



New Zealand Government
Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa

Government Response to the New Zealand Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 Lessons Learned

Government Response to the New Zealand
Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19
Lessons Learned. 2026. Wellington: Ministry of
Health.

ISBN 978-1-991324-94-8 (print)
ISBN 978-1-991324-95-5 (online)

HP 9180



This work is licensed under the
Creative Commons Attribution
4.0 International licence. In essence, you are
free to: share, ie, copy and redistribute the
material in any medium or format; adapt, ie,
remix, transform and build upon the material.
You must give appropriate credit, provide a
link to the licence and indicate if changes
were made.

Minister's foreword

The COVID-19 pandemic was one of the most significant public health and economic events in New Zealand's modern history, and the response to it reached into the life of nearly every New Zealander. It shaped where people could go, whether their businesses survived, how their children were taught, and how families lived and grieved. Those decisions were enormously consequential for lives and livelihoods, and they must be judged honestly, by their effects and by how they were made. New Zealanders met the disruption with resilience and real sacrifice. I particularly thank the frontline health care workers and essential workers who cared for the sick and kept the country running through the most demanding period, often at considerable personal risk. New Zealanders also placed considerable trust in their government. This Government Response to the Inquiry ('the Response') honours that trust by setting out plainly what the New Zealand Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 Lessons Learned (the Inquiry) has found, and how the Government will act on it.

I thank the Commissioners and the thousands of New Zealanders who shared their experiences. The Inquiry confirms that the initial 2020 response was supported by New Zealanders and protected lives. It also finds that, as the response continued, important decisions fell short of the standard New Zealanders were entitled to expect. Restrictions extended beyond what public health advice recommended, Auckland was kept in lockdown and separated from the rest of the country for longer than officials advised was necessary, and the wider costs to businesses, education, mental wellbeing and social cohesion were not consistently weighed. The Government accepts the seriousness of these findings and the lasting consequences they carried.

The economic findings warrant particular attention. The Treasury advised from the outset that emergency **support should be timely, temporary and targeted**, and the Inquiry found that much of the spending that followed did not meet those tests. The Inquiry identified that the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund of around \$60 billion stretched across more than 800 programmes, around half of which were not directly related to the pandemic, adding to the rising house prices and cost of living pressures New Zealanders still feel today. The debt taken on has reduced our capacity to respond to the next shock. Restoring those buffers through prudent and disciplined fiscal management is a central lesson of this Inquiry, and one this Government takes seriously.

Alongside this is trust, and the transparency on which it depends. Too often advice was not timely, transparent or complete, and at times it did not reach the public while it could still shape the decisions being made. Trust of the kind New Zealanders extended cannot be assumed the next time it is called upon. It must be earned through openness and advice that sets out the trade-offs plainly while they can still be weighed. That is why the Government has agreed that, in a future pandemic, the key advice behind key decisions will be proactively released within five working days.

This Response is aimed at practical and durable improvement, and at a system ready for a wide range of future shocks. The Government is strengthening governance, planning, legal frameworks and the resilience of our core systems, and **any future measures must be targeted, time-limited and clearly justified, with proper regard for both lives and livelihoods.** No one can know what the next shock will be, or when it will come, which is precisely why these lessons must be applied now, with rigour.



Hon Simeon Brown
Minister of Health

Contents

Minister's foreword	iii
Executive summary	1
The Government's Response to the Inquiry	3
Implementing the actions	6
Part 1: Overview	7
1.1 Context	8
1.2 How the Government has considered the recommendations	10
1.3 Overview of the Government Response	11
1.4 Implementation and reporting approach	13
1.5 Population considerations	14
Part 2: Response by Action Area	15
Action Area 1: Build economic and fiscal resilience	16
Action Area 2: Strengthen communication and public trust	22
Action Area 3: Strengthen governance, oversight and strategic capability	27
Action Area 4: Prepare pandemic plans, exercises and response structures	32
Action Area 5: Ensure fit-for-purpose legal powers, decision safeguards and democratic accountability	36
Action Area 6: Strengthen health system resilience and public health tools	40
Action Area 7: Maintain sector continuity, essential services and social supports	45
Part 3: Annexes	50
Annex 1: Table of recommendations	51
Annex 2: Further work to implement the Inquiry recommendations	56
Annex 3: Glossary	59

Executive summary

The New Zealand Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 Lessons Learned

The COVID-19 pandemic had, and continues to have, significant, complex and system-wide impacts on New Zealanders.

Learning from this experience, by identifying both the strengths and limitations of New Zealand's response and applying those lessons, is critical to strengthening preparedness and ensuring that future pandemic responses are proportionate, adaptable and effective.

The New Zealand Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 Lessons Learned (the Inquiry) was established in 2022 to identify what New Zealand can learn from the COVID-19 pandemic and how those lessons should inform preparedness for future pandemics.

The Inquiry was conducted in two phases over four years, each governed by separate terms of reference setting out who would lead the Inquiry and what matters would be examined. It considered the public health response, economic and social supports, essential services, decision-making arrangements, legal powers, vaccination, lockdowns, testing and tracing technologies, and the wider impacts of the response on people, communities and institutions.

The Inquiry's final report was presented to Parliament in March 2026. Overall, the Inquiry made 63 recommendations to the Government. These recommendations have been largely accepted, and actions have been identified to deliver on them. The recommendations span the systems, plans, legal settings, health capabilities, economic tools, sector arrangements and community relationships that the Inquiry considered are needed to better prepare for and respond to future pandemics.

The New Zealand Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 Lessons Learned at a glance

The Inquiry examined New Zealand's COVID-19 response to identify lessons for future pandemics.



Established
December 2022



Phase One report
published November 2024



Phase Two report published
March 2026

63

recommendations made to Government, spanning

23

agencies

The Government's Response to the Inquiry

The Government accepts the central lesson of the Inquiry: New Zealand needs to prepare now for future pandemics, recognising that the next pandemic may be very different from COVID-19.

Preparedness cannot be limited to the health system. A future pandemic could affect every part of society, including health services, schools, workplaces, supply chains, businesses, public finances, communities, whānau, and public trust. The Government Response to the Inquiry ('the Response') therefore takes a system-wide approach.

A future-focused Response is a key step towards strengthening New Zealand's preparedness for future pandemics.

The Government agreed to a set of principles to guide the Response:

- **future-focused:** drawing on the lessons identified by the Inquiry to strengthen the Government's ability to prepare for and respond to future shocks, including pandemics
- **transparent and accountable:** ensuring pragmatic actions to strengthen future pandemic preparedness that are transparent, have clear accountabilities for delivery, and foster public trust and confidence
- **coordinated and supports joint efforts:** recognising that effective pandemic preparedness and response requires

coordinated action across a range of agencies, sectors and communities

- **agile and proportionate:** building flexible capabilities that can respond to a wide range of pandemic scenarios proportionate to the level of potential risk or harm, balancing trade-offs

The Government Response groups the recommendations into seven Action Areas.

Together, these Action Areas describe a multi-year programme to strengthen New Zealand's pandemic preparedness through clearer governance, refreshed plans, stronger legal safeguards, more resilient health and public health capabilities, more robust decision-making frameworks, improved economic and fiscal readiness, and continuity of essential services.

The Government Response will strengthen the foundations needed before the next pandemic. It does this by building on lessons from COVID-19, work already completed since the pandemic and work underway across the National Resilience System, health sector, and broader public sector.



Action Area 1: Build economic and fiscal resilience

.....

Action Area 1 responds to 13 recommendations across the Inquiry. The Government Response includes actions to clarify the respective roles of fiscal and monetary policy in a severe downturn, publish analysis on debt buffers through existing stewardship documents, complete analysis of tools available to respond to shocks, develop planning to support ongoing port functionality, and build on supply chain work to improve commercial resilience. The Treasury advised from the outset that emergency **spending should be timely, temporary and targeted**. The Inquiry found that much of the spending that followed did not meet those tests, with around half of the \$60 billion COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund spent across more than 800 programmes that were not directly related to the pandemic. That spending added to the debt New Zealand now carries and to the cost-of-living pressures New Zealanders continue to feel. Restoring the fiscal buffers needed to respond to the next shock is a central focus of this Action Area.

The Response treats economic resilience as central to pandemic preparedness. A future pandemic may require rapid decisions to be made about household support, business support, fiscal settings, monetary policy coordination, supply chains, transport networks and critical goods. Rather than providing comprehensive, fixed plans, the Response emphasises flexible tools, clearer trade-offs, better data, stronger coordination and options that can be adapted to the circumstances of a future crisis.

Action Area 2: Strengthen communication and public trust

.....

Action Area 2 responds to four recommendations across the Inquiry. The Government Response includes actions to **change transparency requirements for decisions that affect human rights, embed transparency, evidence use and communication principles** in key pandemic planning documents, and review evidence on social trust and cohesion. Cabinet has agreed to new transparency requirements so

that, in a future pandemic, key advice relating to key decisions that affect people's rights is released promptly. This is a major area the Government is committed to fixing, and work is underway to give effect to it through a new Cabinet Office Circular still to be agreed.

This Action Area also specifically responds to findings of the Inquiry relating to the provision of advice on vaccine mandate requirements for under 18-year-olds. The Response reinforces that trust, communication and relationships are fundamental to an effective pandemic response. Decisions that are evidence-informed, proportionate, transparent and responsive to communities are essential to earn, maintain and support public trust.

Action Area 3: Strengthen governance, oversight and strategic capability

.....

Action Area 3 responds to eight recommendations across the Inquiry. The Government Response includes actions to finalise the *Pandemic Strategic Framework*, establish a cross-agency pandemic preparedness work programme, strengthen modelling and scenario planning capability, and establish arrangements for accessing expert advice before and during a pandemic.

Pandemic preparedness will be embedded within New Zealand's wider National Resilience System. This recognises that pandemics are one of a number of nationally significant risks that require coordinated preparation, clear roles and effective governance. The Ministry of Health will lead pandemic preparedness as the Strategic Coordination Agency for communicable disease outbreaks, while the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet will continue its stewardship role for the National Resilience System.

Action Area 4: Prepare pandemic plans, exercises and response structures

.....

Action Area 4 responds to seven recommendations across the Inquiry. The Government Response includes actions to refresh the *All-of-Government (AOG) Pandemic Response Plan*, embed response

structures and an operating model for catastrophic risks, develop a pandemic exercise programme, and prepare practical guidance for urgent advice and decision-making during a pandemic.

The Response places strong emphasis on planning before a crisis and recognises that future strategies, including any elimination strategy, must be clearly presented as temporary and subject to review. The refreshed AOG *Pandemic Response Plan*, *Health Sector Pandemic Response Plan* and sector pandemic plans will provide a clearer hierarchy of preparedness documents, considerations and flexible tools. These will help agencies understand their roles, dependencies, escalation points, decision-making, and links to operational plans.

Action Area 5: Ensure fit-for-purpose legal powers, decision safeguards and democratic accountability

.....

Action Area 5 responds to 10 recommendations across the Inquiry. The Government Response includes actions to progress a review of relevant legislation, review non-legislative options for stronger democratic and human rights safeguards, develop guidance on the provision of New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 advice, and consider mechanisms for regular strategic review of pandemic response settings.

The Response highlights that legal powers have to be ready before they are needed. A future pandemic may require decisions that affect rights, freedoms, movement, business activity and public services. The Response, therefore, emphasises the need for clear, proportionate and flexible powers, supported by appropriate safeguards, transparent decision-making, parliamentary accountability and human rights considerations.

Action Area 6: Strengthen health system resilience and public health tools

.....

Action Area 6 responds to 10 recommendations across the Inquiry. The Government Response includes actions to refine the *Health Sector Pandemic Response Plan*, maintain quarantine and isolation

readiness, continue work to scale public health functions, implement the *Health Digital Investment Plan*, develop frameworks for international border restrictions and lockdowns, identify considerations for the use of vaccines in a pandemic, and strengthen health and disability system resilience and continuity.

The Response recognises that public health tools need to be scalable, integrated and sustainable over time. COVID-19 required rapid expansion of testing, tracing, vaccination, infection prevention and control, quarantine, isolation, public health communications and health data systems. The Response focuses on ensuring these capabilities can be activated and expanded in a future pandemic, while also maintaining wider health and disability services.

Action Area 7: Maintain sector continuity, essential services and social supports

.....

Action Area 7 responds to 10 recommendations across the Inquiry. The Government Response includes actions to support agencies to review and refresh sector pandemic plans, assess pandemic risks to lifeline utilities, strengthen welfare coordination, identify opportunities to strengthen housing, income, food security and safety supports, implement new business continuity management requirements in the public service, and progress research on service recovery and outcomes following COVID-19.

The Response recognises preparedness must extend beyond the health response. Essential services, education, corrections, welfare, food security, housing, income support, community services and lifeline utilities all need to be able to continue under pandemic conditions. The Response therefore emphasises sector preparedness, business continuity, clear responsibilities, and stronger understanding of dependencies between sectors. It also reinforces the importance of social supports and community services in reducing disproportionate impacts and helping people, whānau and communities to recover.

Implementing the actions

The Government is committed to implementing the actions outlined in this Response through a coordinated multi-agency work programme.

.....

The Minister of Health will provide oversight and ministerial leadership of the implementation of the Government Response. The Ministry of Health will lead and coordinate delivery across government agencies and Crown entities and will provide the Minister of Health with regular progress updates.

Actions requiring resourcing or Cabinet decisions will follow established processes.

.....

Implementation will require coordinated action across a wide range of agencies. Some actions in this Response will be contingent on new or reprioritised funding, or reprioritised work programmes, or will require staged implementation over time.

