

COVID-19 Inquiry Pānui

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A word from our Chair, Professor Tony Blakely



Kia ora koutou,

This past month saw us achieve a significant milestone for the Inquiry. As of the end of September the Commissioners and I have met with more than 100 organisations, individuals, and community groups across a wide range of topics and areas of interest including educational institutions, businesses, health providers, service providers, community leaders

and government representatives. Recent highlights have included visits to Ōtautahi Christchurch and to Tairāwhiti Gisborne to hear a range of voices and perspectives on the pandemic, as well as visits to several health providers to see firsthand how they responded to COVID-19 and to discuss what lessons they think we might be able to learn ahead of any future pandemic.

Thank you to those across Aotearoa New Zealand who have met with us so far. These engagements continue to be incredibly informative, and we very much appreciate the commitment of New Zealanders to share their COVID-19 experiences with us. We recognise that doing so can be very challenging for some.

You can read more about our regional visits below.

In terms of engagement more generally, I wanted to also touch on the recent survey we undertook via Auckland Council People's Panel. Nearly 3000 Aucklanders responded to the survey – my thanks to all those who took the time to provide us with these valuable insights. We'll use them to inform how best to engage going forward, and as an early indication about the areas of our Inquiry people are likely to want to feedback on. This is especially important for us given Auckland's experience was different from many other parts of the country.

We look forward to opening [public submissions](#) to everyone who would like to share their COVID-19 experience with us from late November.

Throughout October, the Inquiry has also been seeking early written submissions from organisations throughout Aotearoa New Zealand that played a significant role during the pandemic. Thank you to those organisations who have taken the time to create a written

submission so far - we appreciate the time and thought that goes into each submission.

If you have been invited to make an early submission and you have any questions, or if you would like to make a submission on behalf of an organisation and have not been contacted by us, please get in touch with the Inquiry [here](#).

Heoi ano ra,



Professor Tony Blakely

Royal Commission Chair

Inquiry continues regional visits

During September and October, the Commissioners made visits to Tairāwhiti Gisborne and Ōtautahi Christchurch.

Tairāwhiti Gisborne

The Commissioners visited Tairāwhiti Gisborne at the end of September. During the visit they met with Chairs and Chief Executives of local Iwi, Iwi health providers, the emergency response team from Gisborne District Council, the Public Health Unit, local health providers, and schools and training providers. The engagements gave the Inquiry real insight into the experience of the region during the pandemic, exploring topics such as how the needs of the community were met, wellbeing, local leadership, efforts to address inequalities, and their relationships with central government.

Our Chair Professor Blakely also spoke with the [Gisborne Herald](#) about the work of the Inquiry, describing the meetings so far as “incredibly productive”.



From left: Nori Parata, David Langford, Brent Mokokoko, Hon Hekia Parata (Commissioner), Tom Cairns, Billie-Jean Potaka-Ayton, John Whitehead (Commissioner) and Jodie Cook at the Tairāwhiti Gisborne education sector forum.

Ōtautahi Christchurch

In early October the Commissioners travelled to Ōtautahi Christchurch.

During the visit, Commissioners held forums with rural and farming representatives, businesses and economic agencies, local government, and primary care doctors and organisations. They also met with representatives from Te Whatu Ora.

Outside of our formal engagements, participants shared some key points.

“For our business it happened at a time which was critical to us – harvest time for wineries. The industry achieving essential industry status was crucial. It put a lot of stress on people but also built a lot of resilience,” says Brendon Gredig, Chief Operating Officer, Giesen Group.

“We can be a bit hypercritical. I think it’s really important we reflect on how well we did as a country. That collective and community response was really important and in the health system the flexibility, agility, and hard work people put in was really quite phenomenal,”

says Dr Hannah Gordon, Clinical Lead for the Canterbury Primary Response Group.

Professor Blakely also visited Nurse Maude, Rosewood Lifecare, and the regional Public Health Unit. These visits were an opportunity to see firsthand how the COVID-19 pandemic was managed in the health sector.

This visit also gave Commissioners insight into how a region that has had to respond to a range of emergencies and crisis events in recent years applied the learnings from those experiences to the pandemic, as well as the opportunity to hear how the pandemic experience differed in the South Island from the North Island.

“Communications at a central government level to the public were very good. I think that in emergency management we already have plans for how we do things. I think if we had used the existing influenza pandemic plan, we wouldn’t have spent so much time reinventing the wheel and I think that would have saved us a lot of time,” says James Thomson – Response Manager, Emergency Coordination Centre, Canterbury.

Watch the video below to hear more from the stakeholders the Inquiry met with in Ōtautahi Christchurch.



