

**Submission  
No 81**

## **INQUIRY INTO EMERGENCY SERVICES AGENCIES**

**Organisation:** NSW Ambulance

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**NSW Ambulance Submission to the Legislative Council**

**Portfolio Committee No.4 – Legal Affairs**

**Inquiry into emergency services agencies**

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## 1. Introduction

NSW Ambulance, part of NSW Health, operates a mobile health service for the community of NSW providing emergency and non-emergency health care, retrieval and specialist transport services, major event planning and response, and community education. It is one of the largest ambulance services in the world, servicing a population in excess of 7.5 million. NSW Ambulance functions from more than 300 locations across NSW, operating a fleet of more than 1400 ambulance and other vehicles, with an annual expenditure budget of \$890 million in 2017/18.

Under the *Health Services Act 1997* (the Act) the Health Secretary's functions include: the facilitation of the achievement and maintenance of adequate standards of patient care within public hospitals, provision of governance, oversight and control of the public health system and the statutory health organisations within it, as well as in relation to other services provided by the public health system, and to facilitate the efficient and economic operations of the public health system (s.122).

The legislative provisions for ambulance services in NSW are set out in Chapter 5A of the Act. Under the Act it is a function of the Health Secretary to provide, conduct, operate and maintain ambulance services (s.67B). The Health Secretary's functions in relation to ambulance services include: use of systems of management and quality control, implementation of efficiency, economic and resources measures, monitoring whether objectives in the provision of ambulance services are achieved, and achievement and maintenance of adequate standards of ambulance services (s.67B).

The vision of NSW Ambulance is 'excellence in care'. NSW Ambulance recognises that quality of service, equity, meeting community needs, investing in our people and organisational performance will be the basis for the development of NSW Ambulance's future. These concepts are represented in the principles of 'Patient Centred and Staff Focused' and are underpinned by NSW Health's core values of Collaboration, Openness, Respect and Empowerment. NSW Ambulance recognises that excellence in patient care can only be the result of a safe, supported and capable workforce.

Currently the NSW Ambulance workforce consists of 4655<sup>1</sup> employed staff and approximately 416 volunteers. Of these, 4329 (93%) are operational staff involved in the frontline delivery of services. This includes paramedics and specialised areas such as intensive care, critical care and extended care paramedics, special operations, counter disaster, aeromedical and medical retrieval. Service is delivered from 226 ambulance

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<sup>1</sup> As at 30 June, 2016

stations across New South Wales (69 within the metropolitan administrative area, remainder in regional areas) and five Control Centres.

Recently, NSW Ambulance commenced the Paramedic Response Network (PRN). The PRN comprises superstations and Paramedic Response Points (PRP). A hub and spoke model, the PRN allows NSW Ambulance to deliver modern station facilities and services for our staff, providing enhanced coverage across metropolitan Sydney and a more supported and efficient mobile paramedic workforce.

The superstations allow:

- Implementation of a Make Ready Model (MRM) that prepares all ambulances ready for operation at the beginning of a shift, maximising the time available for clinicians to dedicate to paramedic duties;
- Consistent configuration for the superstation, regardless of their size and location, to ensure staff familiarity with layout, functionality and workflow; and
- Access to improved facilities and services for paramedics including training, meeting areas, kitchen facilities and computer access.

The superstations operate with staggered rosters. These rosters are important to improve the matching of resources to patient demand across metropolitan Sydney; improve the prospects for providing paramedics with crib breaks to have meals; and, improve the prospects for finishing crews closer to shift completion times. Two of the main PRN target initiatives include increased clinical leadership and improvements to staff engagement and welfare.

NSW Ambulance recognises that our people are our most important resources. Our operational paramedics deliver a high standard of clinical care in a challenging and, at times, confronting environment.

Like many large organisations, NSW Ambulance has developed policies and procedures that enable robust assessment of applications pursuant to these policies and procedures to be applied consistently and fairly for all staff.

NSW Ambulance has created a suite of support programs to ensure our paramedics remain as safe as possible both physically and mentally at all times during their careers, including any kind of separation from the agency or variation to work patterns.

