
Long Covid from a Disability Rights Perspective

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Online Symposium: Long Covid: Journeying together through the fog
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#longcovid2022



Disability Rights Commissioner role

- To uphold and protect the rights of disabled people.

Rights covered by national and international agreements and laws, e.g.

- Human Rights Act 1993;
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- consistent with Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

A short horizontal bar with a teal segment on the left and a red segment on the right.

Human rights including

- the right to health;
- participation in decisions that affect us;
- access to information provided in ways we can understand;
- reasonable accommodations or modifications.



We don't all get to enjoy these rights

- the way society is set up and negative attitudes to disability
- the pandemic has exacerbated the gaps
- the responses have not always met the needs of disabled people.



Human Rights Commission Inquiry

- urgent inquiry into Omicron responses impact on disabled people (March 2022)*
- confirmed that disabled people's needs not fully taken into account
- trust and engagement in the response affected.
- This does not bode well for how people with Long Covid are faring now or in the future.

*<https://www.hrc.co.nz/news/inquiry-finds-omicron-response-put-disabled-people-risk/>



People with Long Covid at risk of discrimination

- Stories of discrimination similar to experiences of people with chronic health conditions
 - Not believed
 - Not recognised or understood in health system
 - Lack of support

<https://www.nzdoctor.co.nz/article/undoctored/proof-chronic-fatigue-syndrome-not-psychosomatic>

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/programmes/the-detail/story/2018840236/what-happens-if-you-ve-got-long-covid-and-can-t-work>

<https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/new-zealand/2021/02/new-zealand-covid-19-long-haulers-still-suffering-long-term-effects-a-year-on.html>

<https://www.1news.co.nz/2022/04/08/long-covid-sufferers-warn-of-virus-long-term-impacts/>

<https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/2021/december/dr-ukcii-energy-limiting-conditions-survey-shows-huge-impacts-daily-living>

<https://thespinoff.co.nz/society/29-04-2022/ive-been-a-long-covid-advocate-for-two-years-heres-what-people-should-know>



Avenues for complaints e.g.

- Human Rights Commission Te Kāhui Tika Tangata about discrimination on the grounds of disability
- Health and Disability Commission – health and disability services
- Ombudsman’s Office – Government agencies



Attitudes must change



Social Model of Disability vs Medical Model

Social Model – society, attitudes and systems create barriers

vs

Medical Model – impairments and individuals are blamed



Te Tiriti o Waitangi

- Self-determination and participation as Māori and tāngata whaikaha Māori.
- critical that tāngata whaikaha Māori voices are included at the centre of decision-making and planning.
- Human Rights Commission briefings:
<https://www.hrc.co.nz/resources/human-rights-relation-covid-19/>



In summary

From a disability rights perspective what's needed:

- change in attitudes to disability and disabled people,
- commitment to equitable practices and policies, and
- human rights-based & Te Tiriti-based approaches that support equity and dignity.