



## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

By

**The Honourable E. David Burt, JP, MP**

Premier

### **Bermuda's Technology Driven Covid-19 Response**

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**Mr. Speaker**, today I will provide this Honourable House with an update on how the Government has successfully used technology to aid Bermuda's Covid-19 Response Strategy.

**Mr. Speaker**, Bermuda has been praised for the manner in which we have managed the Covid-19 pandemic. It has, however, been a total team effort and today I wish to salute the many men and women who have worked long, hard hours, in many different roles, in the government and the private sector; to keep Bermuda safe.

**Mr. Speaker**, whilst Bermuda has benefitted from the great work of so many people; technology has played a major role in our success in managing the pandemic and mitigating its risks. This pandemic necessitated that the Government use technology more than ever before and we have successfully implemented five (5) separate applications to date:

- Health IQ.BM
- ResQwest for the booking and results management of Covid-19 tests.
- GoData, for managing positive cases and their close contacts;
- The AQUA Solution for monitoring persons on quarantine;
- WeHealth App

**Mr. Speaker**, Health IQ is an application created by a young Bermudian Gabriel Jones, in collaboration with the Bermuda Health Council. The application was originally launched as COVID IQ, at the very start of the pandemic response, creating a way for people to report on any symptoms they may be experiencing, which could be COVID related.

This was the first COVID tool to be released that engaged the public and got them acclimated to technologies that could be helpful in the fight against this virus. Through working with the Bermuda Health Council, that application was re-developed and re-launched in early April to include mapping by parish of residents and visitors reporting symptoms, identifying who and where people were getting tested, and locating individuals who were defined as medically vulnerable. A feature was later added to have the community report on whether their fellow residents were wearing their masks and physically distancing in public.

**Mr Speaker,** this APP is still being used as a leading measure by the Ministry of Health to determine how well the Country is complying with their public health guidance. It is through this APP that we realized early on that public compliance was waning and that we had to ramp up communication and education on the importance of all residents protecting themselves, and those around them. Through its mapping feature, it also provides timely information and a snapshot of what is going on in the Country.

**Mr. Speaker,** I ask all Honourable Members and all of those listening via radio to go to [HEALTHIQ.BM](https://HEALTHIQ.BM) on their mobile device or computer and complete the survey.

**Mr. Speaker,** ResQwest is Bermuda's most widely used application to assist in pandemic management. The Government's ResQwest system is used to book Covid-19 tests for residents and travellers and to check them in for testing. Labs can also login to enter results for those tests, and patients are notified of the results through automated emails. Travelers also use the ResQwest to submit their travel authorisations, which are reviewed by the Covid hotline staff. When travelers arrive, they are automatically booked for on-island tests, based on their pre-test status and length of stay. The Surveillance Team then uses ResQwest's reporting portal to monitor compliance with quarantine regulations.

**Mr. Speaker,** GoData is an epidemiological tool, developed by the World Health Organisation, which Bermuda launched in May of this year for the case management team. GoData is also an outbreak investigation tool for field data collection during public health emergencies. The tool includes functionality for case investigation; contact follow-up; and visualization of chains of transmission, including secure data exchange. It is also designed for flexibility in the field in order to adapt to the wide range of outbreak scenarios. The information stored in GoData informs the statistics that are shared with the public regarding cases.

**Mr. Speaker,** AQUA stands for Active Quarantine User Ally. It is an application made available through HubCulture, a Bermuda based international business. The AQUA solution includes a bracelet; a smart phone application; and a management console. The bracelet is paired with a smart phone and uses Bluetooth technology and geolocation to show the user's location and allows the AQUA team at the Ministry of National Security to identify any violations of the quarantine rules. Bermuda successfully launched the AQUA platform on Monday, August 31st.

The quarantine bracelets are fitted on all travellers who arrive in Bermuda without a pre-test; and are therefore, required to quarantine for 8 days. These travelers are also asked to download the monitoring APP on their smartphones. If the traveler's phone is not compatible, they are provided with a temporary phone to monitor their quarantine. Working closely with Ministry of Health and Information and Digital Technology colleagues, the Aqua Monitoring Team ensures that persons who are quarantining comply with the rules and stay at home until they complete their quarantine period. At the end of their quarantine, travelers are tested for COVID-19. If their result comes back negative, they are allowed to remove and discard the quarantine bracelet, which is not reusable. The loaner phones are returned at the end of the quarantine period: cleaned, sanitized and reused as needed.

