

Oakley Mental Health Research Foundation

Covid-19 Research Fund

Background

Covid-19 has impacted nearly every aspect of life as people know it in Aotearoa. Even in these early stages, significant changes have been made to the way in which health, mental health and addiction services are provided. Responses were rapid and required substantial changes to the way services and support are provided. The need to keep people safe meant that housing-provision was accelerated for people living on the streets; services were set up to address food insecurity and poverty; a number of health and social services that were previously delivered face to face quickly moved to virtual delivery; new and innovative contactless or technology based initiatives were introduced. To date, these changes and their impacts have not been systematically recorded nor evaluated.

The full impact of Covid-19 on people who experience mental health difficulties is yet to be ascertained. In particular, we do not know whether the pandemic has inequitably impacted on people due to their underlying health or social circumstances. The use of technology, for example may have created effective and potentially enduring service options but there are individuals within vulnerable communities who have poor access to Wi-Fi communication; for them, the experience of lockdown may have been traumatically isolating. It is anticipated that there will be effects on people's health and mental health as a result of the uncertainty created by the substantial changes in response to Covid-19. Evidence-based research is urgently needed on the impact of Covid-19 changes on health and social services.

Oakley Mental Health Research Foundation Response

The Oakley Mental Health Research Foundation would welcome applications from researchers wishing to investigate the impact of Covid-19 control measures on the delivery of Mental Health Services.

A fund of \$50,000 has been set up to support research to determine what might be learnt from our response to Covid-19 with a view to this supporting more innovative services and responses to people with serious mental health challenges. The fund may support one or more research projects. The Foundation is seeking to capitalise on the unique context created by the Covid-19 response and to capture the ways in which NZ-based health and social services have changed to better meet presenting needs. Documenting these positive shifts now will help ensure that they are carried forward into service models post Covid-19. The Foundation is particularly keen to support research relevant to reducing inequalities in the provision of mental health services and promoting good outcomes for Māori, Pacific People and other vulnerable communities.

Some key areas for possible investigation could include:

- Innovations through the use of telephone, digital and/or virtual options for support of people with mental health and addiction challenges.
- The impact of the rapid housing of homeless people who have mental health and addiction challenges.
- The changes introduced for people with mental health and addiction issues by addressing food poverty and by supporting people through enhanced provision of food services.
- The potential impact of the Covid-19 response on the coordination and transfer of support services between mental health providers.
- The potential impact of the Covid-19 on mental health crisis response support and help options.
- The gaps that may have emerged in mental health and addiction service provision as a result of moving to a contactless society, and the potential ways in which mental health service provision could be future-proofed.
- The effectiveness of mental health phone lines in the provision of support to people experiencing distress through the Covid-19 alert levels
- The impact of the Covid-19 response on service adherence to mental health and related legislation

Priority will be given to applications that seek to identify best practice options and address potential areas of inequality going forward.

In summary, the Foundation is seeking to identify innovative measures developed as a result of the Covid-19 experience which will lead to policy and practices changes that might create better outcomes for people experiencing significant mental health and/or addiction challenges.