

The Commissioner is a core participant in UK wide COVID-19 Inquiry

Background

The UK Covid-19 Inquiry has been set up to examine the UK's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. An evidenced account of what happened will determine accountability for the failings and mistakes made, which contributed to suffering, loss, and hardship throughout Northern Ireland. The inquiry aims to ensure that vital lessons are learned in order to inform preparations for future pandemics.

The inquiry was formally opened on 20 July 2022 by the Chair, Baroness Heather Hallett, a former Court of Appeal Judge. Baroness Hallett is highly experienced in this area and has previously led the inquest into the 7/7 London bombings and 'On the runs' inquiry.

In April 2022, a public consultation was launched. The Commissioner provided a response to this consultation, where he highlighted that the Terms of Reference are generally comprehensive of the areas that should be covered by the Inquiry, he would like to see a stronger focus on human rights as a foundation for the Inquiry, particularly addressing the disproportionate impact that the pandemic has had on older people.

The final Terms of Reference for the inquiry were received in June 2022 and can be viewed [here](#).

The goal of this inquiry is to examine the preparedness for, response to, and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK. As a result; considering the evidence,

COPNI involvement

During the pandemic, the Commissioner played a significant role as a vocal independent advocate for the rights and interest of older people and on 13 October 2022, the Commissioner secured Participants status in Module 2C of the UK wide

Covid-19 Inquiry. This means he will present evidence on behalf of older people in Northern Ireland who were negatively impacted by the pandemic.

As a core participant, the Commissioner will have the opportunity to make opening and closing statements, suggest lines of questioning to be pursued by Counsel and ask questions of witnesses during a hearing.

Modules

Details of all modules of the Inquiry can be found [here](#), below outlines details of the modules specific to COPNI.

Module 2

Module 2 of the UK Covid-19 public inquiry formally opened on 31st August 2022. Module 2 is split into separate parts to examine the UK's overall response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

2C: Core political and administrative decision-making in Northern Ireland

Core participant status designated 13-10-2022.

This module looks at and makes recommendations about, the decision-making by the government in Northern Ireland in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic between early January 2020 until Covid-19 restrictions were lifted in Northern Ireland in March 2022. Examines the decision-making of key groups and individuals within the government in Northern Ireland including the First Minister, deputy First Minister and other Ministers, in particular between early January and late March 2020 when the first national lockdown was imposed.

- The structures and bodies concerned with the response to the pandemic in Northern Ireland and their relationships and communications with the UK Government, other devolved administrations and local authorities within Northern Ireland.
- The government in Northern Ireland's initial understanding of, and response to, the nature and spread of Covid-19 in Northern Ireland
- Decision-making by the government in Northern Ireland relating to the imposition or non-imposition of non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs)

such as lockdowns, local restrictions, working from home, social distancing, the use of face coverings etc

- Access to and use in decision-making of medical and scientific expertise, data collection and modelling relating to the spread of the virus in Northern Ireland
- Public health communications in Northern Ireland in relation to the steps being taken to control the spread of the virus.
- The public health and coronavirus legislation and regulations that were proposed and enacted.

Module 3: Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on healthcare systems in the 4 nations of the UK

Module 3 of the UK Covid-19 public inquiry formally opened on 8th November 2022. It will consider the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on healthcare systems in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

COPNI are not a core participant in this module but have been served a Rule 9 Request for evidence - A Rule 9 Request is a request submitted in accordance with Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules; it requires a party to provide either disclosure of documents or a written statement.

This will include an examination of the consequences for healthcare systems as a result of the government's response to Covid-19. It will also examine the capacity of healthcare systems to respond to a pandemic and how this evolved during the Covid-19 pandemic. It also will consider the primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare sectors and services, and the experience of healthcare during the pandemic through illustrative accounts.

Finally, it will examine healthcare-related inequalities (such as death rates, PPE, and oximeters), with further detailed consideration in separate designated modules.

COPNI legal team are drafting the Commissioners' statement of evidence at present.

FAQ's

Q. Can there be a devolved, Northern Ireland specific COVID-19 Inquiry?

The Commissioner has publicly voiced the need for a Northern Ireland based public inquiry of the handling of care home residents during the Covid 19 pandemic. It remains his view that a complementary inquiry in Northern Ireland should be established as soon as possible, however in the absence of the Northern Ireland assembly and any such inquiry coming to fruition, the Commissioner is committed to co-operating fully in the wider UK public inquiry regarding the government's management of Covid – 19.

Q. Can I participate in the COVID-19 Inquiry?

Yes, the chair has confirmed that **everyone** has the opportunity to directly share their lived experience of COVID-19 through the **'Every Story Matters'** listening exercise. The aim of this exercise is to provide an equal opportunity to hear evidence from as many impacted people as possible. To share your experience please visit the official UK Covid-19 Inquiry website only, which can be accessed [here](#).

We ask that you do not contact COPNI directly to share your experiences as it is the decision of the Chair who to call as witnesses to the Inquiry. A decision based off experience, to provide a representation of the issues laid down in the Inquiry Terms of Reference.

Q. How long will the Inquiry last?

The Inquiry is currently ongoing and has not yet established a date for completion.

Q. When will the Inquiry report the findings of the module investigations?

The Chair, Baroness Hallett has announced a modular approach to the Covid Inquiry. Therefore, reports will be published at the end of each of module.

Q. What will the inquiry bring for the future?

The goal of this inquiry is to examine the preparedness for, response to, and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK. Therefore, the inquiry will produce an evidenced account of what happened to determine accountability for the compelling failures which contributed to suffering, loss, and hardship.

By considering this evidence, the inquiry will make recommendations for the future to ensure that vital lessons are learned to inform preparations for future pandemics.



Commissioner for **Older People**
for Northern Ireland

Q. How will I be kept updated on the Inquiry process?

All information about the process is regularly posted on the UK COVID Inquiry news page which can be accessed [here](#).

You can keep up to date with COPNI's involvement, by subscribing to our seasonal newsletter, where we will be sharing inquiry progress.

[Sign up to COPNI Newsletter here](#)