

Media Release

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP
Premier



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A STRONGER QUARANTINE PROGRAM TO PROTECT WHAT WE'VE BUILT

The Victorian Government has unveiled a new, stronger quarantine program and a dedicated agency to oversee it enabling Victorians and visitors to safely start returning from overseas.

As part of the Government's response to the interim report of the Hotel Quarantine Inquiry, Premier Daniel Andrews and Minister for Police and Emergency Services Lisa Neville today launched the new body and program – which has been overhauled following a root-and-branch review of the original program.

Significant changes have been made to strengthen leadership, oversight and training, embed public health and enforcement expertise, and tighten obligations for both staff and residents – to keep them and the community safe.

A dedicated agency, COVID-19 Quarantine Victoria (CQV), has been established to oversee all elements of the program – including the Frontline Worker Accommodation program (formerly known as Hotels for Heroes), mandatory quarantine for people entering Australia including Health Hotels for positive and suspected cases or close contacts, and Emergency Accommodation for local residents who need a safe place to quarantine.

It will be led by Corrections Commissioner Emma Cassar, who has been appointed as interim Commissioner of CQV and will report directly to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

All staff working in the program are employed or directly contracted by CQV with the exception of cleaning staff who are on secure, fixed term contracts with Alfred Health. All government staff working in the COVID-19 Accommodation program are under the command of the CQV Commissioner and all contracts for the program will be held by CQV.

Health, enforcement and operational expertise will be embedded in the executive structure of CQV, responding to a key recommendation from the interim report.

Victoria Police will boost its presence in the program, and will continue carrying out supervision, enforcement and compliance duties at all locations. They will be supported by Australian Defence Force personnel and highly trained Resident Support Officers.

Additional infection controls have been introduced, including the daily testing of staff and voluntary regular testing of their family and household members, a centralised contact tracing team, proactive contact mapping for all staff, a ban on secondary face-to-face employment for all staff and strengthened PPE protocols.

Frontline staff will work in 'bubbles' to ensure they only have contact with a limited number of other staff during their shift, allowing for the bubble to be taken offline with minimal impact if one staff member becomes unwell.

The Frontline Worker Accommodation program (formerly known as Hotels for Heroes) will be expanded to include those working in the COVID-19 Accommodation program. This will ensure staff, including those who have household members who work in the aged care sector, are able to access alternative accommodation if required.

Given the high-risk nature of the aged care sector, workers will be required and supported to isolate from anyone in their household who works in the aged care sector. This includes access to dedicated Frontline Worker Accommodation facilities.

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Regular, independent audits will be carried out at all hotels, as recommended by the Board of Inquiry, to identify any issues or improvements and monitor compliance with best-practice infection prevention and control measures.

Unless there are medical, mental health or compassionate reasons, residents will no longer be able to leave their rooms while isolating or quarantining, including for fresh air or exercise breaks. Food and care packages from family and friends will no longer be permitted, with deliveries only accepted from accredited food services.

These measures will help restrict movement to and from quarantine accommodation and further reduce the risk of transmission between those quarantining and staff, helping to keep the Victorian community safe.

These will be tough changes for residents, which is why we've created a timetable of structured activities throughout their stay and increased access to specialised remote children and family friendly activities, exercise programs and mental health and wellbeing programs.

Three Deputy State Controllers with relevant experience will support the Commissioner – including new Deputy Chief Health Officer Professor Ben Cowie who has been appointed to lead health management for the program focusing on infection prevention and control, testing and contact tracing.

Deputy Commissioner Ross Guenther from Victoria Police will provide enforcement expertise, and also oversee the force's expanded role in the program.

The third Deputy State Controller will be appointed shortly and will use their extensive operational and logistical expertise to manage critical staffing and corporate aspects of the program.

There will also be increased oversight on the ground with general managers and site managers introduced at each location, setting clear reporting lines for staff and for any resident complaints or issues.

Healthcare Australia will provide primary health services and wellbeing support across quarantine hotels, where returned travellers without symptoms are accommodated.

Alfred Health will play an expanded role in the management of health hotels, where people who have or are suspected to have coronavirus, and residents with complex care needs, are accommodated.

Stricter standards have also been introduced for cleaning and waste disposal, with cleaners and hotel staff receiving additional training.

Changes to the mandatory quarantine program have been implemented in recent months and build on the significant reset made to the program in July. New practices and standards have been comprehensively tested, and staff are well trained ahead of international flights resuming on 7 December with a cap of 160 passengers arriving each day.

The interim report of the Hotel Quarantine Inquiry made 69 recommendations about a reset of the mandatory quarantine program. The Government has accepted or accepted in principle 52 recommendations, with a further 17 recommendations under review. Thirteen of these recommendations relate to the establishment of a model for home-based quarantine, which would require agreement from National Cabinet.

More details about the Government's response to the interim report can be found at vic.gov.au/hotelquarantineresponse

Quotes attributable to Premier Daniel Andrews

"We know there are thousands of Victorians overseas waiting to get home, but it was vital that we take the time to get the reset of this program right – CQV will deliver the strongest and safest quarantine program in the country."

"This strengthened program and dedicated agency will help us protect everything we have built together."

Quotes attributable to Police and Emergency Services Minister Lisa Neville

"Every element of the program has been strengthened, with increased oversight, leadership and infection prevention and control measures to protect the Victorian community."

"These changes are significant and tough – but they're critical to reducing exposure risks for staff and residents."

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