Where possible, actions will be completed within 12 months from the publication of the Response.

Where relevant, funding requirements will be considered through established Budget and fiscal management processes to ensure sustainable investment in pandemic preparedness and broader system improvements.

Part 1: Overview

1.1 Context

Lessons learned from New Zealand's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

.....

The COVID-19 pandemic and actions taken in response had, and continue to have, significant, complex and system-wide impacts on New Zealanders. While it is not possible to predict the timing, nature and severity of the next pandemic, New Zealand will face pandemics in the future – just as we have in the past.

Learning from the COVID-19 experience, by identifying both the strengths and limitations of New Zealand's response, is critical to enhancing our preparedness and ensuring future pandemic responses are proportionate, adaptable and effective.

The establishment of the New Zealand Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 Lessons Learned (the Inquiry) in December 2022 provided the appropriate, independent and authoritative mechanism to undertake this task.

The following links provide more information on:

-
- 🔗 The Inquiry's Terms of Reference
 - 🔗 The background to the Inquiry
 - 🔗 The Phase One report
 - 🔗 The Phase Two report

In places, this Response document uses shorter versions of recommendations for brevity and ease of reference. The Inquiry's final reports provide the definitive version of the recommendations, some of which contain sub-parts, and readers may want to refer to the links above for additional context.

The core purpose of the Inquiry was to identify lessons for the future.

.....

The Inquiry was tasked with identifying lessons from New Zealand's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and how those lessons can be applied to strengthen New Zealand's preparedness for, and response to, future pandemics.

The Inquiry was conducted in two phases over four years. Each phase was governed by its own terms of reference that set out who would lead the Inquiry and what matters would be examined.

Phase One considered the overall public health response, including border controls, vaccination and lockdown measures; the continuity of essential services; economic support and recovery measures; and communication, engagement and decision-making arrangements.

Phase Two focused on key decisions made between February 2021 and October 2022, including decisions about vaccines (such as mandates, approval processes and safety monitoring), national and regional lockdowns, and the procurement, development and distribution of testing and tracing technologies. It assessed the advice underpinning those decisions, including whether the Government was sufficiently informed about their potential impacts; the extent to which international experience was considered; and whether an appropriate balance was struck between achieving public health objectives and minimising wider social and economic disruption.

The Inquiry carried out extensive engagement, evidence gathering and review.

The Inquiry undertook an extensive programme of engagement and analysis. It reviewed thousands of pages of documents, met with a wide range of individuals and organisations through interviews, community engagements and public hearings, and heard from over 44,000 New Zealanders through the public submissions process.

The delivery of the final reports to the Governor-General marked the end of the Inquiry.

The Inquiry concluded on 26 February 2026, with the delivery of the Phase One and Phase Two reports to the Governor-General of New Zealand. The reports were then tabled in Parliament on 10 March 2026.

In total, the Inquiry made 63 recommendations, spanning a broad range of areas to strengthen New Zealand's preparedness for future pandemics. The Phase One report outlined six lessons and made 39 recommendations, while the Phase Two report set out four broad future-focused lessons alongside 24 recommendations. Together the two main reports, supplementary reports and appendices total around 1,800 pages.

1.2 How the Government has considered the recommendations

The focus must now shift to the future and the actions needed to strengthen pandemic preparedness.

.....

The Government recognises the breadth, depth and significance of the Inquiry's work, together with the profound impacts of the pandemic, and the pandemic response, on New Zealanders' lives and livelihoods.

To ensure appropriate consideration of the Inquiry's recommendations, the Government agreed a set of four guiding principles to underpin the Government Response to the Inquiry ('the Response'). These are:

- **future-focused:** drawing on the lessons identified by the Inquiry to strengthen the Government's ability to prepare for and respond to future shocks, including pandemics
- **transparent and accountable:** ensuring pragmatic actions to strengthen future pandemic preparedness that are transparent, have clear accountabilities for delivery, and foster public trust and confidence
- **coordinated and supports joint efforts:** recognising that effective pandemic preparedness and response requires coordinated action across a broad range of agencies, sectors and communities
- **agile and proportionate:** building flexible capabilities that can respond to a wide range of pandemic scenarios, proportionate to the level of potential risk or harm, balancing trade-offs.

Each of the Inquiry's recommendations was considered according to:

- **expected preparedness and public value:** whether the recommendation would materially strengthen pandemic preparedness, resilience, or quality of future decision-making
- **alignment with current policy direction and work programme:** whether the recommendation is consistent with current policy priorities and settings, including work underway
- **implementation feasibility:** how practicable it is to implement the recommendation, taking account of complexity and dependencies
- **funding fit:** how readily the recommendation might be funded within existing baselines or realistic reprioritisation
- **population impact:** the likely impact of the recommendation on population groups disproportionately impacted during a pandemic, such as older people, disabled people, those with pre-existing health conditions, those experiencing disadvantage, and Māori and Pacific peoples.

This Response document sets out the ways in which the recommendations have been considered, the actions taken to date, and any further actions required to implement them.

1.3 Overview of the Government Response

This Response groups the Inquiry's 63 recommendations into seven thematic Action Areas.

These broadly align with the Inquiry's key lessons and the way in which the recommendations were originally structured in its reports.

Action Areas	Recommendations
Action Area 1: Build economic and fiscal resilience	25 26 27 28 30 3B 3C 3D 3E 3F 3G 3H 3I
Action Area 2: Strengthen communication and public trust	36 4B 4C 4D
Action Area 3: Strengthen governance, oversight and strategic capability	01 02 03 04 05 06 1D 1E
Action Area 4: Prepare pandemic plans, exercises and response structures	07 08 09 10 11 1C 3A
Action Area 5: Ensure fit-for-purpose legal powers, decision safeguards and democratic accountability	12 37 1A 1B 1F 2A 2B 2C 2D 2D
Action Area 6: Strengthen health system resilience and public health tools	13 14 15 16 17 18 19 22 23 24
Action Area 7: Maintain sector continuity, essential services, and social supports	20 21 29 31 32 33 34 35 38 4A

Key: Phase One recommendation Phase Two recommendation

While this Response document groups recommendations, the Government has considered each recommendation made by the Inquiry in turn and responded to each in one of the following ways.

Accept	The Government accepts the recommendation. The recommendation will be implemented as it was set out by the Inquiry.
Accept in principle	The Government accepts the intent of the recommendation. The recommendation will be implemented in a different way from the way it was set out by the Inquiry or implementation is contingent on funding or resourcing.
Partially accept	The Government accepts one or more sub-parts of the recommendation as set out by the Inquiry. It does not accept the recommendation in full.
Not accepted	Following analysis, this recommendation will not be implemented.

In some cases, a recommendation has been accepted, or accepted in principle, and the work to implement it has already been completed or is underway. Where further work to fully address the recommendation has been identified, this has been specified and a status of that work is indicated in one of the following ways.

- **Not yet started:** Work on the implementation of the response to the recommendation has not yet started.
- **Underway:** Work on the implementation of the response to the recommendation has begun.
- **Ongoing:** The work to deliver on this recommendation is part of an ongoing programme of work or activity.

1.4 Implementation and reporting approach

Consistent with the Inquiry's emphasis on accountability and transparency (39), the actions in the Response will be incorporated into a coordinated multiagency work programme to strengthen New Zealand's preparedness for future pandemics. Progress will be tracked, monitored and regularly reported.

The Minister of Health will provide oversight and leadership of the implementation of the Response. The Ministry of Health will lead and coordinate delivery across government agencies and Crown entities and provide the Minister of Health with regular progress updates. The Ministry will publish periodic updates on its website to support public transparency.

Where possible, actions will be completed within 12 months from the publication of the Response.

Actions requiring resourcing or Cabinet decisions will follow established processes.

Some actions in this Response will be contingent on new or reprioritised funding, or reprioritised work programmes, and some will require staged implementation over time. Where relevant, funding requirements will be considered through established Budget and fiscal management processes to ensure sustainable investment in pandemic preparedness and broader system improvements.

1.5 Population considerations

The Inquiry highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic had disproportionate negative impacts on some population groups and communities. These impacts resulted not only from the direct health effects of the disease, but also from disruptions to routine health, education and social services, financial and broader economic pressures, and the unintended consequences of the pandemic response measures.

The Inquiry cited data that disabled people, older people, people with underlying health conditions, and those experiencing pre-existing social and/or economic disadvantage were particularly affected.

One of the overarching lessons identified by the Inquiry is that we need to manage pandemics to look after all aspects of people's lives. This means recognising the broad range of impacts that a future pandemic may have across people's lives – and balancing the responses to minimise both immediate and long-term harms.

Protect lives, livelihoods and ways of life.

.....

The Government agrees with this lesson. It commits to ensuring that implementation of this Response prevents, mitigates and monitors disproportionate harms, with reducing disparities embedded as a core design principle across planning, decision-making and delivery.

Part 2:

Response by Action Area



Action Area 1:

Build economic and fiscal resilience

What the Inquiry found and recommended

This Action Area brings together recommendations about the economic and fiscal resilience needed to manage a future pandemic or comparable national shock – including the importance of timely, temporary and targeted support.

The Inquiry found that future shocks require pre-prepared economic tools, clearer governance, stronger coordination and better targeting so supports can be deployed quickly while maintaining value for money and managing fiscal risk. The Inquiry drew on the Treasury's advice that emergency **economic support should be timely, temporary and targeted**. It found that a significant share of the spending that followed did not meet those tests, with around half of the \$60 billion COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, which was spent across more than 800 programmes, that were not directly related to the pandemic.

The Inquiry recommended determining governance arrangements and responsibilities for a coordinated economic response, including the respective roles of fiscal and monetary policy, financial services continuity, fiscal buffers and value-for-money assessment. It also recommended a labour market plan for pandemic response,

steps to support supply chains and port performance, and a comprehensive plan for financial assistance schemes for people and businesses, including targeting, agency responsibilities, gaps, monitoring, exit strategies and compliance.

Lesson Three of the second phase of the Inquiry focused on agile and robust economic policy in response to future pandemics, with the lessons being applicable to other shocks. The Inquiry recommended that the Treasury publish a four-yearly Financial Resilience report on debt levels and fiscal buffers for major shocks, that annual fiscal strategy objectives be assessed in light of that report, and that the roles of fiscal and monetary policy in a large, uncertain shock be clarified. It also recommended developing implementable income and business support options before the next pandemic, improving the frequency and range of macroeconomic indicators, investigating infrastructure maintenance priorities for timely fiscal stimulus, researching unconventional monetary policy, and improving the transparency of Crown guarantees and indemnities.

Recommendations in this Action Area

Recommendation		Response
Phase One		
25	Determine governance arrangements and responsibilities for a coordinated economic response <i>This recommendation is largely accepted, with parts (c) – develop a playbook – and (g) – fast track value for money assessments – not accepted, due to prioritising the development of a shared understanding of tools available (c) and implementation feasibility challenges (g).</i>	Partially accept
26	Develop a labour market plan for pandemic response	Accept in principle ¹
27	Ensure ongoing operation of supply chains	Accept in principle ²
28	Assess steps to maintain port performance and mitigate trade, aviation and shipping bottlenecks <i>This recommendation is partially accepted: the intent to ensure ongoing port performance is supported; however, developing a comprehensive plan to mitigate all transport shortages or bottlenecks is not considered feasible as trends in international trade, aviation and shipping are outside the control and direct influence of the New Zealand Government.</i>	Partially accept
30	Develop a comprehensive plan for financial assistance schemes	Accept in principle ³
Phase Two		
3B	Treasury to publish a four-yearly Financial Resilience report on debt levels and fiscal buffers for major shocks	Accept in principle ⁴
3C	Outline plans to rebuild fiscal buffers	Accept in principle ⁵
3D	Clarify the roles of fiscal and monetary policy in a large economic shock of uncertain nature and duration	Accept

¹ **Recommendation 26** is accepted in principle as the intent is supported but will be implemented in different way to that set out in the Inquiry.

² **Recommendation 27** is accepted in principle as the intent is supported but will be implemented in different way to that set out in the Inquiry.

³ **Recommendations 30 and 3E** are accepted in principle as the intent of developing income and business support options is supported through work to first assess the broader fiscal toolkit, trade-offs and delivery constraints.

⁴ **Recommendation 3B** is accepted in principle as the intent is supported but will be implemented in a different way to that set out in the Inquiry. The Government considers that existing mechanisms provide sufficient scope to update and publish analysis on prudent debt buffers, while preserving flexibility to determine the best timing and format for that advice.

⁵ **Recommendation 3C** is accepted in principle as the intent is supported but will be implemented in a different way to that set out in the Inquiry. The Government explains its fiscal strategy, including its approach to prudent debt and fiscal buffers, through the Fiscal Strategy Report and existing Public Finance Act 1989 requirements. Governments can draw on existing and future Treasury analysis when setting debt objectives, without creating an additional prescribed reporting process.

Recommendation		Response
3E	Develop options for implementable income and business support before the next pandemic	Accept in principle ³
3F	Increase the frequency of official economic statistics	Accept
3G	Investigate the feasibility of an infrastructure maintenance priorities programme	Accept in principle ⁶
3H	Seek a better understanding of unconventional monetary policies	Accept in principle ⁷
3I	Improve the process for, and transparency of, Crown guarantees and indemnities	Accept in principle ⁸

Work completed or underway

Economic governance and coordination

The Government accepts several elements of the coordinated economic response recommendation (25) and accepts the recommendation to clarify the roles of fiscal and monetary policy in a large economic shock (3D). The Treasury and the Reserve Bank of New Zealand (Reserve Bank) have already published analysis on the respective roles of fiscal and monetary policy, including in a crisis where monetary policy is constrained by the effective lower bound.

