Our team of 5 million has done a great job at following the rules to protect our country from COVID-19. I know that cases in the community, and alert level changes can be quite unsettling for a lot of people, but we do have good reason to feel hopeful in New Zealand.

In February we started the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine, the biggest vaccination programme in our country’s history, ahead of schedule. We have now secured enough doses of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, which has shown excellent efficacy and safety, for all New Zealanders.

Even the most optimistic of experts at the beginning of the pandemic thought it would take at least two years for the world to get COVID-19 vaccines. It’s amazing what we can achieve when the world’s resources are focused on it. It’s the clinical expertise, modern technology and of course the enormous financial resourcing that has enabled unprecedented swift progress.

You probably have a lot of questions about the vaccines, and now that they’re arriving in New Zealand, you’ll rightly be wondering when you’ll be able to get it. As Minister for Seniors, I’ve been actively working to ensure that older New Zealanders are prioritised. It’s important that seniors get an effective vaccine early because of the higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. I’m very pleased that those 65 and over, especially those in aged care facilities, will be among the first to be vaccinated. To find out more about what this will look like, check out the article on the roll-out below.

Many of you will have seen the images of the first of our border workers being vaccinated. Those images are one for our history books. We started by vaccinating our dedicated border workers and their household contacts as they are our first line of defence. The virus is still running rampant in many countries overseas. More than 100,000 New Zealand citizens and residents who have returned home since our borders closed, a significant number of which have tested positive during their 14-day stay in our MIQ facilities. Vaccinating our border workers who are at highest risk of coming into contact with someone with the virus helps reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading into the community.

The big picture is that everyone will be offered the vaccine – free of charge. We are lucky that we can roll out the vaccination programme in a fashion that means we continue to protect every New Zealander without the experience of those life and death situations that so many other countries are facing.

Getting vaccinated is about more than just protecting ourselves - it’s about our loved ones, those at the highest risk, our economy, and ultimately our way of life.

Although the roll-out of the vaccine is a major step forward, we still need to remain vigilant. We need to continue to keep track of where we have been, whether that is through a QR code or just noting it down somewhere, like the free COVID tracer booklet. Remember to wash your hands, cough and sneeze into your elbow, and stay home if you’re sick.

For more information on the vaccines and the roll-out across the country go to the Unite Against COVID-19 website.
COVID-19: Vaccine roll-out

Older people in the community are being prioritised in the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out.

The Government recently announced the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out plan, focusing on targeting those most at risk of getting the coronavirus and those most at risk of getting seriously ill.

The roll-out is being staggered, with the population divided into four main groups.

**Group 1: Started in February**
This group consisted of 50,000 border and MIQ workers, their household contacts and the people they live with. This group will now have had at least one dose administered.

**Group 2: Started in February and will continue through to May**
This group covers frontline workers and people living in high-risk settings. This includes older people in the Counties Manukau District Health Board (DHB) district, home support workers, and those living in aged residential care.

**Group 3: Planned to start in May**
The rest of the senior population is in group three, with those aged 75 and over being vaccinated first, followed by seniors aged 65-74. This group also includes those with underlying health conditions and disabilities.

**Group 4: Planned to start from July**
The remainder of the general population.

For the most up-to-date information on the vaccine roll-out, including a more thorough breakdown of the people included in each group, head to the Unite Against COVID-19 website covid19.govt.nz

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A message from Catherine Hall, Alzheimers New Zealand

Dementia affects nearly every New Zealand family at some point, in some way. You, or someone you know, could develop dementia.

Around 70,000 Kiwis are living with dementia. That number will nearly triple in coming years, costing nearly $5 billion a year by 2050. The impact of dementia is so huge that it must be a top health priority for Government after COVID-19.

Most Kiwis living with dementia live at home, not in secure care. Just like the rest of us, they want to lead full and active lives, doing things they enjoy in their communities.

However, if you are living with dementia, you may experience huge levels of stigma, discrimination, fear, and misunderstanding.

Often, people living with dementia feel isolated, even from friends and family. They may not like to admit or talk about it. We are often told that one of the biggest challenges of being diagnosed with dementia is other people’s reactions.

We can all do something to create a more Dementia Friendly New Zealand – a kind and caring society where people living with dementia are supported and encouraged to live well. There are many ways you can help. You can pledge your support for our Dementia Declaration.

You can also become a ‘Dementia Friend’ and learn about dementia and how you can help. It’s free and only takes 20 minutes online.

If you have a business or organisation, you can make it ‘dementia friendly’ through our Dementia Friendly Recognition Programme.

