



## COVID-19 Inquiry Pānui

Issue 15 - 28 November 2024

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### A message from the Commissioners of Phase One of the COVID-19 Inquiry



Tēnā koutou katoa,

The Phase One report of the COVID-19 Inquiry [is now live](#).

After many months of development, our report is complete. It was delivered to the Minister of Internal Affairs, Hon Brooke van Velden, today. Phase One of the Inquiry has now concluded.

Phase One of the Inquiry has looked back, honestly and scrupulously, to draw out the many lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and help ensure Aotearoa New Zealand is as prepared as possible for any future pandemic.

While we can't know with any certainty when or where the next pandemic will take place, or what form it might take, we do know there will be future pandemics. While the future may be uncertain, we are not powerless: as our report sets out, there are practical steps Aotearoa New Zealand can take now to ensure that whatever situation we face, we are better prepared.

Our report provides recommendations to the Government that will help Aotearoa New Zealand achieve this goal. They are designed to support coordinated, collaborative and efficient pandemic preparation and decision-making, no matter what the next pandemic (or national emergency) looks like. While our recommendations are directed at central government, other communities and groups (including iwi and Māori organisations, non-governmental organisations, local government and the private sector), may find aspects of our lessons and recommendations useful to their own pandemic planning.

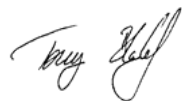
We would like to thank everyone who has so generously shared their pandemic experience and insights with Phase One of the COVID-19 Inquiry and helped make our work possible. We greatly appreciate the time and effort that went into providing evidence and submissions, or meeting with us. We know that sharing COVID-19 experiences isn't always easy.

Thank you to those working in central and local government and in the private and not-for-profit sectors, who shared their reflections and expertise so openly and helped us connect with key communities to gather the additional information we needed. We acknowledge that for many people in our communities, COVID-19 and its effects remain an ongoing concern for their own health, or the health of their loved ones. Many people in Aotearoa New Zealand also continue to live with significant emotional, financial and social impacts from their pandemic experience. For all these people, the COVID-19 pandemic is not over.

Finally, thank you to all the staff at the Inquiry: our Executive Director Dr Justine Cornwall and former Executive Director Anita West, former Commissioner Hon Hekia Parata, our Counsel Assist Jane Meares and Asher Emanuel, and to every member of the Secretariat. It has been a privilege to work with you all.

It has been an honour and a privilege to serve as Commissioners for Phase One of the COVID-19 Inquiry. It is now time for Phase Two to continue this important mahi to ensure Aotearoa New Zealand is ready to prepare for, and to face, future emergencies.

Ngā mihi maioha,



Professor Tony Blakely

Royal Commission Chair

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John Whitehead

Phase One Commissioner



G M Illingworth KC

Grant Illingworth

Phase One Commissioner

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## Personal messages from Professor Tony Blakely and John Whitehead

Commissioner Grant Illingworth will continue with Phase Two as Chair of the Inquiry. Professor Tony Blakely and John Whitehead finish at the Inquiry today, 28 November 2024. Both Commissioners would like to share a personal message of thanks.

### A message from Professor Tony Blakely



Chairing this Inquiry has been both a huge privilege and a genuinely stimulating, rewarding task.

I moved to the University of Melbourne, Australia in 2019. This put me in a unique and fortunate position as a Commissioner at the Inquiry. As I had not been formally involved in the Aotearoa New Zealand COVID-19 response, I was able to bring distance and objectivity to my role, while also having deep local knowledge and expertise. I hope the findings, lessons and recommendations of this Phase One report prove to be useful in better preparing Aotearoa New Zealand for the next pandemic.

I would like to personally thank John Whitehead for his support and friendship as we progressed this work. John has been a constant source of wise counsel and a leader with a relentless public service ethic. Thanks also to Grant Illingworth KC, who joined Phase One of the Inquiry recently. Grant has applied endless energy and integrity, not to mention hard work, to ensure a successful transition to Phase Two of the Inquiry, which he will chair. I also would like to thank the University of Melbourne for supporting me during this time, and to my immediate team and students who have tolerated my many absences while I completed the work of this Inquiry.

However, my most important thanks are to my partner, Rebecca. Her support throughout my work on COVID-19 – both at the time, and during the work of the Inquiry – has been essential.