The Treasury and the Reserve Bank have improved coordination processes (3D), including the Treasury's observer role on the Monetary Policy Committee. Work is underway on a 'traffic light' framework to strengthen coordination between monetary and fiscal policy in large shocks. An independent review of monetary policy decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic is also underway and is due to report back in August 2026.

Labour market resilience

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) has a small labour market performance and policy team focused on labour market data and monitoring, who are building capability to support workforce planning through sectors (26), employers and relevant government agencies. Approaches developed through this work and support for the all-of-government response to the fuel crisis could support labour market resilience analysis as required to support the *All-of-Government (AOG) Pandemic Response Plan*.

Supply chain resilience

The Government accepts in principle the recommendation to ensure the ongoing operation of supply chains. MBIE, New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (NZTE), the Ministry of Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT) and partners have significant work underway in this area (27).

MBIE will continue to work with international

⁶ **Recommendation 3G** is accepted in principle as the intent is supported but will be implemented through planned asset management and investment planning work. A separate infrastructure maintenance priorities programme could duplicate existing agency responsibilities and require ongoing effort to keep current.

⁷ **Recommendation 3H** is accepted in principle as the intent to build a stronger evidence base on unconventional/additional monetary policy tools is supported, continuing to build on Treasury and Reserve Bank of New Zealand work underway.

⁸ **Recommendation 3I** is accepted in principle as work recently completed by the Treasury is considered to have supported the intent of this recommendation. The process for granting indemnities will also be considered as part of Public Finance Reform over the next few years.

partners to develop ways of minimising future supply chain disruptions during a pandemic, including through the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework work on supply chains. An interagency Supply Chain Coordination Group has been established, which includes agencies with responsibility for New Zealand's key goods and critical sectors to share insights, align policy development, participate in international engagements and discuss preparedness and response work.

MBIE has also developed a policy preparedness and response framework for supply chain shocks. It is now conducting deep dives into health and pastoral farming in collaboration with industry to build a deeper understanding of supply chains.

The Government partially accepts the recommendation to ensure the ongoing operation of ports in a pandemic (28). Developing a single comprehensive plan to mitigate all transport shortages or bottlenecks is not considered feasible given trends in international trade, aviation and shipping are outside the control and direct influence of the New Zealand Government. However, operational lessons from the pandemic and existing work – including the *Pandemic Strategic Framework*, *AOG Pandemic Response Plan* (when finalised) and the *Vessel Management Framework* – provide a base from which a response plan shaped to address the particular circumstances of an event can be developed. Parliament's Transport and Infrastructure Committee has opened an inquiry into the productivity and economic performance of New Zealand's ports, which also supports the broader intent of this recommendation.

Financial assistance and income and business support

The Government accepts in principle the recommendation to develop options for **timely, temporary and targeted income and business support** before the next pandemic (3E), as well as undertaking further engagement and work on more comprehensive planning (30). Initiatives that contribute to a base from which this work

can be done are the Treasury's 2025 Long-term Insights Briefing,⁹ an internal Treasury desktop review on fiscal tools, Ministry of Social Development (MSD) work on client scenarios and gap analysis, Inland Revenue work on sequencing support during the pandemic, and MBIE work on a business support framework for severe weather events.

Economic data and fiscal risk tools

Stats NZ is increasing the frequency of producing official economic statistics (3F), including by delivering a monthly Consumers Price Index and developing 25 new monthly industry indicators from 2027. It will continue transitioning from legacy systems to a modern processing platform to improve responsiveness to future policy, data and reporting needs.

The Inquiry recommended research on unconventional monetary policy (3H). The Reserve Bank has already published several papers on the economic impacts of additional monetary policy tools and will continue to build understanding of the costs and benefits of additional monetary policy tools in different circumstances. The Treasury has reviewed the economic and fiscal impacts of the Large-Scale Asset Purchase programme to inform advice on the Memorandum of Understanding for additional monetary policy tools.

Likewise, the Treasury has supported the intent of the Inquiry's recommendation on Crown guarantees and indemnities (3I) through its work to strengthen the public interest test, expand the register of Crown indemnities, provide more guidance to policy teams, and tailor assessment according to the scale of risk to public finances. The process for granting indemnities will also be considered as part of Public Finance Reform over the next few years.

9 The Treasury, 2025. Te Ara Mōkōpuna: Treasury's 2025 Long-term Insights Briefing. URL: treasury.govt.nz/publications/itib/te-ara-mokopuna-2025 (accessed 19 June 2026).

Further work to implement recommendations

Action 1.1: Clarify the respective roles of fiscal and monetary policy in a severe downturn (25, 3D). This action will build on existing Treasury and Reserve Bank analysis, the Treasury's 'fiscal toolkit' work, and work already underway to strengthen coordination through a 'traffic light' framework for large shocks.

Status	Complete
Underway	By 31 October 2029

Action 1.2: Publish analysis on debt buffers through existing stewardship documents. The Treasury regularly assesses appropriate debt buffers for responding to future shocks (3B, 3C). The Treasury will update and review its analysis of appropriate debt buffers for responding to future shocks and cycles and reflect this through existing stewardship documents such as the next *Investment Statement* or *Long-term Fiscal Statement*. The completion date reflects that these stewardship documents are issued every few years. The Treasury expects governments can draw on its analysis of debt buffers when setting debt objectives and explaining their fiscal strategy.¹⁰

Status	Complete
Ongoing	By 31 October 2029

Action 1.3: Complete analysis of tools available to respond to shocks (30, 3E). The Treasury will continue to analyse the pros and cons of different tools for responding to shocks. Where there are net benefits and the tools have support from external stakeholders and Ministers, it will consider pre-positioning those tools.

This work will initially focus on the overall toolkit for responding to shocks and cycles, including principles to guide the response to different shocks and the role of alternative instruments such as household support payments and business finance guarantees.

Status	Complete
Underway	By 30 June 2027

Action 1.4: Improve asset management practices and performance reporting (3G). The Government supports the objective of improving the quality of infrastructure information, which is critical to enable targeted, timely adjustment of maintenance spending in response to shocks or stresses, such as a pandemic. However, a separate infrastructure maintenance priorities programme could duplicate existing agency responsibilities and require ongoing effort to keep current. Instead, the Government's work programme to respond to the National Infrastructure Plan 2026, which includes recommendations for improving asset management practices and performance reporting, will deliver these improvements. The Minister for Infrastructure will report to Cabinet on the Government response to the Plan before the end of June 2027, including with an update on progress on asset management and investment planning requirements.

Status	Complete
Underway	By 30 June 2027

¹⁰ Through existing Public Finance Act 1989 requirements, governments must publish a Fiscal Strategy Report that sets out how their fiscal strategy is consistent with statutory principles of responsible fiscal management, including returning to and maintaining prudent levels of debt.

Action 1.5: Review the Vessel Management Framework (28). The *Vessel Management Framework* was developed during the pandemic to support ongoing port functionality. It remains in place and was updated in December 2023 to apply more broadly to any disease ('disease agnostic'). A review of this framework will be progressed alongside the development of the *AOG Pandemic Response Plan* and relevant sector pandemic plans, as well as legislation review (20, 21, 37). Regular reviews of the framework will be conducted every three years.

Status	Complete
Ongoing	By 30 June 2027

Action 1.6: Build on existing supply chain work programme to establish a programme to improve commercial resilience (27). In addition to the existing cross-agency work programmes on supply chain resilience, NZTE will establish a programme of improving commercial resilience through improving private sector knowledge of supply chain trends and practices.

Status	Complete
Not started	By 30 June 2027

Implementation considerations

- For fiscal and monetary coordination (25, 3D), there are limits to how much clarity can be achieved through contingency planning because the nature, duration and scale of future crises cannot be known in advance.
- Timely and targeted deployment of business and income support (30, 3E) depends on operational agency systems, customer information and existing support mechanisms. COVID-19 required a high-trust model and resourcing shifts.
- Agencies that would progress supply chain resilience work are heavily involved in the current all-of-government response to the Middle East crisis.
- If changes to the Public Finance Act 1989 were made to reflect recommendations on Crown indemnities (3I), this would require House of Representatives and Select Committee time.



Action Area 2: Strengthen communication and public trust

What the Inquiry found and recommended

This Action Area brings together recommendations about strengthening public trust, transparency and the social foundations of pandemic preparedness and response. It is concerned with how decisions that affect people's rights are made and explained, with clear and open communication, and with the trust, social cohesion and community relationships.

A central issue for this Action Area is transparency and its effect on public trust and social cohesion. At times during the COVID-19 pandemic, major decisions that limited people's rights were taken that were not supported by, or that ran counter to, the public health advice, and the advice and reasoning behind those decisions was not made transparent. This meant that New Zealanders were often unable to see the basis for decisions that significantly affected their lives and freedoms, which damaged trust and social cohesion and affected the rights of people across the whole community. The lack of transparency was so significant that, in at least one instance, the Ministry of Health considers that the Inquiry reached a finding that is incorrect. The Government is determined to put this right. Cabinet has agreed that, in a future pandemic, key advice

relating to key decisions will be proactively released within a maximum of five working days of the decision being taken, and a Cabinet Office Circular will be created to clarify the rules that apply.

The Inquiry found that the COVID-19 response depended not only on formal government systems, but also on the strengths of iwi, Māori organisations, Pacific communities, ethnic communities, community organisations, faith groups, businesses, social service providers, volunteers and local leaders. It found that these groups often knew the needs of their communities and could reach people in ways central government could not. The Inquiry therefore recommended reviewing how public sector agencies supported the Crown in its relationship with Māori under the Treaty of Waitangi during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Inquiry found that **communication, transparency and trust were central to social licence**. Early in the pandemic, clear messaging and high trust supported collective action. Over time, however, trust and cohesion were affected by prolonged restrictions, mandates, misinformation, fatigue and uneven experiences of the response. The Inquiry emphasised that future communication should be transparent, accessible, culturally responsive and open about evidence, uncertainty, information sources and the reasoning behind decisions.

The Inquiry also made a significant finding that Ministers were provided with a briefing in December 2021, which was not considered until January 2022, stating that the COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group had ‘raised concerns about vaccine mandates requiring younger groups (e.g. those under 18 years) to be fully vaccinated’.

Noting the themes on transparency and social cohesion, the Inquiry recommended tasking an agency with monitoring local and international research and policy on trust and social cohesion, advising on lessons and options for New Zealand, and developing a clear evidence base on patterns and trends in trust and social cohesion.

Recommendations in this Action Area

Recommendation	Response
Phase One	
36 Review how public sector agencies supported the Crown in its relationship with Māori under the Treaty of Waitangi during COVID-19	Accept
Phase Two	
4B Ensure good transparency and communication of decisions in a pandemic	Accept
4C Task an agency to monitor research and advise on policy regarding trust and social cohesion measures	Accept in principle
4D Develop a clear evidence base on patterns and trends in trust and social cohesion in New Zealand	Accept in principle

Work completed or underway

Transparency and communication

The Government agrees that transparent, evidence-based decision-making and open communication must remain central features of a pandemic response. **Transparency, clarity and effective communication are fundamental to maintaining public trust and ensuring the effectiveness of responses during a pandemic (4B).**

Aspects of the recommendation to ensure transparency and communication of decisions in a pandemic have already been reflected in the *New Zealand Pandemic Plan (2024)* and NEAC’s *Finding Balance* guidance. Key frameworks discussed in other Action Areas, including the *Pandemic Strategic Framework*, *AOG Pandemic Response Plan (07)* and *Health Sector Pandemic Response Plan (13)*, will include principles that support recommendation 4B, such as transparency, proportionality and evidence-informed decision-making.

The Inquiry found that Ministers were provided with a briefing in December 2021, which was not considered until January 2022, stating that the COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group (CV TAG) had 'raised concerns about vaccine mandates requiring younger groups (e.g. those under 18 years) to be fully vaccinated'. The Inquiry further found that more fulsome advice was not provided to Ministers. The Ministry of Health has advised that this particular finding is incorrect, as more fulsome advice on the CV TAG's position regarding two-dose vaccine mandates applying to those aged 12–17 years was referenced in a Cabinet paper in March 2022.

The Ministry of Health will continue to:

- proactively release policy, science and clinical advice provided to Government in line with expectations for public sector agencies regarding transparency and accountability (2E)
- ensure Ministers formally acknowledge receipt of clinical advice, so that there is a clear and timely record of when clinical advice has been received and considered
- advise Ministers on proactively communicating key clinical advice to the public in clear and accessible terms, so that New Zealanders understand the evidence informing significant health decisions while it can still inform public understanding.

Trust and social cohesion

The Government accepts in principle the Inquiry's recommendations to monitor research and advise on trust and social cohesion (4C) and develop an evidence base on trust and social cohesion (4D). However, no one government agency is currently resourced or mandated, or possesses all the functions relevant, to lead on social cohesion monitoring and policy advice across government. Elements related to social cohesion align with work underway across multiple agencies and communities. MSD has previously led work on social cohesion, including developing Te Korowai Whetū Social Cohesion Strategic Framework and Measurement Framework (2022) and the three-yearly baseline indicators report.¹¹ Other work underway includes the Public Service Commission's (PSC's) Kiwis Count,¹² the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Trust Survey work,¹³ and wider public trust initiatives such as the Open Government Partnership,¹⁴ Integrity Action Plan¹⁵ and revised Public Service Code of Conduct¹⁶ training.

