

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Inquiry into the Victorian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

4 December 2020

Witnesses:

- Martin Foley MP
- Professor Euan M Wallace AM
- Mr Terry Symonds
- Mr Argiri Alisandratos
- Mr Ben Rimmer
- Mr Greg Stenton
- Mr Chris Hotham
- Professor Brett Sutton
- Professor Allen Cheng
- Ms Sandy Pitcher
- Mr Jeroen Weimar

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

QUESTION 1 – Costs associated with former Minister for Health

Mr RIORDAN: ... Are there ongoing costs still associated with the former minister's position?

Prof. WALLACE: I am not aware that we have ongoing costs with the minister, but—

Mr RIORDAN: Could you get back to us—take that on notice?

Prof. WALLACE: I will.

Source: Unverified Transcript for COVID-19 – Health, p. 7

RESPONSE

Answer:

The department does not have any ongoing costs associated with the former Minister's position. Ministers and their staff are not paid by the department.

QUESTION 2 Fit-testing

Mr D O'BRIEN: Can I quickly just ask: when do you expect that final 26 000 will be fully fit-tested?

Prof. WALLACE: I do not have an end date. I do not know if Mr Symonds has an end date for that.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Happy if you can investigate it, and if you can, provide it on notice.

Source: Unverified Transcript for COVID-19 – Health, pp. 17-18

RESPONSE**Answer:**

The Department of Health and Human Services, Health Purchasing Victoria and health services are building ongoing capacity across the health system to do fit-testing which involves staff training across the sector and machines being delivered. Based on current assumptions it is estimated that the first 26,000 priority healthcare workers will be tested within next 3-4 months.

QUESTION 3 Percentage of tests performed at various facilities

Mr HIBBINS: Would you be able to provide—and I appreciate if you do not have this information on hand, but on notice if need be—the percentage of tests coming from the various different facilities?

Mr WEIMAR: Yes, I can give you an indication now, and I am happy to take the details on notice.

Source: Unverified Transcript for COVID-19 – Health, p. 22

RESPONSE**Answer:**

Based on testing performed between 1 July 2020 and 1 December 2020, the percentage of results for each type of testing site is:

Type of testing site	Percentage of COVID-19 test performed
Hospital and Public Health Services sites	56
Retail drive through sites	24
GP respiratory clinics	10
Community Health Service drive through	5
Community Health Service fixed site	2
Community Health Service walk through	1
Short-term pop-up sites	1

QUESTION 4 - Use of private security in Hotel for Heroes program

Page 30:

Ms VALLENCE: Yes, it is not a suggestion that they are being detained; it was just more: on that program were they used? Because evidence has been heard by this committee from Minister Pakula and the department of jobs that private security guards were used for Hotels for Heroes. So I am—

Prof. WALLACE: I will follow up. But I am advised that we did not, and it makes sense that we did not.

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Page 31:

Ms VALLENCE: Thank you. And in doing so, if you could also provide all time frames as to which private security was used—

Prof. WALLACE: If—

Ms VALLENCE: if that is the case—

Prof. WALLACE: Yes.

Ms VALLENCE: and what time they were utilised and also if—if so—any of the same security companies were used that were also used in the hotel quarantine program simultaneously. That would be great.

Source: Unverified Transcript for COVID-19 – Health, pp. 29-31

RESPONSE

Answer:

Security services were not provided in the Hotels for Heroes program. Frontline workers were staying voluntarily at the Hotels for Heroes sites.

QUESTION 5 - Department legal costs for Hotel Quarantine Inquiry

Ms VALLENCE: Secretary, in terms of legal costs for the Coate inquiry—I know that was discussed earlier and you said that you would take that on notice—I am just wanting to confirm that you are looking at the legal costs for the Coate inquiry for the Department of Health and Human Services. Will you take that on notice to provide the total cost, or at least the cost to date?

Prof. WALLACE: I said that we do not have total costs because the process is ongoing and that we would provide costs when—

Ms VALLENCE: On that basis, then, have no invoices been provided by your legal representation? I presume that they would want to get paid.

Prof. WALLACE: Well, it is about the proper auditing of our accounts that we do periodically. We will be reporting on costs of aspects of the hotel quarantine program, including board, in due course.

Ms VALLENCE: So would you make that available to the committee, please, in terms of current costs?

Prof. WALLACE: Yes, we will make available the costs when they are ready.

Ms VALLENCE: Thank you. And in terms of that, would you also be so kind as to provide a breakdown of those costs in relation to, say, former Minister Mikakos, Dr Sutton and so on and so forth?

Source: Unverified Transcript for COVID-19 – Health, p. 31

RESPONSE**Answer:**

The department has incurred legal costs (to date) associated with the Hotel Quarantine Inquiry of \$6,252,815.96 (noting that this figure reflects only invoices received and verified. A small number of invoices have been received and are in the process of being verified with more invoices expected to be received until the Hotel Quarantine Inquiry is complete).

The department has not incurred any legal costs on behalf of the former Health Minister (Mikakos) in relation to the Hotel Quarantine Inquiry.

The costs incurred to date associated with the department responding to the Hotel Quarantine Inquiry include support for all departmental staff including Professor Sutton and form part of the figure above. The total individual costs per departmental witness are not readily identified.