

15/5/2020

## Chief Nursing Officer letter to Nurses across Aotearoa

Tēnā koutou katoa,

Well what a fantastic week of celebrations with the 12<sup>th</sup> May as a focal point of acknowledging nurses on International Nurses Day. Thank you to all of you who linked in to the webinar on Tuesday, we had over 170 people listening into a range of wonderful speakers related to 2020 International Year of the Nurse and drew on this year's theme, 'Nursing the World to Health', particularly in the context of COVID-19.

We started with a couple of videos from the Minister of Health and Elizabeth Iro (Chief Nurse at the WHO), and an appearance in person from Dr Ashley Bloomfield. We then heard from three inspirational Nurse leaders sharing their perspective of the International Nurses Day theme - Nursing the World to Health. Thank you to Felicity Gapes (Nightingale Award recipient 2019), Moe Milne (Te Akenehi Hei Award recipient 2018) and Dr Frances Hughes who shared how nurses in the aged care sector have responded to COVID-19.

The National Nurse Leaders group and Chief Nursing Office also put together a short video, which can be found here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=17DejUc\\_I2E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17DejUc_I2E)

## COVID-19 and move to Alert Level 2

Over the past few weeks, our primary and community care organisations have tackled some of the greatest challenges our health system has ever been faced with.

I want to once again mihi to all the kaimahi (staff), both those on the frontline and those in support services, for your dedication and commitment to ensuring the public have been cared for. I also want to acknowledge the impact and stress these uncertain times may have had on your whānau and 'bubbles'.

On Thursday 14 May, New Zealand moved to Alert Level 2 after having no new cases for three consecutive days. The Ministry provided critical input into the advice to inform the Government's decision.

Although we have more freedom of movement at Alert Level 2, there are still restrictions in place. As the Prime Minister said last Thursday, the key rule for Level 2 is to play it safe. As health professionals we play in a key role in working with our patients, whānau and family, and communities to keep them safe.

Alert Level 2 is not life as normal, some restrictions and other measures remain in place to reduce the risk of transmission. The following advice are the most important things we can remember and do, and to support those around us to achieve:

- COVID-19 is still out there. **Play it safe.**
- **Keep your distance** from other people in public, and while in the workplace if feasible.
- **If you're sick, stay home.** Don't go to work or school. Don't socialise.
- If you have **symptoms of cold or flu call Healthline or your health professional** and seek advice about being tested.
- **Wash and dry your hands** thoroughly.
- **Sneeze and cough into your elbow**, regularly **disinfect high touch surfaces.**
- If you have been told to **self-isolate, you must do so immediately.**
- **Keep a track** of where you've been and who you've seen.

## **Budget 2020: Rebuilding Together**

On Thursday 14 May Government announced Budget 2020: Rebuilding Together.

Budget 2020 sees a significant additional investment in the health and wellbeing of New Zealanders to support the day-to-day operation of services delivered by a skilled workforce in our communities, hospitals and other care settings. It includes funding for mental health, disability support, pharmacies, general practice, Māori health, pacific health, maternity services, surgery, pharmaceuticals and ambulance services.

Here are some of the highlights from this year's funding:

- A total \$3.92 billion is allocated to District Health Boards in 2020/21 to provide additional support over the next four years, and another \$125.4 million over four years to meet further cost pressures on planned care. DHBs have also had a one-off injection of \$232.5 million to help them catch up planned care after COVID-19.
- Disability Support Services will get its largest-ever funding boost, with an additional \$832.8 million over five years to take pressure off services and ensure access, which includes \$103.7 million for the current financial year to 30 June 2020 to meet existing cost pressures.
- A further \$12 million has been invested towards transforming New Zealand's disability support system to allow access to pilots around the country. Extra funding of \$22.664 million over four years has also been allocated to boost home and community support carers' pay for travel to carry out their jobs, covering minimum wage pay increases.
- PHARMAC has received an additional \$160 million over four years to help New Zealanders access important medicines and new treatments. The Combined Pharmaceutical Budget is managed by PHARMAC and covers DHB purchasing of medicines, vaccines, medical devices and other treatments.

