



IMPACTS OF COVID-19 IN AOTEAROA NGĀ KAWEKAWE O MATE KORONA

Pacific research team gathers insights on COVID-19 survivors

Amplifying the survival stories of Pacific peoples who've experienced COVID-19 is critical for systemic change in Aotearoa New Zealand, says leading Pacific human rights advocate Tuiloma Lina Samu.

Tuiloma is the Tangata Tiriti Kaitiaki and Pacific governance member for the "Impacts of COVID-19 in Aotearoa—Ngā Kawekawe o Mate Korona" study, launched on 8 February by Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington. Funded by the Ministry of Health, the project aims to survey people age 16 and over who had COVID-19, or were considered a probable case, before 1 December 2021.

Nearly 9,000 eligible people have been contacted by letter and text inviting them to complete online surveys about their experiences of COVID-19 and the healthcare services they received.

"COVID-19 has highlighted the social and economic inequities facing many Pacific peoples," says Tuiloma. "Pacific peoples represent 29 percent of COVID-19 cases in Aotearoa and 34 percent of all hospitalised cases. But the stories of how they've been affected are largely unheard."

Pacific people's viewpoints and lived realities are often silenced and/or overlooked on issues of tremendous importance, says Tuiloma. She adds that this is a crucial time in human history where inequities are only increasing for people who are already heavily disadvantaged.

"The majority of Pacific families in Aotearoa are doing it hard in difficult circumstances in this pandemic. We need to understand how they are being resilient in this adversity."

Tuiloma was the first appointed human rights advisor for Pacific peoples at the New Zealand Human Rights Commission, working with Race Relations Commissioners, and is a well-known champion for Pacific Rainbow people. Tuiloma now works at the Ministry for Pacific Peoples as the principal advisor, cultural practice lead.

Being invited to co-chair the "Impacts of COVID-19 in Aotearoa—Ngā Kawekawe o Mate Korona" study is an honour, says Tuiloma.

"Our Pacific research team is made up of experts in Pacific health, health equity, epidemiology, statistics, health economics, health services research, qualitative research methods and disability research. Dr Marianna Churchward, senior Pacific research fellow, is leading the team, which includes research fellows Dr Lanuola Asiasiga, Dr Sione Vaka, Dr Analosa Veukiso-Ulugia, biostatistician Dr Jesse Kokaua and Samoan researcher Myra McFarland-Tautau."

"They will collect and analyse data related to Pacific participants and will interpret the findings from a Pacific point of view. We want to ensure that the voices of Pacific peoples are heard in the study report and recommendations to the Ministry of Health."

One of the Pacific voices supporting the study is Samoan COVID-19 survivor [Tuala Tagaloa Tamasese Tusani](#). He describes his experiences with the coronavirus as scary, painful and

leaving him feeling perilously close to death. The 44-year old Samoan entrepreneur contracted the Delta variant of COVID-19 in September 2021 and spent four days in Middlemore Hospital and eight days in Auckland Hospital.

“For five days straight, I couldn’t sleep, the pain was so sore,” recalls Tuala. “My fever reached 40°C and I caught pneumonia. When an islander goes to hospital we don’t think we’re coming out, we go there to die. I was close to giving up in hospital.”

Tuala is encouraging others who have had COVID-19 to take part in the study.

“A lot of people are whakamā (embarrassed), like it’s a degrading disease whereas for me I don’t see it like that,” says Tuala. “Our experiences could be of benefit, not just to Pacific peoples, but Kiwis in general.”

Tuiloma says meaningful engagement with Pacific communities will be critical to the success of the Pacific component of the study.

“We will use our Pacific values to build relationships, show respect for knowledge holders, ensure reciprocity and disseminate research findings in ways that Pacific peoples can access them.”

As well, Tuiloma says holding the Tiriti o Waitangi relationship for people who are Te Tiriti partners is important in her role as Tangata Tiriti Kaitiaki.

“The study is grounded in Te Tiriti principles: tino rangatiratanga, equity, partnership, options and active protection. Te Tiriti belongs to everyone in Aotearoa New Zealand. Therefore as non-Māori, we need to be honourable partners alongside tangata taketake/Māori as the indigenous peoples of this land. Te Tiriti lays guidelines for us to get the best outcomes as a nation, taking into account all voices so that people can make the best informed decisions for themselves and their whānau.”

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

For more information or to request media interviews, contact Dr Marianna Churchward on 027 727 3870 or email marianna.churchward@vuw.ac.nz.

Profiles of Pacific research team

Dr Marianna Churchward—Pacific research team lead

Dr Churchward is a qualitative researcher who has worked across several large projects and roles in the capacity of Pacific researcher. She has worked as a researcher/independent researcher in both the university, government and private sector. Marianna is currently working across several projects including a Health Research Council of New Zealand-funded project understanding the experiences of Pacific families with complex needs with respect to health care and social service delivery.

Dr Lanuola Asiasiga—senior research fellow

Dr Asiasiga’s research interest is Pacific people’s wellbeing and most of her research projects have touched on some aspect of this. She was formerly a researcher at Massey University’s Centre for Public Health Research and has been involved in survey work and evaluation. She is now an independent researcher and evaluator.

Dr Sione Vaka—senior research fellow

Dr Sione Vaka is a senior lecturer in the School of Clinical Science at Auckland University of Technology. In 2019, he won the research award from the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses and has also been awarded with many research grants, including the Sir

Thomas Davis Research Fellowship from the Health Research Council of New Zealand in 2021.

Dr Jesse Kokaua—biostatistician and senior research fellow

Dr Jesse Kokaua works in the University of Otago's Va'a O Tautai—Centre for Pacific Health, a part of Te Wāhanga Matua Mātau Hauora—Division of Health Sciences. Dr Kokaua is a statistician who has worked for the Ministry of Health and has a special interest in mental health and the Pacific community.

Dr Analosa Veukiso-Ulugia—senior research fellow

Dr Analosa Veukiso-Ulugia is a Pacific community researcher and has taught in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Auckland. A health professional specialising in Pacific youth health, Analosa is committed to the empowerment of Pacific communities, specifically in the area of sexual health and mental wellbeing. Analosa draws on over 15 years of clinical, community, research and management experience.

Myra McFarland-Tautau—researcher

Myra McFarland-Tautau is a Samoan researcher working at Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington. Her background is in social science research (qualitative/quantitative). She has been involved in a variety of research relating to Pacific health and wellbeing (young and elderly), and general research. A native Samoan speaker, she is an experienced Samoan language teacher at the university within the 'Mataupu Tau Samoa' and Va'aomanu Pasifika, and with expatriates moving to Samoa. She is skilled in Samoan translation and interpreting as well as cultural consultancy. She is involved in work with the wider Pacific community and relates to other ethnic communities.

Tali Uia—researcher

Tali is a Master's student at Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington. She is interested in health promotion and Pacific health.

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.