.2 \$2.986 million for a further 20,000 essential wellbeing packs to be funded through community connectors and other providers who have been delivering these services in the Auckland region since the move to Alert Level 4.
- 45 This additional funding provided will be allocated based on priority population groups within the Auckland region. MSD anticipates that it will continue to weight support towards the Pacific community and more broadly to Māori and Pacific in higher areas of deprivation. This may include funding for iwi, hapū and marae for the purposes of the provision of food and other essential wellbeing items.
- 46 Given the reprioritisation that has already occurred within MSD, MSD cannot further reprioritise from within its baseline without potentially impacting on its ability to provide services focussed on recovery following lockdown e.g. employment services.

- 47 The Ministry of Education's Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches programme currently has an underspend of approximately \$7.0 million due to the programme being suspended or operating at limited capacity during Alert Levels 4 and 3 respectively⁵. This is in addition to the \$3.2 million that was transferred to Vote Social Development as part of the reprioritisation decision agreed to by Cabinet on 27 August 2021 [CAB-21-MIN-0343 refers].
- 48 Of the \$7.0 million underspend accumulated since 27 August, we recommend that \$6.1 million of this is reprioritised and transferred from Vote Education to Vote Social Development to further assist in meeting the surge demand for food and other essential wellbeing items in Auckland for the two weeks following 11 September 2021.
- 49 The Ministry for Pacific Peoples has emphasised that any possible increase in funding and support made available to Pacific providers will help ensure Pacific families and communities, particularly those in Auckland, are able to access food and essential wellbeing items.
- 50 In order to allow sufficient time for the additional funding to be allocated to providers, and food to be purchased and delivered from 11 September 2021, a decision by the COVID-19 Ministers Group on further reprioritisation additional funding is required as soon as practical.

A further draw down on COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund to support the critical need of this past week is also proposed

- 51 The Minister for Social Development and Employment has also considered a reprioritisation of \$5.4 million from the Community Resilience and Recovery Fund (CCRF) to cover critical need funding that required to be allocated over this past week, including for:
- 51.1 \$1.4 million for food access in rural and remote areas
 - 51.2 \$2 million to providers such as those with Community Connectors to provide additional essential wellbeing items
 - 51.3 \$2 million to iwi to meet critical unmet need for whānau (announced by Ministers for Māori Crown Relations: Te Arawhiti, Social Development and Employment, and Whānau Ora on 2 September).

52 s 9(2)(f)(iv) [REDACTED]

⁵ At Alert Level 3 the programme is still live for the children of essential workers etc who are going to school; this is often <10% of the roll.

- 53 The CCRF provides support for activities including initiatives that implement COVID-19 community recovery plans, that support and strengthen social cohesion, and promote communities to normalise requirements and safeguards known to protect against or respond quickly to the risk of COVID-19.
- 54 Instead we propose that the remaining \$0.9 million underspend from the Ministry of Education's Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches programme be transferred to support cover the financial impact along with a further draw down of \$4.5 million from the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund.
- 55 We consider that this request to draw down \$4.5 million from the CRRF meets the refined criteria recently agreed by Cabinet in that it represents a targeted policy response to the immediate impacts of resurgence related restrictions on particular demographic groups. Namely, the funding is for critical need to regions experience significant deprivation from essential items while regions in the North Island have been (and continue to be) at Alert Levels 4 or 3.

Coordination and forward planning across the system will be crucial to successfully responding to need

- 56 The rapid public health response required to contain the spread of the Delta Variant of COVID-19 has highlighted the need to ensure an equally rapid welfare response. Additional support and services need to be ready for immediate deployment and be able to be targeted to areas and populations of greatest need – e.g. outbreak epicentres and population groups most impacted or at risk.
- 57 MSD will continue to work with key agencies across the system, including Te Puni Kōkiri, Te Arawhiti, and the Ministries for Pacific Peoples, Women, Ethnic Communities and Youth Development, and the Offices for Seniors and for Disability issues to share information and ensure that support, including that permitted by the additional funding sought in this paper, is coordinated and targeted to areas and populations with the greatest need.
- 58 Officials will provide Ministers with further advice over the coming weeks on any changes to arrangements that may be needed to ensure the welfare response to any future re-emergence of COVID-19 in Aotearoa New Zealand is rapid, coordinated, and efficient.

