



COVID-19 Inquiry Pānui

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A word from our Chair, Professor Tony Blakely



Kia ora koutou

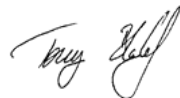
The work of the Inquiry is progressing well, with a real focus during July on meeting with key individuals and organisations in order to hear their experiences of the pandemic, and to gather their insights and reflections about future preparedness. A highlight was a visit to Tāmaki Makaurau where we met with a wide

range of organisations and individuals, including being hosted by the Employers and Manufacturers Association. We also met with Sir Collin Tukuitonga, who provided an important Pasifika perspective on the pandemic and the lessons we can draw on to ensure future preparedness. You can read more about our engagement in this latest issue of our newsletter.

While our programme of engagement is still ramping up, I have been struck in these early conversations by how open, candid and constructive those we've met with have been, both in terms of their direct experiences and involvement, but also in sharing how they believe a future pandemic should be approached. I, and my fellow Commissioners Hekia Parata and John Whitehead, are hugely grateful for this, and for the time that people have generously made available to us.

Alongside the wider information that we have gathered and continue to review, these engagements are tremendously helpful in terms of helping the Inquiry to build a picture of how the pandemic was responded to, and how we might approach one in the future. For those we have yet to meet with, I want to reiterate how valuable your insights will be, and I look forward to meeting with you.

Heoi ano ra,



Professor Tony Blakely

Royal Commission Chair

July Engagement Snapshot

Engaging with key individuals and organisations has been a particular focus on the Inquiry during July. The insights and information shared with the Commission in these engagements are essential to shaping the Inquiry's findings.

As part of a wide-ranging conversation, public health academic and public policy expert Sir Collin Tukuitonga shared a critical perspective on how a future pandemic response could be improved.



“New Zealand had a world-class response, but we failed to address the needs of Māori and Pacific people well enough. The most vulnerable groups were not well supported.”

Sir Collin also acknowledged the work of the Royal Commission, and the positive impact such a review could have.

“The public can be assured of its independence, as the highest form of inquiry.”



Commissioners also met with the Employers and Manufacturers Association while in Tāmaki Makaurau, where the Chair, Chief Executive, members, and senior staff shared their on the ground experiences.



Key points the EMA wanted to share with the Inquiry about how a future pandemic could be approached included:

- A need for more regional variations and input into any national response, especially if the response includes lockdowns
- More trust in businesses to manage the response to the rules provided, rather than selecting which businesses that can and can't open. Monitor, audit and enforce those rules.
- Better co-ordination between various government departments and clear lines of communication between the decision makers and the affected stakeholders
- Work with those stakeholders to design a better response for businesses and their communities and avoid or mitigate unintended consequences.

The EMA feel the value of the Commission is in its willingness to hear different perspectives and make recommendations that will make the country's response to future pandemics more effective and less socially and economically damaging.

Melissa Hodd (pictured below), Head of Government Relations for Foodstuffs NZ gives her perspective:

“As an essential service provider during the COVID-19 response, we appreciate the opportunity the Commission is providing to share our experiences and learnings. Our key message to the Commission is that government cannot develop fully fit-for-purpose responses to such events in isolation; those working at the coal face need a voice and to be heard. Ideally, we would have a seat at the table to help shape the advice provided to decision-makers and the opportunity to partner with government to co-design policy measures that will work operationally at the front-line. In essence we need to be “better together”.



Commissioners also had a valuable engagement with members of the disabled people’s COVID-19 reference group, a group that was brought together during the pandemic by the former Office for Disability Issues.

Commissioners greatly appreciated the opportunity to hear the broad range of perspectives and experiences from the group, and it was an extremely useful initial engagement with the disabled community. They particularly acknowledge the willingness of people to share their views and experiences so openly, given how challenging the pandemic was for many. There was a number of key points made which Commissioners will explore further as part of the Inquiry.



Above: Commissioners and secretariat staff meet with the Disabled People's COVID-19 Reference Group

Introducing new Executive Director Justine Cornwall

The Royal Commission was joined by a new executive director at the beginning of July. After completing her PhD in social psychology at Victoria University of Wellington, Dr Justine Cornwall has held many senior roles across the public sector. Justine was the Deputy Children's Commissioner for three years, where she oversaw work on child poverty and the statutory monitoring of Oranga Tamariki.

Justine has led work on a range of complex social issues, including reviews of the Domestic Violence Act and of the Independent Oversight of the Children's System. Most recently, she has held senior roles within the Ministry of Social Development, and led the establishment of Whaikaha the Ministry of Disabled People.

"It's my privilege to be supporting our three Commissioners in this vitally important mahi. Every New Zealander was affected by COVID-19 in some way – and so it's essential that we capture the lessons from the extraordinary sacrifices that were made."



Updated meeting procedures guidance

We have [published additional meeting procedure guidance on our website](#), which outlines the approach we are taking to meetings and information provided to the Royal Commission. The purpose of the guidance is to ensure that for everyone we meet with, they can be confident about what to expect from the engagement, and be clear about how we will use the information they provide to us.

There are a few key points to highlight from the guidance. During meetings, we will take notes on information provided for the purposes of the Inquiry. It's important that people feel they can share information and perspectives in a free and frank manner, so all content discussed in meetings with the Commissioners will remain confidential.

If the Inquiry considers there is a particular reason for attributing information to a particular person or organisation, we will seek their permission to do so. Any attribution in the final report will also be subject to natural justice and fact-checking processes.



Royal Commission COVID-19 Lessons

<https://www.covid19lessons.royalcommission.nz/>

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