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## COVID-19 Inquiry Newsletter: Issue 24

1 DECEMBER 2025

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## A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR



**Welcome to the last issue of our COVID-19 Inquiry Pānui for 2025.**

The Inquiry continues to make good progress towards completing our final report. We are currently working to incorporate feedback received through the natural justice process, as well as finalise our lessons and recommendations section. We anticipate that by the end of 2025 we will have a completed draft, and when the Inquiry team returns after the holiday break we will turn our attention to the task of producing the final published report.

As mentioned in our last newsletter, we have recently welcomed a new Executive Director, Helen Wyn. As Executive Director, Helen will lead the Secretariat staff and work with Commissioners to complete Phase Two of the Inquiry and deliver our final report.

Helen has been with the Inquiry for several weeks, and we are delighted to have her extensive expertise and capability on board as we complete the final stage of the Inquiry. We have taken the opportunity to further introduce Helen to you all below.

In anticipation of our report being publicly released, we've focused again in this issue on key aspects of our terms of reference. A primary focus of Phase Two of the Inquiry is to review key decisions made by the New Zealand Government across specific areas of the pandemic response. We have been asked to assess these decisions using defined criteria, and to provide findings on the decisions themselves, as well as recommendations on decision-making to prepare for future pandemics. By setting this out here, we hope to assist you – and the many others interested in our work – to have greater insights as to what we intend to address in our final report.

The Inquiry team will take a short break over

the Christmas and New Year period, beginning 24 December and returning 8 January 2026. Should you have any queries for the Inquiry during this time, please contact us via email and we will reply to you as soon as possible.

We hope you have a restful holiday break and summer, and we look forward to updating you again in the new year.

Ngā mihi nui,



**Grant Illingworth KC**  
Chair – Phase Two

## WELCOMING HELEN WYN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



**The Inquiry is pleased to welcome Helen Wyn as our new Executive Director.**

Helen will lead the final stage of the Inquiry, including the development and delivery of the Phase Two report, due to the Governor-General on 26 February 2026.

Helen brings a wealth of public sector experience spanning several decades to the Inquiry. In particular, Helen has an extensive knowledge of Government leadership and the art and process of Government decision-making. She has worked with, and worked as, a senior Government executive, and worked closely with Ministers during her career.

Helen has ten years' experience as a deputy chief executive across several Government departments, including five years as the head of the Policy Advisory Group in Te Tari o te Pirimia me te Komiti Matua - the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Helen has also worked on a range of public policy and regulatory matters in the health, justice, and social sectors. She has worked in leadership roles at Manatū Hauora - the Ministry of Health, Te Tāhū o te Ture - the Ministry of Justice, Te Tari Taiwhenua - the Department of Internal Affairs, and as acting chief executive at Manatū Taonga - the Ministry for Culture and Heritage. Most recently, Helen has spent time working within a Māori-led organisation on governance and Ministerial advice to improve health outcomes for Māori.

## THE INQUIRY'S TERMS OF REFERENCE - KEY DECISIONS



## All Royal Commissions of Inquiry are governed by a terms of reference.

All Royal Commissions of Inquiry are governed by a terms of reference. The terms of reference sets out important details about the Inquiry, such as who the Commissioners are, what matter the Inquiry has been asked to look into, and what areas specifically the Inquiry should and should not make findings on as part of its work.

As the COVID-19 Inquiry enters its final stages and prepares to submit our report, we wanted to share more detail about what we have been working on and what topics will be covered – and what topics won't be covered – in our final report.

As part of this newsletter and the next, the Inquiry will share further information on different parts of our terms of reference as we get closer to delivering our final report.

You can view the full terms of reference [here](#).

### Key decisions

Phase Two of the Inquiry has been asked to review **key decisions** made by the New Zealand Government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 and 2022.

A **key decision** is a decision made by the Government that could or did impact a large number of people or that had a significant cost at a regional or national level – or both.

The Inquiry has specifically been asked to review decisions made between February 2021 and October 2022 regarding:

- **The use of vaccines in response to COVID-19**, specifically vaccine mandates, the approval of COVID-19 vaccines, and vaccine safety (including the monitoring and reporting of adverse reactions). Some key decisions that were made in this category include the decision to mandate certain workers, such as healthcare workers, to get vaccinated or the decision to approve the COVID-19 vaccines that were available in New Zealand. The Inquiry is allowed to consider key decisions on vaccines that were made before February 2021 as long as they are relevant to the terms of reference.
- **The use of lockdowns**, covering both the decision to put them in place and the decision/s to maintain them over time. We have specifically been asked to look at the national lockdown in August and September 2021, as well as the Auckland and Northland lockdown in September 2021. Some key decisions that were made in this category include the decision to use lockdowns in August and September, and the decision/s to extend the Auckland and Northland lockdown.
- **The procurement, development, and distribution of testing and tracing technologies and non-pharmaceutical public health materials** (like masks), specifically the impact of private sector involvement. Key decisions in this category include the decision/s made to use RAT tests and when they were made available.

In order to review these key decisions, the Inquiry has been asked to look at whether these decisions were well-informed and whether they

had consequences that could not have been predicted.

The Inquiry will assess:

- If decisions the Government made were informed by advice on social and economic disruptions, especially social division, health, education, and the economy.
- If the decisions made reflected the advice given to decision-makers at the time.
- If these decisions considered experiences from other countries in similar situations.
- If these decisions balanced addressing the pandemic and minimising social and economic disruptions.
- If these decisions had consequences that could not have been predicted, including consequences that have happened after October 2022.

While making our assessment, we will consider Aotearoa New Zealand's circumstances and what was known when the decision was made, as well as what decisions were made by other countries in similar circumstances.

Once we have made our assessment on these decisions, we will make recommendations on what the Government should take into account when making future decisions to best prepare New Zealand to respond to future pandemics.

Our Phase Two report will cover our review of these key decisions, our findings on how these decisions were made, and our recommendations for future decision-making.

### Next issue

In the next issue, the Inquiry will cover areas and topics that are not included in the Inquiry's terms of reference.

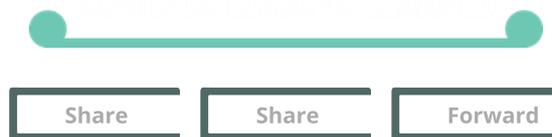
## CONNECT WITH US

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- [Facebook](#)
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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



THE NEW ZEALAND ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO COVID-19  
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