



## Health Services Amendment (Paramedics) Bill 2015 (Proof)

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## HEALTH SERVICES AMENDMENT (PARAMEDICS) BILL 2015

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### Second Reading

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL** (Parliamentary Secretary) [12.38 p.m.], on behalf of the Hon. John Ajaka: I move:  
That this bill be now read a second time.

I seek leave to have the second reading speech incorporated in *Hansard*.

**Leave granted.**

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I am pleased to bring before the House the Health Services Amendment (Paramedics) Bill 2015.

This bill proposes to amend the Health Services Act 1997 to restrict use of the title paramedic.

Paramedics are highly skilled health professionals who provide emergency health services to injured and sick persons. Paramedics work with a wide range of patients from low acuity and in primary care through to advanced life support and intensive care. Their patients cover the life span from birth through paediatrics to geriatrics. They perform complex health procedures and interventions, including emergency medical assessment, lifesaving resuscitation and defibrillation, the administration of drugs of addiction, such as morphine, managing complex burns or spinal injuries, and they do so in challenging or uncontrolled settings.

Paramedics are often at the front line, saving lives and ensuring patients are treated and managed appropriately until the patient can be transported to hospital. It can be highly stressful and, unfortunately, sometimes dangerous work. I think honourable members will agree when I express my gratitude for the work paramedics do in our society.

Paramedics can be contrasted with individuals providing first aid services. First aiders provide a wonderful service to our community, with many first aiders doing so voluntarily—they are often found on our sports fields and at community events assisting members of our community. Again, I think all honourable members can agree our community benefits from their hard work, dedication and community spirit.

There is an effective range of measures in place in New South Wales to regulate paramedics and ensure the protection of the public from unsafe practices. For example:

- The vast majority of paramedics in New South Wales are employees of the Ambulance Service of New South Wales and are subject to employment conditions of the service and the New South Wales Health Code of Conduct.
- The possession and administration of drugs by paramedics is regulated under the New South Wales Poisons and Therapeutics Goods legislation.
- New South Wales paramedics are also subject to the Code of Conduct for Unregistered Health Professionals in New South Wales. The code of conduct sets out a number of important ethical standards for unregistered health practitioners: such as practising in a safe and ethical manner, adopting standard precautions for infection control, not practising under the influence of drugs or alcohol and not engaging in a sexual relationship with a client. Breaches of the Code of Conduct for Unregistered Health Practitioners can be investigated by the Health Care Complaints Commission, which has the power to make a prohibition order in respect of serious breaches of the code. Any person can make a complaint in respect of alleged breaches of the code.

However, there is one gap in the regulation of paramedics. Currently, any person can call themselves a paramedic in New South Wales regardless of their level of qualifications and training. And it can be difficult for the public to distinguish between highly trained and skilled paramedics and other important, but more routine, first aider and first responder roles.

We need to recognise the high degree of education, training and/or experience that are required of paramedics. This education and training ensures paramedics can perform the tasks necessary to treat patients in need of urgent, and often lifesaving, treatment. By protecting the use of the title "paramedic", members of the public can be sure that those who call themselves a paramedic have the necessary qualifications, training or experience.

Paramedics are generally required to hold a university degree or vocational diploma relating to paramedical science. It often takes 3 years or more of study and on-the-job training to be recognised as a paramedic. It is a long hard slog.

While the existing range of regulations covering paramedics is effective, it is time to protect the title "paramedic" and give the community assurance that only those people with the appropriate qualifications, training or experience can call themselves a paramedic.

I am therefore pleased to bring the Health Services Amendment (Paramedics) Bill before the House.

The bill will amend the Health Services Act to make it an offence for a person who is not a paramedic to hold themselves out to be a paramedic.

A paramedic is defined in the bill to include:

- A person who has the qualifications, training or experience prescribed by the regulations,
- A person authorised under the law of another jurisdiction to call themselves a paramedic, or
- A person authorised by the Health Secretary to hold themselves out to be a paramedic.

The Ambulance Service of New South Wales employs around 3,400 paramedics, the majority of all New South Wales paramedics, to help the sick and injured in our community. The Ambulance Service of New South Wales requires their paramedics either to have undertaken an appropriate university course in paramedical health science or undertake an on-the-job vocational diploma, which takes around 3 years. New South Wales Ambulance provides an example of what the public should expect from any paramedic in New South Wales.

There are a large number of university courses across New South Wales and Australia that offer a degree in paramedical science. In addition, the vocational training course offered by the Ambulance Service of New South Wales has the necessary educational and training requirements for paramedics. These courses will be listed in the regulations.

I also recognise that there may be a number of persons who may have been working as a paramedic for many years but will not hold the necessary qualifications, training or experience that will be set out in the regulations and that will be required of persons calling themselves a paramedic going forward. However, their work as a paramedic should not be disregarded. As such, the bill will allow the Health Secretary to authorise a person to call himself or herself a paramedic. Grandparenting arrangements are appropriate as this will be the first time that the title "paramedic" is protected.

New South Wales paramedics are among the best in the world and it requires intense study and training to be a paramedic. Their training and expertise allows paramedics to be authorised to supply and administer drugs of addiction, such as morphine, and to treat severe trauma and undertake complex medical procedures in emergencies, including manual defibrillation, managing labour or delivering a baby and treating heart attacks.

It is right therefore that only those with the appropriate qualifications, training and experience will be able to call themselves a paramedic. Protection of the paramedic title complements the existing range of regulations in New South Wales in respect of paramedics and will ensure that the community can have confidence that someone who calls themselves a paramedic is appropriately qualified and trained.

The New South Wales Ministry of Health has consulted with a range of stakeholders who are all supportive of protection of the paramedic title. The Ministry will continue to consult with these stakeholders on regulations to support the bill.

With this bill, New South Wales will join Tasmania and South Australia who have also decided that the use of the title "paramedic" should be restricted to those with the necessary qualifications and training.

This bill is a vote of confidence in the clinical capabilities of our State's paramedics and an acknowledgement of the lifesaving role they play in providing critical and emergency care.

Their expertise is second to none and I am pleased the Government is acting to ensure the critical role they play in the health system is protected.

This bill acknowledges the high level qualifications paramedics need to provide critical and emergency care and the essential role they play in the New South Wales health system and will ensure that people who do not meet those qualifications cannot call themselves a paramedic.

I commend this bill to the House.