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More support needed for people with COVID-19, preliminary survey results show

Many people who have caught COVID-19 feel they did not get the healthcare needed to cope with the illness, preliminary results from a nationwide study show.

The “Impacts of COVID-19 in Aotearoa—Ngā Kawekawe o Mate Korona” study was launched by Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington in February. The study is investigating the experiences of people who had COVID-19 before 1 December 2021.

“So far, results suggest people with COVID-19 require more healthcare and social service support, and that many did not receive the support they needed to manage their illness,” says Dr Mona Jeffreys, co-leader of the study.

Nearly 900 people have participated in the research so far, with 400 completing a series of four surveys about their experience of the illness.

One in five survey respondents reported barriers to seeing their GP, mainly due to appointment availability and cost, Dr Jeffreys says.

“These barriers were more likely to be faced by those who were sick for longer than a month,” she says.

“Results suggest many people needed a high level of support from their GP while they were sick, with 40 percent seeing their doctor four or more times.”

Many respondents also reported needing better access to mental health support.

“Twenty-nine percent said they did not get mental health support but would have found this useful. Women were twice as likely as men to say this would have helped,” she says.

A significant proportion of respondents provided suggestions for other services that would have been useful while they were ill. These suggestions included:

- delivery of food parcels (21 percent of respondents)
- help with collecting prescriptions (18 percent)
- help with accommodation (14 percent)
- support to keep working (12 percent).
- help with applying for Work and Income support (11 percent)
- childcare assistance (6 percent).

“We know a lot of support is being offered by iwi, Māori and Pacific health and social service providers, and other groups. However, the survey data suggest additional services may be needed for some people with COVID-19,” Dr Jeffreys says.

Survey research is continuing until the end of April 2022. To add to information about people's experience, qualitative data will also be collected through interviews with up to 75 participants.

"We hope more people will participate. The more people who complete the surveys, the more information we can provide to the Ministry of Health to help get people the care they need," Dr Jeffrey says.

The surveys are open to anyone aged 16 or over who had COVID-19 (or were a probable case) before 1 December 2021. People who are eligible can go to <https://covid.aotearoa.com> to take part. Alternatively, they can call 0800 800 581 or email covid.aotearoa@vuw.ac.nz.

For further information, contact study co-leaders Dr Mona Jeffrey on mona.jeffreys@vuw.ac.nz or 027 418 7455, or Dr Lynne Russell (Ngāti Kahungunu, Rangitāne, Kāi Tahu, Ngāti Porou) on lynne.russell@vuw.ac.nz or 022 359 8212.

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