



# Review of Western Australia's Hotel Quarantine Arrangements WA Government Response

April 2021

## Introduction

Western Australia's hotel quarantine program, after border controls, is the best line of defence against the introduction of COVID-19 into the community.

The WA Government has safely quarantined more than 40,000 people since March 2020, when the State's hotel quarantine arrangements were set up swiftly in response to the pandemic.

WA's hotel quarantine system has evolved with our understanding of the virus, the emergence of new scientific evidence, as well as lessons learnt from our own, and other jurisdictions', experiences.

Hotel quarantine is a key element of the WA Government's successful COVID-19 response, which has kept Western Australia free from community transmission for 12 months. Whilst concerning, the locally acquired infection of a hotel quarantine worker on 30 January 2021, known as case #903, did not lead to further community transmission.

In response to this case, as well as the emergence of new variants of COVID-19 internationally, the WA Government commissioned an end-to-end review of the State's hotel quarantine arrangements. The purpose was to identify opportunities to strengthen current processes and practices and ensure the system is as robust and adaptable to new and emerging risks as possible.

# Introduction

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Professor Tarun Weeramanthri was asked to lead the review and provide ongoing advice to support the continuous improvement of WA's hotel quarantine arrangements.

The **first interim advice**, published on 26 February 2021, recommended re-assessment and mitigation of the risk posed by ventilation at hotel quarantine sites, as well as other measures to strengthen infection prevention and control, as a key means of controlling immediate public health risk.

The **second interim advice** addresses the overarching governance, accountability, organisational and risk management structures that direct and determine the operational systems and protocols in place across hotel quarantine sites.

The **final advice** considers the data systems supporting WA's hotel quarantine arrangements, as well as the State's longer-term strategic direction.

The review identified several strengths of WA's system, including successful outcomes achieved to date. In acknowledging that it is a complex system, involving a range of government agencies and external providers and operating across multiple locations, the review also identified several opportunities for improvement.

The WA Government welcomes Professor Weeramanthri's advice and supports all 16 recommendations. The WA Government is committed to implementing the improvements identified by Professor Weeramanthri to ensure our hotel quarantine system continues to support and protect both guests and workers, as well as the broader Western Australian community.

# Improvements already implemented to strengthen hotel quarantine

The WA Government responded quickly to the infection of a hotel quarantine worker on 30 January 2021, implementing a number of immediate measures to strengthen the hotel quarantine system, many of which address recommendations made by Professor Weeramanthri. In parallel, the WA Government has continued to learn from other states and territories to improve the State's hotel quarantine system.

## Infection prevention and control, including ventilation

Professor Weeramanthri recommended several measures to strengthen infection prevention and control as a key means of controlling immediate public health risk.

**Ventilation:** To address strong emerging evidence on airborne transmission, as recommended by the review, an occupational hygienist and specialist engineer have conducted independent assessments of the ventilation systems in place at the State's quarantine hotels. As these assessments are progressively finalised, changes have been implemented. Some of the changes being progressed include the avoidance of certain rooms, adjustments to station placements for some security guards, and the introduction of HEPA Filters in the rooms of positive guests to purify the air. The ventilation adequacy of hotels will continue to be assessed, including when considering the suitability of new quarantine hotels.



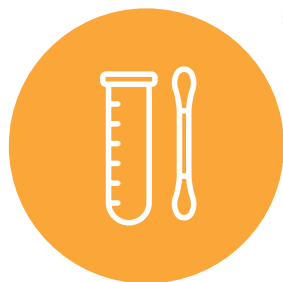
As the review recognised, hotels were not purpose built for quarantine, however the WA Government will continue to seek to mitigate the risks in this environment. The WA Government will also continue to advocate for the development of national standards for ventilation in quarantine hotels, as well as learn from other jurisdictions as new evidence in relation to ventilation emerges.

**Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** The review recommended increased PPE at quarantine hotels. In addition to wearing PPE when interacting with guests, hotel quarantine workers, including security, hotel management, and housekeeping, are now required to wear PPE (surgical masks and protective eye wear) supplied by the Department of Health, at all times in high risk areas. Guests must also wear masks when opening their door for any reason.



# Improvements already implemented to strengthen hotel quarantine

**Testing:** The review identified the opportunity to strengthen testing protocols. Daily saliva testing for hotel quarantine workers, which has been in place since 23 January 2021, was strengthened on 10 March 2021 to introduce a leave of absence testing protocol.



