



**Quarantine Advisory Panel**

# Quarantine Advisory Panel Final Report

## Executive Summary

The Quarantine Advisory Panel (Panel) was established to provide strategic oversight of Western Australia's (WA) quarantine arrangements set up to support the State's COVID-19 pandemic response. This report summarises the work of the Panel, from June 2021 to April 2022, and provides a brief overview of projects completed.

The Panel focused on identifying key risks, gaps, and mitigation strategies in the WA quarantine system. The intent was not to duplicate previous work but to review and build on previous learnings to improve the system through the development of key principles and standards focusing on strategy, risk, performance and controls.

In providing assurance, the Panel took a granular approach in reviewing operations of hotel quarantine and other key areas of the quarantine system. Gaining an understanding of transmission points in the quarantine environment enabled new perspective of quarantine measures. Understanding system-wide operations through end-to-end journey mapping supported the identification of future opportunities and strengths, as well as gaps that may pose a risk to the entire system which could result in unplanned community transmission.

The instigation of the State of Emergency and the establishment of quarantine was to protect the community from infection and control the spread of the virus. Recognising the psychological impact of quarantine, the Panel also placed an emphasis on the health and wellbeing mechanisms in place to protect and support people using and working in the quarantine system, which is reflected in the guiding Principles<sup>1</sup>.

Working Groups (Groups) were established to support the evidence-based decision-making of the Panel and advice to the Hazard Management Agency (HMA). The Groups were agile and committed to ongoing and transparent reporting, providing observations and recommendations to the Panel to support their timely and effective response. During the term the Panel met nine times and the Groups met nine times.

## Key achievements

- The development of key principles to promote a culture of continuous improvement.
- Review of the current service model against defined principles to identify areas of risk and recommendations for improvement. Recommendations were submitted to the HMA on 14 February 2022, addressing areas of strategy, performance, risk, compliance and monitoring, and short-term improvements of the state supervised hotel quarantine model.
- Development of the User Journey Maps to identify the touchpoints of the end-to-end user journey through the quarantine system.
- Development of principles and recommendations to support the effective and safe management of unaccompanied minors subject to supervised quarantine directions.

## Background

The *Review of Western Australia's Hotel Quarantine Arrangements*<sup>2</sup> was announced on 1 February 2021. Commissioned by the WA Government, Professor Tarun Weeramanthri conducted an independent review into WA's hotel quarantine in light of the emergence of new

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix A – Quarantine Advisory Panel – Assurance Principles

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2021-04/Review-of-Hotel-Quarantine-Arrangements-in-Western-Australia-Interim-Advice-2.pdf>

variants of COVID-19 internationally and the infection of hotel quarantine workers. The review recommended the State Emergency Coordinator establish a Quarantine Advisory Panel within the existing Emergency Management framework.

The Panel would be responsible for “*thinking forward, thinking laterally, and adding value by asking the difficult strategic questions of hotel quarantine line management about programme gaps and risks*”. Its scope would cover the whole end-to-end quarantine process, and encompass important social, community and mental health aspects of quarantine.

On 27 May 2021, the Hon Roger Cook announced the appointment of a Quarantine Advisory Panel<sup>3</sup> to provide strategic oversight of WA’s hotel quarantine system. The responsibilities of the Panel include assessing and advising on the capacity, capability and performance of WA's quarantine arrangements.

The Panel was to provide assurance to Government that WA’s quarantine system is fit for purpose, agile and responsive to the dynamic and complex challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and promotes a culture of continuous improvement, best practice and transparency.

The Panel’s role was to:

- provide advice and support the HMA, the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Health, in leading and managing WA’s COVID-19 quarantine arrangements; and
- facilitate whole of government coordination and expert clinical and corporate governance input into WA’s quarantine system.

The Panel’s first meeting was held on 14 June 2021. The Panel recognised system performance, communication, and providing support and assurance as their solid objectives. The Panel agreed WA should embed end-to-end assurance mechanisms and look to continuously improve hotel quarantine. Aiming to focus the process of providing assurance the Panel 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 international locations, low, medium, high or extreme-risk interstate locations and/or WA residents who are impacted by community transmission events.”*

## Assurance

The process of assurance required a clear understanding of risk and how system managers were addressing and mitigating risk.

In order to understand the risks in the system the Panel endeavoured to understand the system at an operational level by regularly reviewing the controls in place, identifying the risk and gaps in the system, the mitigation strategies and seek assurance they are being implemented. However, the reluctance of agencies and data constraints impacted the Panel’s ability to provide timely, evidence-based advice.

