



## **Let's Be Heard:**

Sharing Respondents' Pandemic Experiences, Impacts, and Lessons to be Learned in Scotland

Executive Summary

## Content Warning:

Please be aware that some parts of this report may be distressing or raise issues of concern for some readers. There are a range of services available if you require support after reading this paper. [You can find these on our website.](#)



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# Executive Summary

## What is Let's Be Heard?

Let's Be Heard is the Scottish COVID-19 Inquiry's listening project.

The independent Inquiry is investigating the devolved strategic response to the COVID-19 pandemic between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2022. It will establish the facts, identify any lessons that need to be learned and make recommendations to Scottish Ministers, so we are better prepared in future.

Let's Be Heard was established to give people living in Scotland or affected by decisions made in Scotland during that period the opportunity to share their experiences, and the lessons they believe should be learned from them.

It is the main way in which people can engage with the Inquiry to inform its investigations, reporting and recommendations.

## Purpose of this report

This report shares the preliminary findings from the more than 4,000 responses Let's Be Heard has received since the launch of its National Engagement Period on 23 May 2023. This includes responses from individuals living in each of Scotland's local authority areas.

This is the first of a number of reports of key findings from Let's Be Heard which will be published during the lifetime of the Inquiry.

By sharing its preliminary findings, Let's Be Heard hopes people in Scotland who have not already engaged with the project will recognise some of their experiences in those already shared by others and be encouraged to take part before the National Engagement Period ends on 20 December 2023.

## Main findings: we asked and you said

During its National Engagement Period, Let's Be Heard is asking three core questions:

1. What were your experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What were the impacts of these experiences on you or the people you know?
3. What lessons do you think should be learned from your experiences?

### We asked: What would you like to tell us about your experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**You said:** Experiences shared with Let's Be Heard described difficulty and isolation in not being able to see loved ones, especially those in care or nearing the end of their lives.

- Views regarding rules, restrictions, the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE), and Scottish Government communications were polarised, with many feeling they had received contradictory and inconsistent guidance.
- Key workers described difficulties in accessing vaccination and childcare and said they had faced incredible pressures.
- Health care was a prominent issue, especially in relation to communication challenges, delayed or missed diagnoses and the suspension of services.

- Almost every aspect of people's day-to-day lives changed. Homes became places of working and learning. Families were not able to meet or to be with loved ones at crucial moments, such as when family members and loved ones were dying.

**We asked: What were the impacts of these experiences on you or people you know?**

**You said:** Experiences differed across the country, nevertheless people experienced similar impacts. These include impacts on trust, mental health, life events, and financial security.

- Common impacts on children and young people included boredom and isolation, and many reported that their mental health and wellbeing had suffered.
- Older people were impacted predominantly by the isolation and loneliness caused by pandemic rules and restrictions. This included older people living on their own, as well as those living in care and nursing homes.
- Mental health issues, including anxiety, suicide and depression among people of all ages were reported frequently.
- Lockdown had significant economic impacts on both individuals and small businesses.
- Family dynamics were also severely impacted. While some enjoyed having more time together, others found it difficult to balance the competing responsibilities of working from home, parenting and supporting their children's learning from home. Many also found separation from loved ones incredibly difficult and experienced a feeling of extreme isolation.

- As a result of pandemic experiences, public trust in science, government and in others appeared to decline, a trend which appears to have continued.

### **We asked: What lessons do you think should be learned from your experiences?**

**You said:** Several suggestions were made by respondents to ensure Scotland can more efficiently and effectively respond to future pandemics. Key lessons included:

- Having clearer plans in place for the strategic and emergency response to any future pandemic.
- Maintaining key services, such as primary health care, during a pandemic.
- Prioritising mental health and wellbeing, especially for key groups such as children, young people and those living alone.
- Public health messaging should be clear, consistent and evidence-based.
- Government must better balance protecting the population from the virus and avoiding unnecessary harm.

### **Call to action/next steps**

Let's Be Heard is grateful to all those who have shared their experiences so far, and to the organisations which have supported and facilitated this engagement.

A key focus for the Inquiry, and therefore Let's Be Heard, is investigating whether there were any unequal and disparate impacts for different groups and individuals. For this reason, it is important that Let's Be Heard hears from as wide a range of people as possible.

The team is particularly keen to receive more responses from:

- Minority ethnic communities
- LGBTQ+ people
- Minority religious communities
- Men
- People aged under 20 and over 70
- People who do not feel financially secure

Let's Be Heard is also keen to hear more from:

- Frontline workers
- Migrant keyworkers
- Teachers and school staff
- Children under the age of six and people involved in early years care
- Students in higher and further education
- Unpaid carers
- Young carers
- Disabled people
- Small business and self-employed people
- People in receipt of welfare benefits
- People who were the subject of Do Not Resuscitate Orders (DNRs)/'Do Not Attempt Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation' Orders (DNACPRs) and their relatives
- The relatives of people who received end-of-life care
- People experiencing long COVID

Everyone's experience of the pandemic is important to the Inquiry, and it does not have to be particularly positive or negative. You also do not need to have had COVID-19 to participate. Let's Be Heard wants to hear from **you**.