

## Te Tira Ārai Urutā – the Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 Lessons Learned

### Summaries of engagements held by the Inquiry June 2025

*These engagement summaries highlight the key points raised by a range of stakeholders to inform the Inquiry's evidence-base.*

#### **Midwives' peak bodies forum**

Representatives at this forum told the Inquiry that the vaccine mandates were one of the most challenging periods for midwifery organisations. Many midwives left the profession, which created geographic inequities in particular in rural areas.

Some guidance on how to operate safely during lockdowns developed slowly, requiring professional organisations to provide leadership and advice. We also heard that disruptions to clinical placements particularly affected Auckland-based students. To offset this, peak bodies provided case-by-case exemptions and increased simulation hours.

For future pandemics, representatives recommended that alternative risk management approaches be considered and coordination between health authorities and peak bodies be improved.

#### **Education-focused forum**

Representatives from education-focused Crown entities told the Inquiry that:

- the education sector showcased flexibility and innovation with how education was delivered – including educational television programs and distance assessments tools.
- significant digital divide issues emerged during the lockdowns – particularly affecting South and West Auckland communities.
- extended periods of disrupted learning created lasting effects for learners, including chronic attendance issues and, for some, psychological trauma around the feeling of uncertainty.

They recommended that for future pandemic preparedness, hybrid learning capabilities be maintained, business continuity plans be developed, and sustainable exit strategies from emergency interventions be created.

### **Aku Huia Kaimanawa Midwives Collective**

Representatives of the Collective told the Inquiry that vaccine mandates violated the principles of informed consent, bodily autonomy and professional ethics. They described significant impacts on maternity care access, particularly in rural communities where midwife shortages were experienced. A noticeable shift away from continuity of care models towards hospital-based care became apparent as a result of the shortages.

### **Ngā Maia Trust, Māori Midwives ō Aotearoa**

Māori midwives, comprising 10% of the midwives workforce, experienced significant effects from the vaccine mandates. Representatives described how many midwives faced financial hardship, lost homes, or relied on benefits during the mandate period. Some viewed the mandates as breaching Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles, particularly around the protection of taonga and tino rangatiratanga.

The representatives also described how many Māori families lost trusted midwives who had supported them generationally, disrupting long-established care relationships within communities.

For future pandemics, representatives suggested that an individual's ability to make an informed choice be respected, multiple sources of information be available for access, and traditional health practices be better integrated.

### **Te Aka Hāpai | New Zealand Police Association**

Representatives from the New Zealand Police Association told the Inquiry that:

- while the public was initially compliant during the early lockdowns, extended restrictions created increased pushbacks and enforcement difficulties.
- crime patterns notably changed, with house burglaries decreasing and family harm incidents increasing (which complicated how police were able to respond due to other government agencies not operating normally).
- iwi-led border checks created legal complexities for police enforcement.
- factual information shared on social media was often countered by misinformation, creating a challenging space for engagement.

They recommended that clear protocols and legislative frameworks be established before a future pandemic to ensure everyone understands their roles and responsibilities.

