



Report

Date: 3 September 2021

Security Level: IN CONFIDENCE

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

Overview of the Government's response to increased demand for access to food and other related services

Purpose of the report

- 1 To provide you with an overview of the Ministry of Social Development's contribution to the broader Government's response to increased demand for support to access food and other essential services due to the COVID-19 Delta variant.
- 2 To seek your approval to sponsor a paper to COVID Ministers next week seeking additional funding for access to food and essential items from 11 September.

Recommended actions

It is recommended that you:

- 1 **note** the COVID-19 Delta variant and resultant public health measures have led to greater demand for support to access food and other essential items.
- 2 **note** agencies have funded some iwi, community providers and other networks to meet immediate need for better access to food and other essential items.
- 3 **note** MSD anticipates that demand for access to food and other essential items will exceed additional funding allocated since we moved to Alert level 4 on 17 August.
- 4 **agree** to sponsor a paper for COVID Ministers next week seeking approval to allocate approximately \$10 million to meet ongoing demands from 11 September, some of which would be reprioritised and transferred from Vote Education and drawn down from the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund.

Agree/Disagree

Marama Edwards
Deputy Chief Executive
Māori, Communities and Partnership

Date

Hon Carmel Sepuloni
Minister for Social Development and
Employment

Date

While supply chains are generally working, access to food and other essential items remains more acute than in previous lockdowns

- 3 Since Alert Level 4 restrictions were put in place on 17 August 2021, there has been a surge in demand for support to access food and other essential items.
- 4 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. We note that some people and communities, such as Pacific people, are being more affected than others.
- 5 As the Delta variant is more transmissible and infectious than previous variants, larger numbers of people are being required to self-isolate. This is leading to pressure points in the welfare response being more acutely felt than in previous outbreaks.
- 6 As of 3 September, 37,620 close contacts have been identified since 17 August 2021. The majority are in Auckland, with over half of these contacts identifying as Pacific. This is significantly higher than what we have experienced previously. In comparison, in the August 2020 outbreak, there were 1,500 close contacts identified.
- 7 Since Cabinet approved the additional \$7.2 million for MSD last week, foodbanks have reported sustained demand and remain under immense pressure. Community providers who have been offering support with other essential items such as hygiene products, household items and PPE have reported similar levels of continued demand.
- 8 In the first week of lockdown (Work and Income period 14 August – 20 August) there was a 64 per cent increase in Special Needs Grants (SNG) for food in comparison to the week prior, and an approximate 80 per cent increase after 10 days. In the 2020 Alert Level 4 lockdown, it took three weeks to experience this level of increase.
- 9 Preliminary reports from foodbanks have shown that funding has allowed providers to scale up to deliver an additional 13,300 food parcels (up from 6,000 or 220 per cent in the week prior to lockdown).

Some groups have signalled the need for targeted support or funding for food access and other essential items

- 10 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 with entire support networks not being able to activate and mobilise.
- 11 Ministry for Pacific Peoples has advised that Pacific providers have raised the issue of not having access to PPE as a key concern. Furthermore, Pacific providers report being overwhelmed with requests for support (e.g., food parcels) causing significant strain on existing capacity. As a result, some requests are being put on hold as resources are low or have been exhausted. Accessing information is another key barrier for Pacific peoples, reporting a lack of vital information about the social supports available, including how to access these supports.
- 12 The Ministry for Women is seeking approval to fund \$2 million to re-establish the COVID-19 Community Fund to address the immediate impacts of further lockdowns on vulnerable groups of women and girls. If approved, this fund will assist community groups considered to have the most acute and immediate needs and could include help with leaving an abusing partner, culturally appropriate support networks for migrant women, mental health support for LGBTQ+ women.
- 13 Other groups who were identified as needing targeted support are:
 - 13.1 whānau who are currently not or only partially supported by mainstream community-based providers
 - 13.2 families who are needing access to culturally responsive food, such as Halal food
 - 13.3 communities and whānau in remote or isolated areas, and
 - 13.4 whānau through iwi-led responses.