To complement and expand upon worthwhile work already being undertaken in 2016, the newly appointed Chief Executive convened the inaugural Staff Wellbeing and Resilience Summit. Staff were encouraged to engage in the summit and a quarter of the workforce submitted comments/suggestions identifying the following workplace opportunities to aid staff wellbeing:

- Resilience training for all staff with frontline leaders skilled in mental health literacy and support
- Continued focus on workplace culture to build a supportive and positive workplace
- Enhanced staff support options
- Reduced stigma surrounding mental health
- An improved workers compensation process
- Improved fatigue management and breaks for staff
- Education and support for families and
- Support and care for retired staff

NSW Ambulance is addressing these opportunities, in some cases building upon what was already in place and in others, implementing new initiatives.

The following submission outlines the action taken and action proposed by NSW Ambulance to support its staff. The submission, although specifically directed to the Inquiry's terms of reference, also identifies further underlying issues and programs that provide indirect support in the areas identified.

## **2. Bullying, harassment and discrimination**

### **Workplace Concerns**

The implementation of the Respectful Workplace Framework commenced in late 2008 with the appointment of a Manager, Healthy Workplace Strategies, to drive work on improving workplace behaviour and relationships in order to promote a positive workplace and reduce the risk of bullying, harassment and discrimination. This included a diverse range of strategic and complementary initiatives. NSW Ambulance committed to building the capacity our staff and managers through the development of a tailored Respectful Workplace Training program, which was rolled out to all staff in three stages and is well embedded across the organisation. Stage One commenced in 2008 and involved face-to-face training to promote a healthy approach to resolving issues. This included a discrete 'Straight Talk'<sup>TM</sup> package, which was developed to provide staff with a practical step-by-step guide to initiating a difficult

conversation with a colleague. Employees were provided with 'Straight Talk' cards, to keep at their desk for reference.

Phase Two face to face training was rolled out over nine months during 2011/12, to reinforce the early training around using Straight Talk™ and to promote the benefits of using Staff Support Services to assist in the resolution of workplace concerns. A video was included, which featured our own employees playing fictional roles in which they raised and resolved workplace issues. The inclusion in the video of real workplace topics was designed to provide practical demonstration of the responsibilities of managers and staff to resolve workplace grievances. The training was well received with 96% of staff recommending the training.

Phase Three commenced in late 2016, and by mid-2017, this had been completed by 30% of staff. This component was delivered online and introduced the bystander concept, to show employees how to actively address undesirable behaviour they witnessed but were not involved in.

Positive workplace behaviour and Straight Talk™ are now included in organisational induction, and all new employees continue to be trained in workplace standards of behaviour.

Respectful Workplace Training was supported by the development of a NSW Ambulance charter on desired behaviour, called 'Our Values' which confirmed our key organisational values and described behaviours that support those values, as well as behaviours that did not. Colour posters featuring a range of respected employees as role models were produced and distributed to every workplace<sup>2</sup>. The later release of NSW Health's Core Values incorporated 'Our Values' and is included in our Performance Development Program to articulate the required standards when managing poor performance and conduct matters<sup>3</sup>.

In addition to supporting our staff through enhanced training, in 2009, NSW Ambulance made significant changes to the way in which it managed and resolved staff grievances and complaints, including those regarding bullying, harassment and discrimination. This included the development of a simplified grievance policy, Raising Workplace Concerns and accompanying Flow Charts to guide staff resolving workplace grievances<sup>4</sup>. Straight Talk™

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<sup>2</sup> NSW Ambulance *Our Values*

<sup>3</sup> NSW Health *Workplace Culture Framework – Making a positive difference to workplace culture* July 2011

<sup>4</sup> NSW Ambulance Standard Operating Procedure SOP2011-003 *Raising Workplace Concerns* 25 May 2011

was incorporated as the first step for concerns that could be resolved between the staff members involved.

The Raising Workplace Concerns Standard Operating Policy, in conjunction with specific advice set out in the Promoting a Respectful Workplace - Preventing and Managing Workplace Bullying<sup>5</sup> policy, also provided a framework for assessing concerns based on the potential seriousness of the issues to determine how the organisation should respond to concerns raised by staff. In relation to concerns that potentially could amount to bullying, harassment and discrimination, these issues were assessed as amounting to potential misconduct and referred to the Professional Standards Unit (PSU) for review.

