

**ALL OF GOVERNMENT PRESS CONFERENCE: FRIDAY, 22 OCTOBER 2021
HANSARD TRANSCRIPT**

PM: Kia ora koutou katoa. Today, I'm speaking directly to all New Zealanders to share a plan that will help us stay safe from COVID-19 into the future; a future where we want to continue to protect people's lives but also to live our lives as safely as possible.

Our announcements today are in three parts. I will start by setting out the new framework we will use to help us minimise the impact of COVID-19, and protect ourselves. The second part is the economic support package we will use to especially support Auckland businesses as we transition. Minister Robertson will speak to that. Minister Sepuloni has also, today, set out an extension to our hardship assistance package for families on low incomes. And, finally, given the importance of high vaccine rates across all communities, Minister Henare will set out a plan to accelerate Māori vaccination rates.

In March last year, when I announced our alert level system, I said that the world had changed, and quickly. But we carved our own path then, and now we can do that again. Our focus on elimination kept us free from COVID for much of the past 18 months, at a time when our population was vulnerable to this virus. It kept our case numbers low and our hospitals from being swamped. Our economy held up well, and unemployment stayed low. We can be rightfully proud of what our world-leading response has achieved.

But two things have changed since then. The first is that Delta has made it very hard to maintain our elimination strategy. Its tentacles have reached into our communities and made it hard to shake, even using the best public health measures and the toughest restrictions we had available to us. But right as our longstanding strategy was challenged, we also had a new tool, one that means as COVID has changed, we could change too, and rather than being locked down, we could move forward safely and with confidence. That tool is the vaccine.

The vaccine we are using in New Zealand is safe and effective. If you are vaccinated, it means that you are less likely to catch the virus and much less likely to end up in hospital if you do. It also helps protect everyone. The more people who are vaccinated, the harder it is for COVID to spread through communities quickly and find our most vulnerable. That means while we used to say that we needed to stay home to save lives, we now need to be vaccinated to save lives.

And this is where New Zealand has the chance to continue to carve our own path. Very few countries have had the opportunity to vaccinate people before COVID was in every corner of their communities. We can. Once we have done that, we then need to make sure we keep using that tool to protect ourselves as we gradually and carefully open up. Not all countries have had that chance, and some have opened up with vaccines very quickly or without any other public health measures in place.

Our plan will do things differently. That's because our goal, based on the advice of Professor David Skegg and the Public Health Advisory Group, is to minimise and protect. Minimisation means that we are aiming to keep the spread of COVID-19 as low as possible, that while there will be some level of cases in the community on an ongoing basis, we will work to contain and control any outbreaks, and, if practical to do so, stamp them out. Protection means that we won't just treat COVID like a seasonal illness; we will protect people from it with vaccination, management, and a response that focuses on minimising the significant health impacts we know it can have.

But how will we make our strategy to minimise COVID and protect people work, whilst also making sure that we keep moving forward? The first step is with high vaccination rates. You'll know that we have been resistant to setting a target. We didn't want to leave anyone behind. And we still don't. But we need to give everyone, and especially Aucklanders, certainty over when it will be safe enough to transition to a new system; one where we can give more freedoms to those who are vaccinated. We have looked at all of the evidence, talked to

experts, looked at modelling for our situation, and set a target of 90 percent fully vaccinated for each DHB in New Zealand. The reason we have focused on each DHB is because we need every region to be highly vaccinated, and, by focusing on DHBs, we also make sure we get more equitable outcomes. And when every DHB reaches this target, that is when we will move into a new framework called the COVID-19 Protection Framework.

Let me tell you how this new system will work. Similar to our current alert level system, there will be three settings: green, orange, and red. They're designed to help us manage outbreaks and cases. While you could have cases in the community at any of the different settings, we can use them to try and get numbers down if they're affecting people's safety and our health system.

There are three big differences between this new system and our current one. The first is that it uses vaccine certificates. Basically, if you want to be guaranteed that no matter the setting that we are in that you can go to bars, restaurants, and close-proximity businesses like a hairdresser, you will need to be vaccinated. The second difference is that with vaccine certificates at red, orange, and green, businesses will be able to continue to open and operate. This, I know, is the certainty that many have been looking for. And the third major difference is that rather than use general nationwide lockdowns, if we have cases that start to climb and in areas where we have lower vaccination rates in vulnerable communities, we can use more highly targeted and very localised lockdowns if we need to.

Let me give you, then, a very quick run-through of each of the settings. The red setting is what we'll use when the virus is spreading in a way that means we need to take action to protect our most vulnerable and prevent too much pressure on our health system. So here, while hospitality is open with vaccine certificates, and retail is also open with the usual public health measures, gathering limits and physical distancing will also be required. Education will be open but with public health measures in place. Working from home is encouraged. Masks will also be required in the same way we use them now. This will still feel like a huge amount of freedom relative to what Auckland has now. And because they have done so much work to lift their vaccination rates and because of the border around the city, rather than wait for the rest of New Zealand, Auckland will move into red as soon as all three of the Auckland DHBs hit the 90 percent double vaccination target.

To everyone in Auckland: our businesses, people on their own, families with young children—everyone—I know this period has been so hard. But you are so close. Right now, you are just 16,000 vaccines away from every DHB hitting the 90 percent target for first doses. When that turns into double doses, that's when this new framework kicks in for you. And I know that vaccination certificates will help us get those numbers up.

For the rest of the country, once every DHB hits 90 percent double vaccinated, we anticipate that we will move collectively, together, to orange. At orange, everyone remains open, but because of vaccine certificates, all of the gathering limits currently in place for events, gatherings, or hospitality—they can lift. Places that choose not to use vaccine certificates will either be closed or will have public health measures in place.

Green is when there is some COVID in the community but at low levels. Fully vaccinated people can enjoy all events and hospitality and gatherings by showing a vaccine certificate. Where premises choose not to use vaccine certificates, they will face restrictions on numbers, and spacing similar to the current alert level framework. Face masks will only be mandatory on flights but will be encouraged in indoor settings.

