



Report

Date: 17 December 2020

Security Level: IN CONFIDENCE

To: Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Minister for Social Development & Employment

COVID-19 Resurgence planning arrangements for foreign nationals requiring support with accommodation

Purpose of the report

- 1 To keep you informed about other support that may be available for recipients of Emergency Benefit following changes to support for foreign nationals from 1 December 2020, this report provides an overview of accommodation system arrangements for any potential escalation in COVID-19 Alert Levels.

Background

- 2 During the response to the Alert Level 4 restrictions in March and April 2020, there were increasing reports that some foreign nationals were experiencing serious hardship due to the impacts of COVID-19. This was most apparent in the Queenstown Lakes District but was escalating in other regions.
- 3 Support for accommodation, food and utilities was initially provided through Civil Defence and Emergency Management (CDEM) Groups. The ongoing pressures led to the establishment of a temporary support programme for those in severe hardship, led by the Department of Internal Affairs and delivered through the New Zealand Red Cross.
- 4 The *Visitor Care | Manaaki Manuhiri* programme ran from 1 July to 30 November 2020. The programme provided eligible foreign nationals with in-kind assistance to meet basic needs, like food and accommodation, regardless of Alert Level changes. As at 25 November 2020, the Programme had supported a total of 12,657 people (7,119 individuals / family members and 5,538 Recognised Seasonal Employer workers).
- 5 To ensure that ongoing support for foreign nationals in hardship is available while international travel disruptions continue, Cabinet agreed to provide financial support to foreign nationals in hardship in New Zealand through the provision of an Emergency Benefit, via the Ministry of Social Development (MSD). From 1 December 2020 to 28 February 2021, MSD can grant an Emergency Benefit to eligible people on a Temporary Visa. There have been 91 grants of EB to people on Temporary Visas up to 14 December 2020.

- 6 Support is limited to the base rate of EB only¹, with no access to second or third tier welfare support. The limitations in support available means that MSD cannot legally provide accommodation related support to people under this programme. For example, Accommodation Supplement, payments for Rent Arrears or Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants are not available for people on Temporary Visas. This means that during any Alert Level 3 or 4 restrictions, accommodation support for this group is limited to that available through CDEM Groups, or through The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment's Temporary Accommodation Service (MBIE TAS)².
- 7 In the first instance, all foreign nationals are encouraged to approach their foreign mission (High Commission, Embassy or Consulate) in New Zealand to seek consular support, including if suffering from hardship or unable to find accommodation. Many foreign missions can and will offer consular assistance, that could include limited financial assistance and/or support for a foreign national to return home. The Emergency Benefit criteria note that foreign nationals should have pursued all reasonable means of support, including consular support from their own foreign mission (which are permitted to operate and deliver consular services at all Alert Levels).

COVID-19 Resurgence Planning for Accommodation

- 8 All agencies involved in providing housing services experienced increased demand and disruption to services during the response to Alert Level 4 restrictions. CDEM Groups provided housing support to groups who could not access housing services, often due to urgency, such as after-hours needs, or ineligibility, such as for foreign nationals. MBIE TAS also provided support for those displaced during travel restrictions. Accommodation support during heightened Alert Levels is important to address to ensure that Alert Level requirements are observed to support the overall public health goals of any response.
- 9 During the Auckland regional resurgence in August 2020, improved resourcing, coordination, and understanding of service delivery roles resulted in business as usual housing providers and MBIE TAS successfully managing accommodation needs.
- 10 The *Visitor Care | Manaaki Manuhiri* programme was available to support foreign nationals during this resurgence, and therefore no accommodation support was required through the Auckland CDEM Group and limited support through MBIE TAS. Additionally, DIA reports did not show any surge in support for accommodation during this time.
- 11 With changes in support available to foreign nationals from 1 December, the role of CDEM Groups and MBIE TAS would likely again be required to support foreign nationals with accommodation needs, as a last resort under Alert Levels 3 and 4.

Expected support during regional or national restrictions

- 12 Forecasting overall demand for emergency accommodation support during an escalation in Alert Levels is difficult. Increased availability of international travel has meant many people in hardship have returned to their country of origin. Additionally,

¹ How much a person can get will depend on their situation: single people can receive \$250.74 per week; sole parents can receive \$375.17 per week; those with a partner and children can receive \$428.06 per week.