- 14 MSD is conducting further work across the Ministry to understand any gaps related to services for older people and people with disabilities. We will work to incorporate this information into any subsequent advice and Cabinet papers.

Government agencies' responses to food access and related services during Alert level 4 and 3 is generally meeting immediate needs

- 15 Due to the levels of demand across Aotearoa New Zealand, government agencies have provided additional support to iwi, community and Whānau Ora providers.
- 16 Support has been targeted toward those in self-isolation through provision of food, increasing the accessibility and distribution of food through food banks and other food providers such as Eat My Lunch. They have also provided other essential items, such as period products and hygiene packs.
- 17 We have done initial mapping of agencies' responses to emerging needs in this current lockdown. [Appendix one](#) outlines funding provided by agencies since 17 August 2021.
- 18 In summary, since 17 August 2021, a total of \$69.3¹ million in funding across government has been released by agencies to meet immediate need for access to food, essential items, whānau support and support for Māori or iwi-led responses. This includes:
- \$28.0 million from Te Puni Kōkiri²
 - \$15.4 million from the Ministry of Social Development
 - \$0.3 million from the Ministry of Education
 - \$1.0 million from Te Arawhiti, and
 - \$4.9 million from the National Emergency Management Agency.
- 19 The Ministry of Health was allocated \$20 million through Budget 2021 to provide wrap around services for COVID-19 cases and eligible contacts with higher or complex needs in community settings, including the provision of food and accommodation.

Breakdown of funding by activity

- 20 Of this total amount, \$40.9 million has been allocated to meet the demand for essential items, some of which includes food. Other essential items covered by this funding include period items, connectivity (power and mobile data), household items, warmth, hygiene packs and wellbeing support. This funding will also assist communities' access COVID-19 vaccines and provide self-isolation accommodation.
- 21 The remaining amount, \$8.5 million, has been allocated to food banks, food networks and other food related providers. In practical terms, this equates to an additional 250,000 food parcels, costing approximately \$34.00 per parcel.
- 22 This is in addition to funding that was available for resurgence and food related activities prior to the start of lockdown, such as \$32 million for the MSD Food Secure Communities programme and the \$20 million allocated to the Ministry of Health through Budget 2021 to provide wrap around services, including food and accommodation for COVID-19 cases and eligible contacts with higher or complex needs in the community.

¹ On 2 September the Minister for Pacific Peoples announced funding of \$26 million to support Pacific communities, including through Pacific health and disability services, vaccination services, and communications.

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 address whānau needs.

Breakdown of funding by provider

- 23 Of the total funding released, \$30 million has been allocated by MSD and Te Puni Kōkiri to community providers, including Whānau Ora and MSD providers with Community Connectors to meet the demand for essential items, some of which will include food.
- 24 Of the total funding released, \$8 million has been allocated by MSD, Te Puni Kōkiri and Te Arawhiti to specifically meet the needs of iwi who are leading responses within their rohe. This includes support with communications outreach, iwi-led response planning and support to distribute kai, hygiene products, PPE and other essential items.
- 25 Iwi can also make claims for eligible welfare costs under the Emergency Management appropriation of an additional \$4.9 million through Civil Defence and Emergency (CDEM) Groups, as per last year. This is as a last resort.

Population groups reached though current additional funding

- 26 Funding provided to food banks, food networks and other food related providers will support the needs of different people to access services. While MSD does not request specific information about the people accessing funding, anecdotal information through our providers has indicated that people seeking support are often low income earners who have had hours of work reduced or are struggling to make up the income difference if they are receiving the wage subsidy, which only covers 80 per cent of wages.
- 27 MSD has established an approach informed by Pacific providers across Auckland to reach communities most at need. The three Pacific Food Secure Providers (Affirming Works, South Seas and The Fono) are now the centralised food hub for all Pacific providers. MSD is working with them and the food network to ensure they have funding and stock.
- 28 Approximately \$23 million of Te Puni Kōkiri's funding will target many needs of Māori and Pacific communities, through the three Whānau Ora commissioning agencies. MSD providers also support Māori and Pacific communities.
- 29 Most funding is servicing the needs of Auckland, Wellington and Te Tai Tokerau communities.
- 30 However, CDEM Groups are providing support to those who have no other means of support available through other channels. This is likely to be targeted to those living in rural or isolated areas of the country and those self isolating that cannot get immediate support through other means.

