

To: Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Minister for Social Development

Aide Memoire: Support available for people being released from prison in COVID-19 Alert Level 4

Date	16 April 2020	Decision and Timing	No decision required
B number	B4014	Priority	Low

Contacts			
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Purpose

- 1 This Aide Memoire provides information on what support is available for people being released from prison during COVID-19 Alert Level 4.

Support available for people being released from Prison during Covid-19 Alert Level 4

- 2 Corrections delivers an essential public service in prisons and communities. Regardless of the unprecedented situation all New Zealanders face, public safety remains our top priority. This is a challenging time for all government departments and our service providers. However, we are working together to enable people to be released in line with Court and New Zealand Parole Board decisions.

Community Corrections

- 3 Corrections' efforts are focussed on ensuring that each person required to be released from prison has a pre-release plan in place. This will include safe accommodation options that will allow them to self-isolate, in line with the Alert Level 4 restrictions, and be supported during this difficult time. Regions are reviewing all upcoming releases so that plans can be assessed, and suitable support, options and monitoring can be put in place.
- 4 Probation officers, regional accommodation managers, case managers and National Office staff in Wellington are working closely with providers and other government departments including the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) to identify suitable accommodation options for release. This includes identifying whether any other occupants in the house may have risk factors that relate to COVID-19. This also includes emergency accommodation options for people who have no suitable address upon release.

- 5 On release from prison, a person may be required to comply with conditions imposed by the Courts or New Zealand Parole Board. Their compliance with the conditions of their sentences or orders is closely monitored by Community Corrections. We take all instances of non-compliance extremely seriously and hold people in our care to account if they breach their conditions. Again, public safety is our top priority, and we continue to monitor people in our care residing in the community as usual.
- 6 Community Corrections sites are closed to people reporting in. However, staff continue to monitor people serving sentences in the community via phone, carrying out necessary visits and maintaining essential functions such as electronic monitoring and court reports. Necessary visits are carried out where a case is assessed as high risk, where there may be safety concerns or essential information has not been able to be verified another way. Some people are also dependant on Corrections to support their daily living so visits have been conducted to these people also. All electronic monitoring in the community is continuing as usual, including the installation or removal of monitoring equipment. Reports for the New Zealand Parole Board and Courts will also continue to be completed, with interviews completed by phone or audio-visual link.

Accommodation

- 7 COVID-19 has put pressure on Corrections and MSD's capacity to place people into accommodation. Usually, sourcing emergency accommodation is carried out by Community Corrections and MSD accommodation services. However, due to the impacts of COVID-19, which have created extraordinary demand on MSD services including emergency housing, the Ministry does not have capacity to source emergency accommodation for people leaving prison during COVID-19 period, and potentially beyond. MSD have requested Corrections provide this support until further notice.
- 8 In response, Corrections has developed an interim emergency accommodation process to ensure that people leaving prison have suitable accommodation available. Corrections will continue to work closely with MSD to ensure that emergency accommodation for people leaving prison is noted in the All of Government accommodation list to ensure all agencies have visibility and can avoid inappropriate cross-use of motels and other accommodation. Additionally, we will continue to ensure individuals with child sex offences are not placed in accommodation with vulnerable individuals.
- 9 MSD continues to provide emergency housing assistance to people serving existing community sentences who are considered to present a low or medium risk to the public and are unable to remain in their place of residence under the auspices of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) concerning the provision of Emergency Housing to Corrections cohorts.
- 10 Support services will be provided to all individuals staying in the emergency accommodation via Corrections' existing contracted service providers. This ensures that accommodation providers will not have to manage individuals day-to-day. Individuals will receive a room and up to one month's support services from a contracted service provider. Due to lockdown restrictions services will mostly be provided remotely by phone calls and texts to minimise contact during the Alert Level 4 period.

Ministry of Social Development and Benefit Payments

- 11 Corrections, MSD and Westpac have been working together to ensure that during COVID-19 Alert Level 4 people being released from prison get the support they need prior to their release.
- 12 Corrections and MSD have dedicated staff in each region to plan and manage releases in their area. Both agencies are working closely together to support people being released. This includes setting up people with their benefit and other entitlements prior to their release through a telephone interview with MSD's dedicated case manager. MSD has access to editable electronic Jobseeker Support applications and can complete these on behalf of people in Corrections' care with their consent.
- 13 A new process is available for people being released from prison who are eligible for the Steps to Freedom grant. The usual process of providing people with a Steps to Freedom grant by way of a cheque or form has been replaced. The new process is for Corrections sites to give those eligible people a Westpac prepaid card loaded with their \$350 Steps to Freedom grant. The Westpac prepaid card can be used to purchase items in-store or to withdraw cash from an ATM. Additionally, all people being released from prison during Alert Level 4 will be given a Work and Income payment card. This will allow Work and Income to deposit any hardship assistance the person is entitled to on to the card.
- 14 Corrections has also purchased basic pre-paid mobile phones with credit loaded. These phones are to be given to people being released if they do not have access to a phone post release.

Employment

- 15 Corrections has its own recruitment service which focuses specifically on supporting people with convictions into employment. Corrections has 31 regionally-based Employment and Training Consultants. These are specialist recruiters who place people in our care into employment and support them in maintaining that employment. This dedicated service is available to people post release, as well as those serving a community sentence.
- 16 All Employment and Training Consultants are working remotely during Alert Level 4. They are continuing to support people who have jobs, people who have lost their jobs with benefit support, and where possible placing people into essential service employment.