**Secondary employment:** Restrictions on secondary employment, a priority safety measure identified by the review, came into effect on

10 February 2021 for hotel and security quarantine workers. To minimise financial disadvantage, additional measures have been introduced to support workers.



## Workplace safety and training

The review acknowledged the dedication and hard work of all the people involved in hotel quarantine, and recommended measures to enhance workplace safety. The WA Government thanks those working on the frontline of hotel quarantine, and is committed to implementing measures to better support and protect the workforce.

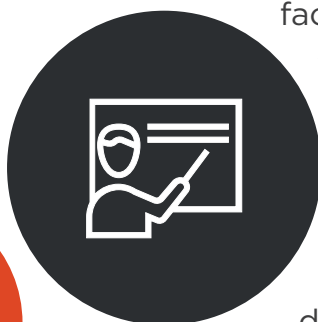
**On-site management:** The review recommended the introduction of on-site managers to enhance on the ground oversight of end-to-end hotel quarantine operations. The Department of Health is currently engaging suitably qualified staff as site managers at hotel facilities. These staff will be responsible for ensuring that each hotel quarantine site has a consistent approach, cohesive workforce culture, and high standards of safety and infection prevention and control.



**Training:** The review acknowledged the training already provided to hotel quarantine workers and identified opportunities for enhancement.

Currently, all hotel quarantine workers in high risk areas, including those processing guest check-ins, and those situated on quarantine floors, undergo face to face infection prevention and control training and are audited by experts weekly.

This will be strengthened by a Hotel Quarantine Training Framework, being developed by the Department of Health, which will formalise the content, delivery, assurance mechanisms and responsibility for training. Infection prevention and control will be a core component of this framework.



## Governance and assurance

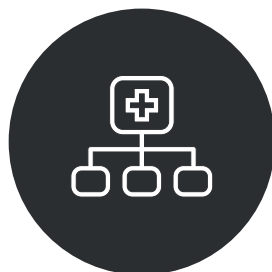
The review recommended measures to strengthen corporate and clinical governance, noting that to achieve and sustain the lowest possible levels of risk in hotel quarantine, the highest levels of governance and assurance are required.

**Corporate governance:** The changing nature of the pandemic requires the governance of its response to be agile and adaptive. As recommended by the review, the WA Government is establishing a 'Quarantine Advisory Panel' to provide strategic oversight of WA's hotel quarantine program. This will support the State Emergency Coordinator and the Department of Health in their roles under the State Emergency Management Framework. The Panel will also play an important role in assuring the implementation of improvements to the hotel quarantine system in line with the review's findings.

**Clinical Governance:** The review found that there is opportunity to strengthen clinical governance in hotel quarantine. Building upon the clinical governance framework and expertise currently in place in WA's health system, the Department of Health is developing a tailored Hotel Quarantine Clinical Governance Framework to build upon the existing and new policy frameworks guiding hotel quarantine operations.

**Assurance:** The review identified opportunities to strengthen assurance mechanisms within hotel quarantine, particularly for testing and training of the hotel quarantine workforce. Measures currently being progressed include the establishment of an audit and assurance team to oversee opportunities for continued strengthening of the system. Further, the Department of Health has engaged an external consultant to review current processes and identify opportunities for improvement. This independent view will support robust end-to-end assurance processes.

**Integrated data:** The review notes reliable, timely and complete data is critical to good planning, preparedness, assessment of risk, end-to-end assurance and monitoring of system performance. The WA Government is actively engaged with its Commonwealth counterparts to progress discussions relating to information sharing processes. In addition, the Department of Health will bring together the appropriate expertise to develop an end-to-end integrated data system, a recommendation of the review, to support continuous improvements in hotel quarantine.



# Commitment to further changes

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## Transition to a 'one program, one culture' model

The review found that, while successful to date, the State's hotel quarantine system could be enhanced by taking a more cohesive approach to practice and protocols, workforces, workplaces and data across the system. To achieve this, the review recommends a transition towards a 'one program, one culture' model.

As a first step, the Department of Health is developing core objectives to guide this model. Further, many of the changes already underway will support this transition, including the introduction of on-site managers to embed a one program culture on the ground and the development of an integrated data system.

Given it is likely that we will require quarantine in some form for some time, as observed by the review, this transition is an opportunity to optimise hotel quarantine for the future.

The system has served WA well to date. To ensure continued success, the WA Government is now focused on transitioning the approach to hotel quarantine to maximise health, economic and social outcomes, while managing current and future risks.

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