

## Review of our Vaccination Policy

After Government changes to vaccination mandates, and conducting an update of our risk assessment, Ara proposed to put our Vaccination Policy into abeyance. Kaimahi (staff) and ākongā (students) were provided with the updated health and safety assessments and policy proposal on 8 April 2022. Between 8 and 14 April 2022, more than 500 people provided feedback on the proposal. We thank you for providing input to inform Ara's decision.

Following this review of the changing risk of the pandemic in our environment, including health and safety assessments, the latest advice from Government and feedback from staff and students, a decision has been made.

The outcome of this process is that Ara Institute of Canterbury will put its current policy into abeyance. Abeyance means the policy exists but is no longer current, nor enforced. This means we will discontinue our current general mandatory vaccination requirement for all kaimahi and ākongā. Requirements under the Public Health Order must still be followed, which means staff and students in areas specified by the Public Health Order will need to be vaccinated.

This change to our policy will mean from Monday, 2 May 2022, mandatory vaccinations are only required for activities where the Public Health Order still applies. Those areas are:

1. Health practitioners providing health services to patients in person
2. Workers who carry out work where health services are provided to members of the public by 1 or more health practitioners and whose role involves being within 2 metres or less of a health practitioner or a member of the public for a period of 15 minutes or more
3. Workers who are employed or engaged by certified providers and carry out work at the premises at which health care services are provided
4. Care and support workers

In practice this means all colleagues working at Manawa, in the Osteopathy Clinic at the City Campus, and at the Health Centre must be vaccinated. This includes colleagues who are visiting these sites to carry out their work, even if they are not normally based there. Learners who are carrying out placements at off-site Health Practices or performing health services on site must also be vaccinated.

As a result of feedback received, we will also

- Continue to strongly encourage mask usage on campus and support our Ara community with regular Covid-19 updates, including reminders about the latest health advice;
- Support our academic staff to offer appropriate alternative methods of learning while Covid-19 is still at significant levels in our communities;
- Support managers and staff to work together to determine the appropriate working arrangements while Covid-19 is still at significant levels in our communities;

- Compile return to campus plans for ākongā and kaimahi. These will take on board ideas and suggestions provided in the survey feedback;
- Support immune-compromised staff to raise their specific concerns with their manager so that appropriate accommodations and adjustments to working arrangements can be considered. HR Business Partners are able to support this process;
- Support immune-compromised students to raise their specific concerns with their Programme Leader or Academic Manager so that feasible learning accommodations and adjustments can be considered. Our Student Life Team are also available to assist.

### Kaimahi and Ākongā Feedback

We know you will be interested in the feedback we received. The survey attracted 317 responses from kaimahi and 190 responses from ākongā. An open forum feedback option on our website attracted responses from 18 people between 13 and 20 April 2022.

Answers to survey questions were that 55% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that the time is right for Ara to put the vaccination policy into abeyance, 10% were neutral, and 35% strongly disagreed or disagreed. 100% of website respondents were in favour of the policy going into abeyance.

We asked four other scale questions of our survey participants and one further scale question of kaimahi. These questions were designed to give us information that will help with managing Covid-19 sentiment on our campuses.

Welcoming all students back on campus, regardless of vaccination status: 57% of survey participants indicated their support for this, 31 % were not supportive, and 12% were neutral.

Welcoming all staff back on campus, regardless of vaccination status: 55% of survey participants indicated their support for this, 32% were not supportive, and 13% were neutral.

Continuing to maintain Covid-19 protection measures, regardless of whether they are mandated (e.g. masks): 59% of participants would like to see continuation of Covid-19 protection measures, regardless of mandate; 25% would not, and 16% were neutral.

Continuation of flexible learning options, when possible, while Covid-19 is still in the community: This question generated a high degree of positive support with 84% of participants agreeing with this, 5% disagreeing, and 11% were neutral.

Staff were asked if they would like to see continuation of flexible working options for staff, when possible, while Covid-19 is still in the community: This question, asked only of kaimahi, generated the highest percentage of positive support with 86% of participants agreeing with the statement, 7% disagreeing, and 7% were neutral.

An open question was asked of all survey participants: *What suggestions do you have to support ākongā (students) and kaimahi (staff) wellbeing regarding Covid-19?*

Many participants provided generous, thoughtful commentary, sharing their perspectives and the reasons for them. A reasonable proportion of comments related to concerns for immune-compromised members of our community and the need to provide options that enable these staff member and students to feel as safe as possible. Some people noted 'vaccination' as their suggestion in this section of the survey.

Other specific suggestions to support wellbeing fell into six main categories. The two most popular themes were: provide flexible learning options for ākongā (this included notions of remote/online learning, support to catch up with missed classes, and consideration of accommodations regarding assessment); and continue to provide work from home options for kaimahi. The other themes related to:

- Masks – most people commenting on this suggested requiring mask use would support their wellbeing, however a significant number also suggested that removing the requirement for mask wearing would support their wellbeing.
- Continuation of health measures, such as: social distancing, good ventilation of learning/work spaces, hand-washing and sanitising, encouraging people to stay at home when ill, regular washing down of hard surfaces, and regular communication to encourage good health practice.
- Providing health education advice, including suggestions about nutrition, exercise, and mindful meditation.

The final theme related to concerns and suggestions to facilitate integration of all ākongā and kaimahi on campus. Many comments in this theme of responses related to divisiveness that is believed to have occurred in society and at Ara regarding vaccination choices. Amongst kaimahi, people wanted the impacts of colleague choices to be acknowledged and respected by all parties. The overall drive in this theme of suggestions was to seek to mitigate and minimise divisiveness. Requests were made to support constructive conversations and mutual understanding, and respect for personal health choices. A number of discussions are now occurring to help kaimahi and ākongā navigate through these conversations.

Please remember that Ara's Covid-19 Vaccination Policy remains in effect until Monday, 2 May 2022.

You may find these support options helpful:

**For staff - if you'd like to discuss your health issues about this policy, contact:**

- Your GP or health practitioner
- [My OCP Employee Assistance, Training & Support](#)
- Talk with your local [WAG member](#)

- Call or text 1737. This is a national 'Need to talk' line led by a team of paid counsellors 24 hours, 7 days a week.

**For students – if you'd like to discuss your health issues about this policy, contact:**

- Your GP or health practitioner
- Ara Health Centre at [HealthCentre@ara.ac.nz](mailto:HealthCentre@ara.ac.nz) or (03) 940 7566
- Call or text 1737. This is a national 'Need to talk' line led by a team of paid counsellors 24 hours, 7 days a week.