



# Securing Our Border

National recognises COVID-19, as well as other pandemic threats, will continue for some years to come. National is committed to a border plan that provides long-term security for New Zealand families, their health and the wider economy.

Human to human contact is the most likely mode of transmission into New Zealand. Therefore, our border is our first line of defence against the threat of transmission of COVID-19 in New Zealand.

Changes in approaches to border management around the world are as profound as the changes in the wake of the September 11 terror attacks in 2001.

This border policy will be our initial response to provide a long-term and coherent response to the ongoing threat of COVID-19 and other public health threats.

## The policy includes:

- Creating Te Korowai Whakamaru/ NZ Border Protection Agency to provide professional coordination and comprehensive management of the potential entry of COVID-19 and other public health threats.
- Providing the necessary resources to ensure this agency is well organised and equipped to provide a strong first line of defence.
- Improving our public health response through investment in new technologies, science, systems and working with stakeholders including Iwi representatives.
- Preparing for a more effective response to future outbreaks, should they occur. Lockdowns, if needed, can be more targeted shorter in duration, while protecting our most vulnerable.

This is how we will correct the systemic breakdown we have seen at the border to date and introduce a professional front line of defence to keep New Zealand safe.

## Creating Te Korowai Whakamaru/ NZ Border Protection Agency

### Proposal

National will establish a single Crown Agency to unify the Government response to securing our border – the first and best line of defence New Zealand has against COVID-19.

The current arrangements are ad-hoc and have been assembled in haste. Various agencies are in charge of different facets of securing our border, which has led to a disorderly and confused response, miscommunication and insufficient testing. This was exposed in August and led to a major lockdown across the Auckland region.

New Zealand needs a coordinated and professional response for the years to come, with a well trained workforce within a structured and compliance-focused agency.

The Agency would be accountable to a dedicated minister, who would set the priority of operational excellence.

Te Korowai Whakamaru/ NZ Border Protection Agency would enhance the all-of-Government response model by establishing a single agency to coordinate the Government's response. National would begin work on implementing the Agency immediately upon taking office, establishing it within our first 100 days.

### Detail:

- The Agency would report to a single minister whose focus will be keeping New Zealand free from the risks of COVID-19 and other pandemic threats.
- The Agency will have overall control of the response when dealing with an outbreak, including the ability to order compliance with agency policies and oversee the response from other agencies such as the Ministry of Health, District Health Boards



and other agencies operating at points of entry.

- The Agency will be empowered to make orders to ensure compliance with the policies it sets.
- The Agency will be responsible for managing co-payment for the costs of managed isolation.
- All Agency workers who are in contact with people in managed isolation would be required to have a COVID-19 test weekly.
- All Agency workers would be required to carry contact tracing technology as it becomes available.
- The Agency would establish policy to manage capacity for safe entry into New Zealand.

This agency will be resourced to act as a centre of expertise with the personnel, technology and capability to provide a world-class defence against COVID-19. They will manage the response in the event of an incursion.

The Agency would not replace any current ministry or department but would draw on the resources across Government, including officials and staff, working within the border and managed isolation system.

The Agency would develop and implement long-term policies and plans for safe and efficient international travel and people movement. In the shorter term, the agency will administer policy and procedures for:

- Approving operations and developing protocols for managed isolation and quarantine facilities, and provide security.
- Ensuring effective training and safety protocols for all staff involved in border control, managed isolation and quarantine.
- Managing protocols for port movements, freight and testing procedures at ports.
- Receiving returning Kiwis and visitors at the border, and ensuring pre-border checks for people coming into New Zealand.

- Transferring people to managed isolation facilities.
- Acting as a centre of expertise on pandemic containment and best practice.
- Facilitating planning with businesses to ensure safe practices. Specifically tailoring plans for small business, retailers and manufacturers.
- Considering expansion of entry qualifications and timing.

Heightened border management will be required for the foreseeable future. Even beyond the development of a COVID-19 vaccine, there will need to be procedures at the border to ensure the ongoing safety of New Zealanders.

## Why a unified response is required

The cost of the current approach is estimated to be close to half a billion dollars for managed isolation and quarantine facilities in 2020 alone. While border control is expensive, it is cheaper than the alternative: periodic lockdowns.