I am aware that while this is a significant increase in funding, not everything we might have hoped for has been funded. However, a number of areas are still under further consideration.

New Zealand's need for a strong, high quality health care system had never before been so important in the face of the challenge presented by COVID-19. This Budget strongly signals that this is the time for rebuilding our health system, and the Ministry's role in supporting you is as critical as ever.

## **Hospital visits at Alert Level 2**

Hospital visiting arrangements at Alert Level 2 must continue to prioritise the safety of patients, visitors and staff while also enabling the very important human interactions which we know mean so much when people are unwell. In high risk areas such as emergency departments, intensive care and maternity, the general principle is for one visitor and one visit per day. In other hospital areas, it's still one visitor at a time but more than one person is able to visit during the day. Each visitor can only visit once. More information will be available on the Ministry of Health website soon.

The National Hospital and Clinic Visitors Policy describes changes to visiting arrangements for DHB hospitals and clinics that will come into effect for each level of the National Hospital Response Framework. These changes are necessary in order to protect the safety of patients, visitors and staff. More information about hospital visits can be found on the Ministry's website [here](#), and more information will be available soon.

## **Reaching a 'gold standard' for contact tracing**

Contact tracing is proving vital at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19. Contact tracing is the process that Public Health Units (PHU) and our National Close Contact Service (NCCS) use

to track down people who may have been exposed to COVID-19 through contact with a suspect, confirmed or probable case during that person's infectious period.

It starts with a phone call from the NCCS or PHU. The person is provided with advice on self-isolation and their health and wellbeing is checked. Following this initial call, the person's details are usually passed on to Healthline, which makes daily follow up calls during the isolation period.

[The rapid audit by Dr Ayesha Verrall](#) and her report recommendations are helping to guide improvements and she visited the NCCS team last week to check on our progress. Last week the Minister also announced the establishment of the [Contact Tracing Assurance Committee](#) to help support the implementation.

### **Funded temporary accommodation for health and disability workers**

Workers in roles where they may have close contact with patients can qualify for funded temporary accommodation if they've been asked to relocate to a different part of the country as part of the COVID-19 response, or they live with a vulnerable person who is at higher risk of severe illness should they contract COVID-19.

If you know any providers or workers who could benefit from this initiative, please let them know they can find out more information about the eligibility criteria and application process by visiting our funded temporary accommodation page [here](#).

### **COVID-19 advice line for primary and community health clinicians: 0800 177 622**

It has become apparent that clinicians are looking for more support, including direct peer-to-peer advice, to deal with the rapidly changing and complex situation. At times 10% of all calls to the Healthline's COVID-19 number have been from primary and community care staff.

To help, the Ministry of Health has contracted the National Telehealth Service to provide a dedicated COVID-19 telephone advice line for you and your colleagues. The number is **0800 177 622**, and is now operational, offering clinical support and advice Monday to Saturday 8am -7pm (with the exception of public holidays). Community health providers, including nurses, can access general advice about management of COVID-19, peer review of presenting problems and advice on specialist referral or connection to other services.

The helpline will be staffed by primary care nurses and GPs, with at least one GP on every shift. Most calls will initially be managed by a nurse, with a GP, pharmacist and midwife available at all times to provide specialist advice, as required.

We expect the service to provide clinical staff with a valuable additional resource to help them navigate the range of information available and to support them in making local decisions to protect their patients and populations. The service is not a source of information about or access to equipment, staffing or funding. These are continuing to be managed through the usual channels.

We can be extremely proud of what we have achieved so far as a team of 5 million. We know that COVID-19 will be with us far beyond this immediate crisis phase and, will impact the way we work for a long time yet. Thank you again for everything you are doing to ensure that our health services continue to be delivered to the highest standard.

Nāku noa,

Margareth Broodkoorn  
Chief Nursing Officer  
Ministry of Health