

Capability building through the Kia Niwha Fellowships

Associate Professor Nadia A. Charania

¹Department of Public Health, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand

²New Zealand Policy Research Institute, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

Improving pandemic plans to better address the needs of migrant and refugee background communities

- **Research purpose:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, migrant and refugee background communities were disproportionately impacted as infectious disease outbreaks can amplify pre-existing inequities and recommended mitigation measures can be difficult to implement. To improve health outcomes and better protect migrants and refugees during future pandemics, there is a need to strengthen Aotearoa New Zealand's pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response efforts.
- **Research approach:** This study is underpinned by complexity science, which enables the systematic exploration of the dynamic interplay among disease characteristics and social dimensions from multiple stakeholders' perspectives. Guided by an interpretive description methodology, narratives were generated from semi-structured interviews with multiple stakeholder groups, including community members, organisation leaders, and pandemic planners. This research has been supported and guided by an Advisory Group comprised of international and national members who are experts in pandemic planning, migrant and refugee health, Māori health, Pacific health, and complexity science. Moreover, I have engaged with various stakeholders in the migrant and refugee health space to help ensure that the research addresses needs that are locally relevant to the communities.
- **Alignment with Te Niwha:** This research focuses on more equitable and inclusive infectious disease pandemic preparedness and response and building research capabilities in the knowledge domain of complexity science. The proposed research aims to amplify the voices of migrants and refugees so future pandemic preparedness and response efforts better reflect their realities thereby strengthening Aotearoa New Zealand's capability for infectious diseases challenges. Moreover, by applying the principles of complexity science to pandemics, the proposed research programme is novel thereby contributing to building world-class research capabilities.
- **Leadership development:** Through this fellowship, I have had the opportunity to develop essential leadership skills from mentors and peers, such as effective communication and managing teams. Importantly, the fellowship provided opportunities to develop relationships with tangata whenua and community members, deepening my understanding of the importance of intentional and reflective interactions. Further engaging with principles and values that underpin meaningful partnerships and manaakitanga have strengthened my ability to undertake this research with migrant and refugee background communities. I have also had the privilege of expanding my international networks during the fellowship placement, thereby fostering collaborations and contributing a unique Aotearoa New Zealand perspective to global discussions on migration and infectious diseases.
- **Future directions:** The data will be analysed using a directed content analytic approach to produce illustrative frameworks that crystallise the interconnected factors. Participants will be engaged again to revise the complexity-informed recommendations to guide pandemic planning to better reflect realities that migrants and refugees experience over the phases of a pandemic. Findings will be shared widely to inform improvements to future pandemic preparedness and response for marginalised communities. The research hopes to benefit migrant and refugee background communities, leaders who support migrants and refugees, practitioners involved in pandemic preparedness and response, policymakers, and researchers. These recommendations are anticipated to strengthen pandemic plans and in turn reduce the health, social, and economic impacts of future pandemics, especially for migrant and refugee background communities.