



23 December 2025

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act Request

Thank you for your email of 5 September 2025, requesting information on the COVID-19 Wage Subsidy and Ministry of Social Development's response to the Royal Commission of Inquiry's (RCOI) Phase 1 report of the Lessons from COVID-19 to prepare Aotearoa New Zealand for a future pandemic.

I sincerely apologise for the delay in responding to this request.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982. Please find my decision on each part set out below.

7. Has MSD implemented any of the recommendations from the Royal Commission of Inquiry's Phase 1 report of the Lessons from COVID-19 to prepare Aotearoa New Zealand for a future pandemic? Please explain with regard to the specific recommendation number, what has been implemented and what has not – and why.

The Ministry has not implemented any new initiatives specifically in response to the RCOI Phase 1 recommendations. This is aligned with the Government's position to await the final report which will cover both Phase 1 and Phase 2 before commencing a formal response.

However, while no new initiatives have been launched, the Ministry has reviewed these recommendations and identified areas of alignment with existing work underway which include:

- **Recommendation 17** – The Ministry previously supported foreign nationals through the Emergency Benefit Programme (which has since ended in August 2021). Future support for stranded superannuation is being scoped though this is not yet considered a full response to the recommendation.
- **Recommendation 20** – The Ministry has a Business Continuity Framework and Incident Management Plan and retains infrastructure from the Care in Community (CiC) Programme.
- **Recommendation 30** – The Ministry has a financial assistance scheme template used during CiC and the North Island Weather Events Response and Recovery (NIWE) with clear agency roles and exit strategies.

- **Recommendation 31 to 33** – The Ministry has governance structures, regional coordination mechanisms, and inter-agency funding panels from CiC that could be reactivated.
- **Recommendation 38** – The Ministry has upgraded its financial and contract management systems to support rapid deployment in emergencies.

These alignments reflect existing capability rather than formal implementation of the recommendations and were work programmes that were already underway.

Attachment 1 is an excel that contains a consolidated list of recommendations from both the Phase One of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 Lessons Learned – Te Tira Ārai Urutā (Sheet 2, Table 1 of the excel) and the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) (Sheet 3, Table 2 of the excel). Sheet 1 contains a key, as well as provides links to the documents where the recommendations were sourced from. We are interested in knowing to what extent particular recommendations have been implemented.

Can you please:

10. Complete the attached excel, in particular Columns E-H of Sheet 2, and Columns C-F of Sheet 3.

As stated above, the Ministry has not implemented any new initiatives specifically in response to the RCOI Phase 1 recommendations. Therefore, this section of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Act as this information does not exist.

Regarding Sheet 3 and completing columns C-F regarding Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) recommendations, I have interpreted your request to mean you are only seeking information relevant to recommendations made to the Ministry and within our remit.

Therefore, I have not addressed the recommendations made in the following reports that you are seeking information on:

- *Ministry of Health: Management of personal protective equipment in response to COVID-19 (code PPE 2020)*
- *Preparations for the nationwide roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine (code Vaccine 2021)*

If this is incorrect, please contact the Ministry to advise.

For the OAG report titled: '*Co-ordination of the all-of-government response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (code AoG 2022)*', the Ministry was not one of the four central agencies asked to formally respond. Accordingly, this part of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Act as this information does not exist.

Information about the Ministry's actions in response to the recommendations in the OAG report titled *Management of the Wage Subsidy Scheme (Code WSS 2021)* is publicly available and can be found here:

- OAG:www.oag.parliament.nz/2021/wage-subsidy-progress/appendix2.htm

Further to this, the Ministry commissioned a comprehensive review of the Wage Subsidy Scheme (WSS), which was overseen by a multi-agency steering group and carried out by two external firms. The Ministry's evaluation programme

was designed to address many of the themes raised by the OAG and included the following:

- The Process Evaluation (*Martin Jenkins*, March 2023): Reviewed policy design, implementation, and governance arrangements, responding to OAG recommendations on clarity of objectives and operational effectiveness – <https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/covid-19/wage-subsidy-evaluation-reports/covid19-wage-subsidy-process-evaluation-final-report-march-2023.pdf>
- The Outcome Evaluation (*Motu*, July 2023): Assessed whether the scheme met its intended goals of maintaining employment and supporting incomes, in line with the OAG's recommendation to measure effectiveness – <https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/covid-19/wage-subsidy-evaluation-reports/wage-subsidy-scheme-outcomes-evaluation.pdf>
- The Value-for-Money Report (*Motu*, July 2023): Examined cost-effectiveness and expenditure impact, addressing OAG's concerns about fiscal accountability – <https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/covid-19/wage-subsidy-evaluation-reports/wage-subsidy-scheme-value-for-money-report.pdf>
- The Synthesis Report (*Martin Jenkins*, *Motu*, March 2023): Consolidated lessons learned to inform future emergency responses, reflecting the OAG's recommendation to document and apply insights – <https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/covid-19/wage-subsidy-evaluation-reports/wage-subsidy-scheme-a3s.pdf>

The details and the published reports are available on the above links and here: <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/covid-19/wage-subsidy-scheme-evaluations.html>

In line with the OAG's recommendations, the Ministry also maintains an ongoing WSS integrity programme. This includes a formal complaints process, integrity checks, investigations, and a response and recovery framework to facilitate repayments and undertake enforcement activity where appropriate, including prosecutions.

More information about the Ministry's Wage Subsidy Integrity and Fraud Programme can be found here: <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/wage-subsidy-integrity/index.html>.

Accordingly, this part of your request, including completing the requested table, is refused under section 18(d) of the Act, as the information is already publicly available. The Act does not require agencies to compile or create new formats when the information can be accessed through existing public sources.

11. Provide the report of progress against the recommendations of Phase One of the Royal Commission (mentioned in Recommendation 39b of the Royal Commission).

12. Advise whether MSD will be producing a report on progress against the Phase One recommendations for tabling in Parliament (mentioned in Recommendation 39c of the Royal Commission).

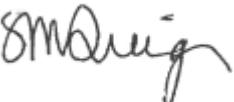
As stated previously, the Ministry has not yet commenced any initiatives nor written a report of progress against the recommendations made in the RCOI Phase 1 report and as such, I am refusing your request under section 18(e) of the Act as this information does not exist. No report has been tabled in Parliament on progress made on any of the recommendations.

I will be publishing this decision letter, with your personal details deleted, on the Ministry's website in due course.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with my decision on your request, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi nui

pp. 

Anna Graham
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