



COVID-19 Inquiry Pānui

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A word from our Commissioners, Professor Tony Blakely and John Whitehead CNZM

Kia ora koutou,

You will have likely seen or heard the Government's announcement last week about the decision to conduct a second inquiry phase into New Zealand's COVID-19 response, and the proposed range of additional topics it will consider.

Given your interest in our work, we wanted to share with you some thoughts about this announcement and what it means for our Inquiry, or the first phase as it is now understood.

A further phase of the COVID-19 Inquiry provides an opportunity to complement the

work we've already undertaken with a view to ensuring Aotearoa New Zealand is even better prepared for future pandemics.

While our current terms of reference are broad enough to allow us to look at a wide range of COVID-19 related topics, like mandates, lockdowns, and social impacts such as the impact on education and mental health, we recognise there are specific areas that people have said they would like considered. That's been reflected in what has been outlined by the Government.

The Government has announced that the second phase will – among other things – consider 'the use of vaccines during the pandemic, specifically, mandates, approval processes and safety including the monitoring and reporting of adverse reactions'. An inquiry into vaccine safety and adverse events is not part of our current terms of reference, and will be a useful addition. We are already looking at vaccine mandates which requires us to also consider vaccine effectiveness as it was integral to the overall elimination strategy. We also know that the use of vaccines is a really important topic for many people.

It is important to understand in general how effective vaccines are at preventing death, preventing hospitalisation, and preventing transmission, because the ethical case for vaccine mandates is stronger if vaccines also stop transmission and vice versa weaker if vaccines are not good at stopping transmission.

Separately, you may also have seen that our reporting date for the first phase has been extended from 30 September to 28 November. The extension means we can fully analyse and consider the thousands of submissions we received from people like you earlier this year.

If you did make a submission, thank you for trusting us with your COVID-19 experience. The vast amount of information we have gathered,

and the diverse experiences we have heard about, are all helping to inform our report.

We know the COVID-19 pandemic required all New Zealanders to take extraordinary actions, and that the pandemic has had significant, ongoing effects on the nation. That is why it is so important that New Zealand learns the lessons from the past, to ensure we are prepared for any future pandemics. Moreover, we hope the lessons and recommendations we draw out for pandemics will also be useful for other emergencies New Zealand will face in the future.

We will use this newsletter to update you about any developments in relation to the second phase of the Inquiry including the appointment of new Commissioners, and an expanded terms of reference, once those decisions are made by the Government.

We feel deeply privileged to serve as Commissioners, and look forward to completing this first phase over the coming months.

Heoi ano ra,



Professor Tony Blakely

Royal Commission Chair



John Whitehead CNZM

Commissioner

**A short guide to the
two phases of the**

COVID-19 Inquiry

The Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 Lessons Learned was announced on 5 December 2022. The purpose of the Royal Commission was set as investigating Aotearoa New Zealand's response to COVID-19 in order to prepare for future pandemics.

After the 2023 election, the coalition Government indicated that it intended to expand the terms of reference for the Royal Commission. The terms of reference set out details about how the Royal Commission will operate, like what topics it should investigate.

On behalf of the Government, the Royal Commission consulted with the New Zealand public on the proposed expansion of the terms of reference from 8 February to 24 March 2024.

The Minister for Internal Affairs announced on 25 June 2024 that the Royal Commission would be conducted in two phases. Phase One would cover the current work of the Royal Commission with the current Commissioners, and would produce a report and conclude on 28 November 2024.

Phase Two will begin after the end of Phase One, and will include an expanded terms of reference and new Commissioners. The Government has said they expect this second phase to report back in February 2026.

The Government has said that new Commissioners and the expanded terms of reference for Phase Two will be announced in August 2024.

Next steps for the Inquiry – Phase One

The remainder of Phase One will involve:

- final engagements to gather evidence,
- the natural justice process (see below for overview),
- and writing the Phase One report.

Final engagements to gather evidence

The Inquiry has met with key decision-makers, Government agencies, Iwi and Māori organisations, health providers, businesses, education providers, and community groups to gather evidence and investigate the topics included in the [current terms of reference](#).

To ensure the Inquiry has gathered all the necessary evidence to make findings and recommendations, we continue to meet with organisations and individuals this month. All engagements are [listed on the Inquiry website](#).

As part of our engagements, we recently met with Te Rūnanga o Toa Rangatira. You can hear some reflections from Helmut Modlik, Tumu Whakarae (CEO), in this video:



The natural justice process

The report produced by the Inquiry must contain findings – conclusions based on the evidence collected on the topics under investigation – and recommendations, which are actions the New Zealand Government could take to prepare for future pandemics.

The Inquiries Act (2013) states that if the Inquiry makes a finding that is potentially adverse to any person, then the Inquiry must make sure that person is aware of the matters that finding

is based on, and the Inquiry must give that person a chance to respond to those matters.

Natural justice will involve the Inquiry contacting anyone impacted by this process and giving them the chance to respond.

Report writing

The report for Phase One is due on 28 November 2024. The Inquiry is using all of the evidence collected to write the report, which contains findings on Aotearoa New Zealand's COVID-19 response and recommendations for actions the New Zealand Government can take to prepare for future pandemics.

The report must be written, proofread, and laid out in time for the delivery date.

Find out more information about the phases of the Inquiry

You can see all the available information about the phases of the Inquiry here:

- [The Inquiry website.](#)
- [The Inquiry statement on the announcement of Phase Two.](#)
- [The press release from the Minister of Internal Affairs.](#)

As well as this newsletter, you can also receive updates on the Inquiry on:

- [Facebook](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
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Royal Commission COVID-19 Lessons

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