**Mr. Speaker,** the Government is in the final stages of piloting a fifth application called WeHealth Bermuda. The aim of WeHealth is to support, but not replace, our contact tracing efforts by making them more comprehensive, effective and efficient, in a completely anonymous way that fully complies with Bermuda's Personal Information Protection Act. WeHealth Bermuda is designed to help slow the spread of Covid-19 by notifying app users of potential exposure to the virus.

Contact Tracing becomes more comprehensive through notifying anonymous contacts. It becomes more effective by notifying people sooner of the risk and the steps they need to follow. Contact tracing becomes more efficient by informing only those at high risk, instead of everyone in the vicinity at the time, with minimal intervention. This means less people will have to be quarantined as we can determine who is actually at risk.

When smartphones that have the WeHealth Bermuda APP installed are near each other, the APP uses Bluetooth signals to determine how close together the devices were, and for how long. A sophisticated model is then used to calculate the risk of infection based on duration, distance and the date of first system onset of the person who tested positive.

WeHealth Bermuda users who test positive for COVID-19, can privately share their diagnosis with the APP. WeHealth Bermuda will then automatically and anonymously alert others who were close enough, for long enough, to potentially be exposed.

Exposure notifications are sent automatically to those considered at significant risk. WeHealth Bermuda COVID-19 exposure notifications cannot show details that could lead to the identification of persons sending the exposure notifications as the system is completely anonymous.

**Mr. Speaker,** using the WeHealth APP combined with other conventional techniques, the University of Arizona reduced the rate of infection, from a daily average of over 160 to under 5 in only a few weeks. This was achieved by employing targeted quarantine of individuals at high risk of infection, rather than mass quarantines or a complete lock-down, with on-site classes continuing throughout. Yes Mr. Speaker, they were able to reduce transmissions by 97% without the need for a lockdown, just by using this app.

**Mr. Speaker,** the Bermuda pilot so far has run one successful simulation at a local restaurant.

- The test utilized 15 smartphones placed at designated tables, to represent a person that may have been seated.
- Four specific scenarios were carried out, in order to determine a specific outcome, in addition to the overall test of observing which phones would display a significant exposure.
- The distances between all of the tables, as well as the distances between the verified positive phones and all other surrounding devices were measured for compliance.
- The test was successful and the application is operating as expected.

**Mr Speaker,** further tests will be carried out over the next few days, and the Application will go live next week Friday the 11th. After the app goes live, anyone who is running the app who tests positive for the COVID 19 virus can send an alert to anyone else with whom they came into close contact within the last fourteen (14) days, provided that person is also running the WeHealth Bermuda app. This alert will include detailed instructions from the Department of Health on what one must do should they receive such an alert.

**Mr Speaker,** I must re-emphasize that these alerts are strictly anonymous and therefore, the recipient cannot ascertain in any way from whom the alert came. Also, the sender, i.e. the person testing positive, has no way of knowing to whom they sent the alert. Thus, everyone's privacy is ensured and guaranteed, and this has been verified by Bermuda's Privacy Commissioner.

**Mr Speaker,** the more people who run this effective app, the better our chances of containing the spread of COVID 19. Persons who have already downloaded the WeHealthBermuda app will not have to do so again when the app goes live. As with any app, there will be regular upgrades that persons can download as they become available.

The success of the application is heavily reliant on the public doing their part, by downloading and running the app. The more people who use the app, the more accurately we can contain the spread of Covid-19. This Mr Speaker is a critical tool in Bermuda preventing further tightening of restrictions and I ask all persons to go to their mobile phone app store and download WeHealth Bermuda today.

**Mr. Speaker**, as part of our technology strategy for Bermuda's economy, this government has promoted Bermuda as a home of technology innovation. Through our use of technology in our Covid-19 Response Strategy, we have put Bermuda on the map as one of the safest places in the world. We have also demonstrated to the world what is possible when technology drives projects, strategies and decision making. We will continue to use technology to keep Bermuda and Bermudians safe, to minimize the spread of the coronavirus, to develop our economy and to give our people hope. Bermuda is one of the few jurisdictions that has successfully implemented this much technology as part of a strategy to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Mr. Speaker**, in closing, whilst I am proud that Bermuda has effectively used technology as part of our Covid-19 Response Strategy, I am appealing to all residents and visitors to follow the protocols, wear a mask when in public, wash hands regularly, practice social distancing, work remotely if possible and to avoid large gatherings.

With the recent increase in Coronavirus cases, we must be more vigilant so that we can reduce the transmission of the virus and have a happy, safe, healthy, holiday season. The technology we are using has proven to be highly effective and we are confident that it will aid in keeping our people safe and secure in the coming months.

**Thank you, Mr. Speaker.**