

Business Continuity During COVID-19 video transcript



Audit objective

In this audit, we looked at how business continuity arrangements helped departments prepare for and respond to COVID-19.

Why this audit is important

Departments need to have effective business continuity arrangements so they can continue to deliver critical services to the community during a disruption.

Who we examined

We examined all state government departments and Cenitex, which provides information and communication services.

What we examined

We looked at departments' business continuity arrangements before COVID-19 and we assessed if they met the relevant standards. We also looked at how effectively these arrangements helped departments respond to the pandemic and if this was done in a coordinated way.

Conclusion

For many years, a pandemic was a known statewide risk to government. While departments had done tests and exercises to prepare for a pandemic, they had not implemented all of the lessons they learnt before COVID-19.

We found that most departments' business continuity arrangements were inadequate and not designed for a complex long-term disruption. This meant that their response to restore and maintain their services at the beginning of the pandemic was not as effective and efficient as it could have been. Despite this, departments responded flexibly and made decisions quickly in challenging circumstances.

Background

COVID-19 has caused a disruption of a scale and complexity that most people have not seen before. However, a pandemic was not an unforeseeable event.

While the Victorian Public Service had strategies to respond to a pandemic, they understandably focused on the emergency response, not business continuity.

Issue 1: preparedness

Except for the Department of Education and Training, no department had business continuity arrangements that fully aligned with the relevant ISO standard before the pandemic. Gaps in their business continuity included inadequate:

- business impact analyses
- business continuity plans
- training and
- policies and procedures.

This meant that departments' business continuity arrangements only partially helped them to respond and maintain their prioritised services.

Issue 2: response

While departments were flexible, they reactively responded to COVID-19. Not all departments were equipped for remote working, so they had to streamline processes and develop guidance in the early stages of the pandemic. This took away resourcing at a critical time.

While departments told us that they continued to deliver their prioritised services within their business continuity timeframes, they didn't have adequate data to support this.

Issue 3: whole-of-government coordination and leadership

There is no whole-of-government coordination and leadership on business continuity to help departments have consistent processes and share their learnings.

There were also missed opportunities to improve preparedness and communication across departments.

What this means

Our audit shows that departments can be better prepared for foreseeable major disruptions. To do this, their business continuity arrangements should be living documents that they regularly test and update.

Recommendations

We made six recommendations to all departments about business impact analyses, business continuity planning, and training, testing and reporting.

We also made two recommendations to the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Treasury and Finance about whole-of-government business continuity coordination and testing.

We recommended that three departments develop standalone pandemic plans.

For more information, or to read our full report, please go to audit.vic.gov.au