There is quite a bit more detail for each of these settings, but they will feel familiar. We have based them on what we have learned from using our old alert levels. But the reason we have changed from this system is because we needed one that could make use of the new tool of vaccines and vaccine certificates. A way that we could keep vaccinated people safe from those who have not been.

In thinking about these settings and when the country moves into them, we did specifically think about the South Island. We also thought about scenarios where we are close to the

targets for each DHB but possibly stuck a small way shy of where we want to be to transition. That's why on 29 November, Cabinet will review the progress that Auckland has made, and the rest of the country, to see if anything needs to change. We are open to moving the South Island before the rest of the country if all the DHBs in the South hit their targets before others. And for Auckland, who have done all of the heavy lifting in this outbreak, we have a collective goal now, but in the meantime, we will still keep assessing the settings we have, and, if it's safe to do so, use the step-downs that we have already talked about. But rather than having to wait week to week, I hope the announcements today give you a better sense of the destination.

So you can see here that our plan gets us moving forward, but in a safe way. And we are better-placed than so many others have been to do that, but we will have COVID cases in the community, and more than we have experienced before. But because we won't take this step until we are at 90 percent vaccination, we will also have high levels of protection that limit COVID's impact. In fact, we'll be one of the few countries that will have such high levels of vaccination while still using public health measures to keep everyone as safe as we can and enjoying the things that so many have missed and loved, and it's all because of vaccines.

Vaccinations are our armour; they help keep us safe. So my message to New Zealanders who have not yet had their first dose: if you want summer, if you want to go to bars and restaurants, get vaccinated. If you want to get a haircut, get vaccinated. If you want to go to a concert or a festival, get vaccinated. If you want to go to a gym or a sports event, get vaccinated. If you are not vaccinated, there will be everyday things you will miss out on. And if you are vaccinated, you can be assured that in the few framework you will get to enjoy the things you love, secure in the knowledge that the people around you and the environment you are in is as safe as possible in a COVID world. If you have done the right thing to keep yourself and others safe, to look after one another, you should feel safe, you should be protected from those who haven't made that choice. That's what the protection framework seeks to offer vaccinated New Zealanders.

To sum up, our strategy moving forward is to minimise and protect. Our alert level system has charted us through a global pandemic in a way that kept us relatively free from the virus, and we now have our playbook written if we ever needed it again, but now we have vaccines. We cannot ask vaccinated people to stay home forever, so now we need a new playbook to reflect a population protected from COVID, and that's what this is.

I know you'll want as much information as possible at a time like this; and so, as always, more detailed guidance on the announcement can be found at covid19.govt.nz, including the details of the system I've just outlined. But just as we did for the alert level framework, we will continue to work through detailed plans for each sector, and this detail will be progressively added. Till then, to the team of 5 million: thank you again for doing your bit in our distinctive and world-leading fight against COVID-19. I have no doubt that we'll do what it takes once again and move forward safely together.

I'll now hand over to Minister Robertson. He will then hand over to Minister Henare, and then we will be happy to each take questions from you.

Hon Grant Robertson: Kia ora. Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou katoa. Thank you, Prime Minister. We know that over the last 20 months the approach New Zealand has taken to COVID and Delta has saved lives and livelihoods. Along with one of the lowest mortality rates in the world, we have also had strong economic growth, low unemployment, and one of the lower levels of Government debt in the world. New Zealand's early success in dealing with COVID has given us options to deal with the Delta outbreak from both a health and an economic point of view. But for people in Auckland right now, I know that this is tough. Over the past couple of months, I've been asked several times whether I'm aware of the impact that restrictions are having on businesses and workers around the country, particularly in Auckland and the Waikato. And I can tell you without a doubt that I am acutely aware of that impact. I regularly speak with businesses, workers, and their representatives from around the country and I have heard their concerns.

We have responded with significant support and with changes and additions to that support over the last two months. To date, we have paid out about \$4.8 billion in support since the Delta outbreak began in August. That amount exceeds the new operating spending we would have for a whole year for the whole country in most budgets. But we are not through this outbreak yet, and as we have done consistently over the past 20 months, we are adjusting in response to the circumstances. I know this outbreak has been particularly hard on Auckland and the coming weeks will continue to be tough as we lift vaccination rates so that we can move to the new COVID protection framework.

To support businesses through this transition, today we are announcing an enhanced business support package. Firstly, we are significantly boosting the resurgence support payment. After the next scheduled payment on 29 October, we will move to fortnightly payments at double the current rate. The first of these will open on 12 November. Currently, the resurgence support payment is a three-weekly payment of \$1,500 per eligible business and \$400 for each fulltime employee up to a total of 50 fulltime employees or a total of \$21,500. For the payments starting on 12 November, this will be \$3,000 per eligible businesses and \$800 per FTE up to 50 FTEs, making for a maximum fortnightly payment of \$43,000.

In effect, this means the resurgence support payment will be a weekly rather than three-weekly payment as it is now, but for ease of application and administration, it will be available in fortnightly instalments. We're not going to change any other settings at this time in order to ensure that the payments can be made without disruption.

We made the decision to use the resurgence support payment because it means the support can be provided quickly using an existing mechanism and because the resurgence support payment provides businesses with the maximum flexibility as to what they use the money for.

The resurgence support payment is now targeting Auckland businesses, with 70 percent of payments going to Auckland, having grown from 40 percent at the first payment, and the next highest area is the Waikato with close to 10 percent of the claims.

This enhanced resurgence support will be paid fortnightly until Auckland has been able to move into the COVID-19 Protection Framework. As a reminder, the wage subsidy will continue to be available on the current criteria while areas of the country are still in alert level 3. The cost of providing both the weekly resurgence support payment and the wage subsidy is estimated to be up to \$940 million per fortnight through this transitional period.

The second element of the business boost we're announcing today is a \$60 million fund for business advice and mental health support in Auckland. This will be delivered through the established Regional Business Partner Network, with grants for advice now not requiring a matching contribution from the business. Businesses will be able to apply for up to \$3,000 worth of advice for planning support and then receive up to \$4,000 to implement that advice. This fund has been requested by businesses. It worked well in the first phase of COVID to support businesses to realign themselves with the changed and challenging business landscape. Some businesses used it to develop a new online presence; others to change the focus of their production or to target a different market.

