

MEDIA RELEASE
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Auditor-General's report to Parliament on COVID-19: Pandemic response and mobilisation

The Auditor-General, Mr Rod Whitehead has tabled his Report on COVID-19: Pandemic response and mobilisation in Parliament today.

The review assessed how well the three lead agencies: Health, Police, Fire and Emergency Management and Premier and Cabinet worked together to respond to the health emergency and mobilise resources in the first few months of the pandemic. The review looked at how the lead agencies worked together to establish governance arrangements, deployed human resources, and maintained effective lines of communication, supported by information management.

Mr Whitehead said, 'On the whole, the governance arrangements enacted were effective with appropriate legislative authority and plans, structures, roles and responsibilities articulated. While not all existing plans were initially fit-for-purpose for a pandemic of this kind, these shortcomings were quickly identified and improvements made before the Public Health Emergency and State of Emergency declarations were made.'

The Report states there were limitations with the capacity of Public Health Services to respond fully to all demands placed on them, such as briefings to the Premier and Minister, contact tracing and queries from and advice to stakeholders and the public. This issue was recognised early by Department of Health, with Public Health's role more targeted towards strategic public health advice and contact tracing.

Mr Whitehead highlighted that, 'Overall, the rapid deployment of people was effective, with resources made available for backfilling of posts, where possible. While health and wellbeing programs to support staff were enhanced in the three agencies we assessed, there are future opportunities for a more coordinated approach between agencies given the large number of staff deployed outside their substantive roles.'

The Report also identified that external communication to the community improved as the response progressed with the rapid resourcing and development of the dedicated coronavirus website and public health hotline.

Mr Whitehead found that an early decision by the State Controller to use one central system for information, situational awareness, intelligence, decision-making and actions to guide the whole-of-government response meant responders were all accessing the same information and able to base their decisions on the best information available at the time.

Mr Whitehead made three recommendations to assist government agencies with improving their understanding of the impact of a protracted response of this nature on capacity, services and people as well as enhancing support for their key responders. These included ongoing scenario rehearsals, coordinated approach for the health and wellbeing of responders and a post-pandemic review for the impact of staff on business as usual activities.

The complete Report can be downloaded from www.audit.tas.gov.au.

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Further information contact Rod Whitehead, Auditor-General, (03) 6173 0900