MSD's response continues to focus on access to food and other essential items through food networks, providers and iwi

- 31 Since 17 August 2021, MSD has allocated a total of \$15.4 million in additional funding to support access to food and other essential items through existing infrastructure and networks. The table below outlines how this funding has been distributed.

Amount	Source of funding	Distribution
\$2.8 million	Re-prioritised from Community Services MCA, including the Community Capability Resilience Fund allocated \$32m from the CRRF	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• \$1.030 million to the Community Connectors• \$900,000 to the food sector• \$896,000 in priority grants for selected providers to support communities
\$7.2 million	Reprioritised from Vote Education and Vote Social Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• \$4.2 million for access to food• \$3 million for community grants for essential items and services, such as those with Community Connectors
\$5.4 million	Reprioritised from the CCRF	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• \$1.4 million for food access in rural and remote areas• \$2 million to providers such as those with Community Connectors• \$2 million to iwi to meet critical unmet need

- 32 The additional funding and support provided since 17 August 2021, builds on MSD's recovery and rebuild infrastructure funded through Budget 2020 including:
- the Food Secure Communities network
 - the Community Connection Service, and
 - Building Community and Provider Capability.
- 33 The Food Secure Communities programme was funded in Budget 2020 (\$32 million over two years). This funding is to help meet the additional demand during COVID-19 lockdowns on foodbanks, food rescue and other community providers.
- 34 Through this funding:
- 131 foodbanks, food rescue and community providers around New Zealand are currently getting funding to help with increased demand, and
 - access to food stocks through food rescue organisations and other food hubs has increased.
- 35 The Community Connectors Service was funded \$41.3 million over two years from Budget 2020 to establish 125 Community Connector positions within the community and throughout the country to help people connect with the services they need to support recovery post COVID-19.
- 36 MSD was also allocated \$36 million from Budget 2020 for the CCRF for community initiatives that support the rebuild and recovery from COVID-19.

Based on past demand and funding levels, we expect further funding to be needed soon if restrictions continue

- 37 If Alert Level 4 and 3 public health restrictions continue, further funding will be needed to meet sustained demand for food and other essential items.
- 38 In terms of MSD's response, the total funding of \$15.4 million has been fully allocated.
- 39 Based on demand trends since 17 August 2021, we expect that this funding will be exhausted by 10 September as anticipated. Further, based on this demand and assuming it will continue, we expect to need similar levels of additional funding. Based on preliminary costings, we estimate the additional funding required will be approximately \$10 million for two weeks from 11 September 2021.
- 40 We expect that this further funding will be mainly allocated to support:
- Food Network New Zealand
 - Foodbanks, and
 - Provision of essential items through community providers.
- 41 Our key assumption is that current or similar Alert Level restrictions will continue from 10 September two weeks. What we know is that Alert Level 4 restrictions will continue for Auckland until at least 15 September and Alert Level 3 restrictions for the remainder of the country until at least 7 September.
- 42 We will continue to be guided by public health response. However, given the likelihood of higher Alert Level restrictions continuing we must ensure that we are being responsive to communities' needs and have adequate funding to meet sustained demand.

If Alert Level 3 and 4 restrictions continue, other pressure points within the welfare response may emerge

- 43 Despite the breadth of agencies' responses to immediate demand, it is unlikely this will reach all areas and all needs.
- 44 Many low-income families and whānau are likely to continue to experience cost pressures as families remain at home rather than school or work.

- 45 The Ministry for Pacific Peoples reported 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 essentials (e.g. food, hygiene products). Information on what supports are available and how they can be accessed need to be made clear to Pacific peoples. This includes targeted messaging and communications, such as translated material into Pacific languages, to ensure as many Pacific peoples as possible can access this information.
- 46 Te Puni Kōkiri, Oranga Tamariki and Te Arawhiti are reporting that heating and energy costs, connectivity costs, transport and psychosocial support will continue as public health restrictions remain, and pressures on whānau and communities compile.