If you’re keen to join dementia and age friendly work going on in your community, contact us and talk to your council about getting involved. Learn more at our website www.alzheimers.org.nz.

People living with dementia have said, “our lives matter. We seek a society where people living with dementia are included, understood and respected; where services and facilities are accessible; and, where people value our presence.”

This is exactly what a dementia friendly approach looks like. Let’s make it happen. Because a dementia friendly New Zealand would be better for all of us.
New Zealand Superannuation and Veteran’s Pension payments are adjusted each year to reflect increases in the cost of living, inflation, and the average wage.

From 1 April fortnightly payments will increase to:
- $768.92 before tax or $672.22 after ‘M’ tax for a married couple who both qualify
- $1,013.28 before tax or $873.88 after ‘M’ tax for a single person living alone
- $932.06 before tax or $806.66 after ‘M’ tax for a single person sharing accommodation.

The first full payment at the new rate will be on 27 April.

For a full summary of the new rates go to the work and income website www.workandincome.govt.nz and search for ‘benefit rates 2021’.

Shake it out: Stretching, workouts & falls

Whether you’re a fitness enthusiast or just enjoy a stroll around the park, it’s important to remain as mobile as you can.

“Remaining physically active in later life is critical to maintaining independence and is a major contributor to overall health status amongst older people,” says Dr John Parsons, Associate Professor at the School of Nursing at The University of Auckland - Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau.

Dr Parsons says we lose around three percent of our muscle mass per day when inactive. Doing movements and workouts at the right level of intensity for you, will help to keep your joints as supple as possible, keep your heart and lungs healthy, and keep your muscles strong and stable.

“Regular physical activity also has an effect on mood as well as being important for keeping in touch with friends and family and for helping you sleep well. It can also help to keep your digestive system working well.”

Activity programmes can be adapted and tailored to anyone. ACC’s Live Stronger website: www.livestronger.org.nz has a range of free resources and information about living well and independent – for longer.

Here, you’ll find a PDF of the so-called “super-seven” exercises from Physiotherapy NZ, alongside exercise sheets and on-demand videos.

Speaking of which, if you love learning via tv shows, Healthy for Life (which was in fact developed by Dr Parsons) is still available on the TVNZOnDemand website www.tvnz.co.nz.

The Live Stronger initiative also features a directory of affordable classes in your area, from all levels and covering dance classes, yoga, Tai Chi, weight training, chair exercise classes and much more.

Age Concern’s Steady As You Go is a nationwide programme also designed for developing strength and balance in seniors. Classes run for sixty minutes each week, costing only $3. You can find your nearest class via their website: www.ageconcern.org.nz/

Good strength and balance helps reduce the risk of falls, a fear of which ACC says causes seniors to “restrict their activity”. This leads to a vicious cycle where “eventually they move less, their strength decreases, their balance is affected and their risk of falling increases”.

“The more you do,” they advise, “the more you can do.”
The effects of Daylight Saving

If you find you’re a bit out of sorts from the clocks changing over in the weekend— you’re not alone.

This is because Daylight Saving challenges our internal body clock, explains Dr Rosie Gibson, Senior Lecturer at Massey University’s Sleep/Wake Research Centre.

“Suddenly our internal clock and the external time of the sun and the clock face are no longer aligned,” she says.

“Our internal clock cannot immediately shift following the clock change, it can take a few days to adjust. During this time, we might feel sleepier during the day.”

Firstly, the good news is that it is more challenging to adjust to beginning of daylight saving (springing forward) than the end (falling back).

This, Dr Gibson explains, is because most of us find it easier to sleep an hour later and gain an hour in bed in the morning, rather than lose an hour and rise earlier.

Secondly, there are things you can do to manage the impact of Daylight Saving.

• You can prepare for the start of daylight saving by adjusting your sleep schedule. Bring your bedtime back by 10-20 minutes each night leading up to Daylight Saving so when the clocks change its less of a shock

• Being mindful of exposure to bright light and natural sunlight in the morning. If you wake up too early in the new time, avoid too much natural and digital light as this will reinforce an earlier than preferred wake up time

• If you find your energy is fading because of the adjustment, try a walk outside in the natural light around midday. This will help boost your energy and feeling alert

• Be mindful of also adjusting the time you eat meals, as this will help the body clock adjust

• Avoid caffeine in the afternoon and evening and don’t use alcohol as a sleep aid

Finally, Dr Gibson adds, be mindful that if your sleep is affected, you might be sleepier in the daytime. Look out for signs of fatigue if you’re in situations with greater risk, such as driving.

If you need to nap, plan a short time after lunch, when it is less likely to affect your sleep time at night.