As part of the package, \$10 million is being provided for mental health and wellbeing support to small businesses. This will be delivered through a programme that is to be designed in conjunction with the EMA and the Auckland Business Chamber of Commerce.

A couple of other announcements to mention today. We know that COVID-19 restrictions are having an impact on low-income households, so we are making it easier for people to get assistance. Currently, a single person working 30 hours per week on the minimum wage is not eligible for hardship assistance from Work and Income. Minister Sepuloni is announcing today that from 1 November, we're lifting the income limits for assistance to 40 hours at the minimum wage or \$800 per week and \$1,600 per week for a couple with or without children. This is estimated to mean that 25,000 more grants will be made to low-income workers over

the next four months. Cabinet has committed to reviewing the use of this assistance and we may extend it as is needed.

We are also developing further support for individuals and families experiencing hardship as a result of the Delta outbreak, which I will be discussing with Cabinet in the next few weeks. Cabinet has also approved a significant package to help lift Māori vaccination and support Māori community response to Delta, which Minister Henare will outline shortly.

Just before I finish, I will turn to the assistance that will be provided under the new framework. Cabinet has made in-principle decisions on financial support which will become available when the new framework takes effect. I will be taking a paper to Cabinet in November confirming the details of that support and any other outstanding decisions relating to the transition, but I will provide an overview of how we will do that now.

Firstly, a transition grant will be made available to support particularly Auckland businesses when they move into the new framework. This grant will be based on similar criteria to the resurgence support payment. Once the framework is fully operational across New Zealand, this will be the time to replace the current support schemes with something that will better reflect the new framework. I will be proposing to Ministers financial support that targets the most affected businesses for when areas of the country are in red.

One of the issues that we are working through is what to do in terms of businesses who decide not to be part of the vaccine certificate regime. If we used the current settings based on revenue drops, we may well end up supporting them but not those who are using certificates. It is my personal preference that any payment will not be made available to those businesses that should be operating using a vaccine certificate regime but choose not to; however, this requires further work to be operational.

Across-the-board support will not be provided for areas designated as orange or green, because, at these levels, businesses will be able to operate as normal, with some requiring vaccine certificates to do so. We are also seeking further advice on what support could be made in the event of local lockdowns. Throughout all of this period, there will also continue to be ongoing support for people to isolate as a result of being exposed to COVID or being tested, regardless of where the people affected are based.

As we have done consistently over the last 20 months, we will listen carefully to business and the wider community about the impact of Delta, and we will evolve and change our responses as required. Delta has tested us all, and I know that we have asked a lot of people as we have fought this outbreak. I thank you for all the sacrifices you have made while we get people vaccinated. We are almost there, and to reiterate the words of the Prime Minister: please get vaccinated. And, if you are vaccinated, please talk to anyone you know who is not and explain to them that we all need to step up together.

I'll now hand over to Minister Henare.

Hon Peeni Henare: Thank you, Deputy Prime Minister. Tēnā koutou katoa. As you have heard from the Prime Minister, the new protection framework will support us to keep people safe, especially our vulnerable communities, and minimise the impact COVID-19 has on business and our day-to-day lives.

If you want to protect yourself, your whānau, and your community from this deadly virus, high vaccination rates is the only way you can do this in order to protect our whānau. So far, over \$250 million has been allocated to support Māori since the start of the pandemic.

That's why, today, I'm pleased to announce, alongside my colleagues, a further \$120 million fund to support Māori communities to fast-track vaccination efforts and prepare for the new COVID-19 Protection Framework. Sixty million dollars will go towards further supporting our Māori vaccination rates, and a further \$60 million will support Māori and iwi-led initiatives to protect our communities against COVID-19.

Our kuia and kaumātua are leading the way, and now we need the rest of the whānau to do the same. Currently, 67 percent of the eligible Māori population have had at least one dose; of those, 46 percent are now fully vaccinated. This describes the challenge in front of us.

And, in conclusion, I say to my whānau and to our people: koinei te wā. The time is now. Tēnā koutou.

PM: Thank you to the Ministers. I think, to spare the media orientating between this podium and the table, I will ask Ministers to come and stand with me so that, if there are any questions that relate to their announcements, we can take them as seamlessly as possible. Look, I'll start with Jenna, and then I'll come down the back to TV One. Thank you.

Media: Prime Minister, looking at the time frames of this, will there be any way that Aucklanders can share Christmas with people outside of Auckland?

PM: Absolutely—absolutely. In fact, we've already modelled that, even at the current rates, Auckland would move before, absolutely before, Christmas, but what we want is for them to move as soon as possible. You've heard me just say that, actually, they're 16,000 doses away from hitting that 90 percent target for first doses. Then, if those individuals all then go on to be fully vaccinated, Auckland can move. This is within Auckland's grasp, and we'll be throwing every resource we can to support them, and we just added the incentive that, for anyone who is not vaccinated right now, unless you choose to be, you will not be able to enjoy the freedoms of other New Zealanders.

Media: And what about that border? Will that remain in place until the rest of New Zealand catches up to the traffic light system?

PM: Yep. So we don't anticipate, in the long term, hard borders like the one we have now being a part of the way that New Zealand operates into the future, but right now it is playing a role for us in containing the outbreak in Auckland and keeping the rest of New Zealand safe. But we know Auckland needs to be able to move and we want them to move safely. What we're working on right now is the idea of using vaccination certificates, coupled with testing, to enable Aucklanders to move beyond the border.

Media: Why did you not specifically set a Māori vaccination target within this framework? Could you leave them behind?

PM: So I'll give you a first response to that, and then I'll ask Minister Henare to speak to that too. We gave good consideration to a range of different targets, and reaching an equitable outcome was one of our goals. That is why we are using DHBs and stating that we want DHBs to reach that 90 percent target. That's our best way of making sure that no matter where you live in the country, we have good rates, and no matter who you are. At the same time, you'll see that we are also in this period funding our Māori providers to accelerate the vaccination rates amongst communities as well. Couple together with the incentive of vaccination certificates, we're eager and believe we can see those vaccination rates go up.