Although referral in appropriate circumstances occurs, NSW Ambulance has taken into account the findings of the Public Service Commission in the *Positive and Productive Workplaces Guide*<sup>6</sup> that concluded that informal action should be taken as soon as unreasonable behaviour occurs and before it becomes an entrenched pattern. Formal investigation will, the Commissioner determined, rarely achieve the desired outcome of 'mending workplace relations'. For this reason, local action, or interaction by Healthy Workplace Services, is often considered a better option rather than automatic referral to PSU.

If the issues are considered to amount to misconduct or less formal intervention has been implemented but failed, and the matter is referred to the PSU, the PSU initially convenes an Allegation Review Group (ARG) to thoroughly assess the concerns and make recommendations as to further action.

The ARG (previously referred to as the Serious Allegations Advisory Group) commenced in 2008 and is tasked with reviewing significant complaints or concerns which, if substantiated, would be serious enough to warrant disciplinary or remedial action. The ARG comprises the following multi-disciplinary group of senior managers: the Director or Assistant Director, PSU (providing expertise in misconduct processes); a member of the Executive, a Deputy Director of Operations, or other Director/Senior Manager responsible for the supervision of the employee (providing service delivery expertise and functional input); the Director, Healthy Workplace Strategies (providing expertise in staff supports, team dynamics and impairment matters) and the Director, Patient Safety and Clinical Quality (providing clinical practice expertise).

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<sup>5</sup> NSW Ambulance Standard Operating Procedure SOP2012-014 *Promoting a Respectful Workplace – Preventing and Managing Workplace Bullying* 18 July 2012

<sup>6</sup> NSW Public Service Commission Guideline April 2016 *Positive and Productive Workplaces – A guide for the NSW government sector to prevent and manage unreasonable behaviour and bullying*



The protection of NSW Ambulance’s patients and clients, including children, is the ARG’s primary consideration when undertaking an assessment. The ARG also considers (amongst other things) the nature of the complaint or concern and how it arose; the likely consequences if the complaint or concern is found to be substantiated; the welfare of all parties involved, or potentially involved, in any proposed information gathering / investigation, including the employee the subject of the concern, the complainant, colleagues and witnesses; other potential risks, and mandatory reporting obligations (e.g. criminal conduct, public interest disclosures, reportable (child related), corrupt conduct or notifiable conduct of any employee who is a registered health practitioner).

The ARG makes recommendations for further action to the relevant decision maker, which may include further information gathering by way of an Initial Review and Investigation under NSW Ambulance’s Managing Misconduct Policy Directive<sup>7</sup> and Procedures<sup>8</sup>. The ARG Terms of Reference provide further information<sup>9</sup>.

With respect to allegations of misconduct referred to the PSU involving *possible bullying or harassment*, the following table details the number of initial reviews and investigations undertaken; the findings imposed in relation to misconduct investigations/initial review/preliminary assessment; and outcomes in those sustained matters since 2009:

### Reviews and Investigations Undertaken

Process	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
<b>Total bullying matters</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>
Misconduct Investigation	5	7	3	9	4	3	3
Initial Review/Preliminary Assessment		1	9	4	4	8	5
Independent Medical Exam*	1	1		2	1		

\* Referrals for Independent Medical Examinations in some cases arise from misconduct investigation/initial review/preliminary assessment

<sup>7</sup> NSW Ambulance Policy Directive *Managing Misconduct Policy Directive PD2015-009* 8 July 2015

<sup>8</sup> NSW Ambulance Operating Procedure *Managing Misconduct Operating Procedure PRO2015-008* 8 July 2015

<sup>9</sup> NSW Ambulance *Allegations Review Group (ARG) – Terms of Reference* Information Sheet C to Managing Misconduct Operating Procedure

