

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

PĀNUI

COVID-19 Inquiry Newsletter: Issue 19

16 MAY 2025

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR



My fellow commissioners and I extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who made a public submission to the Inquiry.

Phase Two of the Inquiry received over 31,000 public submissions before the submissions portal closed on 27 April 2025.

We heard from people across Aotearoa New Zealand on every topic the Inquiry is assessing. People shared a range of experiences and insights into how the pandemic and the response to it impacted many different areas of their lives, and in many ways continues to do so.

We are grateful to those who took the time to make a submission, especially on topics that are still difficult to reflect on for some of us. The number of submissions received shows that the pandemic is still a highly important issue for many people in this country.

We will now begin the process of analysing all the submissions we have received. Hearing from the public is vitally important to the work of the Inquiry, and the submissions we have received will be very critical in informing our work.

Another significant milestone for the Inquiry is the appointment of our Executive Director, Andrew Sweet. Andrew is an economist and policy advisor with many years' experience in public sector leadership across a variety of sectors and topics. We are very grateful to have Andrew's expertise and leadership for the remainder of the Inquiry as we work to complete our programme of work and deliver our report.

The coming months will see the Inquiry complete the bulk of our evidence gathering. As well as analysing the public submissions we have received and the written evidence we have gathered from government agencies and other organisations, we will also be meeting with key decision-makers and advisors, and hearing from groups who were most impacted by the pandemic and the government's response to it. We began holding these meetings in April and

will continue to hear from a range of parties over the coming months.

We will also be holding public hearings in July and August. We will provide more information about the scope of the hearings in a future update. We can indicate, however, that these hearings will focus tightly on key decisions made by government in response to the pandemic, in 2021 and 2022, and the consequences of those decisions for the people of Aotearoa New Zealand.

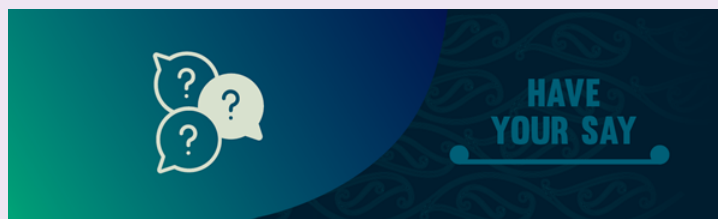
Ngā mihi nui,



Grant Illingworth KC

Chair – Phase Two

A FINAL UPDATE ON PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS



Phase Two of Te Tira Ārai Urutā – the Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 Lessons Learned received more than 31,000 submissions from community groups, businesses, organisations and the wider public.

The public submissions portal closed on Sunday 27 April 2025.

The COVID-19 Inquiry received submissions from every region in Aotearoa New Zealand, from Te Tai Tokerau Northland to Murihiku Southland. The region with the highest number of submissions was Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, with just under 7,500 submissions. The Inquiry also saw large numbers of submissions coming from Te Tai Tokerau Northland and Whakatū Nelson.

The Inquiry also heard from a range of ethnic groups and communities (NZ European, Māori, Pasifika, Asian communities, and those from the Middle East and Latin America), as well as a range of age groups (from under 18 to over 85). Nearly 25% of submissions came from those aged 55-64. The Inquiry heard from a wide range of people, with the majority of submissions coming from women (almost 60%).

The sentiment of submissions ranges widely, from those who are critical of the New Zealand Government's response as a whole, to those who are positive about the overall response, as well as many who hold mixed views about the response.

The Inquiry received submissions across all topics included in our terms of reference (vaccine mandates, approvals, and safety, lockdowns, and testing, tracing, and public health materials). Vaccine mandates, safety, and lockdowns were the most frequently discussed topics.

As well as considering the submissions received during Phase Two, the Inquiry will also be considering any non-confidential submissions from Phase One that cover topics being assessed in Phase Two, as well as information provided during the consultation on the Inquiry's terms of reference in early 2024.

All submissions will be analysed and used to inform the work of the Inquiry. If you have a question about your submission, please email

ENGAGEMENTS AND INTERVIEWS



In April the Inquiry began holding interviews with key decision-makers and advisors, as well as engagements with impacted groups.

Throughout April, the Inquiry interviewed key decision-makers and advisors regarding testing and vaccines. Our interview process is designed to discuss key decisions made by the Government regarding our key topics – vaccine mandates, safety, and approvals, lockdowns, and testing, tracing, and public health materials. This programme will continue over the coming months as the Inquiry meets with a range of key decision-makers and advisors.

The Inquiry also met with representatives of groups highly impacted by the pandemic and the Government's response to it, including representatives of the homeless and the elderly communities, and experts in contact tracing, immunisations, and misinformation and disinformation. The Inquiry intends to meet with a broad range of impacted groups over the coming months to build a full picture of the impacts of the pandemic and the pandemic response.

The Inquiry will publish a full list of interviews and engagements on a monthly basis. We will let our audiences know when this list is available.

PUBLIC HEARINGS



Phase Two of the Inquiry will hold two sessions of public hearings in mid-2025.

The first session of hearings will take place in July in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. These hearings will allow both the Inquiry and the public to hear from groups that were most impacted by the pandemic and the Government's response to it.

The second session of hearings will take place in August in Pōneke Wellington. These hearings will allow the Inquiry and the public to hear from key decision-makers and advisors to the pandemic response.

The purpose of these hearings is to give insight into the Inquiry's work and ensure that the wider public has visibility of the evidence we are gathering ahead of Inquiry's findings being released. The hearings are one of several initiatives designed to provide the public with a clear view of the Inquiry's work.

The hearings will be livestreamed via the Inquiry website, so anyone who wishes to watch the hearings can do so. The Inquiry will also provide several accessible methods for viewing and understanding the hearings. More information will be available about this soon.

Information will be available on the Inquiry website over the coming weeks regarding dates,

times, and who we expect to appear at the hearings.

The Inquiry will contact hearing witnesses from the beginning of June onwards.

APPOINTMENT OF NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Andrew Sweet has been appointed as the Executive Director of the Inquiry. He will lead the delivery of Phase Two's work programme, with the report due 26 February 2026.

Andrew is an economist and policy advisor with over 30 years of experience in the public and private sectors. Prior to joining the Inquiry, Andrew was director of Firecone New Zealand, a boutique consulting firm specialising in public policy, economic analysis and quantitative analysis.

From 2010 to 2022, Andrew worked across Government - first at the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (until 2014), providing advice directly to Prime Minister John Key and his office, and then from 2019 to 2022 as a Commissioner at the New Zealand Productivity Commission, providing leadership to the Commission and policy advice and analysis to the Government.

Andrew has worked on a wide range of policy and regulatory issues throughout his career,

including infrastructure policy and regulation, the transport sector, climate change, freshwater management, resource management policy, science and innovation policy, and social service delivery models.

STAYING INFORMED ABOUT THE WORK OF THE INQUIRY



Phase Two of the Inquiry aims to provide insight into the work and processes of the Inquiry in a range of ways.

The Inquiry currently provides regular updates on our work through this newsletter, our website, and our social media channels. We also have a number of new initiatives coming soon designed to provide further insight and access to the Inquiry's work.

- We will be livestreaming our public hearings, where we will hear from key decision-makers and those most impacted by the pandemic
- We will be publishing summaries of the engagements we have held with impacted groups
- We will be publishing a list of everyone we have met with

The Inquiry intends to continue working on initiatives to give the public insight into our work. We will keep our audiences up-to-date on any new initiatives through this newsletter as well as our other channels.

CONNECTING WITH US

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



NZ ROYAL COMMISSION COVID-19 LESSONS LEARNED

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