Hon Peeni Henare: Kia ora. There's not too much more to offer, really, to that. The ongoing support that's required is what I believe will continue to boost what's already happening and is already successful. We have heard and taken a lot of feedback from Māori, iwi leaders, amongst others. So, today, in the announcement, I, alongside my colleagues, am very comfortable that we've landed in a place where we can continue to support Māori vaccination rates to grow. Just in conclusion, while we say 90 percent for Māori, and indeed for the rest of the population, we will continue to make the vaccine available to continue to lift those numbers.

Media: But, Minister, you've said in the past that you wouldn't be comfortable easing restrictions until Māori hit 90 percent double dosed. This plan could mean that that doesn't happen.

Hon Peeni Henare: I've never set a rate or a target; what I've been quite clear on, though, is if Te Tai Tokerau, for example, is going to hit 90 percent, they are going to have to lift Māori vaccination rates exponentially. And, in order to do that, our support today will support them

to do that, and I'm confident that we'll get there in quite a large number of our regions, if not all of them.

PM: The other point I'd make: in the fight against COVID, we've been a team. We've been the team of 5 million, but we're actually not going to be safe unless we're all safe. We're a country that moves around. We want to make sure that, when we do that, we don't pose risk to other regions because we have a framework that leaves other regions with low vaccination rates. So that's why we're all in this together. We need to reach those high rates together so that we can protect one another.

Media: Prime Minister, the national 90 percent vaccination target still leaves 500,000 people unvaccinated, and therefore unprotected, with only a few hundred ICU beds in the country. How can you be certain that this plan won't overwhelm the health system?

PM: Because it's been designed exactly for that reason: to ensure that we have very high vaccination rates—in fact, some of the highest vaccination rates in the world—before we then move into this framework. So that balances the need to allow people who have been vaccinated to have additional freedoms whilst still keeping in place protections that stop unvaccinated people from being in those high-risk environment. Secondly, what I'd say is that there has been significant work on ensuring that we have a health system that is prepared, but the best thing we can do to protect our health system is to set targets like this with very high vaccination rates.

Media: But even if tens of thousands of people, or even thousands of people, got the virus and got very sick, our hospital system wouldn't be able to cope with that, surely?

PM: We have created a system that prevents that scenario.

Media: How? Can you explain exactly—

PM: By having some of the highest vaccination rates in the world. By also ensuring that you have good spread across the country, so that further diminishes the idea of having population groups—large population groups—of unvaccinated individuals. The framework also enables us to move into settings to add extra protections if we anticipate that there is pressure on our health system. And finally, we also have the option of localised lockdowns. If you look around the world at the moment for those countries that have the vaccination rates that we are seeking, very few are coupling together the kinds of measures that we are as an added layer of protection. We've done that on the basis of modelling and the advice of experts, and also looking at what's happened overseas.

Media: We've seen in countries like—

PM: I think I've answered your question, and I refer you to a few weeks ago when we released modelling that demonstrated the options—alongside high vaccination rates—of using public health restrictions to keep case numbers and hospitalisations in a manageable place.

Media: Yeah. Just on the vaccine certificate, so can you just give us a bit more clarity around that? So it's, essentially, going to be an opt-in scheme for businesses, particularly at the orange and green levels, that if you opt in you basically get the most benefit out of it?

PM: Yeah. It's quite simple. If you are a business that chooses to use vaccine certificates you'll get to operate at every level. At red we do have some public health measures on top of that, just for added safety. If you're a business who chooses not to, in the hospitality space, actually, you won't get to operate normally. And so I think we've made the decision there quite clear-cut. For retail, we are not proposing, outside of businesses that we call close proximity—so that's places where you're getting your hair cut or you're getting a facial or you're in a space where it's very hard to keep social distancing. We're using vaccine certificates there, but broadly, for retail, because of the fact we can use public health measures, distancing, and because the logistical challenge of having every retailer responsible for scanning someone's vaccine certificate, we haven't proposed their use in this framework. That's not unusual. Other countries have taken similar measures.

Media: So basically you're, like, you're going to a pub or a bar or big event, they'd be set up to scan your certificate—

PM: Correct—correct.

Media: —but not if you go to The Warehouse?

PM: Correct—correct. That doesn't mean that retailers won't have the option of using them; they will, and we're setting up a legal framework that will enable them to. The only areas where we will specify that you cannot require vaccination certificates are where people are accessing essential goods and services—food at supermarkets, medicines at pharmacies, and examples like that.

Media: And just quickly, on the, you said, I think it's 29 November you'll be reviewing how the rates are going around the country. What happens if there's a couple of areas where it's like high 85, for example, and looks pretty much—

PM: Yeah. And, look, we've put in that review date because we do want to just assess our progress, assess what more might need to be done to support, assess whether or not, if you're 88.9 and you're right on the cusp, and you've got enough bookings that demonstrate you're going to hit it, we will be pragmatic, but we've got that check-in date for a reason.

Media: What modelling have you based this on, and what does it predict in terms of case numbers—you know, hospitalisations, deaths—and does it have breakdowns including Māori and Pacific communities?

PM: So you'll see that the research that was published in September, it modelled for us baseline—so remember the research that was released. It modelled baseline settings around public health measures—vaccine requirements, vaccine rates—and we considered that the baseline health settings was we could consider akin to orange. So that's what we've used as the basis, and you can see the difference that those high vaccination rates make. Keep in mind, the numbers drop dramatically once you have access to vaccinations for five to 12s. We haven't banked on that. We've built the system over the modelling that we have. But our assumption is, of course, that it will make a vast difference once children are able to be vaccinated too.

Media: Can you paint a picture, though, of what it would look like under these levels, for example, at orange, with 90 percent vaccinations, in terms of those case numbers, in terms of the profile of the outbreak?

PM: Perhaps if I could do that just by using an R-value. So at orange, it's anticipated that you could sit around a 1.09. So you know from that that is low. You might have some growth, but it would be steady and it would be manageable. Red, which is what we propose as part of this setting, gives you the ability to bring that down further. So if you've got a situation where you have growing case numbers and you want to use a tool to bring that down, then you would use red, and that is why, of course, we're proposing to use Auckland in that frame.

