

Wednesday, 13 October 2021

## Background

The Australian Government, in partnership with the Northern Territory (NT), established the Centre for National Resilience (the Centre) in Howard Springs, Darwin to prioritise the return of Australians stranded overseas. The Australian Government is committed to bringing overseas Australians who wish to return home, including the most vulnerable Australians, and has worked to ensure their safety and that of the broader Australian community. Both governments are dedicated to the continuous improvement at the Centre to accommodate as many returning Australians as safely possible.

The partnership between the NT Government and the Commonwealth Government has been formalised through a bilateral agreement to support repatriation quarantine arrangements from October 2020 to December 2021. The agreement is [publicly available](#) on the Council of Federal Financial Relations website. Under the bilateral agreement, the NT has primary responsibility and authority for the delivery of quarantine services at the Centre.

The bilateral agreement requires that the Commonwealth clinical lead from the Commonwealth Department of Health works closely with the NT Government, through formal reviews, on [infection](#) prevention and control (IPC) arrangements at the Centre. The reviews support the NT Government with ongoing improvements and enhancements to IPC arrangements and quarantine arrangements to reflect best practice and the latest health advice. This includes outcomes of quarantine reviews such as the Halton review and the latest advice and guidance of National Cabinet and the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC). The October 2020, February 2021 and May 2021 reviews are summarised below.

## October 2020

The Centre was established on 20 October 2020, the first review was undertaken upon set up and provided the Commonwealth and the opportunity to ensure the operations aligned with the hierarchy of controls for IPC arrangements. This included finalising the command and control structure for the newly established, complex operation. The review included an escorted tour of the facility in full Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) which demonstrated good compliance with the guidance published by the AHPPC Infection Control Expert Group.

The review recognised the work of the NT to establish the Centre and immediate learnings as the first few cohorts were received, such as enhancement to processes to manage the highly vulnerable cohort including jurisdiction transfer processes for critically unwell passengers. The Commonwealth also worked with the NT to finalise documentation and planning, including Centre specific disaster management plans, as per the bilateral agreement requirements.

## February 2021

The February 2021 review was undertaken in the context of the Centre's capacity at the time of up to 850 returning Australians per fortnight, and with the lens of assisting expansion preparations to receive up to 2,000 returning Australians per fortnight from May 2021. More than 4,500 repatriated Australians had undertaken quarantine at the Centre between October 2020 and the time of this audit.

The visit included observing the arrivals process of a repatriation flight at Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Base, site tours and meetings with key stakeholders. An inspection of the Darwin International Airport as part of this visit evidenced that the international terminal is better equipped to support repatriation flights, particularly the upcoming increased frequency of flights and passenger numbers under the expansion.

Recommendations following the February review included transitioning to a single-governance source of Centre management with a clearly defined governance structure and universal operating procedures for all agencies involved, and enhancing the arrivals process to further minimise the risk of COVID-19 transmission and reduce arrival processing time.

## May 2021

The May 2021 review was undertaken in the context of the current operations and to understand the new arrangements in place (including IPC practices) to support up to 2,000 returning Australians per fortnight. More than 10,000 repatriated Australians had undertaken quarantine at the Centre since October 2020. The review found that NT Government has completed considerable work to expand the capacity at the Centre.

The visit included Commonwealth IPC officials observing the arrivals process of a repatriation flight at the Darwin RAAF Base, site tours and meetings with key stakeholders. The review noted evidence of significant efforts in workforce recruitment and training, capital works at the Centre, transition to a single source of Centre management, and streamlining the arrivals process (including transitioning flight arrivals to Darwin International Airport).

Recommendations following the May 2021 review included providing updated governance documents to show the Centre's governance structures in the context of the broader NT command and control structure and numerous agencies involved, and seeking updates on ongoing planning for longer-term operations and enhancements to accommodate the 2,000 passengers per fortnight.

## Future reviews

Due to the size of the program, associated complexities of quarantine and learnings over the operation, there will always be improvements and enhancements that can be made. The NT is dedicated to continuous improvement, including demonstrable implementation of recommendations from Commonwealth audits.

---

For more information, visit [coronavirus.nt.gov.au](https://coronavirus.nt.gov.au)

Audit Review Summary, Northern Territory Centre for National Resilience for the Organised National  
Repatriation of Australians

The Commonwealth will continue to undertake regular audits of the Centre. In line with the bilateral agreement the NT also undertakes regular reviews of arrangements, including IPC arrangements, to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN RELEASED UNDER  
THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 1982 (CTH)  
BY THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

---

For more information, visit [coronavirus.nt.gov.au](https://coronavirus.nt.gov.au)