



Human Rights in a Pandemic

A VICTORIAN OMBUDSMAN ENQUIRY

What was the problem?

Tamika lived in New South Wales and flew into Melbourne in early 2021. At the time, the Victorian Government required all travellers from New South Wales to spend 14 days in hotel quarantine due to a COVID-19 outbreak.

Tamika and her child were detained for five hours at Melbourne Airport while they were assigned a quarantine hotel. Tamika said she needed to use the toilet as she was walking to the bus but staff did not allow her to return to the airport and told her to wait until she arrived at the hotel. When the bus arrived, Tamika saw there was no toilet on it.

Tamika tried to hold until she arrived at the hotel but couldn't. She found an empty water bottle and had to relieve herself in it while the bus was moving. We received a complaint from Tamika after she left quarantine. She said she did not expect being treated this way.

What did we look at?

During the pandemic, people in quarantine are often being detained by the State. While it is important to manage infection risks, people must be treated humanely and with dignity.

We made enquiries with the (then) Department of Health and Human Services and COVID-19 Quarantine Victoria to find out what happened in Tamika's case.

What was the outcome?

In response to our enquiries, the Department of Health and Human Services called Tamika about her complaint and COVID-19 Quarantine Victoria provided a written response regarding her experience.

Although buses used in the quarantine program do not have bathrooms and stops are not permitted to prevent infection risks, people should be able to use facilities at the airport before being transported.

We monitored complaints to our office to make sure this did not happen again.