Crown-iwi relationships

Te Puni Kōkiri has previously reviewed how key public sector agencies supported the Crown's relationship with iwi and Māori during COVID-19 (36) and identified both positive practices and systemic gaps.

Whānau Ora, as a devolved commissioning model, supported urgent and immediate needs during the pandemic. In 2023 the Office of the Auditor-General released a report on this work, *How Well Public Organisations Are Supporting Whānau Ora and Whānau-centred Approaches*.¹⁷

11 Dunkley K, Terry A, Pover E, et al. 2025. Te Korowai Whetū: Social Cohesion in Aotearoa New Zealand 2024. URL: msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/community/social-cohesion/2024-social-cohesion-indicator-report-final.pdf (accessed 20 June 2026).

12 PSC. (nd). Kiwis Count. URL: publicservice.govt.nz/data/kiwis-count (accessed 20 June 2026).

13 PSC. 2026. Trust in the Public Service. URL: publicservice.govt.nz/data/trust-in-the-public-service (accessed 20 June 2026).

14 PSC. (nd). Open Government Partnership. URL: publicservice.govt.nz/system/open-government-partnership (accessed 20 June 2026).

15 PSC. (nd). Work we are doing to strengthen integrity and conduct. URL: publicservice.govt.nz/role-and-purpose/integrity-and-conduct/work-we-are-doing-to-strengthen-integrity-and-conduct (accessed 20 June 2026).

16 PSC. 2026. The Code of Conduct for the Public Sector. URL: publicservice.govt.nz/guidance/the-code-of-conduct-for-the-public-sector (accessed 20 June 2026).

17 Office of the Auditor-General. 2023. *How Well Public Organisations Are Supporting Whānau Ora and Whānau-centred Approaches*. URL: <https://ao.parliament.nz/2023/whanau-ora> (accessed 20 June 2026).

Further work to deliver recommendations

Action 2.1: Strengthen transparency requirements for decisions that affect people’s rights. Cabinet has agreed that, in a future pandemic, key advice relating to key decisions that affect people’s rights will be proactively released within a maximum of five working days of the decision being taken, subject to the existing considerations under the Official Information Act 1982. The Public Service Commission and the Ministry of Justice will develop a Cabinet Office Circular to clarify how this requirement will apply across government, so that decisions affecting people’s rights are taken and explained transparently (4B).

Status	Complete
Underway	By 30 September 2026

Action 2.2: Identify examples of agencies using family and whānau-centred approaches. Te Puni Kōkiri will identify good-practice examples of agencies using family and whānau-centred approaches, such as Whānau Ora, that can be highlighted or shared (36).

Status	Complete
Underway	By 30 June 2027

Action 2.3: Review actions taken in response to the Waitangi Tribunal’s Haumarū: The COVID-19 Priority Report. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) led the initial response to the Waitangi Tribunal’s Haumarū report. Te Puni Kōkiri and the Ministry of Health will review this response, Updated Actions Taken in Response to Waitangi Tribunal’s COVID-19 Priority Report,¹⁸ to consider whether concerns raised in the report have been remedied or mitigated (36), and support implementation and ongoing use of sector-specific Treaty of Waitangi frameworks.

Status	Complete
Underway	By 30 June 2027

Action 2.4: Ensure key documents embed transparency, evidence and communication principles. The Ministry of Health will ensure that principles relating to transparency, the use of evidence, and communication are embedded in pandemic direction-setting and planning documents. These documents include the *Pandemic Strategic Framework* and *AOG Pandemic Response Plan*, sector plans, decision-making guidance, policy advice templates, communications and engagement strategies, and other relevant policies as they are finalised (4B). Part of this work will involve considering how to make information accessible by providing it in alternative formats for disabled people, and for people for whom English is not their first language.

Status	Complete
Ongoing	By 30 June 2027

18 DPMC. 2023. Proactive release and update on actions taken in response to the Waitangi Tribunal’s Haumarū COVID-19 Priority Report. URL: dpmc.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2023-01/Proactive-Release-and-Updated-Information-on-Actions-Taken-in-Response-to-Waitangi-Tribunals-Haumarū-COVID-19-Priority-Report.pdf (accessed 20 June 2026).

Action 2.5: Review the current state of monitoring and reporting of trust and social cohesion work across government (4C, 4D).

MSD is working with government agencies that have a role in monitoring and reporting on trust and social cohesion to develop a current state analysis and identify any gaps and opportunities for improvement. If this review identifies a clear need for a more formal cross-agency group, that group could be established to drive progress.

Status	Complete
Underway	31 December 2026

Implementation considerations

- The Inquiry identified that Recommendation 36 should be supported by all public sector agencies, in conjunction with Te Puni Kōkiri.
- If further work is required following an assessment of the current state of the evidence base on social trust and cohesion (4C, 4D), consideration will need to be given to resourcing and how agencies and organisations participate in supporting implementation of this recommendation.



Action Area 3: Strengthen governance, oversight and strategic capability

What the Inquiry found and recommended

This Action Area brings together recommendations about the system-level governance, oversight and strategic capability needed to prepare for future pandemics and other nationally significant risks.

.....

The Inquiry found that future pandemic preparedness requires stronger all-of-government coordination and accountability. It recommended a **central agency function** to coordinate preparedness for pandemics and other National Risks, supported by scenario planning, modelling capability and expert advice. It also recommended strengthening oversight and public transparency of pandemic preparedness, including through National Risk reporting and consideration of sustainable funding for preparedness and system improvements.

The Inquiry also emphasised that the next pandemic may differ significantly from COVID-19, and that New Zealand should prepare through scenario thinking, modelling and investment decisions made ahead of time. The Inquiry's future-focused lessons emphasised that strong foundations need to be in place before a pandemic, including tools for decision-making, planning, scenario analysis, public health, economic and social supports, and data and knowledge.

Lesson One of the second phase of the Inquiry focused on systems that promote good government decision-making. It found that future decision-makers need timely data, modelling and structured advice to support trade-offs between public health measures and wider health, economic, social and educational outcomes. It recommended the Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service should investigate establishing a **permanent strategic function** at the centre of government, either the Treasury or the DPMC, and set up a clear work programme for that function.

Recommendations in this Action Area

Recommendation		Response
Phase One		
01	Establish a central agency function to coordinate all-of-government preparedness to respond to pandemics (and other national risks)	Accept in principle ¹⁹
02	Ensure the central agency function has access to scenario planning and modelling capability	Accept in principle ²⁰
03	Establish a pandemic expert advisory group	Accept
04	Strengthen oversight and accountability for pandemic preparedness (and other national risks)	Partially accept ²¹
05	Increase transparency on national risks and preparedness	Accept in principle ²²
06	Provide advice on sustainable funding for preparedness	Accept
Phase Two		
1D	Investigate establishing a permanent strategic function in the Treasury or DPMC	Accept in principle ²³
1E	Set aims for the strategic function to improve modelling, impact estimates, data, and a new framework for advice on trade-offs	Accept in principle

¹⁹ **Recommendation 01** is accepted in principle. The intent of the recommendation will be delivered by the Ministry of Health as the Strategic Coordination Agency responsible for coordinating all-of-government pandemic preparedness, as part of recently strengthened National Resilience System accountabilities and structures.

²⁰ **Recommendation 02 and 1E** are accepted in principle as the intent is supported but it will be implemented in a different way to that set out by the Inquiry. Rather than being undertaken by a central agency function, it will be delivered through the Ministry of Health's Strategic Coordination Agency role. Note the fourth bullet point in **Recommendation 1E**, which relates to developing a framework for structuring advice for decision-makers in a pandemic, is addressed in Action Area 2 (Action 2.4).

²¹ **Recommendation 04** is partially accepted as the overall intent is supported and already being addressed, including via the establishment of the Chief Executive National Resilience Board, annual risk and resilience reporting from DPMC to Ministers, and clarifying responsibilities and expectations for National Resilience System agencies. As such, some sub-parts of the recommendations will not be taken forward as proposed. For example, sub-recommendation 4e for setting formal performance expectations and direction on pandemic preparedness for chief executives and Crown entities is not supported as these are effectively provided for by the components of the National Risk and Resilience system.

²² **Recommendation 05** is accepted in principle as the intent is supported but it will be implemented in a different way to that set out by the Inquiry: government will continue to share information about the risks we face and the actions being taken to address them, but not necessarily in the form and cadence recommended by the Inquiry.

²³ **Recommendation 1D** is accepted in principle. The intent of the recommendation will be delivered by the Ministry of Health as the Strategic Coordination Agency responsible for coordinating all-of-government pandemic preparedness, as part of recently strengthened National Resilience System accountabilities and structures.

Work complete or underway

Strengthening National Resilience System settings (coordination, oversight, accountability and transparency)

.....

The Government supports the Inquiry's emphasis on the need for robust coordination and strategic decision-making for pandemics, and other National Risks.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Resilience System has been strengthened to ensure that New Zealand is better prepared to tackle the increasingly complex resilience challenges we face.

Cabinet agreed the National Risk and Resilience Framework, led by DPMC, to drive a more strategic and proactive approach to managing our National Risks, including pandemics.²⁴

Agency roles and responsibilities have been strengthened by shifting to two clear and distinct roles – Strategic Coordination Agency and Lead agency – assigned by DPMC as system steward and lead for the National Resilience System.

Strategic Coordination Agencies are responsible for coordinating the all-of-government strategic approach to National Risks. Where a National Risk occurs, Lead agencies are responsible for preparing for and managing a response.

DPMC has assigned the Ministry of Health to be the Strategic Coordination Agency responsible for coordinating the AOG strategic approach to preparedness for pandemics and other communicable disease outbreaks. It has also made the Ministry the Lead agency responsible for managing a response where a pandemic occurs.

These strengthened responsibilities will deliver on the overall intent of the Inquiry's recommendations relating to the establishment of a permanent strategic function (01, 1D). The Government supports the Inquiry's emphasis on oversight and transparency for preparedness, with work underway to address the intent of the recommendation.

The recently established Chief Executive National Resilience Board will provide coordinated, whole-of-system governance for the National Resilience System, with a strategic focus on building long-term resilience. The National Resilience Board provides a mechanism for chief executive engagement on pandemic preparedness work. Responsible Ministers will continue to receive annual assurance reporting from DPMC on the status and effectiveness of broader National Risk management, including for pandemics, and relevant key gaps and opportunities for resilience-building (04).

Empowering New Zealanders by keeping them informed of the risks we face is consistent with the National Risk and Resilience Framework. DPMC publishes the National Risk Register on its website and will continue to share more information about the actions being taken to address them²⁵ (05a).

Strategic direction setting

.....

The Ministry of Health is developing a draft *Pandemic Strategic Framework* to set the overall direction to drive coordinated action across government agencies for strengthening New Zealand's resilience and preparedness, and its response to future pandemic threats (01, 1D).

24 DPMC. 2025. National Risk and Resilience Frameworks. URL: dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/risk-and-resilience/national-risk-and-resilience-framework (accessed 22 June 2026).

25 DPMC. 2025. New Zealand's National Risks. URL: dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/risk-and-resilience/national-risk-and-resilience-framework/new-zealands-national-risks (accessed 18 June 2026).

Modelling and scenario planning

The Ministry of Health is leading work to improve epidemiological modelling and scenario planning, drawing on capability that sits across the Ministry of Health, Health New Zealand (Health NZ), Institute for Public Health and Forensic Science (including the Infectious Diseases Research Platform), and the university/academic sector, which the Inquiry found should be an area of focus for the central agency function (02, 03 and 1E).

Expert advice

Government agencies and Crown entities currently draw on expert advice for a range of purposes relating to pandemic preparedness and response, such as disease surveillance, outbreak response, and advice on specific pieces of work (eg, the development of the *Pandemic Strategic Framework*). The establishment of more durable, responsive and flexible arrangements that enable access to a broad range of expert advice, as contemplated by the Inquiry (03), will be addressed through Action 3.2.

Sustainable funding for preparedness

The Government acknowledges that across the Inquiry, some recommendations have been made that may be contingent on new or reprioritised funding, and others will take time to deliver. Where this is the case, the Treasury’s existing Budget and fiscal management processes provide the mechanism for considering sustainable funding for pandemic preparedness and wider system improvements. In any future significant pandemic, the Treasury would also be able to coordinate any out-of-cycle funding process required to support the response (06).

Further work to deliver recommendations

Action 3.1: Strengthen modelling and scenario planning (02, 1E). The Ministry of Health will work with relevant agencies to review current modelling tools, data measures and capabilities and determine what is needed to support future pandemic responses (including economic and social data measures and modelling).

Status	Complete
Underway	By 30 June 2027

Action 3.2: Establish arrangements to access expert advice (03). The Ministry of Health will establish arrangements to access expert advice for pandemic preparedness, and flexible, responsive mechanisms for strategic expert advice during a pandemic. These arrangements will ensure that preparedness and response activities are informed by a genuine and evidence-based range of expert perspectives, including independent and external experts whose advice may challenge official or prevailing views, so that decision-makers are tested by robust and diverse expertise rather than a narrow range of opinions.

Status	Complete
Underway	By 31 Dec 2026

Recommendations not accepted in this Action Area

Public sector annual reporting requirements

The Inquiry recommended that public sector agencies provide an assessment of pandemic preparedness in their annual reports (5b).

While the Government supports the intent of this recommendation – that agencies should be prepared to respond to a pandemic – it does not accept the requirement to include this in annual reporting.

Agencies already have a general obligation to ensure business continuity in the face of risks that may impact their service delivery (see Action Area 7). The refresh of sector-specific pandemic plans will also address preparedness and business continuity in more detail.



