

Report on a page

In early 2020, the global economic outlook was characterised by uncertainty and volatility and a severe economic downturn was widely expected. In response, the Queensland Government implemented a range of health and economic policies and measures. A key part of the support measures included rapid economic response and recovery initiatives. In September 2020, we provided a broad outline of the government's activities in response to COVID-19 in our report *Queensland Government response to COVID-19* (Report 3: 2020–21).

This audit examines whether the Queensland Government's COVID-19 economic response and recovery initiatives were designed and managed effectively. We examined the design, delivery, and evaluation of a selection of initiatives. We also looked at central monitoring of the initiatives based on our report *Queensland Government response to COVID-19* (Report 3: 2020–21). This audit does not assess the pandemic management or the impacts of decisions on border closures.

Key learnings

The Queensland Government committed \$17.2 billion for economic response and recovery, for more than 300 initiatives. These included grants, loans, and state tax relief for both businesses and individuals. These initiatives – together with the containment of the COVID-19 case numbers and economic stimulus from all levels of government – contributed to a faster-than-expected economic recovery through to December 2021.

Given the emergency and the need for a rapid response, it is reasonable to expect there will be lessons for the future. By December 2021, there had been sufficient time for the entities designing and delivering the rapid response initiatives to evaluate their performance and apply relevant learnings to current and new initiatives. We summarise key learnings in Figure A, and our recommendations are on page 2.

Figure A Learnings for current and future rapid response initiatives

Designing, delivering, and evaluating rapid response initiatives

- **Needs** – continuing to develop an understanding of users' needs throughout the life cycle of the initiatives will help improve uptake rates.
- **Risks** – identifying and managing risks to achieving objectives, beyond compliance risks, will improve the ability to monitor and to meet the objectives.
- **Collaboration** – coordinating and sharing data across agencies will assist in improving support to the target cohort, especially where the delivery entity for the initiative is different from the frontline service provider and/or does not have data to determine eligibility.
- **Communication** – communication needs to reach the intended businesses and individuals. This is easier for pre-existing initiatives. New initiatives need targeted communication strategies.
- **Evaluating against pre-determined objectives** – collecting performance data enables evaluation of how well the initiative is achieving its objectives – this can be used to direct initiatives as they progress and in the design of future initiatives.

Monitoring rapid response initiatives

- **Objectives** – central data collection and monitoring about whether initiatives are meeting their objectives and when they are due to end will enable better assessment of effectiveness and delivery.
- **Demand** – pre-existing programs have data that makes it easier to predict demand and allocate funding. New initiatives need more analysis and ongoing monitoring to ensure they meet demand and are appropriately funded.
- **Costs** – collecting data on all the relevant costs of delivering initiatives will inform the design and budget allocation for future programs.