But an expensive and ineffective system is the worst outcome. National will manage the border effectively to keep New Zealanders safe.

Border management to date has not been satisfactory. It has been ad-hoc and has resulted in a confused response from government departments and private services, heightening the risk to New Zealanders.

The current management requires synchronisation between large numbers of agencies:



Government Agencies	Non-government organisations
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet	Hotels
Customs	Health Staff
Immigration	Security
Aviation Security	Transport (Buses)
Primary Industries	Iwi
Health	Airlines
Defence	
Police	
Civil Defence	
Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment	
District Health Boards	
Local Government	

This is all currently coordinated by a senior military officer reporting to the Minister of Housing.

## Securing the border

Testing at the border is required to make sure the Government is identifying and managing active cases. Ensuring access and availability to testing is critical. However, there have been numerous issues of testing procedures not being followed, with inconsistencies in required testing of individuals in managed isolation and quarantine.

National would follow international models and require people coming into the country to not only quarantine but also receive a test for COVID-19, or a subsequent pandemic virus, three days before departure and provide the results of that test to airline staff before boarding their plane.

### National would

- Require people travelling to New Zealand to provide evidence of a negative COVID-19 test before arriving into New Zealand.

- Pre boarding thermal imaging and completion of health declaration card.
- Deploy compulsory contact tracing technology for Agency workers, workers in border facilities and points of entry, and District Health Board staff treating or testing patients.
- Ensure new arrivals can be adequately contact traced by requiring compulsory use of contact tracing technology.
- Require another test within three days of arrival as well as a test on day 12.
- Implement thermal imaging at points of entry.
- Require arrivals to complete a health declaration card.



# Strengthening Our Public Health Response

The threat from COVID-19 will be present for years to come and other pandemic threats will require responses in the future.

National recognises we must also prepare a second line of defence, behind our border, so that in the event of any limited outbreak, cases can be identified, traced and isolated quickly.

With strong contact tracing and a more sophisticated testing and compliance structure we can minimise the impact on New Zealanders of further incursions. We will protect those vulnerable to the disease and the wider population from the major impact of outbreaks.

As outlined in the Verrall Report provided to the Ministry of Health on contact tracing, outbreaks can be controlled through rapid contact tracing. Further, contact tracing, when used alongside other public health measures has more than 90 per cent efficacy against COVID-19, which makes it as effective as many vaccines.

This report, and the examples of high-quality contact tracing and testing systems internationally, provide confidence that similar systems in New Zealand could allow for less intrusive lockdowns in the event of an isolated outbreak.

A functional response system requires coordination at the border and the ability to rapidly deploy contact tracing and testing throughout the country if we are to expel the risk of future outbreaks.

However, the system in past months has not worked as it should. While frontline workers at the border have been doing their best in difficult conditions, they, like the public, have been let down by a cobbled together approach.

Our health system will adapt to provide greater capability in the event of an outbreak. National will ensure our medical systems are

adequately resourced with equipment such as ventilators to provide appropriate treatment solutions in the event an outbreak.

In addition, National will enhance the contact tracing system and develop a long-term plan for managing public health threats such as COVID-19.

## Contact Tracing

Contact tracing is one of the most effective tools we have against COVID-19.

The success of a high-capacity rapid contact tracing service has also been seen in South East Asian countries such as Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan in addressing outbreaks as noted by the New Zealand Initiative's Leonard Hong.

The first line of defence must be strong border management, but ensuring a high-quality contact tracing system is a vital second line. National would implement the following:

### Scale up contact tracing

Ensuring consistency and capacity within the contact tracing system is critical to achieving the goals of a rapid contact tracing system that would help manage any isolated incidents of COVID-19 beyond the border and to limit the need of intensive lockdowns across the country.

The recent examples of contact tracing from the South Auckland cluster identified on 11 August 2020 showed that, while contact tracing could be undertaken, there were questions about the time it took to identify and notify contacts. If New Zealand is to be able to effectively eliminate COVID-19 from the country we should immediately look to scale up the capacity of contact tracing to enhance speed reliability within the system.

### National would

- Ensure the response to COVID-19 and other pandemic threats is coordinated nationally to provide for a more comprehensive contact tracing system.
- Scale up the contact tracing capability by increasing the numbers of people available



to work on contact tracing to ensure contacts can be identified, traced and isolated quickly.