Thank you.



Professor Tony Blakely

Royal Commission Chair

**A message from John Whitehead**



As well as those we have thanked above, I would like to pay particular tribute to Professor Tony Blakely. I have had the privilege of being able to observe first-hand the values he brought to the Inquiry.

Anyone who knows Tony well will be aware of the huge amount of energy and commitment he brings to everything he does and that has certainly been true with the work of this Inquiry.

Unfortunately, these qualities have not been universally appreciated. He has endured regular public challenge and comment about perceived conflicts of interest, despite the rigorous clearance processes all Commissioners are subject to and despite any possible conflicts being strictly managed throughout the Inquiry. Tony has acted with complete integrity throughout and shown an unwavering determination to bring an independent and open mind to the evidence the Inquiry has considered. Thank you, Tony, for your leadership.

I would also like to acknowledge my wife, Eileen. Throughout the nearly two years of Te Tira Ārai Urutā, including a period when I was unwell, Eileen kept me calm when the pressure of the Inquiry, along with other demands, proved challenging and supported me at every step – as always. Thank you.

It has been a privilege to be entrusted as a Commissioner in this Inquiry, and to hear the often deeply moving experiences of so many people. I sincerely hope that our Phase One work – and indeed Phase Two – will make a real difference for this country that I am so proud of.



John Whitehead

Phase One Commissioner

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## The Phase One report

The Phase One report of the COVID-19 Inquiry is live.

The following documents are available on the [Inquiry's website](#).

- Main Report
- Summary Report
- Experiences Report (an overview of public feedback to the Inquiry)
- Consolidated lessons and recommendations document
- Explainer video
- Translated and accessible summary documents in te reo Māori, Samoan, Tongan, Hindi, Simplified Chinese, New Zealand Sign Language, Braille, Audio, Easy Read and Large Print formats. *Note: some language and accessible formats will be published in the coming days*

# An update from Phase Two

Tēnā koutou katoa,

The Commissioners (Judy Kavanagh, Anthony Hill and I), along with our secretariat team, have been hard at work planning for Phase Two of the Inquiry. We have been considering our terms of reference and how we can best collect evidence for this phase of the Inquiry from key decision-makers, other interested groups and the public.

A vital part of the Inquiry will be hearing from you, your friends, your whānau, and others; especially those affected by the government decisions we have been asked to review. In early 2025, we will be inviting public submissions. We will shortly provide information about how you can participate in that process.

Before opening the public submissions process, however, we will begin gathering publicly available information and collecting evidence from government agencies and other sources. This stage of evidence-gathering will commence immediately. Please take a look at [our terms of reference](#), which define the issues Phase Two will be investigating. It is important to highlight that we can only review and make recommendations to government on the matters identified in our terms of reference. Our central task is to identify lessons for the future, not to act as judges of past conduct. Ahead of public submissions formally opening in early 2025, you can contact the Inquiry at [InquiryintoCOVID-19lessons@dia.govt.nz](mailto:InquiryintoCOVID-19lessons@dia.govt.nz) if you need more information, or to make an early submission.

You can read the Phase One report on the [Inquiry's website](#). We will look to build on much of the work of Phase One of the Inquiry; specifically by looking at certain issues in more depth, like lockdowns and mandates. We will

also review some new issues including, for example, key decisions the government made as part of its COVID-19 response in relation to vaccine safety.

Our purpose is to help ensure we are well-prepared for any future pandemic, and the inevitable impact this would have, by providing carefully considered, practical recommendations to Government and the wider community to improve Aotearoa New Zealand's overall readiness. Every life matters, and every story counts; so we extend our sincere thanks for your continued interest in the work of the Inquiry. We will continue to provide regular updates on our progress over the coming months.

Ngā mihi nui,



G M Illingworth KC

Grant Illingworth

Phase One Commissioner

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## Keep up to date with the Inquiry

The Inquiry will continue to provide updates through this newsletter, our social media channels, and our website throughout Phase Two. Make sure you're subscribed to your preferred channel to keep up with our work.

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

- [Facebook](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)

- [Instagram](#)
- [YouTube](#)
- [Newsletter](#)

You can also find updates about the Inquiry on [our website](#).



Royal Commission COVID-19 Lessons

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