Other pressure points within the welfare response are emerging

- 59 Despite the breadth of agencies' responses to immediate demand, it is unlikely the response will reach all areas and meet all needs. Additionally, pre-existing income and poverty inequities are likely to be amplified and many families and whānau are likely to experience the effects of compounding social issues for some time, including:
- 59.1 access to, and cost of, food and hygiene items for low-income families and whānau

- 59.2 costs associated with connectivity, heating, and energy – particularly as the Winter Energy Payment concludes on 1 October 2021
- 59.3 psycho-social wellbeing, s (9)(2)(g)(i) particularly for children and young people
- 59.4 family violence and sexual violence.
- 60 The Caring for Communities Chief Executives group is monitoring these social issues and meeting regularly to discuss responses. This group will provide information to Ministers on responses as required.
- 61 Evidence indicates COVID-19 lockdowns have disproportionate effects on women. The Ministry for Women has sought \$2 million to re-establish its COVID-19 Community Fund to address the immediate impacts of further lockdowns on vulnerable groups of women and girls.

Financial Implications

- 62 MSD is closely monitoring the impact of the current lockdown on its baseline and has already absorbed additional organisational pressures, as well as reprioritised funding from its community appropriations.
- 63 MSD has reprioritised \$4.0 million from its departmental baselines, and \$2.8 million from its Community Support Services Multi-Category Appropriation (MCA) to support the increased demand for community services such as food provision and youth line.
- 64 MSD has explored reprioritisation from other appropriations within Vote Social Development, including the Improved Employment and Social Outcomes Support MC. However, MSD is already experiencing an increase in client volumes as a result of lockdown, and while it is likely that demand for employment programmes will be slower in the short term, the majority of MSD's employment funding is already contractually committed. Additionally, MSD anticipates there will be a greater need for these services when lockdown ends. As such, we do not see any further opportunity to further prioritise from MSD's baselines at this time.
- 65 As indicated above, further funding may be required after the two weeks from 11 September (i.e. from 25 September 2021). We propose that the COVID-19 Ministers Group agree to a delegation for the Minister of Finance and the Minister for Social Development and Employment to jointly agree an additional draw down from the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund of up to \$3.1 million, should parts of New Zealand remain at Alert Levels 4 or 3, and there continues to be a demonstrated surge in demand for support to access food and other essential wellbeing items.
- 66 A further delegation is also proposed for the Minister of Finance, Minister of Education and Minister for Social Development and Employment to jointly agree any fiscally neutral adjustments to respond to similar need.

Legislative Implications

67 There are no legislative implications.

Regulatory Impact Statement

68 A Regulatory Impact Statement has not been prepared as there are no legislative implications.

Population Implications

69 **Māori:** While Māori are not visible in current positive COVID-19 cases, low vaccination coverage for Māori means Māori communities are at higher risk of becoming infected if COVID-19 spreads. Additional funding will ensure that whānau, especially those in Auckland, are able to have continued access to food and other essential wellbeing items.

70 **Pacific people:** With a high proportion positive cases of COVID-19 being members of the Pacific community, the Alert Level 4 and 3 restrictions are having a greater, disproportional impact on Pacific people. Increased funding and support made available will help ensure Pacific families and communities, particularly those in Auckland, are able to access essential wellbeing items (e.g. food, hygiene products).

71 **Women:** Evidence indicates that COVID-19 lockdowns have disproportionate effects on women, and particularly the most vulnerable women in society. The adverse effects include job losses, loss of income, increased unpaid care work, and an additional barrier to those seeking to leave violent or abusive domestic situations. While there are other government supports available to vulnerable New Zealanders, including women, through schemes such as the wage subsidy, proposed additional funding will help ensure women, particularly those in Auckland are able to access food and essential wellbeing items. This funding will compliment funding sought by the Ministry for Women to support there are additional needs aren't meet through this funding – access or information on period products, help with leaving an abusing partner, culturally appropriate support networks for migrant women, and mental health support for LGBTQ+ women.

72 **Disabled people:** Ensuring accessibility of communications and support for disabled people will be especially critical during Alert Levels 4 and 3. With restrictions on movement and limitations such as the ability to get to the supermarket (e.g. queuing), some disabled people may not be able to and/or feel safe access food as they would usually do. Additional food support may be required for disabled people living in the community. More flexible whānau-centred support will also enable a holistic approach to disabled adults as well as children and youth living with families who may have additional needs from because of the Alert Level 4 and 3 restrictions.

