



On June 25, 2020, Ambassador Jane Hardy, Australia's Consul-General in Honolulu, discussed Australia's strategy for managing the Covid-19 pandemic. Her talk emphasized the country's highly internationalized nature and its holistic approach to recovery on both the national and regional levels.

Public Health Measures

- **Strategy:** The Australian Government does not use the term “elimination” but refers to its “suppression” strategy, which aims to keep the rate of transmission (Rt) between 0 and 1. In March, Australia imposed strict social-distancing restrictions and closed its borders to drastically slow the number of new infections.
- **3-step-framework:** Thanks to a sharp reduction in new cases, in May the Australian government planned for a gradual opening of society. The opening is divided into three phases: 1) *Connecting with friends and family*. Groups of people can be together in homes and in the community. 2) *Larger gatherings and more business re-openings*. Higher-risk activities have tighter restrictions. 3) *Opening businesses and the community with minimal restrictions*. Reopening efforts are still underpinned by “COVIDSafe” ways of living. Australia is currently in Phase 2 and it is expected to enter Phase 3 in July.
- **Testing:** Australia has the 4th highest rate of testing worldwide, after Denmark, the UK, and Singapore. In April, the government expanded testing to begin tracing asymptomatic cases.
- **Contact tracing:** In April, the government released a contact tracing mobile app called “COVIDSafe” to complement the work of human contact tracers. The app is completely voluntary. It automatically tracks encounters between users and later allows a state or territory health authority to warn a user if they have come within 1.5 meters of an infected patient for 15 minutes or more. All data is collected on a health authority-administered server and automatically deleted after 21 days.
- **Travel quarantine:** Australia requires mandatory isolation of Australians returning from overseas, in centers such as hotels which are organized by state and territory governments. All travelers are transported directly from the airport of arrival to their quarantine-designated areas. Quarantine related-arrangements and expenses are managed by the respective State and Territory governments.
- **Face coverings:** [Guidance](#) from the Federal Government maintains that routine use of face masks in the community is not recommended while the rate of community transmission of COVID-19 is low.

***Insight:** Hawaii could consider complementing human tracers with a mobile app. It could also consider using hotel rooms as quarantine-designated areas for visitors and providing essential services to returning residents isolating in their home.*

Travel and Tourism

- **Travel restrictions:** Australia receives high numbers of international travelers from around the world. Early restrictions in March banned arrivals from China, Iran and South Korea. Enhanced screenings were enacted for arrivals from Italy, Australia's largest European minority community.

- **Air travel:** Qantas has grounded most of its international services, warning of a “skeleton service” for overseas travel until at least mid-2021. Domestic air travel has continued.
- **Trans-Tasman bubble:** Australia and New Zealand have been discussing the possibility of implementing a “Trans-Tasman Bubble,” i.e., opening travel between Australia and New Zealand, as early as September. Travelers would not be required to undergo 14-day quarantines because both countries have been successful at flattening the curve.
- **Domestic tourism:** Domestic travel has increased. Although four states have closed their land borders, many Australians are embracing road trips and inter-state flights. Caravanning has a long tradition in the country.
- **Insight:** *Hawaii could form special partnerships with other US states with low case counts by prioritizing resumption of flights to/from those destinations and fast-tracking screening processes for their residents.*

Economic Assistance Measures

- **Domestic:** Australia’s government passed a suite of economic packages supporting the workforce, health care, frontline medical workers, emergency response, childcare, and remote communities. Consistent principles are applied across the nation, implemented by states and territories, delivering hardship provisions for energy, water, and rates for households and small businesses. Aid for aboriginal communities to mitigate near- and medium-term effects of Covid-19 address the needs of indigenous businesses, jobseekers, community infrastructure, social services, and school meal programs over the next two years.
- **International:** Since April, Australia has reframed aid and the capabilities of its programs supporting its Pacific Island neighbors and Southeast Asia as Covid-19 resilience and response efforts. It has spent US\$126 million on island states and US\$3 million on Southeast Asia.

Insight: *The pandemic will likely deepen disparity and economic burdens for the next generation, similar to those who came of age during the Great Depression. Measures to ensure affordable education and equal access to health care and social services may be worthwhile investments in Hawaii’s long-term economic recovery.*

This document was prepared by Eugenio Benincasa, Ariel Stenek, and Keoni Williams. For more information, please contact Dr. Crystal Pryor (crystal@pacforum.org), Director of Nonproliferation, Technology, and Fellowships at Pacific Forum. These preliminary findings provide a general summary of the discussion. This is not a consensus document. The views expressed are those of the HIF chair and do not necessarily reflect the views of all participants. The speaker has approved this summation of their presentation.