

The powers provided to the Chief Health Officer following the declaration of a health emergency are extensive, narrowly focused on dealing with Covid 19 and are not subject to any form of governance process in terms of parliamentary or other oversight mechanism. Given the significant impact that decisions taken under this legislation have had, and could have on society, the economy and many aspects of people lives we believe that more oversight and review of decisions is required. While the situation was fast moving in 2020 and many things were unknown, that is not currently the case. As such the powers delegated to the CHO should be commensurate to the situation, both in terms of breadth and duration.

The length of time for any extension should be reduced and then subject to parliamentary approval and debate.

The CHO should be required to attend a parliamentary committee on a regular basis to outline the decisions taken, the basis for those decisions and other options considered.

As the CHO decisions are focused on a very narrow area of concern but have far wider impact, the CHO should be required to consult with a wider expert group to check the broader impact of any decisions and this information should be provided to Government before any final decisions are taken.

While the CHO makes the health decisions the mechanics of how to implement these should be headed to a person with practical experience in logistical response (as with cyclone response). This person would be better placed to manage the co-ordination and thinking required for optimal practical responses.

More transparency as to the scientific rationale for decisions should be made, this could be included as part of the committee review.