Media: Mortality rates—I mean, it's something that's difficult to talk about but, you know, what allowance or what does this mean for, potentially, mortality rates?

PM: It means get vaccinated. You know, the best protection that I can offer and that anyone can offer right now is a vaccination, and we are doing everything that we can to remove every barrier and incentivise and give every reason to be vaccinated, but we also need to give hope to the vaccinated. We need to give them a path to what life will look like now that they've done what we've asked, and gone out and protected themselves and their families. So COVID is a marathon for all of us, but right now we're in a sprint, and we're sprinting to get as many people vaccinated as possible so that we can transition to a framework that keeps people safe but actually brings back many of the things that have been missing in life.

Media: And finally, Grant Robertson, your personal preference for not giving financial support to businesses not using vax certificates—do you have some colleagues that need convincing? And is your aim, really, to make it as difficult as possible for them to keep operating?

Hon Grant Robertson: No. It's not the colleagues I need to convince, but we do, obviously, have to make sure that our regime is robust and within the law. But it's more a matter of just having to work through it. The point I was making was a very practical one, which is I don't want a situation where we're, effectively, rewarding people for not being part of the vaccine certificate regime. And the current way that we work our financial supports out is revenue drop, and, obviously, you would experience quite a significant revenue drop if, under the red level, you were a contactless-only business relative to a business that had actually done the right thing.

Media: [*Inaudible*] legality, rather than—

Hon Grant Robertson: It's just making sure we can operationalise it, and I'm confident in the next couple of weeks we'll sort that out.

Media: [*Inaudible*]

Hon Grant Robertson: I beg your pardon?

Media: [*Inaudible*]

Hon Grant Robertson: In terms of support, you mean? No, that's not something we've considered, Brent—no.

Media: Can we ask the Minister Robertson while he's there?

PM: Yeah. Please. Just keep going.

Hon Grant Robertson: Oh, how nice of you, Prime Minister!

Media: Can I ask one to Minister Robertson, then to you afterwards?

PM: Yeah, go on.

Media: Yeah—yeah. I just—in terms of the cost of all of this, how is the Government planning to pay for it?

Hon Grant Robertson: So we'll be drawing down on the COVID response and recovery fund for what's in this package today. There is still money remaining. You remember we replenished it recently, and we will have to add at least a couple of billion dollars to that overall from all of the things we're announcing today, but it's an important investment in making sure we support businesses and individuals to transition to the framework and then through the framework.

Media: And is the couple of billions of dollars coming from extra borrowing?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, it's coming from the COVID response and recovery fund that we've already replenished.

Media: [*Inaudible*] will that apply for all businesses [*Inaudible*]?

Hon Grant Robertson: Yeah—no, I take the point you're making. On the first point, yes, it will require legislation. Minister Hipkins might want to talk about that. On the second point, this is, you know, the way we've done our support schemes. We haven't distinguished between the type of business. You just have to show that you've had that revenue drop. That's one of the very issues that we need to work our way through. It's more, I would suggest, to think about what the new framework looks like than think about what the old framework did. So under the new framework, we'd be expecting plumbers and so forth to simply go about their business, so they won't have restrictions in that way, whereas in the red framework, you do have businesses who will be operating with restrictions with vaccine certificates—hospitality and so on—whereas others would be not able to operate that way

and be contactless. So you need to think about it more in terms of the restrictions that are in here which wouldn't apply to a plumber or a builder.

Media: [*Inaudible*]

Hon Grant Robertson: Yep.

Media: [*Inaudible*] a vaccine certificate [*Inaudible*]

Hon Grant Robertson: Yeah. That's right. And that is one of the issues that we need to work through is the way they apply. I mean, you'll understand, Richard, that these are very new areas for employment law, and we are carefully working our way through that. A number of ministers have been working closely with the likes of the EMA, Business New Zealand, Council of Trade Unions, to make sure we can land something that works, and I think we'll be saying a bit more about that shortly.

Minister Hipkins, do you want to say anything about the legislation?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Just very briefly on the legislation, yes it will require a law change. That law change will be to the COVID-19 Public Health Response Act. It will be introduced into the House after the forthcoming recess, so in about two and a half, three weeks' time. And I expect it will pass through the House very quickly. It will pick up the issues around the vaccination certificate. It will also pick up the issues that Minister Wood and Minister Parker have been working on around greater certainty for those businesses who are considering a vaccination requirement for their staff. That's thrown up a handful of issues that they want greater clarity on, so we're working through that at the moment. That will also be in the bill. So the bill will deal with all of the issues around vaccination that are floating around. It will be done in one piece of legislation.

Media: This plan—it's the plan for the foreseeable future—seems to rely heavily on DHBs, but at the same time the Government's doing a significant change-up of how the DHB system works. Is that going to have any issues there?

PM: I wouldn't describe it as reliance; it's just acknowledging that at the moment we are in geographic areas; it's a way that we can use those boundaries to describe what we want to achieve for population groups and geographic areas. But what I would say is we're already seeing different ways of operating within the Auckland metro area. The DHBs there are cooperating and collaborating a lot, and what we want to continue to see is that collaboration and support as we seek to drive up vaccination rates across all of Auckland. I know there might be some parts of Auckland that says, you know, "We're well ahead of others.", but, actually, Auckland is a mobile city. We all move around, live, spend time, and service one another's areas and needs, and so we need to make sure that if we are to move safely we need good uptake across all of Auckland.

Media: And does this plan mean the end of lockdowns in New Zealand, or is that still a prospect?