Find out more about the Sleep/Wake Research Centre at www.sleepwake.ac.nz/

Rates rebates

A rates rebate is a partial refund for people who pay rates to a council. If you pay rates on your residence – you might be eligible for a rebate of up to $655.

The scheme only applies to the one property you live in and doesn't apply to multiple or holiday homes. You can apply for a rates rebate if you live in a retirement village, you just need the signature of your village manager.

Head over to www.govt.nz to find out more on eligibility, what to do if you live in a trust owned property, and work out how much you might be entitled to with the online rebate calculator.

Some payments, such as the Winter Energy Payment, are not included in the definition of income.

Post or drop off your application form to your council. Applications close 30 June 2021.
ANZAC Day

ANZAC Day is fast approaching, taking place on 25 April. Sadly, last year because of COVID-19 and the Level 4 lockdown, ANZAC day had to be different. Without the traditional dawn services, New Zealanders all over the world found different ways of commemorating the contributions made by service personnel and their families.

What might sometimes be overlooked are the dedicated organisations and individuals that do great work all year round to recognise, support, and comfort service men, women, and their families. Royal New Zealand Returned and Services' Association (RNZRSA) National Women's Section is one of those groups.

The first Women's Section was formed in Kaiapoi on Waitangi Day 1941 and other Women's Sections were soon established across New Zealand. The National Women's Section was formed in 2004 and incorporated in 2006, which gave women a voice on RNZRSA National Council.

Before that, all Women's Sections were affiliated to their local RSA.

The National Women's Section Board has nine members, with their own personal connections to service. Some of whom are veterans themselves, with most married to veterans. Their President Diane Wilson has been involved in initiatives for military families for over 40 years.

Her father was a Second World War veteran who was held as a prisoner of war and her husband served with the Corps of Royal New Zealand Engineers.

Women’s Sections continue to lead programmes for families in their communities. Fundraising for local clubs and Poppy Day started with women within the RSA movement and is still a big part of their work today.

During the Second World War, members of Women's Sections visited the families of service personnel who had died, which continues today.

“You just sit there sometimes, they don’t need any welfare assistance, they just need someone to talk to,” says Diane.

“Our core focus will always be our veterans and their families, because that’s who we are.”

For more information on the Royal New Zealand Returned and Services’ Association and ANZAC Day go to the RSA website www.rsa.org.nz

President of the RNZRSA National Women’s Section Diane Wilson (left) and Vice President Lynda Gage

Winter Energy Payment

The Winter Energy Payment is starting again on 1 May.

If you get NZ Super or Veteran’s Pension, you will be entitled to get the Winter Energy Payment all winter, from 1 May until 1 October. The payment is made automatically, you don’t need to apply. The payment is made to help with the cost of keeping your home warm and dry over winter, so you won’t need to worry when you turn the heater on.

Couples and people with dependent children will get $31.82 a week. Single people will get $20.46 a week.

Last year, the Winter Energy Payment was temporarily doubled because of COVID-19. This year, it is reverting back to the standard rate.
One in four New Zealanders have a disability, and older people are more likely to have a disability. We all have a part to play in ensuring that every Kiwi is included and can fully participate in everyday life.

Accessibility plays a vital role in helping those with disabilities participate in society. Whether in education, employment, getting goods and services we need, or taking part in community and social life; accessibility needs are everywhere.

Accessibility for those with a disability is more than moving around physical locations. It includes accessibility of services such as entertainment, access of information, and understandable communication. It involves everyday routines such as public transport, shopping, socialising, and making sure that public spaces are friendly and inviting for diverse groups.

Currently, standards of accessibility are not well understood, difficult to enforce, and limited in their reach. That is why the Government is looking to develop an Accessibility Act.

The purpose of the new legislation and its supporting framework will be to progressively increase access to more parts of everyday life for all New Zealanders.

Through accelerating accessibility, we support a more inclusive Aotearoa that improves the overall wellbeing for all people with access needs and disabilities – including seniors.

This work aligns with the Making Environments Accessible key area for action in the Better Later life strategy – He Oranga Kaumātua 2019 to 2034 and, in particular, the implementation of Age Friendly Aotearoa New Zealand.

The Ministry of Social Development, and the Access Alliance are working in partnership to develop options for this new legislative framework.

From March to April 2021, they will be talking about accessibility with communities and groups such as older people, Māori and Pasifika, carers, businesses, and disabled people’s advisory groups. It is important that they hear from you about your thoughts and experiences of the barriers you might have faced.

Share your experience with them at Accelerating_Accessibility@msd.govt.nz

Information and updates about Accelerating Accessibility can be found on the Office for Disability Issues website: www.odi.govt.nz
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