We have previously signalled that psychosocial issues may start to emerge

- 47 From 2020, we have good evidence of the immediate and medium-term impacts of social isolation and crowding from lockdown. It can negatively impact social and psycho-social wellbeing, particularly for children. It can also negatively impact mental health and elevate risk factors and drivers of family violence and sexual violence.
- 48 We are still closely monitoring demand in this space, and some agencies have responded to initial psychosocial needs.
- 49 Te Puni Kōkiri has identified areas of emerging concern being mental health and the potential for self-harm incidents (especially for rangatahi who experience higher rates of self-harm and suicide). Issues impacting whānau mental hauora are financial stress, illness, relationship problems, high deprivation, and lack of support.
- 50 Oranga Tamariki providers in Te Tai Tokerau, Auckland and Midlands have also reported that parental mental health is suffering, particularly among families with disabled children. Whānau are presenting high anxiety, particularly about jobs and money. Family violence providers are also finding it challenging to communicate with clients in a safe way. Banardo's counselling helpline "What's up", which is targeted at tamariki and rangatahi, has seen an increase in calls – including calls related to self-harm and suicide risk.

Joined-up approach to meet future demand while restrictions continue

- 51 Agencies are taking a high trust model with coordination largely happening at the provider level at the moment. Agencies continue to discuss how we can work together to meet these expected and emerging needs. The priority is ensuring that funding is coordinated locally, complimentary and reaches all population groups.

Funding options

- 52 There may be opportunities to seek further reprioritisation of funding from other agencies' appropriations if underspend due to Alert Level restrictions continue. However, if further reprioritisation cannot occur and demand continues, the Ministry will come back to you with further advice on how to meet this demand.
- 53 The Ministry of Education has indicated that the Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches programme has a daily underspend during Alert Level 4 and 3 of approximately \$300,000 per school day, a total of approximately \$1.5 million per week. MSD is working with the Ministry of Education on an approach to allocate this underspend to the ongoing demand for food and other essential items.
- 54 We cannot further reprioritise from within MSD's baseline, given the reprioritisation that has already occurred. We recommend additional funding be sought from the CRRF on the basis that it meets a key criterion that it targets policy responses to the immediate impacts of resurgence-related restrictions on particular groups.
- 55 From our preliminary costings, we estimate a further \$10 million will be required to support ongoing needs after 11 September. Therefore, we propose that you sponsor a paper for COVID Ministers in the week commencing 6 September, which seeks approval to reprioritise and transfer from Vote Education and draw down from CRRF.

Indication of further support required for iwi and Māori

- 56 Early indications from Te Arawhiti, Te Puni Kōkiri and within MSD networks is further needs may arise from iwi, as well as communities in rural and isolated communities.
- 57 Further work could be done to support Māori. Te Puni Kōkiri has identified opportunities to address food access through existing resourcing efforts to include:
- involve and fund iwi and hapū in planning and determining activities for kai and related services,
 - activating a broader range of Māori providers, and
 - support for Ngā Hiahia Kai Māori Food Network in Tāmaki.
- 58 We will continue to monitor this space as needs arise and work with Te Arawhiti, Te Puni Kōkiri and NEMA to coordinate an approach. We also continue to work alongside these agencies to ensure current allocation and distribution is complimentary and maximises reach.

Appendix

- 59 Appendix One – Government agency funding allocated to support lockdown from 17th August 2021

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Responsible manager: Marissa Whight, Policy Manager, Social Development, Child and Youth Policy

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	Re-prioritised from Vote Education and Vote Social Development	\$4.200m to support provision of food
			\$3.000m for community grants for essential items and services
Ministry of Social Development	\$5.4m	Reprioritised funding from Community Capability Resilience Fund – allocated \$32.000m 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 2021 (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 NEMA'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	\$69.3m³		

³ On 2 September the Minister for Pacific Peoples announced funding of \$26 million to support Pacific communities, including through Pacific health and disability services, vaccination services, and communications.