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Major study on COVID-19 impacts in Aotearoa launched

A nationwide study to assess the impacts of COVID-19 on people in Aotearoa New Zealand has been launched today by Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington.

The “Impacts of COVID-19 in Aotearoa—Ngā Kawekawe o Mate Korona” study, funded by the Ministry of Health, aims to survey people aged 16 and over who had COVID-19, or were a probable case, before 1 December 2021.

Nearly 9,000 eligible people will be contacted by letter and text over the next two weeks inviting them to complete online surveys about their experiences of COVID-19 and the healthcare services they received.

The study is led by Dr Lynne Russell (Ngāti Kahungunu, Rangitāne, Kāi Tahu, Ngāti Porou) and Dr Mona Jeffreys, who head-up a multi-disciplinary team of researchers, primarily from the University’s Te Hikuwai Rangahau Hauora—Health Services Research Centre. Dr Marianna Churchward (Lotofaga, Faleasiu, Samoa) leads the Pacific arm of the research.

“We want as many people as possible to take part in the surveys so we can understand their experiences of COVID-19 and assess the effectiveness of the services they received,” Dr Russell said.

A series of interviews with COVID-19 survivors will also be conducted as part of the research.

Insights gained from the study will be used to provide recommendations to the Ministry of Health on how to better support people with COVID-19 and improve health services in the future.

Survey questions that participants will be invited to answer focus on four areas:

- the support they received (and would have liked) when they were first diagnosed with COVID-19, and how the situation affected them and their whānau
- their experience after getting COVID-19 and the quality of the health services they accessed
- the financial costs of COVID-19 to them and their whānau, and who (if anyone) helped care for them
- Long COVID and symptoms that continued to affect their health beyond the first month of getting the virus.

Dr Russell said the effects of COVID-19 on Māori, Pacific communities and whānau hauā (disabled communities) are a key focus of the research.

Jenene Crossan, who was the 37th COVID-19 case in Aotearoa, is among those already signed up to participate in the study, and is one of four people who has had COVID-19 advising the research team.

Jenene tested positive for COVID-19 in 2020 and has since suffered from Long COVID symptoms. She's encouraging others who have had COVID-19 to take part in the study.

"The more we come together to understand the impacts of the virus on our people, the better we can serve and protect our tamariki and whānau."

Speaking up "may not be comfortable, but it is the right thing to do and I hope it is rewarding for those who bravely step up," Jenene said.

Any information participants provide to the research team would be kept strictly confidential, Dr Jeffreys said.

"We know some people may be reluctant to share information because of the stigma associated with COVID-19 infection. We want to reassure participants that their identities will remain confidential unless they give us permission to release that information," she said.

People who want to participate can go to covid.aotearoa.com. Alternatively, they can call 0800 800 581 or email covid.aotearoa@vuw.ac.nz.

For more information, contact [Dr Lynne Russell](mailto:lynne.russell@vuw.ac.nz) on lynne.russell@vuw.ac.nz or 022 359 8212, or [Dr Mona Jeffreys](mailto:mona.jeffreys@vuw.ac.nz) on mona.jeffreys@vuw.ac.nz or 027 418 7455, or Dr Marianna Churchward on marianna.churchward@vuw.ac.nz or 027 727 3870.

Additional comments from those involved in the study are also available [here](#).

Study Q&A

Q: What is this study about?

A: The "Impacts of COVID-19 in Aotearoa—Ngā Kawekawe o Mate Korona" study aims to understand the experiences of people who had COVID-19 or were a probable case. Researchers want to know about the impact COVID-19 has had on the health and well-being of these individuals and their whānau.

Note: a "probable case" is someone who probably had COVID, based on symptoms and contact with a known case, but this was not confirmed by testing (either because the person wasn't tested or had a false negative test result).

Q: Who can take part?

A: Anyone in Aotearoa New Zealand who is aged 16 and over, and had COVID-19—or were a probable case—before 1 December 2021 can take part. This includes people who had it at the beginning of the pandemic or more recently, as well as people who contracted COVID-19 overseas before returning to Aotearoa New Zealand.

Q: How do I participate?

A: Eligible people can take part by completing the surveys at covid.aotearoa.com. There are four surveys: participants can complete as many as they like or only those that are relevant to them. Those wanting to take part can also call 0800 800 581 or email covid.aotearoa@vuw.ac.nz.

Q: What will happen to participants' information?

A: Information collected from participants will be stored securely. Only members of the research team will have access to the data. No participants will be identifiable in any of the results, unless the person gives their permission to release this information.

Q: How will the results be used?

A: Results will be used to provide recommendations to the Ministry of Health on how to better support people with COVID-19.

Q: Who is funding the study?

A: The study is funded by the Ministry of Health. A total of \$1.2 million, over 12 months, has been provided to Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington for the study. Te Hikuwai Rangahau Hauora—Health Services Research Centre, at the University’s Te Wāhanga Tātai Hauora—Faculty of Health, is leading the research.

Issued by Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington principal adviser—media content Jessica Wilson: jessica.m.wilson@vuw.ac.nz or 021 837 742

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