

## Community Providers

### Context

The focus of community providers is to support access for all people to testing services by enabling expanded access to, and acceptability of, COVID-19 testing services within Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly, those in difficult to reach areas (such as isolated or rural communities). They also play an important role in identifying positive cases and connecting these people with the appropriate health services within their community.

### Barriers to access and disincentives

There are a range of barriers and disincentives to testing access and uptake. These are both perceived and real, across diverse population groups including Māori, Pacific and disabled peoples.

Continuing to identify and understand these barriers will support decisions and actions aimed at enhancing more equitable and widespread national access to COVID-19 testing across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Barriers and disincentives to testing vary by population groups, location, and type of testing modality, but may include:

* perceived need to test: self-assessment of severity or likelihood of COVID-19 or other viruses
* the process: expectations and experience of discomfort, inability (for financial, family obligation or other reasons) to isolate at home after testing as recommended).
* financial: perceived and real costs of testing/visiting primary care facilities (getting to and from an appointment, the appointment itself, following recommended isolation advice after PCR testing or positive COVID-19 test result, lack of sick leave arrangements, financial hardship);
* visa status: new migrants, bridging and temporary visa holders may not realise they are eligible for free testing; and
* access for disabled people to get information on the time and method of testing, physical access to testing and health facilities, access to adequate transport and health facilities, and sensory environments.

### Community engagement in relation to Testing

Ongoing engagement with our communities is critical in ensuring the appropriate health messages for the current health care settings are reaching all sections of the community.

Engagement with key stakeholder and partners such as Te Aka Whai Ora and Whaikaha is essential to achieve sustainable and enduring services and outcomes.

In particular, it is essential we focus on those communities at greatest risk of serious illness from COVID-19, including Māori and Pacific people, disabled people, the elderly and the clinically vulnerable.

Community engagement will target:

* **the public**, to encourage an understanding and acceptance of good health care practice in context of current health care settings, including encouraging symptomatic people get tested as soon as they develop COVID-19 compatible symptoms
* **health professionals and community service providers**, to encourage appropriate testing and public messaging; and
* **community leaders of priority populations and those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID19 (vulnerable people)** to support development and delivery of the right messaging, appropriate engagement with each group, and appropriate ways of sending information, including consideration of cultural and linguistic diversity for Māori and Pacific people and other ethnic groups, and health literacy (written and recorded media communications).

Public communication will focus on:

* promoting the importance of good hygiene practice at all times in all scenarios and all communities, and personal protective measures for those who are at higher risk of poor health outcomes
* highlighting how to access the right test for their needs; including the type of test; locations for sourcing RATs for testing, how to take a RAT, what to do while awaiting results and what to do if a test is positive; and
* clearly explain recommended testing circumstances, and changes to this over time along with the rational for these changes.

Public communications will adhere to the Plain Language Act (2022) and accessibility standards to ensure equitable access for our communities.

Public communications with be informed throughout by health professionals, service and community leaders, and increased during escalation of cases and community transmission between low and high transmission rates.

### Testing and Supply Case Studies

Equity was in the forefront of the Omicron response as highlighted in a rapid review conducted in October 2022. Removing barriers to access, an equitable approach and meaningful community provider engagement was essential to ensuring increased testing and those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (vulnerable people) received RATS and PPE in a timely manner.

The learning and insights gained from the providers was critical in informing our approach over time, Direct feedback, and appreciation of the mahi that took place was documented to produce two volumes of Case Studies. Identified in these handouts are learned experiences of engagement with providers in rural, urban settings, background and populations served in the response.

This approach has enabled us to identify and implement practical solutions to some of the key equity challenges our most vulnerable communities face.

You can read case studies that Te Whatu Ora developed, summarising work undertaken to improve equitable outcomes for priority population groups [here](https://www.tewhatuora.govt.nz/publications/case-studies-on-equity-volume-i-and-volume-ii/).

### Community gatherings

Community providers including Māori providers, iwi and Pacific led groups, will be prioritised in local and regional tactical approaches. This includes the importance of collaboration and acknowledging community context which will ensure that the needs of their whānau and communities are central to their response.

This approach will provide better outcomes for these communities, following a range of experiences by Māori and Pacific people and other priority groups and their whānau, such as Māori in Tamaki Makaurau[[1]](#footnote-1), the Northland Outbreak (Nov 2021) and the All of God Samoa Church cluster (Oct 2021).

Community groups and event planners should consider the following, as this may help to reduce the chance of significant spread at the event:

* Public health messaging before the event:
* Stay at home if unwell
* conduct a self-test RAT or if unable get an assisted RAT from one of the community providers within your area see here for list: [How to use a RAT | Unite against COVID-19 (covid19.govt.nz)](https://covid19.govt.nz/testing-and-isolation/covid-19-testing/how-to-use-a-rat/)
* Encouraging COVID-19 vaccination and boosters – [COVID-19 vaccine boosters | Unite against COVID-19 (covid19.govt.nz)](https://covid19.govt.nz/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccine-boosters/)
* Provision of masks at the event
* Provision of RAT kits at the event

### Distribution and Assisted Channels

During the Delta outbreak there was growing concern that the distribution model for Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) would not provide sufficient coverage at pace for Māori.  Therefore, Māori and iwi led providers were identified to co-ordinate regional delivery approaches. This would expand reach into Māori communities that were previously underserved resulting in exclusion.

This approach is called the Māori Provider Distribution channel (MPDC), it currently consists of 29 Māori-led and Iwi providers strategically positioned all over the country to complement the existing DHB collection sites.

The MPDC co-ordinates and distributes RATs and PPE to priority populations. The outcome is to expand the delivery reach into Māori communities including priority population groups.

The selected MPDC were identified as having the following capabilities in delivering this service:

* The infrastructure, capability, and capacity to receive large volumes of RATs.
* Established Māori community provider networks that will ensure reach across Māori networks.
* Local and regional knowledge and relationships to operate within their regional context.
* Have the ability to stand up within 24 hours, move at pace and remain agile/flexible.
* Rural services and providers are connected to access RATs.

### Community providers - Testing and Supply services

Community providers supply RAT kits and services for those who are unable to complete a test themselves. They also provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as masks and wipes, when available, throughout Aotearoa.

Community providers (including local Iwi and Pacific leadership groups) must be included in the design of local and regional testing services.

This will be achieved through collaboration and understanding the local community context, which will in turn support the needs of the whānau and communities by having optimal testing strategies in place. This approach will support better outcomes for these communities.

### Community Providers - Assisted RATs within the community

The focus of community providers is to support access for all people to testing services by enabling expanded access to, and acceptability of, COVID-19 testing services within Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly, those in difficult to reach areas (such as isolated or rural communities).

Community providers supply RAT kits and services for those who are unable to complete a test themselves and they also can upload the RAT results and provide advice on next steps

The names and locations of community providers and collection sites for RATs, can be found on [Healthpoint](https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/covid-19).. For information on obtaining RATs, follow this link [How to get RATs](https://www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/covid-19-testing/covid-19-testing-priority-groups#household).

1. [Māori Covid-Impact Report.pdf (imsb.maori.nz)](https://www.imsb.maori.nz/assets/sm/upload/ch/1a/v7/ud/Ma%CC%84ori%20Covid-Impact%20Report.pdf?k=70ce9b35df) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)