A recommendation in Prof Weeramanthri’s final advice is data;

- *The HMA/SHICC to identify gaps, address data quality concerns and commit to data sharing arrangements with relevant partner agencies.*

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix B – Quarantine Advisory Panel Members

A lack of integrated data and communications is an operational risk. An important measure to consider now and in future pandemics is the sharing of information and learnings, this would assist and support effective whole-of-government decision-making and avoid duplication and preventable errors. Reliable data enables key stakeholders to be responsive and agile, ensuring the entire system is working at optimum.

The Panel initially focused on identified high-risk components of the system and ensure treatment action plans and mitigation strategies were adequate and continuously reviewed. The process included a review of recommendations made by Halton<sup>4</sup> and Weeramanthri.

Under the Terms of Reference, the Panel has a responsibility to:

- *Monitor, assess and provide assurance of the implementation of recommendations related to the Review of Western Australia's Quarantine Arrangements and other relevant State, interstate, national and international reviews, research and advice.*
- *Monitor, assess and provide advice on the capacity, capability and performance of WA's quarantine arrangements. This includes consideration of the safety and wellbeing of guests and staff, as well as corporate governance aspects such as procurement, contract management, workforce and industrial arrangements.*

On the 27 July 2021 the Panel agreed to take a granular approach to review the hotel quarantine system, looking at operational level policies, procedures and protocols; and the underpinning evidence that supports WA's current quarantine arrangements. Acknowledging the complexities within which the quarantine system is managed and recognising Emergency Management (EM) structure supporting the EM Act and Public Health legislation, the Panel reviewed WA hotel quarantine operational documents to identify system strengths, potential gaps and weakness and identify opportunities for system improvements.

Assurance Principles were developed to guide the assurance process as it relates to potential risks in WA's quarantine system and to promote a culture of continuous improvement across the entire quarantine system. The intent was to provide multi-faceted principle-based assurance as the system evolved to meet new challenges and variants of concern.

The Panel agreed in order to identify key themes and areas of risk within WA's quarantine system they had to clearly identify the touchpoints of the user within the system by mapping out the end-to-end journey of travellers. Engaging an independent consult, the User Journey project focused on the experience of international and domestic travellers who were issued a quarantine Direction in 2021. The final report submitted to the HMA on 21 February 2022 provides a summary of areas of sub-optimal experience and improvement opportunities. The User Journey Maps were published on the Panel's web pages on [www.gov.au](http://www.gov.au) on 4 March 2022. The maps and the experiences of travellers will continue to inform Panel advice and recommendations for continuous improvement of the WA quarantine system.

Professor Weeramanthri's final advice<sup>5</sup> (12 March 2021) identified measures to strengthen hotel quarantine and provided recommendations and opportunities for further improvement. The Terms of Reference state a key function of the panel is to;

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<sup>4</sup> National Review of Quarantine – Adj. Professor Jane Halton AO PSM

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2021-04/Review-of-Hotel-Quarantine-Arrangements-in-Western-Australia-Final-Advice.pdf>

- *Monitor, assess and provide assurance of the implementation of recommendations related to the Review of Western Australia’s Quarantine Arrangements and other relevant State, interstate, national and international reviews, research and advice.*

The Panel agreed to finalise this function by providing a report to the HMA confirming all recommendations as they relate to hotel quarantine have been fully implemented by the State Health Incident Coordination Centre (SHICC) and Public Health Emergency Operations Centre (PHEOC) and highlight relevant recommendations to transition across to the Centre for National Resilience Perth (CNRP).

## **Escalation and Resolution of Risks**

The scale of the COVID-19 pandemic required a multi-agency response. Overall, the state agencies collaborated and developed a quarantine system that achieved its objective in protecting the community and limiting the spread of the virus. The establishment of the Panel provided a forum for the escalation and resolution of risks and issues with strategic significance. The high-level expertise of the Panel provided a different perspective to stakeholders and an opportunity to seek guidance on ongoing “wicked problems”. The Panel were able to provide oversight, discuss and identify potential issues and provide solutions for shared strategies.

The SHICC raised concern regarding management of unaccompanied minors arriving in WA and subject to supervised quarantine. The Panel reviewed and accepted the paper providing recommendations for improvement. The Panel developed guiding Unaccompanied Minors Principles<sup>6</sup> to assist the SHICC and other key agencies manage unaccompanied minors in quarantine and improve interagency processes through clearly defined and documented roles and responsibilities. The Panel sought expert advice to ensure the principles achieved their objective and enabled agencies working in the quarantine system to provide the best possible care for children. The final paper was socialised and reviewed by key stakeholders and presented to the Panel on 29 March 2022 who endorsed the paper.

