

Summary of the terms of reference for the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Lessons Learned from Aotearoa New Zealand's Response to COVID-19 That Should Be Applied in Preparation for a Future Pandemic

Purpose of inquiry

The purpose of the inquiry is to strengthen Aotearoa New Zealand's preparedness for, and response to, any future pandemic by identifying those lessons learned from New Zealand's response to COVID-19 that should be applied in preparation for any future pandemic.

Scope of inquiry

The scope of the inquiry is the lessons learned from New Zealand's response to COVID-19 that should be applied in preparation for any future pandemic in the following areas:

- the legislative, regulatory, and operational settings required to support New Zealand's public health response to a pandemic;
- communication with, engagement of, and enabling people and communities to mobilise and act in support of both personal and community public health outcomes over an extended period;
- the legislative, regulatory, and operational settings needed to ensure the continued supply of goods and services required to enable people to isolate or otherwise take protective measures for an extended period during a pandemic;
- the legislative, regulatory, and operational settings required to support New Zealand's immediate economic response to a future pandemic;
- the decision-making structures and arrangements that might be used or put in place during an evolving pandemic of extended length;
- consideration of the interests of Māori in the context of a pandemic, consistent with the Te Tiriti o Waitangi relationship;
- consideration of the impact on, and differential support for, essential workers and populations and communities that may be disproportionately impacted by a pandemic.

The inquiry may assess whether New Zealand's initial elimination strategy and later minimisation and protection strategy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and supporting economic and other measures, were effective in limiting the spread of infection and limiting the impact of the virus on vulnerable groups and the health system, having regard to New Zealand's circumstances, what was known at the time, and the strategies adopted by comparable jurisdictions.

The inquiry should consider the strategies, settings, and measures identified above as they existed or operated between February 2020 and October 2022, and not outside those dates.

Matters upon which recommendations are sought

The inquiry should make recommendations on the public health strategies and supporting economic and other measures that New Zealand should apply in preparation for any future pandemic, in relation to the principal matters within the inquiry's scope, by applying relevant lessons learned from New Zealand's response to COVID-19 and the response from comparable jurisdictions.

Limits to inquiry's scope

The following matters are outside the scope of the inquiry:

- particular clinical decisions made by clinicians or by public health authorities during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- how and when the strategies and other measures devised in response to COVID-19 were implemented or applied in particular situations or in individual cases;
- the specific epidemiology of the COVID-19 virus and its variants;
- vaccine efficacy;
- the recent reforms to New Zealand's health system, including the organisational arrangements for public health services;
- the judgments and decisions of courts and tribunals and independent agencies such as the Ombudsman, the Privacy Commissioner, or the Independent Police Conduct Authority relating to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- the operation of the private sector, except where the private sector delivers services integral to a pandemic response;
- particular decisions taken by the Reserve Bank's independent monetary policy committee during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- any adaptation of court procedures by the judiciary during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- any adaptation of parliamentary processes during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- the conduct of the general election during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Timing

The inquiry may begin considering evidence on 1 February 2023.

The inquiry must deliver its report by 26 June 2024.