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13 November 2023

Lance D. Lavery

By email: fyi-request-24435-b529ffd3@requests.fyi.org.nz
Ref: H2023032389

Tēnā koe Lance

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to Manatū Hauora (the Ministry of Health) on 13 October 2023 for information regarding COVID-19 Vaccine Exemptions. You requested:

"I am seeking comprehensive and detailed information concerning the exemptions granted in relation to the Covid-19 vaccination strategy. My primary focus is on the Ministry of Health staff and associated contractors, considering the importance of their roles in the public health sector. My requests are as follows:

- 1. Detailed criteria employed to determine eligibility for vaccine exemptions, including any documentation or guidelines used in the evaluation process.*
- 2. A comprehensive breakdown of vaccine exemptions granted. This should include data segmented by roles (e.g., medical professionals, administrative personnel, contractors) within the Ministry of Health.*
- 3. The rationale or reasons documented for granting these exemptions, especially for key positions or roles that have significant public health responsibilities within the Ministry.*
- 4. Information elucidating any differential or distinct criteria applied to Ministry of Health staff and contractors compared to the general New Zealand public when assessing vaccine exemption requests.*
- 5. Internal communications, directives, memos, or guidelines circulated within the Ministry of Health regarding the decision-making process for granting exemptions. I'm also interested in any guidance regarding how to communicate or not communicate these decisions to the public and media.*
- 6. A description of mechanisms or checks put in place to ensure the exemption process's transparency, fairness, and consistency, especially considering potential public perceptions of preferential treatment for Ministry staff.*
- 7. Specifics about any appeals or reviews initiated against exemption decisions within the Ministry, the review process, and the outcomes of these reviews.*
- 8. Correspondence, emails, or documented discussions highlighting concerns, feedback, or objections from within the Ministry, other governmental departments, or external entities about the exemption process or the number of exemptions granted.*

9. Statistical data indicating the total number of Ministry of Health staff and contractors who applied for exemptions, the number granted, the number denied, and any trends, patterns, or anomalies observed in these decisions.

10. Insights into any operational impacts, challenges, or changes to service delivery within the Ministry of Health due to the number of staff or contractors receiving exemptions. This includes any contingency plans or adjustments made in response.

11. Any studies, evaluations, or reviews undertaken (internally or externally) assessing the potential public health implications or risks associated with the number of vaccine exemptions granted within the Ministry.”

Your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Act as the information requested does not exist. Manatū Hauora does not have:

- Any specific criteria to determine eligibility for vaccine exemptions that were specific to our kaimahi and associated contractors.
- Any record of vaccine exemptions that were granted to our kaimahi and associated contractors.
- Any record of any staff member or associated contractor who applied for an exemption.

As such, Manatū Hauora has no:

- Record of any internal communications, directives, memos, or guidelines specifically.
- Record of any mechanisms or checks that were put in place to ensure the exemption process’s transparency, fairness, and consistency for granting exemptions to any staff member or associated contractor.
- Record of any appeals or reviews against exemption decisions of Manatū Hauora staff or associated contractors.
- Correspondence, emails, or documented discussions highlighting concerns, feedback, or objections within the Ministry, other governmental departments, or external entities about the exemption process.
- Statistical data regarding exemptions.
- Operational impacts, challenges, or changes to service delivery because of an internal exemption.
- Reviews that have been undertaken internally or externally.

Information regarding general vaccine exemptions is publicly available here:

- www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h2023019241_response.pdf.
- www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202206082_response.pdf.
- www.tewhatoru.govt.nz/assets/Publications/OIA-response/Appendix-1-HNZ00028251.pdf.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of your request with us, including this decision, please feel free to contact the OIA Services Team on: oiagr@health.govt.nz.

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 Manatū Hauora website at: www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Celia Wellington'.

Celia Wellington
Deputy Director-General
Corporate Services | Te Pou Tiaki