

TE TIRA ĀRAI URUTĀ  
**NZ ROYAL COMMISSION  
COVID-19 LESSONS LEARNED**

# PĀNUI

## COVID-19 Inquiry Newsletter: Issue 17

12 MARCH 2025

### In this issue:

- **A message from our Chair**
- **An update on public submissions**
- **Understanding the topics the Inquiry is assessing**
- **Information requests**
- **Keep up with the work of the Inquiry**

## A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR



**The Inquiry's public submissions portal has now been open for over a month.**

So far, we have received submissions from every age group, from those 18-and-under to those 85 and older. We have heard from every region in Aotearoa New Zealand (except the

Chatham Islands). We have heard from many individuals, but also from families/whānau, businesses, and iwi.

Thank you to everyone who has made a submission to the Inquiry so far – it's incredibly important that we hear from as many people as possible about their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The submissions period is open until 27 April 2025. If you or someone you know would like to make a submission, please visit [www.covid19inquiry.nz](http://www.covid19inquiry.nz) or call 0800 500 306.

As we enter March, the Inquiry has now reached the end of its establishment phase. This phase is an important part of any Inquiry, allowing us to complete work such as creating a work programme and setting a strategic direction, as well as hiring the necessary staff to support our work.

As we have now reached the end of this establishment period, we are saying farewell to some of the staff who supported this part of the Inquiry.

First, thank you and farewell to our Executive Director, Helen Potiki. Helen has been responsible for establishing the overall direction of the Inquiry, and we are very grateful for her hard work, dedication, and calm leadership during this time. We wish her all the best with her new role within the Department of Internal Affairs and for the future.

Thank you and farewell also to our Counsel Assist, Kristy McDonald KC and Nick Whittington. It is vital to any Inquiry to have the strong support of legal experts, and we are grateful for the excellent work undertaken by Kristy and Nick over the last few months.

Andrew Sweet, who recently joined the Inquiry as Head of Delivery, will be the acting Executive Director ahead of more permanent

arrangements being put in place. The process to appoint a new counsel assisting the Inquiry is underway, and we look forward to announcing an appointment soon.

Over the coming months, the Inquiry will continue to gather evidence towards our final recommendations. As well as seeking written evidence and documentation from Government Agencies and other sources, we will also begin to hold evidence-gathering meetings. We will keep you informed on the progress of these meetings as they occur.

As many of you will know, 28 February 2025 marked five years from the day the first case of COVID-19 was detected in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Aotearoa has been through a rough time in the years since, and many people are still feeling the effects of the pandemic.

That is why, even five years on, it is important that we continue with this Inquiry. We're focused on addressing questions the public want answered regarding this very difficult time, to make sure the concerns of everyone who experienced Aotearoa New Zealand's pandemic response are heard, and to help New Zealanders better understand the Government's response to COVID-19. We want to ensure that a robust Inquiry has taken place into Aotearoa New Zealand's response to COVID-19.

We are here to ensure that lessons are learned for the future, and to make sure Aotearoa New Zealand is prepared for future pandemics. We need a well-organised, resilient, robust defence to any future pandemics, and we need to be able to come together as a country to face any future pandemics. Our goal is to provide recommendations – that can be understood by all New Zealanders – to help build a strong response for the future. We are very honoured to have the opportunity to lead this Inquiry.

Ngā mihi nui,



**Grant Illingworth KC**

Chair – Phase Two

## AN UPDATE ON PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS



**The Inquiry officially opened the online public submissions portal on 3 February 2025.**

So far, the Inquiry has heard from:

- People of every age group. We have received the most submissions from the 55-64 age group (around 23% of all submissions), and the least submissions from the 18-and-under age group.
- People from every region in Aotearoa New Zealand, except the Chatham Islands. Most submissions (around 27%) have come from the Auckland region, with a significant number also coming from Northland and the Nelson-Tasman region.
- People of a range of ethnicities, including almost all ethnicities that make up the population of New Zealand.
- Individuals, families/whānau, businesses and organisations, and iwi.

You may have seen one of the advertisements sharing the opportunity to make a submission. Throughout February, March, and April, the Inquiry has a public information campaign running across social media, online advertising, print, and radio.