Action Area 4:

Prepare pandemic plans, exercises and response structures

What the Inquiry found and recommended

This Action Area brings together recommendations about the practical mechanisms and plans needed to prepare for, and stand up, an all-of-government pandemic response.

The Inquiry found that pre-COVID pandemic planning was focused on the health elements of a response and did not provide a sufficiently integrated, scenario-based, all-of-government framework for a pandemic of COVID-19's scale and duration. It found that New Zealand's response relied on significant adaptation during the pandemic, including bespoke response structures and rapid cross-agency coordination. The Inquiry recommended that New Zealand develop an *all-of-government pandemic response plan* with clear objectives, roles, triggers, transition points, communication arrangements, monitoring of impacts, links with sector plans, and recognition of Treaty of Waitangi obligations.

The Inquiry also found that conducting regular pandemic response exercises is essential to preparedness. It noted that previous pandemic exercises were limited and infrequent, and recommended that plans be tested through regular national pandemic response exercises and updated afterwards. It also recommended a response structure that can be quickly activated where a Lead agency cannot coordinate the response alone, and arrangements to move public sector capability and capacity during a response, including by bringing in specialist expertise and rotating staff to manage fatigue and burnout.

The Inquiry added a related lesson about how strategies and plans are designed and communicated. It found that elimination strategies can be highly effective in preventing deaths and hospitalisations, but are difficult to exit if they are not clearly presented as temporary from the outset. It recommended that decision-makers explicitly present elimination strategies as temporary in a future pandemic, including in the *All-of-Government Pandemic Response Plan*, to manage public expectations and create the right environment for forward planning and strategy adaptation.

Recommendations in this Action Area

Recommendation		Response
Phase One		
07	Develop an <i>all-of-government pandemic response plan</i>	Accept
08	Update the <i>all-of-government pandemic response plan</i> after each national pandemic response exercise	Accept
09	Develop an all-of-government response structure	Accept
10	Develop a plan to move public sector capability and capacity during a pandemic response	Accept in principle ²⁶
11	Prepare guidance and templates for urgent advice	Accept
Phase Two		
1C	Present elimination strategies as temporary from the outset of a pandemic, including in the <i>New Zealand Pandemic Plan</i>	Accept
3A	The strategic function should prepare and maintain a short-form guide for decision-makers facing a pandemic	Accept in principle ²⁷

Note: Recommendations 13 (*Refine the current health system pandemic plan*) and 20 (*Develop and maintain sector pandemic plans*) have a close relationship with this Action Area but are discussed in more detail in Action Areas 6 and 7 respectively.

Work completed or underway

The New Zealand Pandemic Plan has been updated

The *New Zealand Pandemic Plan* was updated in 2024.²⁸ The interim update reflected changes to the health system since 2022 and incorporated some of the early lessons from the COVID-19 response. It sets out the different phases of a pandemic and the different strategies for managing each phase (articulated as Keep it Out, Stamp it Out and Manage It). It includes

escalation/de-escalation points to guide the transition between phases, as well as the factors to consider when assessing risk and determining the appropriate response strategy.

Other new and refreshed planning documents will now be finalised, including the *Pandemic Strategic Framework* and the *AOG Pandemic Response Plan*, which will address the recommendations of the Inquiry (07).

26 **Recommendation 10** is accepted in principle as the intent is supported but it will be implemented in a different way to that set out by the Inquiry: rather than developing a 'plan', the PSC maintains and operates a virtual Mobility Hub to support rapid redeployment of public service capability and capacity in significant emergencies or crises.

27 **Recommendation 3A** is accepted in principle as the intent is supported but it will be implemented in a different way to that set out by the Inquiry: rather than being undertaken by a central agency function, it will be delivered through the Ministry of Health's Strategic Coordination Agency role.

28 Ministry of Health. 2024. *New Zealand Pandemic Plan: A framework for action*. URL: health.govt.nz/publications/new-zealand-pandemic-plan-a-framework-for-action (accessed 18 June 2026).

All-of-government operating model for responding to Catastrophic National Risks

DPMC is developing a fit-for-purpose strategic operating model for managing responses to Catastrophic National Risks – such as a future pandemic – as a supplement to the well-established Officials’ Committee for Domestic and External Security Coordination (ODESC) system.²⁹

This model will describe when and how further wraparound support for ‘Lead agencies’ will be activated to enable an effective all-of-government response. The Ministry of Health will tailor this model to a pandemic, which will provide the core elements of the Ministry of Health-led AOG *Pandemic Response Plan* (09).

Processes to support rapid deployment of public sector capacity and capability during emergency events

To support the ability to move public sector capacity and capability in a pandemic response (10), the PSC maintains and operates a virtual Mobility Hub to support rapid redeployment of public service capability and capacity in significant emergencies or crises. This approach has been well tested over recent years. It includes maintaining networks of human resources leads, facilitating cross-government calls for staff, tracking expressions of interest and talent pools, advising on secondment and transfer mechanisms, and monitoring whether mobilisation is sufficient.

At this time there is no formalised plan (as proposed in the recommendation). This is because arrangements and actions required are either already hardwired into agency roles and operating procedures or are heavily dependent on the specific context of the emergency event.

Further work to deliver recommendations

Action 4.1: Finalise the *Pandemic Strategic Framework* and refresh the *AOG Pandemic Response Plan* (07). The Ministry of Health will finalise the *Pandemic Strategic Framework* and refresh the 2024 *New Zealand Pandemic Plan* to create an updated *AOG Pandemic Response Plan*.

These plans will sit within a broader hierarchy of planning documents (see diagram below). The *AOG Pandemic Response Plan* will guide more operational response planning, including the *Health Sector Pandemic Response Plan* (13 – Action Area 6) and other sector-specific pandemic planning (20 – Action Area 7).

The refreshed *AOG Pandemic Response Plan* will ensure a stronger all-of-government focus, including by addressing roles and responsibilities during different pandemic scenarios and outlining escalation triggers where the ODESC system or an alternative operating model should be activated.

Both the *AOG Pandemic Response Plan* and the *Pandemic Strategic Framework* will clearly describe the various pandemic management strategies and explicitly state that elimination strategies are to be time limited and subject to regular review (1C). This will include articulating ‘triggers’ for moving between different pandemic management strategies, embedding mechanisms for review, and aligning public communications to emphasise the temporary nature of elimination while outlining pathways to alternative response settings.

Status	Complete
Underway	By 30 June 2027

29 For more on the ODESC system, see DPMC. 2025. New Zealand’s strategic crisis response arrangements. URL: dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/risk-and-resilience/new-zealands-strategic-crisis-response-arrangements (accessed 19 June 2026).

Action 4.2: Develop an all-of-government operating model for Catastrophic National Risks and tailor for a pandemic (09). DPMC will develop a strategic all-of-government operating model for responding to Catastrophic National Risks. While this model will not be tailored to pandemics specifically, key elements will be incorporated by the Ministry of Health into the refreshed AOG *Pandemic Response Plan* and adapted for a pandemic-specific emergency, including defining the escalation considerations (‘triggers’) for when the model would be activated.

Status	Complete
Underway	By 30 June 2027

Action 4.3 Develop a pandemic exercise programme (08). The Ministry of Health will work with relevant agencies to develop a pandemic response exercise programme, bringing together existing agency exercises and additional activities – from small-scale tabletop exercises to large national simulations – subject to available resourcing and capacity.

A key element of the proposed pandemic exercise programme will be establishing mechanisms to capture and report lessons, and to ensure these lessons are incorporated into updated plans, protocols and procedures so they remain current and fit for purpose.

Status	Complete
Not yet started	By 30 June 2027

Action 4.4: Develop a framework to guide policy advice in a pandemic. The Ministry of Health will work with key agencies to develop a structured framework that supports the provision of high-quality policy advice to ensure that decision-makers are fully informed about all relevant factors, and implications of their decisions during a pandemic (11) (1E³⁰). This will also include the development of a short-form guide of key considerations for decision-makers facing a pandemic (3A).

Status	Complete
Underway	By 31 March 2027

Implementation considerations

The refresh of the AOG *Pandemic Response Plan* will need to be appropriately sequenced with the finalisation of the *Pandemic Strategic Framework* and DPMC’s all-of-government operating model for managing a response to a Catastrophic National Risk.

30 Only the fourth bullet point of **Recommendation 1E** (‘Develop a framework for structuring advice to decision-makers in a future pandemic that enables them to effectively weigh impacts of public health measures across desired outcomes, and so to identify the important trade-offs’) is addressed by this action. The rest of the recommendation is addressed in Action Area 1.

Action Area 5:

Ensure fit-for-purpose legal powers, decision safeguards and democratic accountability



What the Inquiry found and recommended

This Action Area brings together recommendations about ensuring the legal framework, decision-making safeguards and democratic accountability mechanisms are fit for responding to a future pandemic.

.....

The Inquiry found that the COVID-19 response required the rapid creation and use of extraordinary legal powers, including powers that significantly restricted rights and freedoms. It recommended, in Phase One, that all relevant legislation be reviewed and strengthened before a future pandemic. It also recommended processes and accountability mechanisms to protect democratic and human rights during a pandemic, including cross-party input, parliamentary scrutiny, public transparency, social licence and readiness by oversight bodies.

The Inquiry described legislation as the guardrail for fundamental rights and freedoms. It recommended, in Phase Two, that New Zealand develop standing primary legislation for pandemics through ordinary, transparent processes before the next pandemic, rather than relying on hurried bespoke legislation under urgency. It emphasised that pandemic legislation should include clear powers, clear triggers, appropriate decision-making authority, exemptions, safeguards, human rights protections, proportionality requirements, least restrictive measures, and consideration of public health, social and economic impacts.

The Inquiry also identified related safeguards for executive decision-making. It recommended limiting exemptions from regulatory impact statements to genuinely time-critical decisions; updating the Cabinet Manual and/or CabGuide so urgent Cabinet decisions taken outside regular quality assurance processes are reviewed promptly and regularly; publishing advice relating to the exercise of pandemic powers; and setting external triggers for regular and transparent strategic reviews during a severe pandemic.

Recommendations in this Action Area

Recommendation	Response
12 Establish processes and accountability mechanisms to protect democratic and human rights during a pandemic	Accept
37 Ensure all relevant legislation is fit for purpose in a pandemic	Accept in principle ³¹
1A Limit exemptions to produce regulatory impact statements	Accept
1B Update the Cabinet Manual and/or CabGuide so Cabinet decisions taken outside regular quality assurance processes are promptly and regularly reviewed	Accept
1F Set an external trigger for regular and transparent strategic reviews	Accept
2A Develop standing primary legislation for pandemics	Accept in principle
2B Ensure pandemic legislation includes clear powers, safeguards and flexibility	Accept in principle
2C Enact pandemic legislation through ordinary, transparent processes and consultation	Accept in principle
2D Limit future use of urgency and bespoke pandemic legislation	Accept in principle
2E Enhance transparency by publishing advice relating to the exercise of pandemic powers	Partially accept

Work completed or underway

Review of emergency response provisions of the Health Act 1956

The Ministry of Health has previously reviewed the existing legal framework provided by section 70 of the Health Act 1956. It considers that these powers:

- do not provide the full range of public health measures that may be required during a future response, particularly nuanced powers required to implement less restrictive measures and avoid the need for stricter powers
- provide for substantial rights-limiting measures to be exercised by non-elected officials without ministerial oversight or other safeguards.

The Government agrees with the Inquiry that the legal framework for responding to pandemics needs to be strengthened.

However, the Government considers this is best achieved in the context of a review of the Health Act 1956 in its entirety. This would allow the full continuum of powers relating to preventing and responding to infectious diseases to be considered alongside emergency response provisions. It would also enable the Health Act 1956 to be updated and modernised to reflect the current environment and address a range of known problems (37a–d and 2A–2D).

³¹ **Recommendations 37, 2A–2D** are accepted in principle as the intent is supported but it will be implemented in a different way to that set out by the Inquiry: the Ministry of Health will review the Health Act 1956 in its entirety.

Rules around exemptions to Regulatory Analysis Summaries

Steps have already been taken to tighten exemptions as codified in the 2024 Impact Analysis Cabinet Circular and more recently in the Cabinet Circular Expectations for Good Law-Making (published in April 2026³²) (1A).

The new Circular and subsequent associated guidance, including in the CabGuide, continue to emphasise the importance of limiting emergency exemptions to situations that are genuinely time critical, and introduce conditions for post-implementation reviews one year after legislation comes into force (1A, 1B).

Further work to deliver recommendations

Action 5.1: Progress legislative review of the Health Act 1956 (and related legislation). The Ministry of Health will undertake a review of the Health Act 1956 in its entirety. This review will be the primary workstream for responding to the Inquiry’s recommendations (37a–d and 2A–D).

The Epidemic Preparedness Act 2006 will be reviewed concurrently with the Health Act 1956 as part of this legislative workstream, so that the two Acts are considered together and any changes needed to strengthen New Zealand’s legal preparedness for a future pandemic are progressed as a single, coherent programme.

The review will consider legislative options for building stronger mechanisms for democratic and human rights safeguards, including the option of an enhanced role for oversight agencies³³ to ensure the appropriate exercise of public health powers (12).

It will also consider statutory mechanisms for regular review and/or reporting to Parliament on the adequacy of pandemic response settings during a pandemic (1F).

