


10 March 2021

s 9(2)(a)



Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) which was transferred from the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment to the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) on 14 January 2021 for:

“Incident reports of mental health incidents in MIQ facilities, advice to ministers on mental health in MIQ and learnings from mental health incidents in MIQ”

On 4 February 2021, your request was partially transferred to Canterbury District Health Board (DHB) for a response. You can expect a response from Canterbury DHB in due course.

On 15 February 2021, the due date for responding to your request was extended under section 15A of the Act as further research, collation and consultation was required.

The Ministry contacted you on 19 January 2021 to refine the first part of your request regarding *‘Incident reports of mental health incidents in MIQ facilities...’* to the following:

“The number and categories of referrals to the MIQ facilities mental health team.”

This is because mental health incident reports contain identifiable information and therefore may be withheld in full under section 9(2)(a) of the Act, to protect personal privacy. Further to this, there have been no logged incidents involving managed isolation and quarantine (MIQ) guests’ mental health issues. Nursing staff send referrals to the Mental Health team based on need and assessment as well as following consultation with a Charge Nurse Manager. These are not regarded as incidents.

Protecting the mental health and wellbeing of people in MIQ facilities is very important to us. You can read about some of the options available to people in the welcome pack at: www.miq.govt.nz/assets/MIQ-documents/miq-welcome-pack-english.pdf. As outlined in the welcome pack, smoking is not allowed inside the MIQ rooms and designated smoking areas are provided in each facility, depending on available space. There may be time limits on smoking areas and may be escorted while smoking. Physical distancing from others from different bubbles is also required while smoking and all smoking areas are monitored.

The Ministry has identified one document provided to the Minister for COVID-19 Response, Hon Chris Hipkins, regarding mental health in MIQ facilities. Relevant excerpts of the document are enclosed.

The Ministry has collected the following information on mental health referrals. Please note that referrals for crisis and specialist mental health support should not be considered as incidents, as this would be inappropriate and stigmatising.

Northern Regional Health Coordination Centre (NRHCC):

The NRHCC covers the Counties Manukau, Waitematā and Auckland DHBs. There has been a total of 24 mental health referrals. The main reasons for these referrals were due to:

- Mood and anxiety problems (e.g., depression, panic attacks, claustrophobia);
- Addiction and withdrawal support; or
- Situational factors (e.g., jetlag, declined exemption from MIQ).

Lakes DHB:

Lakes DHB does not hold any information on mental health referrals in MIQ facilities.

Waikato DHB:

Waikato DHB has had two returnees that have presented with mental health concerns in MIQ facilities that required hospitalisation. Waikato DHB engaged the Mental Health and Addictions service to assist with both cases.

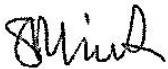
Capital & Coast DHB:

Capital & Coast DHB reported that since June 2020, there has only been one mental health referral where an individual has been admitted to hospital for treatment.

I trust this information 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 website at: www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests.

Yours sincerely



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COVID-19 Health System Response**

Appendix A: List of documents for release

#	Date	Title	Decision on release
1	4 December 2020	Briefing (20202211): Strengthening the managed isolation and quarantine facilities smoking policy	Relevant excerpts have been released under section 16(1)(e) of the Act.

**Briefing to Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister for COVID-19 Response (20202211):
Strengthening the managed isolation and quarantine facilities smoking policy**

Operational implications and risks:

The Ministry's Tobacco Control and Mental Health and Addictions teams advise that prohibiting smoking may cause stress amongst returnees that smoke, particularly those who smoke heavily and/or are severely addicted to smoking. This may have an adverse effect on the mental health and wellbeing of these returnees and could potentially increase incidences of non-compliance with MIQF rules

Recommendation:

The Ministry does not recommend making MIQFs Smokefree due to:
The potential adverse mental health and wellbeing impacts that smoking prohibition may cause, particularly for returnees that are heavy smokers;

Operational enhancements to further reduce risk from smoking areas:

The potential adverse impact on the mental health and wellbeing of smokers, and the associated compliance and IPC risks, that could arise if access to smoking is restricted or prohibited in MIQFs.

Released under the Official Information Act 1982