ADVERTISEMENT
Advertise with Stuff

Call for long Covid to be recognised as a disability support 'insufficient, patchy'

Hannah Martin . 09:00, Jan 26 2023

(Martin, H., 2023a) [26 Jan 2023]

KATHRYN GEORGE/STUFF

A newly-released report investigating the impacts of Covid-19 on communities in Aotearoa has found the health, social and financial fallout was not equitable.

The impacts of Covid-19 have been "worse" for Māori, Pasifika and disabled people, research states.

The study, published on Thursday, also shone a light on those with long Covid, calling for it to be recognised as a disability to ensure people can access financial and practical support, as care remains "insufficient and patchy".

Te Herenga Waka–Victoria University of Wellington researchers surveyed 990 people (in-depth interviews were held with 52 people) who caught Covid-19 before December 1, 2021,.

Study co-leader Dr Lynne Russell (Ngāti Kahungunu, Rangitāne, Kāi Tahu, Ngāti Porou) said Covid-19 affected everyone, but had much greater health, social, and financial impacts on populations "already significantly disadvantaged".

READ MORE:
* **The pandemic's not over yet – relaxed restrictions expose vulnerable communities**
* **Health experts say the Government has failed to protect Māori and Pasifika from the latest outbreak, calling it "our worst nightmare"**
* **Covid risks still with us**

This was particularly true for Māori, Pasifika and disabled New Zealanders, who were more likely to report barriers to healthcare and support when they had Covid-19, as well as poorer mental health and higher rates of financial stress, Russell said.

ADVERTISEMENT
Stuff

Forty-three percent of Māori and 36% of Pasifika saw a GP when they had Covid-19, compared with 55% of Pākehā and other participants – mainly due to difficulty and cost in getting an appointment.

Disabled people were also more likely to report barriers to seeing a GP, either because they didn't have transport or a carer/support person, or they owed money to their health provider, the report stated.

beachfront property

3 Rain pushes Auckland construction firm with more than 100 employees into liquidation

4 Potential cyclone on track to hit North Island will form a day sooner

5 The $2 rice dish that withstood earthquakes, Covid and a cost of living crisis

6 Man stabbed woman 23 times after she refused to give him cigarette

7 Quiz: Morning trivia challenge: February 8, 2023

8 Years of sewage flows into Wellington harbour after pipe error

9 Council staffer allegedly continued working with kids after claims of inappropriate sexual behaviour

10 Three men on trial in Christchurch accused of stupefying and sexual violation

ADVERTISEMENT
Advertise with Stuff

support policies so people can take time off when unwell; and provide a wider range of support services to whānau and families.

Life-changing impact of long Covid

About one in five participants (22% or 217 people), self-reported symptoms meeting the World Health Organisation's definition of long Covid: ongoing or new symptoms which persist for at least three months following infection, not explained by alternate diagnoses.

SUPPLIED

Dr Lynne Russell, co-leader of The Impacts of Covid-19 in Aotearoa study, and co-lead Dr Mona Jeffreys said, among a host of results, disabled people faced more barriers to care than non-disabled people. (File photo)

The risk of long Covid was higher among people with pre-existing heart disease or high BMI – neither age nor sex predicted risk.

Many reported experiencing extreme fatigue, and likened the physical effects to "ageing".

More than half did not agree that they received adequate health or social care, and reported not feeling listened to or understood.

Experiences varied: some said their symptoms were actively investigated, while others had symptoms "dismissed", or were told there was not much that could be done for them.

"People with long Covid had to fight to be seen and heard; this required a step-up into self-advocacy, and was difficult for people already reduced in capacity," the research stated.

A lack of financial support for those who lost their jobs or had to reduce their hours was identified as a major issue of "significant" concern for those with long Covid, grappling with the uncertainty of how long their condition may last.

STUFF

There have been more than 2.1 million confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Aotearoa since the pandemic began.

The researchers recommended a national, consumer-led, long Covid centre be set up to support local long Covid clinics: to develop evidence-based guidelines for services to better support those with the condition.

Manatū Hauora's chief science advisor Ian Town welcomed the findings, which he said would be used to inform Aotearoa's ongoing pandemic response and future pandemics – especially for disadvantaged populations.

"It's clear there's no such thing as 'one-size-fits-all' when it comes to delivery of health services, and this is especially pronounced during a pandemic."

"Significant system-level changes" had been implemented after the report's surveys were carried out, including the formation of Te Aka Whai Ora (Māori Health Authority) and Whaikaha, the Ministry for Disabled People.

"The Government is committed to continuously lifting the performance of the health system and improving equity and outcomes for those communities that have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic," Town said.

Lead agencies would work together to consider the report's 33 recommendations.

WATCH: The News Brief: Ruto raids ODM as Raila plots fightback

21 mins ago 3:14

10:35 Latest news bulletin | February 7th –...

1:53 WATCH: Waiguru cautions bar...

5:39 WATCH: Kenyatta Hospital...

6:46 Desperate search for earthquake...

1:57 Civil war complicates delivering aid t...

1:13 78-year-old Harry Styles fan steals the sho...

4:24 WATCH: Ruto to determine Chitembwe fat...

7:03 Tribunal recommends removal of...

2:05 Leopard has a Quiet Drink