Status	Complete
Not yet started	FY28+

Action 5.2: Review non-legislative options for stronger mechanisms for democratic and human rights safeguards. The Ministry of Health, DPMC and other key agencies, with the Office of the Clerk, will establish stronger mechanisms for cross-party and parliamentary scrutiny, in advance of a pandemic (12). This may include considering potential amendments to Standing Orders, the Cabinet Manual and/or Cabinet Office Circulars, noting that any amendments to Standing Orders and the Cabinet Manual and Cabinet Office Circulars are matters for the Standing Orders Committee and Cabinet respectively. Consideration will be given to whether any changes should apply to pandemics only or more broadly to other emergency events.

Status	Complete
Not yet started	By 30 June 2027

Action 5.3: Invite oversight entities to explore how they can exercise their functions in a pandemic.¹³ The Government will invite entities with oversight and accountability responsibilities to engage with the Ministry of Health and other relevant agencies to explore how oversight agencies can effectively exercise their functions during a pandemic of extended duration (12).

Status	Complete
Not yet started	By 31 December 2026

32 Cabinet Office Circular (26) 2: Expectations for Good Law-making. URL: dPMC.govt.nz/publications/co-26-2-expectations-good-law-making#introduction (accessed 19 June 2026).

33 These entities will include the Offices of Parliament (the Office of the Auditor-General, the Office of the Ombudsman and the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment) and the Electoral Commission. They will also include entities identified as designated National Preventative Mechanisms under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture (listed on www.justice.govt.nz as the Human Rights Commissioner (oversight responsibilities for the National Preventative Mechanisms), Independent Police Conduct Authority, Mana Mokopuna | Children and Young People’s Commission, Inspector of Service Penal Establishments and Office of the Ombudsman).

Action 5.4: Develop guidelines on transparency of human rights advice. The Ministry of Justice and Crown Law Office will develop guidelines on providing advice on maintaining consistency with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990, including the exercise of pandemic powers in a way that balances transparency with maintaining legal privilege (2E).

Status	Complete
Not yet started	By 31 December 2026

Implementation considerations

- The Health Act 1956 review is a multi-year programme of work. How it is staged, given capacity implications and other work programme priorities, will be considered.
- Work on parliamentary scrutiny and cross-party engagement may involve both legislative and non-legislative mechanisms, including Standing Orders and the Cabinet Manual. Decisions about those mechanisms sit with the appropriate constitutional actors.



Action Area 6:

Strengthen health system resilience and public health tools

What the Inquiry found and recommended

This Action Area brings together recommendations about strengthening the health system's resilience and ensuring key public health tools can be scaled up and sustained during a pandemic.

.....

The Inquiry found that New Zealand's health system was strained but not overwhelmed during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that the early elimination strategy was effective in preventing widespread infection before vaccines became widely available. However, it also found that future preparedness requires more scalable and integrated health and public health capability, including the ability to rapidly expand testing, contact tracing, quarantine and isolation, vaccination, infection prevention and control guidance, and supporting data systems.

The Inquiry recommended refining the health system pandemic plan so it links with the *AOG Pandemic Response Plan* and addresses public health strategies, surge capacity, wider health-system resilience, health communications and Treaty of Waitangi obligations. It also recommended comprehensive planning for quarantine and isolation, border restrictions, lockdowns and vaccination requirements, including thresholds, allocation of scarce capacity, links to welfare and business support, and ways to mitigate negative impacts.

The Inquiry emphasised that a pandemic response must not focus only on the infectious disease itself. It recommended planning to maintain health and disability services during a pandemic, particularly for people whose needs may become more acute as a result of disrupted or delayed care. It also recommended assessing the costs and benefits of improving ventilation in hospitals and health care facilities, and reviewing options for improving ventilation and filtration in other public buildings.

Recommendations in this Action Area

Recommendation		Response
Phase One		
13	Refine the health system pandemic plan	Accept
14	Develop a comprehensive plan for quarantine and isolation measures	Accept in principle ³⁴
15	Ensure the health system can rapidly scale up key public health functions	Accept in principle ³⁵
16	Ensure the health system has the information and data capability to deliver a pandemic response	Accept in principle ³⁶
17	Develop a comprehensive plan for international border restrictions	Accept in principle ³⁷
18	Develop a comprehensive plan for national and regional lockdowns	Accept in principle
19	Identify when vaccination requirements may be recommended and how impacts could be mitigated	Accept
22	Plan and ensure health and disability service continuity and resilience during a pandemic	Accept in principle ³⁸
23	Determine the costs and benefits of improving ventilation in hospitals and health care facilities	Accept in principle ³⁹
24	Review and develop options for improving ventilation and filtration in public buildings outside health care facilities	Partially accept

³⁴ **Recommendation 14** is accepted in principle as the intent to develop a range of options to support isolation requirements in a pandemic is supported. Rather than developing a 'comprehensive plan', the refreshed *Health Sector Pandemic Response Plan* will include considerations for a range of quarantine and isolation options. The extent to which these options can be activated at pace and at scale is contingent on funding and resourcing.

³⁵ **Recommendation 15** is accepted in principle as the intent is supported, but full implementation is contingent on funding beyond current baselines.

³⁶ **Recommendation 16** is accepted in principle as the intent to develop connected, shared health data and information systems is supported, but full delivery is contingent on sustained investment in line with the *Health Digital Investment Plan*.

³⁷ **Recommendations 17 and 18** are accepted in principle as the intent to have pre-prepared plans is supported in principle, but flexible, principle-based frameworks that set out options, considerations and guidance are preferred over comprehensive plans.

³⁸ **Recommendation 22** is accepted in principle as the intent to plan and ensure health system readiness and resilience is strongly supported and aligned with Health NZ's current direction, but full implementation is contingent on reprioritisation within current programmes and targeted investment, which will require further scoping.

³⁹ **Recommendation 23** is accepted in principle as the intent to determine the costs and benefits of improving ventilation is supported, but several factors limit the ability to determine a detailed cost-benefit analysis without additional estate baseline information, precursor investment, resourcing and prioritisation.

Work completed or underway

Plans are in place

As referenced in Action Area 4, the *New Zealand Pandemic Plan* was updated in 2024. This update includes information about activities that sit within the health sector.

The Ministry of Health has also developed a draft *Pandemic Strategic Framework*, which will provide a foundation for the refreshed *Health Sector Pandemic Response Plan* and help align that plan with the *AOG Pandemic Response Plan*.

Health NZ maintains a National Quarantine Capability Readiness Plan (14), which outlines how limited facility-based quarantine and isolation could be activated in the event of a significant international border restriction. Current operational delivery of the National Quarantine Capability is limited to the scenario of a significant international border restriction. It includes maintaining and testing the National Quarantine Capability Readiness Plan and limited work to define a set of requirements for a facilities booking system.

Rapid scaling of public health functions

The National Public Health Service in Health NZ and the Ministry of Health have work underway to ensure that key public health functions can be rapidly scaled to respond to communicable disease outbreaks such as measles. This work provides a strong foundation (albeit at a smaller scale) for any future pandemic responses (15). Other work progressed since the pandemic includes improvements to the Notifiable Disease Management System, strengthened infection prevention and control (IPC) measures and guidance, early work on a national data repository for laboratory results, work by Health NZ, the Ministry of Health and PHF Science on a National Public Health Laboratory, strengthened contact tracing surge planning, and ongoing immunisation technology development including enhancements to the Immunisation Register.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was significant development of data and information capabilities. Since the establishment of Health NZ and other health sector changes, there has been further progress in connecting and sharing health system data and information (16). This includes the development of the 10-year *Health Digital Investment Plan*,⁴⁰ along with the creation of and improvements to the Notifiable Disease Management System, the Aotearoa Immunisation Register, My Health Account, Book My Vaccine, and related consumer-facing and assisted-support platforms.

Border restrictions framework

Likewise, the Border Executive Board, which helps coordinate border agencies, has identified existing work that would support a comprehensive framework should border restrictions be required (17). This work includes the flexible powers now available in the Immigration Act 2009, the border exception framework developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, Maritime NZ's work with seafarers and on the *Vessel Management Framework*, the New Zealand Traveller Declaration, and the Strategic Approach to Health at the Border workstream. The action to progress this recommendation will collate work into one framework.

Health and disability service continuity

Foundations for the continuity and resilience of the health and disability system in a pandemic (22) have been established. These include strengthened business continuity and emergency management models, workforce planning, IPC guidance, procurement and supply chain functions, and system monitoring and reporting through dashboards for workforce availability, hospital and intensive care unit capacity, testing and vaccination coverage.

40 Health NZ. 2025. *Health Digital Investment Plan*. URL: healthnz.govt.nz/publications/health-digital-investment-plan (accessed 19 June 2026).

Ventilation

Health NZ currently applies a risk-based approach to ventilation focused on high-priority clinical areas in both general and specialist hospitals. Health NZ has also incorporated contemporary ventilation and IPC standards, is increasing the percentage of single rooms (and negative pressure rooms) in new hospital and health facility builds and major redevelopments (23), maintains hospital ventilation systems, and uses air reticulation and filters where required, alongside making continuing improvements to IPC programmes and guidance.

Under the Building Act 2004, new buildings (both public and private) must meet the Building Code, which includes ventilation requirements (24). Existing buildings are not required to meet new or amended requirements when the Building Code changes. MBIE is currently developing options for proposed changes to ventilation requirements in the Building Code compliance documents, including the adoption of up-to-date standards, for its 2028 update. Benefits and costs of options will be considered prior to public consultation.

Further work to deliver recommendations

Action 6.1: Refine the Health Sector Pandemic Response Plan. The Ministry of Health will lead the development of a broad *Health Sector Pandemic Response Plan* (13) that pulls together existing plans for elements of a pandemic response and outlines expectations for the level of pandemic readiness that is required across the health sector. This work will consider roles, responsibilities and governance arrangements between the Ministry of Health, Health NZ and other agencies, including how responsibility for maintaining and updating the plan will be shared over time.

The response plan will also include decision-making guidance for the potential use of public health measures (18, 19).

Health NZ will lead planning for operational components relating to service delivery, workforce mobilisation and system capacity.

Status	Complete
Not yet started	By 30 June 2027

Action 6.2: Maintain the National Quarantine Capability Readiness Plan (14) to strengthen operational readiness for managed isolation, self-isolation and quarantine in the event of significant international border restrictions. Health NZ will maintain the National Quarantine Capability Readiness Plan and continue work to develop requirements for a future allocation system, which will be completed by June 2027.

Status	Complete
Underway	By 30 June 2027

Action 6.3: Continue work to ensure public health functions can scale. Health NZ will undertake further work across IPC, testing, contact tracing and vaccination (15). This includes increasing IPC capability, improving laboratory validation and workforce training, streamlining digital testing systems, strengthening procurement and supply chains, reviewing contact tracing surge plans, establishing training packages for surge staff, and strengthening immunisation preparedness arrangements. Health NZ will continue work to scale public health functions to manage communicable disease outbreaks.

Status	Complete
Ongoing	By 30 June 2027

Action 6.4: Implement the 10-year Health Digital Investment Plan (16). Health NZ will deliver the *Health Digital Investment Plan*, which, in setting the future direction for connected and shared health systems, data and information, ensures the health system has the data and information it needs to respond to a pandemic (16). Parts of the plan remain subject to future funding decisions.

Status	Complete
Ongoing	FY 2030+

Action 6.5: Develop a framework for the use of international border restrictions. The Border Executive Board will develop a comprehensive framework – rather than a ‘comprehensive plan’ (17) – that guides the use of border restrictions, clarifies interfaces between related health and border measures, and highlights impacts on people.

Status	Complete
Not yet started	By 30 June 2027

Action 6.6: Strengthen health and disability system resilience and continuity (22). Health NZ will build on its COVID-19 experience to strengthen the planning, preparedness and resilience of health care services. Areas of focus will include funding arrangements, workforce resilience and surge planning, physical capacity planning, commissioning frameworks that support equity and flexibility, consistent service prioritisation guidance, procurement and supply chain resilience, and routine system-wide exercising and assurance of pandemic readiness.

Status	Complete
Ongoing	By 30 June 2027

Implementation considerations

- Delivery beyond baseline operational readiness for quarantine and isolation (14) would be subject to additional resourcing and funding to develop and implement wider quarantine and isolation options.
- Likewise, the level to which public health functions can be scaled (ie, extending readiness from current levels to pandemic levels) (15) is contingent on funding, workforce capacity, data and digital infrastructure, new disease (pandemic) resources and Notifiable Disease Management System modules, fit-for-purpose legislation, supply chains, support for cases and contacts, commissioning arrangements with Māori, Pacific and community providers, laboratory funding arrangements, and enabling functions such as public information management and sector engagement. As part of the refresh of the *Health Sector Pandemic Response Plan*, planning assumptions and more specific requirements will be identified and any resourcing implications worked through usual budget management processes.
- Health information and data capability (16) depends on sustained investment in line with the *Health Digital Investment Plan*, which is subject to future funding decisions.



Action Area 7:

Maintain sector continuity, essential services and social supports

What the Inquiry found and recommended

This Action Area brings together recommendations about maintaining sector continuity, essential services and social supports during a pandemic.

The Inquiry found that while many essential services continued during COVID-19, the response exposed gaps in cross-sector preparedness beyond the health system and emphasised that an effective response must address all aspects of people's lives, including health, social wellbeing and economic security. Sectors need to understand in advance how they will operate under public health restrictions, including which essential activities must be maintained, what flexibility may be needed, and their dependencies on other sectors and core system enablers.

The Inquiry recommended that public sector agencies develop and maintain sector pandemic plans, support safe continuation of activities, and strengthen arrangements for lifeline utilities and essential goods and services.