73 **Older people:** Outreach services to older people will reflect difficulties they may have in accessing food, particularly if they have a physical or sensory impairment, such as is not feeling able to get to a supermarket, their local

supermarket being closed, and/or not being able to access online services. Older people who are isolated from normal support networks due to the restrictions may also be more vulnerable to abuse and neglect in their homes and/or while living with family members.

- 74 **Children and youth:** Accessing support for children and youth is critical to maintain wellbeing, particularly mental health, during the uncertain stressful times of Alert Levels 4 and 3. Flexible support services that are able to apply a whānau-centred approach will ensure children and youth are not forgotten, including in provision of food. A whānau that is supported to maintain their resilience will contribute to children being able to engage with education and development.
- 75 **Ethnic communities:** Some migrant and refugee communities are reporting an increase in shopping bills for large families, causing some financial stress. Access to foodbanks and food service providers continues to cater towards specific cultural dietary requirements where they are able and if not to refer families onto the services that can. MSD are supporting New Zealand Food Network local food hubs who support Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities including the Supreme Sikh Society. MSD are also dedicating a proportion of direct funding specifically for CALD communities, and support organisations such as Kahui Te Kaha (Muslim food support); Multi-ethnic Council (Muslim food support) and Chinese New Settlers.

Human Rights

- 76 There are no human rights implications.

Consultation

- 77 The following agencies were consulted in the development of this paper: the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Treasury, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry for Pacific Peoples, Te Puni Kōkiri, Te Arawhiti, The National Emergency Management Agency and Ministry of Youth Development – Te Manatū Whakahiato Taiohi.

Communications

- 78 If agreed, a communications approach will be developed with relevant Ministers' offices.

Proactive Release

- 79 I intend to proactively release this Cabinet paper, with redactions as appropriate under the Official Information Act 1982, within 30 business days of decisions being confirmed by Cabinet.

Recommendations

- 80 The Minister of Education and Minister for Social Development and Employment recommends that the COVID-19 Ministers Group:

IN CONFIDENCE

- 1 **Note** that restrictions put in place as part of the public health response to the emergence of the Delta COVID-19 variant in the community has resulted in a surge in demand for support to access food and other essential wellbeing items.
- 2 **Note** that since 17 August 2021, a total of \$69.4 million in additional funding has been released by government agencies to meet increased need for support to access food, essential wellbeing items, whānau support, support for Pacific, and Māori or iwi-led responses.
- 3 **Note** that on 27 August 2021 Cabinet agreed to reprioritise funds from Vote Education’s Outcomes for Target Students Groups to Vote Social Development [CAB-21-MIN-0343 refers] in order to meet increased need for food access and other essential wellbeing items following the emergence of the COVID-19 Delta variant.
- 4 **Note** that based on spend to date, we expect additional funding released by MSD to be exhausted by 10 September.
- 5 **Note** that we anticipate seeing continued surged demand for food and other essential wellbeing items in the Auckland region while it remains at Alert Level 4 (and possibly Alert Level 3) over the two-week period from 11 September 2021 due to:
 - 6.1 large groups of people self-isolating and unable to support each other
 - 6.2 reduced hours for some workers who may be living week to week, and
 - 6.3 increased utility costs for families who are staying at home rather than going to school and work.
- 6 **Agree** to a fiscally neutral adjustment to meet the sustained increased community demand for food access and other essential wellbeing items in response to the emergence of the COVID-19 Delta variant for the two weeks from 11 September 2021 in the Auckland region.
- 7 **Agree** to new funding of \$4.5 million to address unmet need over this past week for to food access in rural and remote areas, Community Connectors and to support iwi to address critical unmet need for their whānau.
- 8 **Approve** the following changes to appropriations to give effect to the policy decision in recommendation 6 above, with no impact on the operating balance and net core Crown debt:

	\$m – increase/(decrease)				
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26 & outyears
Vote Social Development					

IN CONFIDENCE

Minister for Social Development and Employment Multi-Category Expenses and Capital Expenditure: Community Support Services MCA Non-Departmental Other Expenses: Community Response to Adverse or Emergency Events	7.000	-	-	-	-
Vote Education Minister of Education Multi-Category Expenses and Capital Expenditure: Outcomes for Target Student Groups MCA Non-Departmental Output Expenses: School Lunch Programme	(7.000)	-	-	-	-
Total Operating	-	-	-	-	-