## Resourcing the Long Term Response

National would ensure the Agency and the wider Government sector is resourced to manage the response in the longer term.

The pandemic has brought forth considerable innovation to improve testing and better manage COVID-19 and other pandemic threats. National recognises that in the medium term, technology is going to provide the capacity to better test and track, to manage the COVID-19 and other pandemic threats.

The response to COVID-19 and similar pandemic threats requires the Government to fund and invest in emerging medical technologies and practices as they become viable. The Agency would be expected to learn from and collaborate to ensure best practice protocols and technology are brought to or developed in New Zealand and shared.

The current Government's response has been too slow. The Government's COVID-19 contact tracing app was deployed after private sector alternatives were made available and take-up of the COVID-19 app has seen limited usage. Since the rollout of the app in May there has been less than two uses per New Zealander. That is not sufficient and more must be done.

Internationally, examples such as Australia show success in deploying a Bluetooth contact tracing app, which allows for easier and more effective contact tracing.

### National would

- Immediately invest and seek to rapidly deploy a Bluetooth application to enhance contact tracing capability.
- Explore alternative contact tracing technologies to add more tools to the contact tracing system (eg: COVID Card).

- Immediately provide additional resource to bolster the campaign to increase the use and take-up of the COVID-19 app and continue to update its functionality.
- Ensure the Government is working with private providers to ensure best practice in the way we are deploying contact tracing technology.
- Undertake risk-based assessments for requiring the use of certain contact-tracing technologies. For example, requiring border-facing workers to use COVID Cards or mandating the use of contact tracing technology for people arriving from certain high-risk countries in the future.

## Surveillance and Monitoring

Continued monitoring and surveillance will be required to make sure the policies at the border are successful. A strong testing regime will provide confidence in the efforts at the border.

### National would

- Widen the availability of testing throughout the country, making sure there are readily deployable mobile testing stations in each main population centre as well as any population centre where there is a quarantine facility.
- Implement a target for test waiting times of no longer than 60 minutes for a test.
- Strive towards a 'test on demand' system where people seeking a test can and do receive one. A number of reports of individuals being told they do not require a test or waiting for more than five hours for a test is not optimal. National would scale up availability and processing so we have as widespread of a testing system as possible.
- Ensure regular wastewater testing for COVID-19 to monitor potential early outbreaks in the community. This would build on the testing already undertaken by the Institute of Environmental Science and Research in April and operating in other countries such as the Netherlands.



- Ensure people in managed isolation and quarantine have a compulsory day three and day 12 COVID-19 test.

## At-risk care contingency planning

Certain populations are more at risk of a COVID-19 outbreak than others and it is important a clear plan is developed to continue to keep these New Zealanders safe. Most obviously, those who live in retirement homes across the country require a plan in place so they are prioritised, even under Alert Level 1.

### National would

- Require regular testing of aged-care workers.
- Have regular opportunities for testing within retirement homes.
- Ensure adequate supplies of personal protective equipment and appropriate hygiene protocols are in place.
- Coordinate with food providers and delivery agencies for an aged care response plan to cater to those who cannot simply rely on volunteers to deliver necessities to them in the event of an increase in Alert Level.

## Building a more resilient economy

National would strengthen the ability for our economy to work in a COVID-19 and pandemic prone world. We will work to ensure that in the first instance our border is secure but with a mind to ensuring we are not caught wanting if an incursion does occur.

If lockdowns do occur, we must help our economy so that commerce can continue through lockdowns and people can continue work. Our economy must become more resilient to the threat posed by COVID-19. Lockdowns are a short-term intervention that come at a tremendous cost to businesses and our economy. In the long term, New Zealand

cannot afford to shut down or slow our entire economy even if there is a localised incursion. National will improve regulatory settings and allowing more business to be conducted in a contactless way. We will need to become more contactless and able to operate despite the health threat. We will need efficient systems that protect the supply chain and minimise the upheaval and disruption caused by an incursion.

National is concerned the lessons of the first lockdown were not closely studied to provide an improved response during the August lockdown. Continuous improvement of our systems is required so that lockdowns become more targeted and effective, with minimal impact on our communities and the economy. For example, where small businesses like butchers and greengrocers can demonstrate and implement or plan to operate safely, they should be allowed to do so.