For the social sector, it recommended determining governance arrangements and responsibilities for a coordinated welfare response; ensuring policy options and funding mechanisms are available for housing, income, food security, safety and mental health needs; and planning cross-sector commissioning of community services, which includes a focus on quick and efficient funding, flexible delivery and clear wind-down processes.

The Inquiry also recommended sector-specific planning for justice and education to maintain their core functions while protecting wellbeing and ensuring access.

This group of recommendations also includes a recovery-oriented recommendation: to research the impacts of the COVID-19 response on service delivery and outcomes, as well as how quickly outcomes recovered and which interventions helped restore them.

Recommendations in this Action Area

Recommendation		Response
Phase One		
20	Develop and maintain sector pandemic plans	Accept
21	Consider which sector activities can continue safely under public health restrictions	Accept in principle ⁴¹
29	Ensure ongoing functioning of lifeline utilities and continued provision of necessary goods and services <i>This recommendation is accepted in part as the National Emergency Management Agency accepts part A of the recommendation, but part B will be addressed through implementation of recommendations 18, 21 and 27.</i>	Partially accept
31	Determine governance arrangements and responsibilities for a coordinated welfare response	Accept in principle ⁴²
32	Ensure policy options and funding mechanisms are in place for housing, income, food security, safety and mental health needs	Accept in principle ⁴¹
33	Plan and coordinate cross-sector commissioning of community services	Accept in principle ⁴¹
34	Develop a plan that balances the need to maintain a functioning prison system with the wellbeing and human rights of the prison population	Accept
35	Maintain access to education during a pandemic	Accept
38	Provide for the infrastructure needed to support each sector's pandemic response	Accept in principle ⁴³
Phase Two		
4A	Research the impacts of the COVID-19 response on service delivery and outcomes in education, health, social development, employment and disability services	Accept

⁴¹ **Recommendation 21** is accepted in principle, as continuity planning would strengthen resilience; however, sector-led plans should retain flexibility, with high-level guidance preferred over pre-defining essential activities, building on existing arrangements.

⁴² **Recommendations 31, 32 and 33** are accepted in principle, as the intent of the recommendation is accepted, but implementation of the recommendation will focus more specifically on the social sector.

⁴³ **Recommendation 38** is accepted in principle, as the intent of the recommendation is accepted; however, ensuring infrastructure supports readiness is primarily a stewardship responsibility of individual public service chief executives or interdepartmental boards. Central agencies are not positioned to undertake a detailed system-wide audit across all public service agencies.

Work completed or underway

The Government supports the Inquiry’s emphasis on ensuring that essential services can continue during a pandemic, and recognises the importance of sectors understanding in advance how they will operate under public health restrictions. This includes understanding which activities may need to be designated essential, what flexibility may be needed and what dependencies those activities have on other sectors.

Sector plans

Existing sector-specific plans and arrangements (20) were developed before and during the pandemic, but should be updated to ensure they reflect lessons learned and are fit for a broad range of pandemic scenarios. As the Inquiry noted, the next pandemic may be significantly different from the COVID-19 experience.

The refreshed requirements for general business continuity management in the Public Service Amendment Act 2026 support sector preparedness by requiring public service agencies to consider and plan for how they can maintain essential public services during significant disruptions, such as pandemics (21).

Together, the *Pandemic Strategic Framework* and the *AOG Pandemic Response Plan* will provide a foundation for more structured, consistent and aligned sector planning (see Action Area 4).

Like agencies in other sectors, the Department of Corrections has developed a draft pandemic plan (34) aligned with the current *New Zealand Pandemic Plan*. This draft plan has recently been updated to strengthen prisoner wellbeing considerations. Revisions include specific planning for vulnerable cohorts such as older prisoners, prisoners with chronic conditions and immunocompromised prisoners, as well as broader wellbeing measures during periods of restriction. The draft plan recognises the importance of unlock time, access to fresh air, physical activity, whānau contact and mental health support. The Department of Corrections will include oversight bodies in

the development of its plan to ensure that they are enabled during a future pandemic.

In parallel, the Department of Corrections is developing a Workforce Disruption Plan that defines minimum continuity objectives, levels of service and critical business functions required to maintain safe custodial operations under significant workforce pressure. This framework is intended to apply across all major disruptions, including pandemics, and support consistent and transparent decision-making when reduced staffing limits the ability to maintain business-as-usual regimes.

Likewise, the Ministry of Education has incorporated lessons from COVID-19 on maintaining access to education during a pandemic (35) and can draw on and adapt the education system’s existing and evolving arrangements in responding to future events, such as a pandemic. This includes maintaining national frameworks, guidance and tools for pandemic preparedness and education continuity, supporting digital learning platforms and resource hubs, preserving and updating distribution channels for learning packs and devices, maintaining support mechanisms specific to early childhood education, and using existing regulatory and assurance settings for international learners.

Lifeline utilities

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) is progressing work to strengthen the resilience of lifeline utilities in response to risks, including pandemic risks (29), through ongoing engagement with lifeline utility sector providers and wider emergency management reforms. This includes maintaining the regulatory and planning framework under the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002, the *National Civil Defence Emergency Management Plan* and associated guidelines, and progressing changes through the Emergency Management Bill (No 2) to expand the scope of lifeline utilities and strengthen continuity planning requirements.

Social sector recommendations

The Inquiry’s social sector recommendations – to provide a coordinated welfare response (31), policy and funding mechanisms for housing, income, food security, safety and mental health needs (32), and cross-sector commissioning of community services (33) – are supported by work across the social sector and emergency management system. This includes NEMA’s emergency management system reform work and MSD’s Funders Forum (33). In addition, the review of social housing and MSD business-as-usual work (32) covers a range of supports, including income and accommodation support, hardship assistance, food security partnerships, and child and family support.

The 2023 *Government Inquiry into the Response to the North Island Severe Weather Events* made a similar recommendation about the coordination of welfare (31). The Government considers the welfare coordination for pandemics should not be looked at in isolation from other types of emergency events, and strengthening welfare coordination should occur system-wide, with provision for hazard-specific responses where needed for large-scale or prolonged events. The roles and responsibilities of associated agencies will be clarified through the development of the *AOG Pandemic Response Plan* (07).

Through the Strengthening Emergency Management Programme, NEMA is developing a suite of changes to strengthen the emergency management system. As part of this work, NEMA will engage across the system from mid-2026 to update and align the *National Civil Defence Emergency Management Plan*.

MSD will continue to explore how established commissioning processes such as the Funders Forum can be used effectively in emergency events such as a pandemic (33).

Infrastructure

Work undertaken to establish the new accountabilities under the National Risk and Resilience Framework – which allocates responsibilities for preparing for and managing nationally significant risks – will support the Inquiry’s recommendations on ensuring sectors have the infrastructure required to support responses to a pandemic (38). These accountabilities will be complemented by the new business continuity management requirements established through the new Public Service Amendment Act 2026.

Research

A programme of mixed-methods research is underway (4A), which includes analysis of administrative and survey data alongside stakeholder interviews. This work will assess the extent to which health services have returned to pre-pandemic levels, the factors influencing service recovery, and the outcomes that deteriorated during and after the pandemic. This work will be supported through the procurement of specialist research services and will contribute to cross-agency understanding of effective interventions to restore service delivery and outcomes.

Further work to deliver recommendations

Action 7.1: Review and refresh sector pandemic plans. Building on sectors’ existing emergency management and business continuity plans, the Ministry of Health will provide guidance to support sector agencies to consistently review, refresh and maintain their plans in line with the *AOG Pandemic Response Plan* (20, 21, 34, 35).

Status	Complete
Not yet started	By 30 June 2027

Action 7.2: Assess and understand pandemic risks to lifeline utilities. NEMA, supported by the Ministry of Health and MBIE, will coordinate work with lifeline utility sectors to assess pandemic risks and incorporate these into planning (29). This will be informed by health guidance on the range of pandemic impacts that could affect lifeline utilities' operations. NEMA will monitor progress as part of wider critical infrastructure stewardship.

Status	Complete
Ongoing	By 31 December 2029

Action 7.3: Strengthen support for people and households during a pandemic.

MSD, with support from other government agencies, including NEMA, the Ministry of Health and Health NZ, will develop a social sector cross-government work programme to identify:

- ongoing roles and responsibilities
- options for a system-level approach to strengthen welfare coordination (31) and housing, income, food security and safety supports (32).

Status	Complete
Not yet started	By 30 June 2027

Action 7.4: Implement new business continuity management requirements in the public service. In addition to maintaining the existing arrangements for strategic pandemic preparedness, DPMC and PSC will consider how best to implement new business continuity management requirements in the public service (38). If necessary, this may include work to assess, validate or assure these arrangements.

Status	Complete
Underway	31 March 2027

Action 7.5: Progress research to strengthen the evidence base on service recovery and outcomes following the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministry of Health has initiated a mixed-methods research project to assess the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health system.

Further research, building on work already undertaken, will be progressed by other agencies assessing pandemic recovery in education, employment and social development. It will include a focus on disability support.

MSD will firstly undertake an internal review of evaluations, reports and monitoring used during and following the COVID-19 pandemic to ascertain any gaps in its understanding of its service delivery and recovery.

As system steward, the Ministry of Education constantly monitors the overall performance and resilience of the education system, including attendance, learning, wellbeing and workforce pressures. The Education Review Office (ERO) is responsible for providing independent evaluation and review that informs and supports improvement across early learning services, kōhanga reo, puna kōhungahunga, kura and schools. Existing publicly available ERO and Ministry of Education research provides evidence on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on education. The Ministry and ERO will continue to monitor these impacts, including any future challenges to the education system (4A).

Status	Complete
Underway	By 30 June 2027

Implementation considerations

Many of the recommendations across this Action Area span a number of responsible agencies, including the recommendations related to lifeline utilities and necessary goods and services (29), welfare governance at national, regional and community levels (31), and policy and funding mechanisms for housing, income, food security, safety and mental health (32). Implementing them will require careful engagement and clear leadership to avoid duplication of effort.

Part 3:

Annexes

Annex 1: Table of recommendations

Recommendation		Response	Lead agency ⁴⁴	Supporting agencies	Action Area
Phase One					
1	Establish a central agency function to coordinate all-of-government preparedness to respond to pandemics (and other National Risks)	Accept in principle	DPMC	Ministry of Health, Treasury, PSC	3
2	Ensure the central agency function has access to scenario planning and modelling capability	Accept in principle	Ministry of Health	Treasury, DPMC, MSD, Ministry of Education	3
3	Establish a pandemic expert advisory group	Accept	Ministry of Health	DPMC	3
4	Strengthen oversight and accountability for pandemic preparedness (and other national risks)	Partially accept	DPMC	Ministry of Health, PSC	3
5	Increase transparency on national risks and preparedness	Accept in principle	DPMC Treasury		3
6	Provide advice on sustainable funding for preparedness	Accept	Treasury		3
7	Develop an <i>all-of-government pandemic response plan</i>	Accept	Ministry of Health	DPMC	4
8	Update the <i>all-of-government pandemic response plan</i> after each national pandemic response exercise	Accept	Ministry of Health	DPMC	4
9	Develop an all-of-government response structure	Accept	DPMC	Ministry of Health	4
10	Develop a plan to move public sector capability and capacity during a pandemic response	Accept in principle	PSC	DPMC, Ministry of Health	4
11	Prepare guidance and templates for urgent advice	Accept	Ministry of Health	DPMC, Ministry of Justice	4

⁴⁴ Lead agencies in this table are those who were responsible for developing advice, alongside supporting agencies, on the Government's Response to Inquiry recommendations, and in some cases were identified by the Inquiry itself. Agencies responsible for leading further actions required to implement the Inquiry recommendations are identified in Annex 2.

