

29 July 2020

E ngā ringa atawhai o ngā kaumātua, tēnā koutou

Dear Aged Care Sector Colleagues

I am pleased to share with you the Ministry of Health's (the Ministry's) Action Plan to address the recommendations made in the Independent Review into the COVID-19 Clusters in Aged Residential Care (ARC) facilities.

This document must be prefaced first with an acknowledgement of the hard work and dedication each of you within the aged care sector exhibited whilst ensuring the safety of New Zealand's elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I have heard stories of the aged care sector workforce's experience of providing care to the elderly, and in each of these stories there was acknowledgement that the employee had gone above and beyond the call of duty. I acknowledge that in addition to rapid upskilling in Infection Prevention and Control and Personal Protective Equipment, employees took extra time to ensure people in their care were able to connect with their whānau or loved ones in new and creative ways.

I and the Ministry team would like to thank each of you, as individuals and as organisations, for your collective response to protect those in your care during the initial outbreaks of COVID-19. The collaboration and kiwi ingenuity that was exhibited was both inspiring and world-leading, and I am proud of what you have each achieved.

In acknowledging our accomplishments, we must also retain sight of the need for continued vigilance as COVID-19 continues to spread in other parts of the world. In April 2020 I called for an independent review into our ARC facilities to understand what was going well and what could be improved on. The purpose of the review is to strengthen New Zealand's response to COVID-19 within the aged care sector.

When our health and disability system is stress-tested, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, the points of weakness within our system are most evident. The Action Plan is the Ministry's intention to strengthen those points of weakness and support the sector to build relationships that will strengthen New Zealand's response to future outbreaks of COVID-19 or future pandemics.

There is much that we can collectively do. Importantly, in delivering this Action Plan we are partnering with key agencies, such as the Health Quality & Safety Commission, to ensure we are each working to our strengths to deliver better and safer care to New Zealanders. We will be reporting on the progress of our Action Plan, and I would encourage you to follow the progress on the Ministry's website.

Thank you for your continued determination as we work together to rise up and meet the unprecedented challenges the COVID-19 pandemic presents. Our most vulnerable New Zealanders are kept safe and our health and disability system remains strong because of your tireless efforts.

Ngā mihi nui

Dr Ashley Bloomfield  
**Director-General of Health**