At the request of Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the Panel agreed to provide relevant strategic advice to support the successful operations of the CNRP and its interoperability within the State’s overall quarantine objectives. The final report, endorsed by the Panel on 29 March 2022, provides high-level strategic advice to the HMA and recommendations in three key areas that may assist in supporting second stage negotiations of the tender process;

- User (quarantine resident)
- Contractor
- Contracting agency

## **Future Planning**

Health advice indicates that WA should expect to be impacted by future pandemics. Future planning should include a multi-disciplinary advisory team engaged early in the pandemic to be proactive not reactive to provide support, advice and strategic oversight.

Professor Weeramanthri recommended the SHICC/HMA transition hotel quarantine to a “one program, one culture” model. The Panel considered this in their assurance work reviewing the end-to-end quarantine journey to support continuous improvement. The recommendation should be a key consideration in future planning efforts and key learnings.

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<sup>6</sup> Appendix C – Quarantine Advisory Panel – Unaccompanied Minors Principles

Strengthen the purpose of data linkages across governments agencies, improving approaches to specific collection, sharing and responding to real data needs to be included in pre-pandemic planning and testing.

One of the lessons learned from the assurance work related to hotel quarantine is the importance of timely reporting and analysis of issues, non-compliance and safety. The context of reporting is to be dynamic and future proof as the system is constantly evolving with changing risk profiles.

Communication should be two-way process. There should be timely data and information flow between stakeholders. This is fundamental in providing a cohesive approach to the management and continuous improvement of the quarantine system. The agile implementation of this principle could also be applied to sharing information between jurisdictions to strengthen measures minimising public health risk. The information sharing should reflect lessons learned from lived experience.

The reports and recommendations provided by the Panel could be included in the Operational Model for the CNRP. The purpose-built facility could provide safe, effective quarantine into the future should learnings from hotel quarantine be implemented.

The User Journey feedback from operational and executive stakeholders clearly reinforced the importance of minimising harm to the users of the system, highlighting the importance of user engagement early in a pandemic to inform decisions regarding health and wellbeing should quarantine be included in future modelling.

The evolution of the pandemic demanded an agile and responsive advisory panel. Monthly meetings limited the responsiveness of the Panel which was mitigated through the introduction of the Working Group in September 2021. Further delays were the result of the provision of timely information from relevant stakeholders and impacting the Working Groups ability to clearly understand areas of concerns and their ability to provide timely and constructive advice.

The economic impact of a future quarantine system should be considered for future public health pandemics. When National Cabinet agreed to move to a user-pays model, the high cost of quarantine (security, hotels, logistics, testing) and the economic impact for the individuals using the system has been significant. Improvement in the criteria and process for demonstrating financial hardship would enhance the user experience. Consideration should be given to long-term planning to reduce the financial burden on the state, including the impact on the health system and the individuals subject to quarantine.

Measures taken to address the pandemic such as community lockdowns, mandatory quarantine, and closing-down parts of the economy (tourism, hospitality) have resulted in differential mental health outcomes. The work of the wellness and engagement teams had a positive impact for most quarantine residents. However, the long-term mental health outcomes for quarantine residents need to be included in any study of mental health impacts of the pandemic.

## Conclusion

Over the last two years the quarantine arrangements have been understandably reactive, developed in a short period of time in response to the global pandemic, adjustments and improvements have been implemented to adapt to the emergence of variants of concern, border controls, a vaccinated population and the changing requirements of quarantine.

The hotel quarantine system has been a key part of WA's response in managing the pandemic, achieving its objective in preventing the transmission and subsequent spread of COVID-19 to the WA community, also public co-operation and their compliance with public health measures has been instrumental in achieving this objective.

The Panel has provided specific systems improvement advice in relation to this pandemic. This advice and recommendations could be used to ensure future quarantine responses are less reactive with planning based on lessons learned from the COVID-19 quarantine response. Planning must be responsive and adaptive, oversight, accountability, governance, auditing and assurance are key areas of focus to apply to the management of future pandemics.

The Panel committed to ongoing and transparent reporting to the HMA, providing recommendations to drive continuous improvement of the quarantine system. As quarantine structures and processes develop, issues are resolved and frameworks are embedded, evidence based strategic planning activities should be integrated into the decision-making systems.

The Panel acknowledge and appreciate the continued support of all key stakeholders and agencies providing extensive operational expertise in managing WA's response in a rapidly changing environment.