² Under the National CDEM Plan Order 2015, MBIE is the agency responsible for the coordination of the provision of temporary accommodation to those displaced from their homes due to an emergency.

employment opportunities in seasonal and other industries within New Zealand has provided employment options for many people on temporary visas.

- 13 Despite the current environment, we do anticipate some demand for emergency support. This may include those requiring placement in commercial accommodation (eg stranded travellers with no residence), those needing to move during a lockdown (eg due to family violence), and those who cannot fully cover their existing accommodation costs due to loss of income. There will also be some foreign nationals that are not eligible for EB through MSD that may require emergency support for accommodation.
- 14 We expect that support through consular services from their own Governments via their foreign missions, eligibility for EB, as well as other options for support through community providers (eg foodbanks), will mitigate impacts of any loss of income.

Emergency support through CDEM Groups and TAS

- 15 During Alert Level 4 restrictions, CDEM Groups provided support to foreign nationals as there was no other avenue in place at that time. CDEM Group support varied depending on needs and other avenues of assistance. In most emergency situations CDEM Group accommodation support is limited to placing people who are displaced from their homes, usually in commercial accommodation for up to two weeks. It is not intended to support people who have lost income and cannot meet their living costs.
- 16 For any response to COVID-19, CDEM Groups can be reimbursed by the Government for the costs of accommodation where it meets the policy in the Guide to the National CDEM Plan. This policy allows reimbursement where people have been required to self-isolate under COVID-19 response measures.
- 17 Additionally, the provision of temporary accommodation for those displaced in an emergency is covered under the mandate for MBIE TAS. For example, support may be required where groups are unable to travel due to travel restrictions and are required to remain in place for longer durations (over two weeks). To date, these situations have been limited.
- 18 During any resurgence, agencies involved in providing accommodation support will work closely together to ensure that people receive support from the appropriate agency.
- 19 The updated system flow chart is provided in Appendix One.

Recommended actions

It is recommended that you:

- 1 **note** that support for foreign nationals in hardship changed from 1 December 2020, with MSD now able to grant an Emergency Benefit to eligible people on a Temporary Visa
- 2 **note** that under the Emergency Benefit, MSD cannot provide accommodation support for foreign nationals
- 3 **note** that it is difficult to determine overall demand for emergency accommodation support for foreign nationals during any escalation in Alert Levels, but we anticipate that some support may be required
- 4 **note** that provision of financial support through MSD, combined with community support options (eg foodbanks) should mitigate impacts of any escalation in Alert Levels

5 **note** that under COVID-19 resurgence plans, support for emergency accommodation during Alert Level 3 or 4 is available through CDEM Groups or the Temporary Accommodation Service as a last resort

6 **note** that MSD will work with the COVID-19 Communications team to ensure updated communications material is available to help people understand accommodation system arrangements during an escalation in Alert Levels

7 **agree** to forward a copy of this report to:

7.1 Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister for COVID-19 Response

agree / disagree

7.2 Hon Nanaia Mahuta, Minister for Foreign Affairs

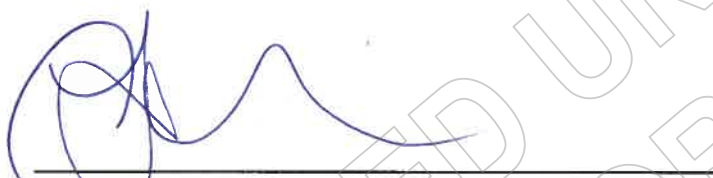
agree / disagree

7.3 Hon Kiritapu Allan, Minister for Emergency Management

agree / disagree

7.4 Hon Poto Williams, Associate Minister for Housing

agree / disagree



Chappie Te Kani
Caring for Communities Workstream Lead
DPMC COVID-19 Response Group

17/12/2020
Date



Hon Carmel Sepuloni
Minister for Social Development & Employment

21/12/20
Date

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Access to accommodation during Alert Level 3 - 4

New Zealand Government