Other engagements

The Commissioners also continued to engage with organisations and individuals throughout

Aotearoa, speaking with businesses, educational institutions and bodies, government agencies, and scientific researchers, and visited Auckland City Hospital and Palmerston North Hospital to learn more about pandemic experiences and preparedness for future pandemics.

You can view all the engagements the Inquiry has held so far on [our website](#).

Early submissions to the Inquiry

In September, the Inquiry contacted organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand that played a key role in the pandemic response. These included organisations that support our communities and our regions across health, education, justice, business and more.

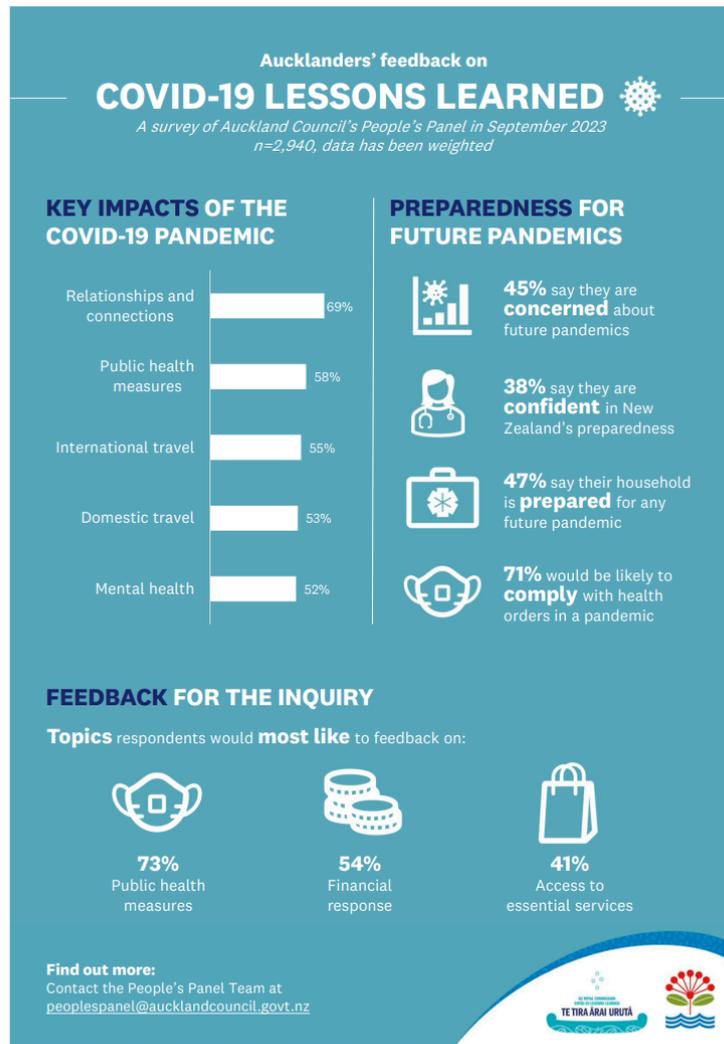
The Inquiry invited these organisations to provide us with a written submission, as well as copies of any publicly available information they may have prepared or produced, that covers their insights, reflections, and perspectives on the pandemic and how Aotearoa New Zealand can prepare for the future. Each submission we receive will help inform the Inquiry's final report.

Thank you to those who have provided a submission so far.

Any questions about the early submissions process can be directed to InquiryintoCOVID-19lessons@dia.govt.nz.

Those looking to make a submission can also review the Inquiry's [Terms of Reference](#) to confirm what information should be included with the submission.

Snapshot of results from the People's Panel survey



At the end of September 2023, the Inquiry conducted a survey of Aucklanders with the support of the [Auckland Council People's Panel](#).

Nearly 3000 people responded to the survey, which was intended to help inform how best to engage with people going forward, provide us with an early indication about the areas of our Inquiry people are likely to want to feedback on and inform how we ask for input during our public campaign.

While the survey respondents were self-selected and therefore not necessarily representative of all New Zealanders, it was interesting to see the results. These insights

were also useful given Auckland's pandemic experience was different from many other parts of the country. Key findings from the survey included that when it came to the impacts of COVID-19, respondents said they felt the most impact:

- in their relationships (69%),
- from public health measures (58%),
- on their travel plans (international 55%, domestic 53%),
- on their mental health (52%)

Respondents also said they would most like to provide feedback to the Inquiry on:

- public health measures (73%),
- the financial response to the pandemic (54%)
- access to essential services (41%).

Respondents were also asked about attitudes and preparedness towards future pandemics. 45% of respondents were concerned about future pandemics, while around 47% said their households were prepared for a future pandemic. 38% thought New Zealand as a country was prepared for a future pandemic, and 71% said they would be likely to comply with future health orders.

Thank you to those who took part in the survey.



Royal Commission COVID-19 Lessons

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

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