

8 March 2022

133 Molesworth Street
PO Box 5013
Wellington 6140
New Zealand
T+64 4 496 2000

s 9(2)(a)

By email: s 9(2)(a)
Ref: H202201077

Tēnā koe s 9(2)(a)

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) received by the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) on 5 February 2022. You asked for the following:

“From the 2021 calendar year, all internal communications and policies within the Ministry of Health, and communications, policies and advice received and sent by the Minister of Health’s office, regarding policy and procedure towards consideration of governmental or ministerial best interest, public opinion, and transparency, in responding to OIA requests received and media enquiries, including the granting of interviews.”

As you were advised on 16 February 2022, the following part of your request has been transferred to the Office of the Minister of Health, Hon Andrew Little, under section 14(b)(ii) of the Act:

“From the 2021 calendar year, all advice received and sent by the Minister of Health’s office, regarding policy and procedure towards consideration of governmental or ministerial best interest, public opinion, and transparency, in responding to OIA requests received and media enquiries, including the granting of interviews.”

You can expect a response to this part of your request from the Minister in due course.

The Ministry publishes guidelines and policies, including media guidelines on its intranet. These resources are used regularly for training staff working in the of the Ministry and available to all Ministry employees.

The media rules and guidelines published on the intranet, relevant to the topic you are interested in are below:

- The news media have a legitimate interest in the Ministry and its activities. The Ministry’s approach is to be open and helpful to the media and to recognise that they are an important means of communication with the general public.
- All Ministry spokespeople are to be media trained.
- Only designated Ministry spokespeople comment on behalf of the Ministry. This includes commenting on behalf of the Ministry on social media platforms.
- Interviews are given only by authorised Ministry spokespeople. Any staff member may be asked to brief a spokesperson on an issue prior to interview.
- All statements given to media are to be attributed to the appropriate spokesperson, who is responsible for approving written statements.

- The Ministry's media team members are not designated spokespeople. This is for their protection and to ensure trained spokespeople are aware of issues in their areas of expertise.
- A summary of all media requests and responses is circulated to the Director-General, Executive Leadership Team and media spokespeople at the end of each day.

Spokespeople are expected to:

- know enough to give the media the full picture
- be fully accountable for the Government's policy approach
- be accountable for proper handling of media inquiries
- consider who else should be made aware of media comment (sector colleagues, Ministry staff etc.)

Requests for interviews from the media are generally considered during conversations within the media team or with senior Ministry employees and their offices. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry has dealt with more requests for interviews than it has been possible to accommodate. There continues to be a high level of public interest in the Ministry's role in the New Zealand's COVID-19 Response. The Director-General of Health, Dr Ashley Bloomfield and other senior Ministry staff frequently make themselves available to the media through media stand ups – there have been 291 to date – or through media interviews. However, the availability of these staff is constrained by other pressures such as the COVID-19 Response. The Ministry's media team continues to provide information to media and the public of New Zealand via regular updates on the Ministry's media centre: www.health.govt.nz/news-media.

In addition, the Official Information Act 1982 guides all Ministry responses to requests for official information. The Ministry's guiding principle is that information should be made available unless there are good reasons under the Act to withhold. A copy of the Ministry's OIA policy is publicly available here which may be of interest to you: www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/oia_policy_final.pdf.

I trust this fulfils your request. Under section 28(3) of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by calling 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Ministry of Health website at: www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases.

Nāku noa, nā



Sarah Turner
Deputy Director-General
Office of the Director-General