



## COVERSHEET

<b>Minister</b>	Hon Stuart Nash	<b>Portfolio</b>	Small Business
<b>Title of Cabinet paper</b>	Small Business Health and Wellness Support Package Expansion	<b>Date to be published</b>	31 January 2023

### List of documents that have been proactively released

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>
3 August 2022	Small Business Health and Wellness Support Package Expansion	Office of the Minister for Small Business
8 August 2022	Cabinet Minute SWC-22-MIN-0142	Cabinet Office

### Information redacted

**NO**

Any information redacted in this document is redacted in accordance with MBIE's policy on Proactive Release and is labelled with the reason for redaction. This may include information that would be redacted if this information was requested under Official Information Act 1982. Where this is the case, the reasons for withholding information are listed below. Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

In Confidence

Office of the Minister for Small Business  
Cabinet Economic Development Committee

## **Small Business Health and Wellness Support Package Expansion**

### **Proposal**

1. I am seeking Cabinet agreement to expand the scope of the Small Business Health and Wellness Support Package for Auckland to include the whole of New Zealand until June 2024, due to ongoing challenges faced by the business community from COVID-19.

### **Issue identification**

2. While the Auckland region was the area immediately most hit by the Delta outbreak, the subsequent arrival of Omicron has meant that a greater number of small businesses outside Auckland have potentially been affected and require mental wellness support. The underspend of the package during the 2021/2022 financial year provides an opportunity to continue delivering valuable services, to a wider small business audience.

### **Background**

3. On 18 October 2021, Cabinet approved an economic support package of \$50 million for Auckland businesses to address the impacts of ongoing lockdowns resulting from the widespread COVID-19 Delta variant outbreak. Cabinet authorised the COVID-19 Ministerial Group (CMG) to take decisions on this package (CAB-21-MIN-0425 refers).
4. This suite of support packages was charged against the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, and implemented by Auckland Unlimited as *Activate Tāmaki Makaurau* (ATM).
5. On 22 October 2021, the Minister of Finance issued a file-note (*Confirmation of Decisions: Economic Support Package for Auckland*) confirming approval by the CMG of a set of decisions on the Economic Support Package for Auckland. This set of decisions included agreement that up to (an additional) \$10 million be made available for mental health and wellbeing initiatives for business owners and employers as part of the Auckland support package.
6. All of the business advisory and implementation funding programmes offered under ATM have been completed, with allocated funding fully committed. However, the mental health and wellbeing support, branded as *First Steps*, has seen slower uptake, with under \$2.6 million spent since its introduction in November 2021. The Minister of Finance and I have agreed to an expense transfer of this funding to the end of the 2023/2024 financial year.

## **Delivery of First Steps services to date**

7. Auckland Unlimited sub-contracted the delivery of the Small Business Mental Health and Wellbeing Support Package initiative to the Auckland Business Chamber (the Chamber) and the Employers and Manufacturers Association. Using representative bodies of the business community as providers of this service was seen as advantageous as they were able to deliver services to their members using methods that historically have been effective.
8. Since November 2021, the Chamber has developed a First Steps website ([First Steps | Mental Health and Wellbeing Support for Business Owners](#)) that has offered:
  - access to one-to-one mental health and wellbeing services (a list of approved providers and the services they offer, such as counselling, career coaching, or nutrition, and a link to apply for funding to work with one of the providers);
  - a bespoke support line (0800 1ST STEPS) as well as links to other mental health support lines;
  - a wellbeing self-assessment tool (6 questions, developed by Clearhead, to assist users in assessing their own wellbeing); and
  - mental health and wellbeing resources (including links to existing mental health and well-being resources available on other websites, and a set of informational videos produced by the Chamber).
9. Since November 2021, the number of people accessing the online resources has been high and continues to increase. To date, there have been 67,000 visitors to the website, and 51,000 resources have been downloaded.
10. Significant effort was made to increase the uptake of the one-to-one services, including marketing and streamlining the application process. However, the uptake of these services remained far lower than expected in the first six months of the programme. These one-to-one services made up a large component of the allocated \$10 million budget, resulting in an underspend of \$7.4 million.
11. I directed MBIE officials to discontinue the underused one-to-one services, and explore nationally rolling out the successful elements of this programme.

## **Proposed change to scope**

12. I propose to leave in place the successful online support resources. These resources provide people in the business community the opportunity to access self-directed wellbeing and mental health help quickly and efficiently.
13. Many of the resources created for the Auckland based package are suitable to use in a national roll out. However, some additional material will need to be produced to suit the regional business communities and culturally diverse populations. The marketing of the resources will extend nationally.
14. The production of all website content and resources will be supervised by a clinical psychologist to ensure this material is both safe and effective. Funding has been set aside for this expertise within the budget. In addition to this oversight, all website

content and resources will be created drawing from Te Waka O Digital Mental Health & Addiction Tool. This tool helps developers and vendors meet baseline standards, to deliver safe, trusted and effective digital mental health and wellbeing solutions for individuals, whānau, and communities across Aotearoa New Zealand.