## Appendix A: Quarantine Advisory Panel – Assurance Principles

The following principles have been developed to guide the Quarantine Advisory Panel (Panel) assurance process as it relates to potential risks in Western Australia's (WA) quarantine system. The Panel define 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 international locations, low, medium, high or extreme-risk interstate locations and/or WA residents who are impacted by community transmission events.”*

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1. The quarantine system should be viewed as an **eco-system**. Quarantine facilities and services should be sufficient and effective in providing the basic needs for both consumers and workers; and should operate with compassion and empathy. The physical and mental health of individuals and workers associated within the quarantine system is paramount and proactive support mechanisms should be available.
  2. The system should be adequately provisioned and **resourced** to ensure it is meeting the needs of those using and working in the system including cultural needs, disability support needs and medical requirements.
  3. Workforce **continuity plans** should be robust. The increased transmission risk of COVID-19 Delta variant and the complexities of workforce requirements supporting the quarantine ecosystem means that contingency plans for the workforce should be in place to manage a community transmission event.
  4. **Workers** in the quarantine system should be protected through consistent, repetitive and high standard training in infection prevention and control practices. Training programs should ensure workers clearly understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to infection, prevention and control.
  5. The **effectiveness of the quarantine system** should be monitored through audit and compliance reporting and lessons learned (WA and other jurisdictions). The Panel need to understand the operations of WA's current quarantine system, transmission events and breaches to ensure the system is adaptive to Delta and other emerging variants of concern. Evaluation of the system will guide recommendations for operational and system improvements.
  6. The Panel will work within the emergency management structure and statutory framework. The complexities are underpinned by the **Emergency Management Act and Public Health legislation**. The Panel will not seek to go beyond this.
  7. The Panel will consider the reasons for travel to inform approaches to longer-term strategic planning. Quarantine is integral to the COVID-19 response and there is a requirement to consider the surge capacity when the current flight caps increase.
  8. There should be an established **assurance** process with regular audits and reviews of their effectiveness. Reliable, timely and complete data is critical to the planning, preparedness, assessment of risk, end to end assurance and monitoring of the system to support



continuous improvement. The assurance process should consider changes to the reporting framework, changes that will instil confidence in knowing the system is performing. Improved specific reporting will highlight issues arising, areas for improvement, and provide assistance to those working in the system.

9. The quarantine system should be underpinned by strong and transparent **governance** arrangements, including clear chain of command and decision-making processes, communication, operational plans (e.g. response to positive cases, lessons learned, outbreak management plans) and record keeping. The system should have established escalation processes and the planning should identify risks associated with an outbreak. With reference to lessons learned, existing and new standard operating procedures (SOP) developed should be reviewed and updated to include COVID-19 Delta variant and other emerging variants of concern. The Panel should be able to identify where regular review of controls are informing continuous improvement.
10. Assess the risk, consider the definition of non-compliance and the risk. **Risk, audit and compliance** principles should emphasise strong and transparent governance, developing a system for monitoring compliance.
11. Monitor, assess and provide advice on the **capacity, capability and performance** of WA's quarantine arrangements. This includes consideration of the safety and wellbeing of guests and staff, as well as corporate governance aspects such as procurement, contract management, workforce and industrial arrangements.

## Appendix B: Quarantine Advisory Panel Members

- Sue Ash AO, Independent Chair;
- Dr David Russell-Weisz, Director General Department of Health;
- Dr Andrew Robertson, Chief Health Officer;
- Commissioner Chris Dawson, State Emergency Coordinator;
- Emily Roper, Director General Department of the Premier and Cabinet;
- Nicki Godecke, Deputy Director General, Major Projects, Department of Finance;
- Professor Allen Cheng, Public health expert;
- Professor Alison Jones, Toxicology expert;
- Rob McDonald, Former South Metropolitan Health Service Board Chair; and
- Garry Taylor, A/Executive Director Safety, Freight and Business Management Systems, Public Transport Authority.

## Appendix C: Unaccompanied Minors Principles

The below principles have been developed to guide the Quarantine Advisory Panel assurance process as it relates to the management of minors subject to quarantine directions in Western Australia.

*An **Unaccompanied Minor (or child)** is defined as a person under the age of 18 years without an accompanying parent, guardian or caregiver.*

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- 1) Pre-travel information relating to children travelling unaccompanied and subject to mandatory supervised quarantine is simple and easily accessible.
  - 2) The Unaccompanied Minor's contribution to deliberations relating to their care and safety are taken into account.
  - 3) The safety and protection of minors, who are or become unaccompanied during their quarantine journey, is delegated to a single lead agency, who make appropriate records.
  - 4) Duty of care - the lead agency must ensure a minor is never rendered unaccompanied for the entirety of the quarantine period; from time of arrival at Perth airport through to clearance by the public health unit.
  - 5) All agencies involved in the quarantine journey have clearly defined roles and responsibilities to support the safety and protection of minors including, but not limited to, protection from unwanted adult interest.
  - 6) Unaccompanied minors who are in state supervised quarantine facilities are protected from illegal activities including the provision of alcohol, drugs, nicotine products and information technology.
  - 7) Cultural, gender specific, religious and belief practices are to be respected, and supported wherever practicable.
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- 8) "National Principles for Child Safe Organisations" are embedded in all processes and are quality assured by the lead agency regularly.
- 9) The quarantine of unaccompanied minors in a hotel facility is not appropriate.