PM: Nationwide lockdowns, in the way that we know them—not every case will be a public health emergency. I know what it does to the national psyche every time you see a press release that says there's going to be a press conference in the Beehive—what that does to everyone's anxiety levels, the uncertainty that it creates. We will no longer be in that world. Instead, we have the vaccines to create a level of safety and armour, and there'll be much more predictability. You'll see when things might be escalating and we might need to bring in extra measures, but there'll be a continuity to the way we'll be able to operate regardless. We do still, however—and this is very important: on the advice of experts, we've retained the ability to use localised lockdowns. We've seen a few examples of that in recent times where we see a smaller area where we may see that we've got low vaccination rates. It may be isolated parts of New Zealand where we're concerned uptake hasn't been as good or we're concerned about health impacts. We still will reserve the right and the ability to use those localised lockdowns.

Media: Prime Minister, does your modelling with when the DHBs will hit the 90 percent double vax—does it assume that there will need to be a 95 percent for first doses, given that differential?

PM: Yeah, so the Ministry of Health have done the modelling taking into account uptakes and have suggested that Auckland would certainly get there in December—early December. Our view is, though, that, actually, you can't quite predict what people hearing the message today that says very soon you won't be able to do many things that you love without being vaccinated, and I expect that will accelerate vaccinations. That is certainly our goal.

Media: And you've mentioned, like, the review at the end of November might see the South Island, for example, moving to the new framework?

PM: Yeah, so what we're going to do is just reserve the ability to look across the country at how everyone is tracking. If you've got a situation when we come to the review in November that every DHB in the South Island has hit the target, we're reserving the ability to say, well, OK, we could move the South Island as a whole into the framework. No decisions have been made, but I wanted to signal to the South Island that if that were the case, that we would consider that.

Media: Would you also consider that DHB per DHB, and, if so, how would you run those borders? Would there be a hard border between DHBs—

PM: Yeah, so, of course, at that point it's much, much easier to do that in the South than it is in any other part of the country. You've got entry points of planes and ferries, and those give you the ability to run checks much, much more easily than anywhere else. But in the longer term, once everyone is in the framework, we don't in the much longer term see hard borders as being a long-term part of our future. But they are here now and providing a tool for us now to contain the outbreak, and we will keep using it.

Media: And can I just finally ask, on the modelling that was mentioned before at 90 percent vaccination for the 12 and up, that's, you know, in a year, expected to be 1,557 deaths, peak hospitalisations at 878. Are you effectively saying that we won't reach those levels because we'll still have lockdowns in the tool kit?

PM: So we consider those baseline public health measures to be a bit more akin to an orange. We've got the tool of red, if we need to, to continue to bring the R-value down, and the other thing that you see makes the most significant difference in that modelling from September is the ability to vaccinate those under-12s. So I don't anticipate that we'll have a full 12-month period where we don't have that tool available to us. We don't yet, and we haven't designed this around that, but I believe we will have it in the near future.

Media: [*Inaudible*] the majority of the South Island is doing really well in vaccination, but [*Inaudible*] Marlborough region, they're really low. Will that [*Inaudible*]?

PM: We're all in this together, and that's where I'd say that we all know that, actually, the thing that prevents us from having to use restrictions and, you know, limitations because of outbreaks is by us having a high vaccination rate across the country. And so I absolutely believe that by setting this target, if we have areas that achieve it, we'll then look into putting extra support and extra measures to help other regions to reach that target, too. We are literally all in this together.

Media: [*Inaudible*] the Auckland border [*Inaudible*] if they're in red, have they travelled outside of Auckland to an area—

PM: Yeah, and that's what we're working on right now. So the Auckland border is a hard border. It's actually what's going to enable us to move Auckland sooner than the rest of the country. We want to reward the fact that Aucklanders have done a lot of hard work to get their vaccination rates out in front of the rest of the country. So because we have a border in place, we can move them into this framework earlier than others. But what we are looking at—because we want to enable Aucklanders to move but we want to also stop the outbreak moving with them, so we're investigating using vaccine certificates and a testing regime to

allow them to do that. It is a considerable logistical exercise. New Zealand doesn't use land borders in the same way that other states and countries do, but we are determined to try and find a way. So another simple message to Aucklanders: if you want to be able to move beyond Auckland, get vaccinated.

Media: For the eligible population, currently that's 12 plus but at some point soon it could be 5 plus. Will it still be 90 percent of 12 plus, or will you move the goalposts to—

PM: Yeah, no, we will keep the target as it is. All that that does at that point is just actually add greater protection. It adds a huge amount in terms of the resilience, but we're just not clear at this stage—Pfizer hasn't submitted data to us yet, so we're not in a position to consider. The FDA, if I recall, on 28 October will be considering the Pfizer application, so we'll very soon, I think, know what kind of time lines we might be moving to. But no, we won't adjust the targets or move the goalposts in that regard.

Media: [*Inaudible*] light system have any impact on the border, or is that, for you, a completely different—

PM: It is different, because, look, as I've said, the border is really part of the transition that we've got at the moment. It is helping us contain this outbreak, so we will keep using it, particularly because we need to keep ensuring the rest of New Zealand is safe while we vaccinate. But in the long term, do I see hard borders across the country as being part of our future? I don't, because, actually, it's a very hard way for the country to live and to operate, but for now we will keep using it.

Media: On getting to 90 percent, currently you only publish DHB by DHB data every week. Auckland gets all its three DHBs published every day. Would you like to step it up so every DHB—

PM: Yeah, well, I get it, and so I can see that there'd be good cause to incentivise—a good question. Minister Hipkins?

Hon Chris Hipkins: [*Inaudible*]

PM: Yeah, let's publish it every day. I think everyone deserves to know how we're tracking. Executive decision made on the podium.

Media: Ashley Bloomfield is on record wanting a 90 percent vaccination rate for Māori. You've also suggested—

PM: Sorry, what was that, Ben?

Media: Ashley Bloomfield, the Director-General of Health, is on record saying he wants a 90 percent vaccination target for Māori. You've also suggested this in the past. Did he recommend this as part of the public health advice, and does the framework deviate from his public health advice in any way?

PM: Yeah, so I don't recall having said that, so I'm not sure I'll just rely on a recollection around Ashley. I think the point that Minister Henare has made is the right one: the target that we're using here is a point that we transition. We are not going to stop at any point our efforts to vaccinate everyone. That will not end, because, actually, in my view, until we have tried to ensure that everyone has had that conversation about being vaccinated, then we've still got a job to do. So it is a milestone, and that's the language Dr Bloomfield always uses—it is a milestone; it is not the end of a campaign. From the public health advice, my recollection is yes, that we are in alignment around where we have landed, but as always—I'll always let Dr Bloomfield speak directly, but this is something that went through a long process between us all.