15. I also propose to extend the duration of this package to June 2024. This extension would also allow the amended *First Steps* programme to be operational long enough for the full benefits of the programme to be realised.
16. The extension of this package would allow all New Zealand small businesses to have access to online business-orientated mental health and wellbeing resources. This reflects the spread of Omicron to the rest of the country and the need for these services to be available outside of Auckland.
17. I note that small businesses are represented in a wide range of industries, and include trades people, dairy farmers, and café owners. With mental health being a priority across them all, I will instruct the Ministry for Business, Innovation, and Employment to continue making linkages across government and industry mental health and wellbeing services, and to use this package as an opportunity to coordinate services, remove duplication, and fill gaps.

## **Impact**

18. There are an estimated 546,000 Small and Medium Businesses with fewer than twenty employees in New Zealand, and up to 1,225,000 individuals who own or are employed by those small businesses. This package will provide those owners and employees with access to mental health and wellbeing tools, and will fund marketing to make businesses aware of the website. The Chamber has committed to a target of 320,000 of visitors to the website and 240,000 of resources downloaded for the 2022/2023 financial year.
19. Further content focused on Māori businesses and other minority cultural groups businesses will also be produced. To reach regional small business owners and employees, the Chamber will draw from its network of partners (e.g. Employers and Manufactures Association and Global Network of Business Councils) and regional Chambers throughout the country. They will utilise these networks and relationships to ensure that region-specific and relevant content is included on the First Steps website. To reach small business owners and employees in minority cultural groups the Chamber will leverage its working relationship with partners (Whaakari, Pacific Business Trust, Poutama Trust and the Ministry for Ethnic Communities) to reach diverse populations, and ensure that the content and resources available to appropriately support them.

## **Timing**

20. If the amended package is agreed, I will move to ensure implementation and delivery as soon as possible.
21. While Auckland Unlimited implemented the wider economic support package, including the Small Business Health and Wellness Support Package, for Auckland businesses following the COVID-19 Delta outbreak, the programmes associated with

the other funding are ceasing. Auckland Unlimited will no longer have a long-term role in the *First Steps* programme and will no longer be the contract partner for the Regional Business Partner Network. The Chamber will take over the administration of the national roll out of the Small Business Mental Health and Wellbeing Support Package until at least the end 2022/2023 financial year at the earliest.

### **Consultation**

22. The New Zealand Treasury, Ministry of Health, and Ministry for Primary Industries were consulted in the development of this paper. The Chamber also provided material used in this paper.

### **Financial Implications**

23. There are no additional financial implications arising from this Cabinet paper.
24. The expansion to deliver this package nationally until 2024 will come from unspent funds granted in the 2021/2022 budget, for Vote Business, Science and Innovation – Small Business: Business and Wellbeing Support Multi-Category Appropriation (MCA).
25. An expense transfer of \$2 million was made into the 2022/2023 financial year with additional \$1 million transferred into the next financial year through the in-principle expense transfer process. This allows a budget of up to \$3 million to implement First Steps national roll out in the next two financial years without requiring any additional funding from the Crown. Please note that this budget allows for significant contingency as the cost of some services by the Chamber is unknown at this stage. Any unspent funds will be returned to centre at the end of 2023/2024 Financial Year.

### **Legislative Implications**

26. There are no immediate legislative implications arising from this paper.

### **Impact Analysis**

27. Regulatory Impact Analysis does not apply.

### **Human Rights**

28. The proposals in this paper are consistent with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Human Rights Act 1993.

### **Publicity**

29. I will not publicly announce the contents of this paper, but should Cabinet agree to the amended package, the availability of the website will be publicised.

### **Proactive Release**

30. I propose to proactively release this Cabinet paper, associated minutes, and key advice papers, with appropriate redactions.

## Recommendations

The Minister for Small Business recommends that Cabinet:

1. **Agree** to expand the scope of the Small Business Health and Wellness Support Package for Auckland to include online resources available and marketed to the whole of New Zealand, including content tailored to the regions, Māori businesses and other minority cultural groups' businesses.
2. **Agree** to extend the duration of the national Small Business Mental Health and Wellbeing Support Package to June 2024.
3. **Note** that no further change to appropriations is required to expand the scope of the Small Business Mental Health and Wellbeing Support Package identified in recommendation 1 and 2, and that all unspent and unallocated funds were returned to the centre at the end of financial year 2021/22.
4. **Agree** that Auckland Unlimited will no longer administer this package, and the Auckland Chamber will administer the national roll out of the Small Business Mental Health and Wellbeing package until at least the end 2022/2023 financial year at the earliest.
5. **Note** that authority has previously been delegated to the Minister for Small Business to make decisions regarding the detailed design of the scheme (as delegated by the Minister of Finance on 22 October 2021 under delegated authority CAB-21-MIN-0425)

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Stuart Nash

Minister for Small Business