9 **Approve** the following changes to appropriations to give effect to the policy decision in recommendation 7 above, with a corresponding impact on the operating balance and net core Crown debt:

	\$m – increase/(decrease)				
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26 & outyears
Vote Social Development					
Minister for Social Development and Employment					
Multi-Category Expenses and Capital Expenditure:					
Community Support Services MCA					

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Non-Departmental Other Expenses:					
Community Response to Adverse or Emergency Events	4.500	-	-	-	-
Total Operating	4.500	-	-	-	-

- 10 **Agree** that the proposed changes to appropriations for 2021/22 in recommendation 8 and 9 above, be included in the 2021/22 Supplementary Estimates and that, in the interim, the increases be met from Imprest Supply.
- 11 **Agree** that the expenses incurred under recommendation 9 above be charged against the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund established as part of Budget 2020.
- 12 **Agree** to provide delegated authority to the Minister of Finance and the Minister for Social Development and Employment, should Auckland remain in alert level 3 or above, to jointly agree additional funding to meet increased community demand for food access and other essential wellbeing items in response to the emergence of the COVID-19 Delta variant, up to a maximum of \$3.1 million.
- 13 **Authorise** the Minister of Finance and the Minister for Social Development and Employment, should Auckland remain in alert level 3 or above, to jointly agree additional funding to give effect to the decision in recommendation 12 above, up to a maximum of \$3.1 million, to be charged against the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, in accordance with CAB-21-MIN-0349.
- 14 **Agree** to provide delegated authority to the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Education and Minister for Social Development and Employment, should Auckland remain in alert level 3 or above, to jointly agree any additional fiscally neutral adjustments from Vote Education to Vote Social Development to meet increased community demand for food access and other essential wellbeing items in response to the emergence of the COVID-19 Delta variant.
- 15 **Authorise** the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Education and Minister for Social Development and Employment, should Auckland remain in Alert Level 3 or above, to jointly agree any additional fiscally neutral adjustments to give effect to the decision in recommendation 14 above.
- 16 **Note** that MSD will continue to work with Te Puni Kōkiri, Te Arawhiti, the Ministries for Pacific Peoples, Women, Ethnic Communities and Youth Development, and the Offices for Seniors and Disability Issues to share information and ensure that these support initiatives are coordinated.
- 17 **Note** that the new CRRF funding of \$4.5 million will be separately tracked and reported on by the Ministry of Social Development.

I N C O N F I D E N C E

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Chris Hipkins

Minister of Education

Hon Carmel Sepuloni

Minister for Social Development and Employment

Appendix One: Government agency funding allocated to support lockdown from 17th August 2021

Agency	Amount	Source	Service/distribution/activity
Te Puni Kōkiri	\$23m	COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund – August 2021	Food, power, mobile data, hygiene packs, mental health support, wraparound support to access multiple services
Te Puni Kōkiri	\$5m	Reprioritised from baseline	Community driven, local solutions to gaps in access and provision – small grants
Te Arawhiti	\$1m	COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund	Iwi-led response planning, communications outreach, support for vaccine uptake
Ministry of Social Development	\$2.8m	Reprioritised funding from Community Capability Resilience Fund	\$1.030 million to support whānau into existing channels of welfare support and support those self-isolating
			\$900,000 to support provision of food
			\$896,000 in priority grants to support communities
Ministry of Social Development	\$7.2m	Reprioritised from Vote Education (\$3.2m) and Vote Social Development (\$4.0m)	\$4.200m to support provision of food
			\$3.000m for community grants for essential wellbeing items and services
Ministry of Social Development	\$5.4m	Reprioritised funding from Community Capability Resilience Fund – allocated \$32.0m from COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund in Budget 2020	\$1.400m for food access in rural and remote areas
			\$2.000m to Community Connection service providers
			\$2.000m to address critical unmet need
Ministry of Education	Unknown	Repurposed funding within Period Products in Schools Programme	Provision of period products – 40,000 packs (enough for 20,000 per month)
Ministry of Health	\$20m	Allocated through Budget 2020 (COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund)	Wrap-around services for cases and eligible contacts with higher or complex needs
National Emergency Management Agency	\$4.90m	2021/22 financial year	Support people that have immediate welfare needs that do not meet the National Emergency Management Agency's normal funding criteria and who cannot access other sources of support to meet the needs, including support to iwi, rural and isolated communities
Total	\$69.3m		