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Royal Commission to draw lessons from pandemic response



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HON JAN TINETTI(/MINISTER/HON-JAN-TINETTI)

Prime Minister (/portfolio/labour-2020-2023/prime-minister)

Internal Affairs (/portfolio/labour-2020-2023/internal-affairs)

A Royal Commission to prepare New Zealand for future pandemics through lessons learned from COVID-19 has been announced by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern today.

“Every country in the world has grappled with COVID-19 and there was no playbook for managing it,” Jacinda Ardern said.

“It had been over 100 years since we experienced a pandemic of this scale, so it’s critical we compile what worked and what we can learn from it should it ever happen again.

“New Zealand experienced fewer cases, hospitalisations and deaths than nearly any other country in the first two years of the pandemic but there has undoubtedly been a huge impact on New Zealanders both here and abroad.

“A Royal Commission of Inquiry is the highest form of public inquiry and is the right thing to do, given the COVID-19 emergency was the most significant threat to the health of New Zealanders and our economy since World War II.”

Today Cabinet approved the terms of reference. The Royal Commission has been asked to look at the overall response, including the economic response, identify what we can learn from it and how that can be applied to any future pandemic.

It will be chaired by Australian-based epidemiologist Professor Tony Blakely, alongside two members, former Cabinet Minister Hon Hekia Parata and former Treasury Secretary John Whitehead, CNZM, KStJ. Each brings a unique set of skills, and importantly, are independent of the Government and its response.

“Professor Blakely’s understanding of public health is extensive. He has the knowledge and experience necessary to lead this work. Hekia Parata and John Whitehead will add expertise and bring useful perspectives on the economic response and the response for Māori,” Minister of Internal Affairs Jan Tinetti said.

“New Zealand’s COVID-19 response has been heavily examined, both internationally and nationally. So far 75 reviews have been carried out within New Zealand since 2020, generating a total of 1,639 recommendations.”

The Royal Commission will begin considering evidence from 1 February 2023 and conclude in mid-2024.

“A report will then be prepared which will help inform any future Government’s pandemic response,” Jan Tinetti said.

Notes for Editors: Attached is a summary of the Royal Commission terms of reference.