Recommendation		Response	Lead agency ⁴⁴	Supporting agencies	Action Area
12	Establish processes and accountability mechanisms to protect democratic and human rights during a pandemic	Accept	Ministry of Health	DPMC	5
13	Refine the health system pandemic plan	Accept	Ministry of Health	Health NZ	6
14	Develop a comprehensive plan for quarantine and isolation measures	Accept in principle	Ministry of Health	Health NZ	6
15	Ensure the health system can rapidly scale up key public health functions	Accept in principle	Health NZ	Ministry of Health	6
16	Ensure the health system has the information and data capability to deliver a pandemic response	Accept in principle	Ministry of Health	Health New Zealand	6
17	Develop a comprehensive plan for international border restrictions	Accept in principle	Customs	Border Executive Board agencies, MSD	6
18	Develop a comprehensive plan for national and regional lockdowns	Accept in principle	Ministry of Health	Health NZ, Police	6
19	Identify when vaccination requirements may be recommended and how impacts could be mitigated	Accept	Ministry of Health	Health NZ	6
20	Develop and maintain sector pandemic plans	Accept	Ministry of Health	PSC, Health NZ, Justice, Corrections, Education, MSD, Whaikaha, MBIE, Ministry for Primary Industries, MCERT, NEMA	7
21	Consider which sector activities can continue safely under public health restrictions	Accept in principle	Ministry of Health	PSC	7
22	Plan and ensure health and disability service continuity and resilience during a pandemic	Accept in principle	Health NZ	Ministry of Health, Whaikaha, MSD	6
23	Determine the costs and benefits of improving ventilation in hospitals and health care facilities	Accept in principle	Health NZ	Ministry of Health, MBIE	6

Recommendation	Response	Lead agency ⁴⁴	Supporting agencies	Action Area
24 Review and develop options for improving ventilation and filtration in public buildings outside health care facilities	Partially accept	MBIE	Ministry of Health	6
25 Determine governance arrangements and responsibilities for a coordinated economic response	Partially accept	Treasury	Reserve Bank	1
26 Develop a labour market plan for pandemic response	Accept in principle	26a–b: MBIE 26c: Ministry of Health	Health NZ	1
27 Ensure ongoing operation of supply chains	Accept in principle	MBIE	MCERT, NZTE	1
28 Assess steps to maintain port performance and mitigate trade, aviation and shipping bottlenecks	Partially accept	MCERT	MBIE, Maritime New Zealand	1
29 Ensure ongoing functioning of lifeline utilities and continued provision of necessary goods and services	Partially accept	NEMA	MBIE, Ministry of Health	7
30 Develop a comprehensive plan for financial assistance schemes	Accept in principle	Treasury	Inland Revenue, MSD, MBIE	1
31 Determine governance arrangements and responsibilities for a coordinated welfare response	Accept in principle	MSD	Ministry of Health, NEMA	7
32 Ensure policy options and funding mechanisms are in place for housing, income, food security, safety and mental health needs	Accept in principle	MSD	MCERT, Health NZ, Police	7
33 Plan and coordinate cross-sector commissioning of community services	Accept in principle	MSD	Health NZ	7
34 Develop a plan that balances the need to maintain a functioning prison system with the wellbeing and human rights of the prison population	Accept	Corrections	Health NZ	7
35 Maintain access to education during a pandemic	Accept	Ministry of Education	Health NZ	7
36 Review how public sector agencies supported the Crown in its relationship with Māori under the Treaty of Waitangi during COVID-19	Accept	Te Puni Kōkiri	All agencies	2

Recommendation		Response	Lead agency ⁴⁴	Supporting agencies	Action Area
37	Ensure all relevant legislation is fit for purpose in a pandemic	Accept in principle	37a–d: Ministry of Health 37e: Treasury	DPMC	5
38	Provide for the management and review of the infrastructure needed to support each sector's response in a pandemic	Accept in principle	PSC	All agencies	7
39	Ensure timely implementation of the recommendations of Phase One	Accept in principle	Ministry of Health		All
Phase Two					
1A	Limit exemptions to produce regulatory impact statements	Accept	Ministry for Regulation	DPMC	5
1B	Update the Cabinet Manual and/or CabGuide so Cabinet decisions taken outside regular quality assurance processes are promptly and regularly reviewed	Accept	DPMC	Ministry for Regulation	5
1C	Present elimination strategies as temporary from the outset of a pandemic, including in the <i>New Zealand Pandemic Plan</i>	Accept	Ministry of Health		4
1D	Investigate establishing a permanent strategic function in the Treasury or DPMC	Accept in principle	DPMC	Ministry of Health, Treasury, PSC	3
1E	Set aims for the strategic function to improve modelling, impact estimates, data, and a new framework for advice	Accept in principle	Ministry of Health	Treasury, DPMC, MSD, Ministry of Education	3
1F	Set an external trigger for regular and transparent strategic reviews	Accept	Ministry of Health		5
2A	Develop standing primary legislation for pandemics	Accept in principle	Ministry of Health		5
2B	Ensure pandemic legislation includes clear powers, safeguards and flexibility	Accept in principle	Ministry of Health		5
2C	Enact the legislation through ordinary, transparent processes and consultation	Accept in principle	Ministry of Health		5
2D	Limit future use of urgency and bespoke pandemic legislation	Accept in principle	Ministry of Health		5

Recommendation	Response	Lead agency ⁴⁴	Supporting agencies	Action Area
2E Enhance transparency by publishing advice relating to the exercise of pandemic powers	Partially accept	Ministry of Health	Ministry of Justice, Crown Law	5
3A The strategic function should prepare and maintain a short-form guide for decision-makers facing a pandemic	Accept in principle	Ministry of Health	DPMC, Treasury, PSC	4
3B Treasury to publish a four-yearly Financial Resilience report on debt levels and fiscal buffers for major shocks	Accept in principle	Treasury	Reserve Bank	1
3C Outline plans to rebuild fiscal buffers	Accept in principle	Treasury	Reserve Bank	1
3D Clarify the roles of fiscal and monetary policy in a large economic shock of uncertain nature and duration	Accept	Treasury	Reserve Bank	1
3E Develop options for implementable income and business support before the next pandemic	Accept in principle	Treasury		1
3F Increase the frequency of official economic statistics	Accept	Stats NZ	Treasury, Reserve Bank	1
3G Investigate the feasibility of an infrastructure maintenance priorities programme	Accept in principle	Treasury	New Zealand Infrastructure Commission	1
3H Seek a better understanding of unconventional monetary policies	Accept in principle	Treasury	Reserve Bank	1
3I Improve the process for, and transparency of, Crown guarantees and indemnities	Accept in principle	Treasury	Crown Law	1
4A Research the impacts of the COVID-19 response on service delivery and outcomes in education, health, social development, employment and disability services	Accept	Ministry of Health	MSD, Ministry of Education	7
4B Ensure good transparency and communication of decisions in a pandemic	Accept	Ministry of Health		2
4C Task an agency to monitor research and advise on policy regarding trust and social cohesion measures	Accept in principle	MSD	Department of Internal Affairs, DPMC, PSC	2
4D Develop a clear evidence base on patterns and trends in trust and social cohesion in New Zealand	Accept in principle	MSD	Department of Internal Affairs, DPMC, PSC	2

Annex 2: Further work to implement the Inquiry recommendations

Action Area	Action	Lead agency	Status	Complete
Action Area 1 Build economic and fiscal resilience	1.1 Clarify the respective roles of fiscal and monetary policy in a severe downturn	Treasury	Underway	31 October 2029
	1.2 Publish analysis on debt buffers through existing stewardship documents	Treasury	Ongoing	31 October 2029
	1.3 Complete analysis of tools available to respond to shocks	Treasury	Underway	30 June 2027
	1.4 Improve asset management practices and performance reporting	Treasury	Underway	30 June 2027
	1.5 Review the <i>Vessel Management Framework</i>	MCERT	Ongoing	30 June 2027
	1.6 Build on the existing supply chain work programme to establish a programme to improve commercial resilience	NZTE	Not yet started	30 June 2027
Action Area 2 Strengthen communication and public trust	2.1 Strengthen transparency requirements for decisions that limit human rights	PSC	Underway	30 September 2026
	2.2 Identify examples of agencies using family and whānau-centred approaches	Te Puni Kōkiri	Underway	30 June 2027
	2.3 Review actions taken in response to Waitangi Tribunal's Haumarū COVID-19 Priority Report	Ministry of Health	Underway	30 June 2027
	2.4 Ensure key documents embed transparency, evidence and communication principles	Ministry of Health	Ongoing	30 June 2027
	2.5 Review the current state of monitoring and reporting of social cohesion work across government	MSD	Underway	31 December 2026

Action Area	Action	Lead agency	Status	Complete
Action Area 3 Strengthen governance, oversight and strategic capability	3.1 Strengthen modelling and scenario planning	Ministry of Health	Underway	30 June 2027
	3.2 Establish arrangements to access expert advice	Ministry of Health	Underway	31 December 2026
Action Area 4 Prepare pandemic plans, exercises and response structures	4.1 Finalise the <i>Pandemic Strategic Framework</i> and refresh the <i>AOG Pandemic Response Plan</i>	Ministry of Health	Underway	30 June 2027
	4.2 Develop an all-of-government operating model for catastrophic risks and tailor for a pandemic	DPMC; Ministry of Health	Underway	30 June 2027
	4.3 Develop a pandemic exercise programme	Ministry of Health	Not yet started	30 June 2027
	4.4 Develop a framework to guide policy advice in a pandemic	Ministry of Health	Underway	31 March 2027
Action Area 5 Ensure fit-for-purpose legal powers, decision safeguards and democratic accountability	5.1 Progress legislative review of the Health Act 1956	Ministry of Health	Not yet started	FY 2028+
	5.2 Review non-legislative options for stronger mechanisms for democratic and human rights safeguards	Ministry of Health; DPMC	Not yet started	30 June 2027
	5.3 Invite oversight entities to explore how they can exercise their functions in a pandemic	Ministry of Health	Not yet started	31 December 2026
	5.4 Develop guidelines on transparency of human rights advice	Ministry of Justice; Crown Law	Not yet started	31 December 2026
Action Area 6 Strengthen health system resilience and public health tools	6.1 Refine the <i>Health Sector Pandemic Response Plan</i>	Ministry of Health	Not yet started	30 June 2027
	6.2 Maintain the National Quarantine Capability Readiness Plan	Health NZ	Underway	30 June 2027
	6.3 Continue work to ensure public health functions can scale	Health NZ	Ongoing	30 June 2027
	6.4 Implement the 10-year <i>Health Digital Investment Plan</i>	Health NZ	Ongoing	FY 2030+
	6.5 Develop a framework for the use of international border restrictions	Border Executive Board	Not yet started	30 June 2027
	6.6 Strengthen health and disability system resilience and continuity	Health NZ	Ongoing	30 June 2027

Action Area	Action	Lead agency	Status	Complete
Action Area 7 Maintain sector continuity, essential services and social supports	7.1 Review and refresh sector pandemic plans	Ministry of Health	Not yet started	30 June 2027
	7.2 Assess and understand pandemic risks to lifeline utilities	NEMA	Ongoing	31 Dec. 2029
	7.3 Strengthen support for people and households during a pandemic	MSD	Not yet started	30 June 2027
	7.4 Implement new business continuity management requirements in the public service	PSC; DPMC	Underway	31 March 2027
	7.5 Progress research to strengthen the evidence base on service recovery and outcomes following COVID-19	Ministry of Health	Underway	30 June 2027

Annex 3: Glossary

All-of-government (AOG)	A term describing issues, policies or processes that involve all agencies across New Zealand's public sector, characterised by coordinated and joined up action across organisational boundaries
Cabinet	Central decision-making body of the New Zealand Government, led by the Prime Minister and made up of senior Ministers
Catastrophic National Risks	A category of the most serious National Risks that have the potential to cause significant loss of life, serious and prolonged disruption to the normal functioning of society, and/or widespread destruction across the built and natural environment
DPMC	Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Fiscal policy	One tool a government has to achieve its economic and social objectives. The operation of fiscal policy is governed by the Public Finance Act 1989. It refers to how a government manages its revenue, expenses, assets and liabilities to meet these objectives
Health NZ	Health New Zealand
IPC	Infection prevention and control
Isolation	Separating people who are infected with a contagious disease from others who are not infected, to prevent transmission
Lead agency	The central government organisation designated under the National Resilience System to prepare for and manage the response to an emergency or crisis event at the national level. The Ministry of Health is the Lead agency for (human) communicable disease outbreak (including pandemics)
Lifeline utilities	Entities listed in Part A and Part B of Schedule 1 of the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002. Lifeline utilities provide essential and enabling infrastructure and services that support commercial and domestic activity. Lifeline utilities deliver services. Examples are: water supply, wastewater and stormwater collection; electricity, gas and petroleum distribution; telecommunications and broadcasting; and transportation networks, including roads, railways, airports and ports
MBIE	Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment
MCERT	Ministry of Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport
Monetary policy	The actions the Reserve Bank of New Zealand takes, primarily by adjusting the Official Cash Rate, to achieve and maintain low inflation to support maximum sustainable employment
MSD	Ministry of Social Development
National Resilience System	A 'system of systems' encompassing national security, hazards, emergency management, and strategic crisis response systems. The National Resilience System provides the framing through which government agencies work together to strengthen New Zealand's ability to endure, adapt and thrive in the face of significant shocks and stresses. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is the strategic steward and leader of the National Resilience System

National Risk and Resilience Framework	The national-level framework ⁴⁵ that drives a strategic and proactive approach to risk management across all of New Zealand's National Risks
National Risks	Significant hazards and national security threats that are identified on the National Risk Register and could trigger a national-level crisis, and cause significant harm to our collective safety, security and prosperity ⁴⁶
NEMA	National Emergency Management Agency
NZTE	New Zealand Trade and Enterprise
ODESC system	The Officials' Committee for Domestic and External Security Coordination system. The central government system for strategic crisis management, coordination and governance across all hazards and all threats, led by DPMC. The ODESC system is activated when an emerging or actual incident meets defined thresholds requiring coordinated national decisionmaking and crisis response ⁴⁷
PSC	Public Service Commission
Quarantine	Separating people who may have been exposed to a contagious disease from others until it is confirmed that they are not infected. Quarantine – either at a border or as part of contact tracing – is a long-standing tool in public health to slow, or even stop, the spread of communicable diseases
Strategic Coordination Agency	The central government organisation designated under the National Resilience System to be responsible for leading and coordinating a whole-of-government strategic approach to proactively managing specific National Risks. The Ministry of Health is the Strategic Coordination Agency for (human) communicable disease outbreak (including pandemics) and vector-borne communicable disease outbreak
Ventilation	The process of introducing fresh air into indoor spaces while removing stale air. Ventilation lowers the concentration of any infectious particles or droplets transmitted through the air that may have been introduced by the presence of a person with a respiratory infection

45 DPMC. (nd). National Risk and Resilience Framework. URL: dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/risk-and-resilience/national-risk-and-resilience-framework (accessed 20 June 2026).

46 DPMC. (nd). New Zealand's National Risks. URL: dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/risk-and-resilience/national-risk-and-resilience-framework/new-zealands-national-risks (accessed 20 June 2026).

47 DPMC. 2025. New Zealand's strategic crisis response arrangements. URL: dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/risk-and-resilience/new-zealands-strategic-crisis-response-arrangements (accessed 19 June 2026).