Media: Can I ask—we only just got the paperwork. There's a fair bit of it. It does feel fairly complicated, though. Do you have a task—

PM: I can simplify it right down for you. If you want to be able to, no matter the setting, if you want to be able to go to a bar, a restaurant, a cafe, a gym, a place you can have your

hair cut, a sporting event, a festival, a gathering; get vaccinated. That will mean no matter what setting we are in, you will be able to enjoy those things. If you are a business that wants to remain open no matter what setting, use vaccine certificates and you'll be able to. That's the simple answer.

Media: There doesn't seem to be anything in here about when schools reopen in Auckland. Is that—

PM: That's because once you're in the framework, education opens. There are public health measures at every level, but, of course, given the transition situation we're in, we're continuing to assess the safety of the outbreak in Auckland and making decisions based on that status.

Media: So will it be when Auckland moves into the red framework that—

PM: That is when we anticipate schools coming back on line—correct.

Media: And also in just here, even under the green setting, gatherings are still limited to 100 people unless you have vaccine passports—weddings and that sort of thing.

PM: Correct.

Media: How are you going to police that—

PM: A very good question. So, yes, you'll see that, actually, at orange and green levels, if you're using vaccine certificates, there's no limits. And we wanted to be consistent, because the same goes for businesses who are operating. So we wanted to allow vaccine certificates to be used privately as well so that there are no limits. The issue of compliance—every country has faced this. A lot of countries have used the idea of vaccine certificates at private gatherings as a way to have larger gatherings. But, actually, all the way through we've always had elements of our alert level, and now this, where we do rely on people to follow the guidance, and there's always an element of that, but with a 90 percent vaccination rate, the likelihood that people are vaccinated is much improved.

Media: Are you relying of Kiwis dobbing in other people?

PM: No, we've never relied on that. We've relied on Kiwis doing the right thing, and for the most part they have. But every country where they've used vaccine certificates in private environments, they have relied on that. What I would also say, of course, is event facilities where you might have a private gathering but at an event, of course, we can use the facility operators to assist. But what we've sought to do is make private and public consistent, because otherwise you could have very odd inconsistencies in your regime.

Media: Prime Minister, are the phased steps still in use?

PM: Yes, as I said in the script, yes, until Auckland moves, we'll keep using those, so that won't have a situation where Auckland is just waiting for this framework. We will keep using those in the meantime.

Media: How different is this plan to the one that wasn't supported by Māori organisations, Māori leaders, and several independent experts, or is this the same plan?

PM: No. So there have been elements that have been certainly strengthened, but I think probably the most significant difference is that in some parts of the consultation, we had not yet at that point concluded the trigger to move in the framework. And I think that will make a difference when people hear that we are seeking very high vaccination rates across the country before moving into the framework.

Media: So this one was created in further collaboration with those who did not—

PM: We've used collaboration all the way through, and it's fair to say there will be some who wanted us to go faster, some who wanted us to go slower. But we've drawn on the best advice that we have and also international experience, but also we've chosen a path that is unique to New Zealand, as we always have.

Media: Prime Minister, how many Cabinet Ministers asked for a 90 percent target for Māori?

PM: We deliberated together and collectively formed consensus on these targets.

Media: So you can't say how many Ministers specifically requested that you had a 90 percent target?

PM: Jo, let me be very clear. We canvassed a range of options and, as a Cabinet, came to the consensus on these ones.

Media: Can I also just follow up from Jason's question earlier. You said that you weren't going to particularly rely on DHBs to do the work, but the way that the health system is set up at the moment, we do still have DHBs. So how are you going to get groups within DHB areas vaccinated if you're not relying on the staff that are already there, who we have already seen have failed some groups?

PM: Forgive me if I wasn't clear enough. The reason that DHBs are helpful to us is not just because that's the way the health system is currently structured but because it gives us that ability to highlight the geographic spread we want to see with the 90 percent target. DHBs, of course, are playing an enormous roll in this roll-out, but we also know that as we move into those harder-to-reach communities, they need to, and in most cases are, collaborating heavily with other organisations, providers, iwi, and hapū. But what we've also announced today is the ability for those providers—iwi, hapū, and organisations who may not have been part of the current roll-out—to be part of it, because we need to accelerate our vaccination rates, particularly for those groups where we have a significant difference in rates.

Media: If you had your time again, would you do the announcement that you've done today, where you're giving the money directly, and a lot of it, to providers in this way? Because we're in the end of October now, and you've got DHBs who until this week have not handed over mobile vaccination clinics to iwi providers in South Taranaki. Only have they done it when there's been relentless media negativity.

PM: I don't think it's fair to say that every DHB has been the same. I don't think that's fair to say, and there have been a number of DHBs that have collaborated and worked collectively and shared resource and funding right from the beginning. As we have seen issues emerge, we have sought to address them, and that's exactly what we're doing.

Media: The Iwi Chairs Forum have opposed this framework twice before due to low vaccination rates for Māori. Was that taken into consideration?

PM: Yes. Yes, it was. We did carefully consider the advice and feedback from iwi leaders, and their stated desire of a 95 percent target, but as you can see, what we've tried to balance here is both the need for geographic spread but also to lift equity in our vaccination rates. As Minister Henare has said, you cannot get good vaccination rates in Northland unless you are lifting Māori. I'd say the same in Tairāwhiti. So these goals, these milestones we've set, will also require us to lift those vaccinations in Māori communities.

Media: Can I have one pātai for Minister Henare?

PM: Yeah.

Media: [*Speaks te reo Māori. Translation to be inserted.*]

Hon Peeni Henare: [*Speaks te reo Māori. Translation to be inserted.*]

Just in support of the Prime Minister's answer, the two tranches—the second tranche is to continue to work collaboratively with iwi, hapū, and those community groups to make sure that we can (1) continue vaccination rates, but (2) support our communities, and that's the co-design that they also asked for and we're happy to deliver that.