### **Accessible options**

To make the process of making a submission as easy as possible for as many people as possible, the Inquiry has now made available a range of accessible options to support the process of making a submission.

At [www.covid19inquiry.nz](http://www.covid19inquiry.nz) you can now find information about the submissions process in Braille, Audio, Large Print, and New Zealand Sign Language. You can also find a submission form in New Zealand Sign Language with the option to make a video submission in New Zealand Sign Language. Deaf, blind, and deafblind people can also use the NZ Relay service by contacting 0800 500 306 in order to make a submission. Information in Easy Read will be available soon.

You can also find information and submission forms in te reo Maori, Samoan, Tongan, Hindi, and Simplified Chinese.

To find these options, visit [www.covid19inquiry.nz](http://www.covid19inquiry.nz) and click on the button 'Languages and alternative formats'.

### **Phase One submissions**

Many of you made a submission to Phase One of the Inquiry. If we have your email address, you will have received an email from us directly with an update on the status of your submission.

Any submissions made to Phase One that include information relating to the topics covered by Phase Two will be considered as part of the work of Phase Two. The only exception is submissions that were marked permanently confidential, which means they can't be considered by Phase Two.

If you are not sure if your submission was permanently confidential, or if you are not sure what your submission included, you can email the Inquiry at [InquiryintoCOVID-19lessons@dia.govt.nz](mailto:InquiryintoCOVID-19lessons@dia.govt.nz) to find out.

If you have anything further to tell the Inquiry, or your submission did not cover the topics Phase Two is assessing, we encourage you to make another submission to the Inquiry.

Public submissions are open until 27 April 2025. You can make a submission at [www.covid19inquiry.nz](http://www.covid19inquiry.nz) or by calling 0800 500 306.

## UNDERSTANDING THE TOPICS THE INQUIRY IS ASSESSING



**During Phase Two, the Inquiry is assessing the following topics:**

- Vaccines, including mandates, safety, and approvals
- Lockdowns, especially the lockdowns of late 2021 onwards
- Testing, tracing, and public health materials

Many of these are large topics that cover many different areas. In particular, the Inquiry has received some queries asking to clarify what is included in the topic of vaccines, particularly regarding the scope of the vaccine safety topic, and whether it also includes vaccine efficacy.

The Inquiry will be considering available evidence from a range of sources on the use of vaccines during the COVID-19 response. The Phase One report made a useful distinction between 'vaccine efficacy' and 'vaccine effectiveness,' and this has guided our thinking about what would be considered in scope for this second phase, under the broad heading of vaccine safety. The Inquiry intends to consider vaccine safety by assessing the following areas: scientific or technical evidence regarding the health effects of COVID-19 vaccines used in Aotearoa New Zealand, the functionality of the vaccine itself, and the processes used to approve the vaccine.

However, while the Inquiry intends to consider a wide range of evidence on many aspects of vaccine safety, the Inquiry is not authorised to conduct its own laboratory studies and clinical trials regarding any COVID-19 vaccine in terms of its overall 'efficacy'.

If you have any questions about any topics included in the [terms of reference](#), please email the Inquiry at [InquiryintoCOVID-19lessons@dia.govt.nz](mailto:InquiryintoCOVID-19lessons@dia.govt.nz). For more information, you can also see our [FAQs section](#).



**INFORMATION REQUESTS**



**In January the Inquiry sent requests for information to a range of Government Agencies and other organisations involved in making key decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

These requests were issued under section 20(a) of the Inquiries Act 2013. The requests asked each agency or organisation to provide information regarding the key decisions they were involved in.

The information from these requests was due on **7 March 2025**. This evidence will be used to inform the overall work and recommendations of the Inquiry, as well as some of the next steps for evidence-gathering.

If your agency has not received an information request from the Inquiry, we may be in touch at a later date to seek information from you. If you have any questions, please contact the Inquiry team on [InquiryintoCOVID-19lessons@dia.govt.nz](mailto:InquiryintoCOVID-19lessons@dia.govt.nz)

## **KEEP UP WITH THE WORK OF THE INQUIRY**

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

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

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

OUR PURPOSE IS TO  
**LEARN FROM AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND'S  
EXPERIENCE OF THE PANDEMIC**  
TO PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE



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