



Interim Recommendations CEO, Hazard Management Agency

Recommendations

- Improve access to information relating to quarantine particularly as it relates to unaccompanied minors.
- Strengthen inter-agency relationships to support the protection and safety of unaccompanied minors.
- Embed National Principles for Child Safe Organisations across all functions of the quarantine system.
- Enhance audit and compliance reporting to include remedial actions where targets are not being met.

Background

The Review of WA's Hotel Quarantine Arrangements recommended the establishment of an advisory panel to provide strategic and forward thinking, risk assessment, and adding value by asking the difficult questions of Hotel Quarantine line management (Weeramanthri, 2021).

Government has confirmed hotel quarantine will continue to be a key element of the WA quarantine system. The role of the Quarantine Advisory Panel (QAP) is to provide assurance to government hotel quarantine is fit-for-purpose, agile and responsive to the dynamic and complex challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since its establishment in May 2021, the QAP have affirmed their role and responsibilities in providing advice and supporting the HMA's Chief Executive Officer and the Minister of Health.

Approach

The QAP defined WA's quarantine system as;

“the mechanisms and levers involved in the management of individuals who are positive or suspected positive of COVID-19. This includes arrivals into WA from medium, high or extreme-risk national or international locations and/or WA residents who are impacted by community transmission events.”

The definition, agreed by the QAP on 27 July 2021, is inclusive of all touchpoints a person who is COVID-19 positive (or suspected) may encounter and aims to identify any areas that may pose a risk to the WA community.

Initially agreeing to take a granular approach in the review of current risks and mitigation strategies supporting hotel quarantine, the Panel are currently in the process of developing key 'Principles' to guide the assurance process. The Principles will aim to be pragmatic and add value to current quarantine processes.

Advice will identify gaps and mitigation strategies, record observations and report on possible system improvements and will be underpinned by the governing legislation.

This interim report is a summary of current projects which have not been concluded but have identified potential operational and system improvements that will reduce risk and enhance the user experience.

Unaccompanied Minors

The issues raised by the State Health Incident Coordination Centre (SHICC) were investigated and findings presented to the QAP on 21 September 2021. The QAP reviewed, accepted the paper and agreed to;

- 1) Define the roles and responsibilities of all agencies involved in the management of unaccompanied minors within the WA quarantine system.
- 2) Obtain a cross jurisdictional perspective via AHPPC.
- 3) Define principles to guide the assurance process as it relates to minors.

Whilst the final outcomes will be presented to the QAP in October, interim recommendations include the improvement of pre-travel information for parents and guardians; strengthening of inter-agency relationships and the embedding of 'National Principles for Child Safe Organisations' (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2019) across all policies and procedures within the quarantine system.

Improve access to pre-travel information

There are significant complexities around ever-changing travel and quarantine requirements. In order to plan their child's journey, parents/guardians need easy access to reliable and simple to understand information. Where relatively straightforward messages are conveyed, the majority of consumers will use the information correctly (OECD, 2020).

Since the initial report was presented to the QAP, access to information has improved but still lacks clear instructions for parents/guardians. Parents are advised that "arrangements must be made" but there is no guidance on how to make arrangements.

Do unaccompanied minors have to undertake hotel quarantine?

Unaccompanied minors (under 18 years) arriving from overseas are subject to hotel quarantine (centre direction) and arrangements must be made to have a responsible adult enter the quarantine centre in company with the child. The responsible adult and the minor (under 18) will be subject to undertake hotel quarantine. (Government of Western Australia, 2021)

Clearly outlining actions required of parents will support compliance with the Directions and early detection of inbound unaccompanied.

Strengthen inter-agency relationships

WA's quarantine system is a whole of government response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The safety and protection of minors subject to mandatory quarantine is the responsibility of all agencies involved from the time of arrival to clearance by Public Health.

Whilst the emergency management structure provides for clear accountability, due to the complexity of the emergency, the clarification of roles and responsibilities should be continuously reviewed.

National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed the "National Principles for Child Safe Organisations" in 2019 and committed to embedding child safe cultures across all sectors of Australian society.

This commitment needs to be extended across all policy decisions and operational procedures within WA's quarantine system.

Assurance and Risk Mitigation

Due to the complexity of the COVID-19 pandemic and Western Australia's response, the QAP decided to take a systematic approach in reviewing the quarantine system and providing assurance to government.

Professor Tarun Weeramanthri recognised the low risk appetite of COVID-19 transmission in the community meant execution and compliance of mitigations strategies needs to be near 100%.

The QAP agreed to review hotel quarantine operational, high-risk functions and related treatment action plans to ascertain if risks are being managed at a tolerable level.

A sub-group of independent members of the QAP met to work through documents provided by the SHICC to stress test their risk mitigation strategies. Whilst a full report is yet to be compiled, the group found that audit and compliance reporting could be enhanced with the inclusion of remedial actions where compliance targets are not being met.

Acknowledgement

The Quarantine Advisory Panel acknowledge and appreciate the continued support of all key emergency management agencies. Numerous units within the Department of Health, Department of Communities and WA Police have generally engaged without hesitation and supported the efforts for the QAP through verbal feedback and the provision of operational procedures and policies. The success of the Panel heavily relies on the ongoing support of all stakeholders within the quarantine system above their daily, highly demanding roles during an emergency response.

References

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- Weeramanthri, T. (2021). *Review of Western Australia's Hotel Quarantine Arrangements - Interim Advice #2*. Perth: Government of Western Australia.