Media: Just on the localised lockdowns. Can we expect to see what we saw in the Firth of Thames earlier in this outbreak where section 70 orders were used?

PM: That's the kind of model that we might use. It may not necessarily be through that legal instrument but it would be the same outcome.

Media: Can you clarify when exactly Aucklanders will be able to leave Auckland for domestic travel?

PM: Sorry, a slight distraction. Would you mind repeating that question?

Media: Can you clarify when exactly Aucklanders will be able to leave Auckland domestically to travel?

PM: Ah, yes. So that is something that we are doing active work on now. As I've already explained, it is a significant logistical challenge to establish a land border the likes of which New Zealand has not had before. But our goal, because, of course, we expect for the summer period, for the holiday period, people will want to be reunited, we have set ourselves a goal to try and establish whether or not this will be possible well in time for those milestones.

Media: Just a couple of questions for Minister Henare if possible.

PM: Yes, and then what I'm going to do is I'm going come to here and then I'm actually going to finish on you, Bernard. Was yours for Minister Robertson or myself? Anyone? Oh, me? Great, OK.

Media: How exactly will the \$120 million fund be distributed? Will it be to DHBs or will it be to community providers, Whānau Ora?

Hon Peeni Henare: It will be directly to those groups and organisations and providers that will lift our vaccination rates. We've made that clear and we've also taken the step of making sure that the powers for decision making sits with myself, Minister Robertson, Davis, and Jackson.

Media: And how can you ensure that Māori won't be collateral damage when the country moves to this new framework, considering there are no specific targets for Māori?

Hon Peeni Henare: There's only one way to do that and that's to vaccinate.

Media: Prime Minister, just going back on gatherings, specifically for churches—

PM: Oh, yes.

Media: —how do you expect those groups to operate? It's quite important for Pacific people to worship, and missing out on worship would be a lot more important than missing out on going to a bar and club. So how do you expect churches to operate under that new framework?

PM: We gave a lot of consideration to how we would treat faith-based gatherings, churches, marae, and it seemed only fair that if we're using vaccine certificates as a tool to have larger gatherings, we should enable our faith-based services and marae to use those tools as well so that they can once again have larger gatherings safely. So we've done that. Of course, a vaccine certificate, they will be simple to use. People will be able to carry them with them and simply show them, or, if someone chooses to be a more sophisticated, there is an app that allows you to scan and see that someone has a certified certificate. So it will be a simple tool for anyone to use within a church or within any other setting that may not be a business.

We gave a lot of consideration to including those faith-based services, churches. Some countries have not included them in vaccine certificate arrangements. But here in New Zealand, unfortunately, we have seen that in our churches we've seen COVID spread, and that's unfortunate because one of the things that everyone generally finds very joyful to engage in—singing—spreads COVID very, very easily. So we wanted people to be able to gather safely and we wanted people to have a tool to make them feel safe coming back together again. And so we decided to use vaccine certificates across the board in that regard.

There is choice, because we accept that some may not want to use them, but then there are gathering limits if you choose not to.

Media: Prime Minister, sorry if I missed it, but where exactly in the traffic light system is the ability to relax the boundary restrictions around Auckland? I don't see it in here.

PM: Yeah, no, that's because in the longer term the boundary, the hard border, we have at the moment is as a result of our transition. So because we at the moment have an outbreak that is contained to Auckland, that is why we have a hard border. Into the future, and when we are using this framework more broadly, we don't expect in the long term to have those kinds of hard land borders. But it is there now and it is helping us now to protect the rest of New Zealand so we will keep using it. But that's why you don't see it listed there, because in the future we don't anticipate them being used in the way that we have now.

Media: So just on the fairness and equity that you've talked about, can you give us a sense of the scale of the income supports you're going to talk about in Cabinet next week? Because, on the face of it, those poorest people who've struggled in the last three or four months are getting \$9.6 million and businesses are getting a couple of billion dollars on top of \$16 billion they've also been given.

PM: I'll let Minister Robertson respond. Of course, keeping in mind, as businesses continually and rightly point out, the wage subsidy is a subsidy that is passed on to employees. But I'll let Minister Robertson speak to that.

Hon Grant Robertson: The first thing I'd say is that, as I said when I spoke, we are still looking at further measures to support people who are in hardship at that individual level. That's simply one announcement that Minister Sepuloni has made today.

The second thing that I would say is, obviously, throughout this period, we have put additional resources in to support food security, to provide support to our NGOs who are on the ground in those communities. Many millions of dollars have gone in. In terms of day to day, we've lifted benefits. Nobody who is supported by the State has had that reduced; in fact, they've had it increased through the period of COVID. But we are aware that there are particular parts of our community who are really struggling and we are committed to doing more for them.

Media: [*Inaudible*] couple of billion dollars on top of the \$16 billion in cash you've given to businesses, because they currently have \$110 billion in their bank accounts?

Hon Grant Robertson: Yeah, this is targeted to small and medium enterprises. These are the people who employ the workers around New Zealand. These are the people who get up every single day having set a business up, and they are the people who drive the rest of the economy. So, therefore, I do want to make sure that they stay in business, that people have jobs, and that we come out the other side of this. That is not in any way to diminish the experience of individuals or communities. The resurgence support payment is capped at 50 FTEs. It's not about big businesses; it's about small and medium enterprises, who make our communities work and who employ people. And so I don't resile from supporting them, no.

PM: Great. Thank you. Thank you, everyone. I did say that I would call time. We do have people who are able to answer technical questions that may exist, and, of course—

Hon Grant Robertson: Taumarunui was the centre of the earthquake.

PM: Oh! Actually, I have to say, Minister Robertson just said to me that he wanted to check whether or not it was wind; he wasn't entirely convinced it was an earthquake. And I would expect such a statement from the MP for Wellington Central.

Thank you, everyone. There will be the extra, additional, information available on the COVID-19 website, for anyone who's trying to follow along at home. It's all in writing and we will continue to add detail. Until then, thank you for joining us.

conclusion of press conference