## Findings Imposed

Findings	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
Sustained Disciplinary Action		1		1			2
Sustained Disciplinary Action/Remedial Action	1		1	4			1
Sustained Remedial Action	2	1	1	3	2		
Remedial Action	1	3	5	1	3	4	2
Dismissal	1					1	1
Allowed to resign – final outcome dismissal		2	1		1		1
Allowed to resign – sustained disciplinary and/or remedial action		1				2	
Misconduct investigation suspended – medically discharged				1		2	1
Direct management response/action			3	1	1	2	
NFA			1	3	1	2	

## Outcomes

Outcomes*	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
Formal Warning				3			1
Warning	3	1					
Counselling	2		3		2	4	2
Direction/s	1	1	1	2		1	2
Performance Improvement Plan	3	1	4	6	2	2	2
Training & Development (Clinical Training)	3	2	4	5	1	3	2
Reprimand	1						
Dr/psychologist to confirm – fitness for duties/sessions no longer required		1			1	1	2
Mediation or facilitated discussions		1	4	1			
Demoted		1		1			1
Additional Supervision & Support	1		1	1		2	
Secondment or transfer			1	5	2		
Apology				1			

\* Note – more than 1 outcome may be imposed in one matter

NSW Ambulance recognises that involvement in these matters is often a stressful time for the staff involved and their teams so an essential part of the assessment undertaken by the ARG is to determine the potential support needs of those staff, as well as the support that their managers may require while the matter is dealt with.

Once the formal processes have concluded, NSW Ambulance focuses on ensuring a successful reintegration of staff into the workplace. This routinely involves consultation between the PSU, local managers, Clinical Services and the Healthy Workplace Strategies team to identify the nature of the support required. A range of services are offered including clinical refresher training, mediation through our Internal Mediation Service using qualified mediators, team building programs, management coaching and individual psychological support.

In addition to the Raising Workplace Concerns Framework and the Managing Misconduct framework, NSW Ambulance also introduced a comprehensive Policy<sup>10</sup> and Procedure<sup>11</sup> for *Managing for Improved Performance and Behaviour* in 2012. This Policy and Procedure focuses on assisting managers to identify and address concerns about an employee's performance and/or behaviour in order for the employee to reach and maintain satisfactory standards. The framework also promotes the shared professional values and behaviours as set out in *Our Values*. The roll-out of that policy framework included face to face training for all Zone Managers and an online training module as part of the Ambulance Management Qualification (AMQ) for frontline operational managers to supplement the face to face component. The online training module is also available for all staff to complete.

Training for managers has been a key aspect of improving the prevention and management of concerns in the workplace. This has been prioritised by NSW Ambulance and all managers have been provided with training about preventing and managing bullying, including the early management of identified risks. Since 2008, over 850 managers or aspiring managers have undertaken the AMQ (Certificate IV in Frontline Management), which has improved their capacity to support their teams, manage grievances, address unsatisfactory performance and identify, manage and escalate misconduct concerns. The AMQ also seeks to equip managers with the tools to manage the positive workplace outcomes and early intervention to prevent unsatisfactory performance and potential grievances.

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<sup>10</sup> NSW Ambulance Standard Operating Policy SOP 2012-004 *Managing for Improved Performance and Behaviour Policy* 29 February 2012

<sup>11</sup> NSW Ambulance *Managing for Improved Performance and Behaviour Procedures* 29 February 2012

The responsibility of all managers to address concerns in the workplace, including those regarding bullying and harassment has been reinforced by including these requirements into the position descriptions for all management roles.

NSW Ambulance is committed to continually improving its workplace culture. The NSW Government's People Matters Employee Survey 2016 captured workplace views on a range of aspects and focus group consultations have been held with staff to analyse views and report on the results for our organisation. These results will be used to help inform NSW Ambulance's Safety & Culture Summit 2017 and ongoing work in this area.

The Safety & Culture Summit, to be held in July 2017, will be the first such Summit convened by NSW Ambulance. A number of key agencies have partners with our Agency recognising the benefit of having an event such as this. A number of innovative programs and initiatives will be launched on the day with staff committing to improving safety culture across the organisation.

### **Grievance Contact Officers**

GCOs provide confidential advice and support to staff who have a workplace concern or who may be considering lodging a grievance for bullying or harassment. They also assist staff in identifying potential resolution pathways and refer staff to the appropriate NSW Ambulance policies, procedures and staff support services.

### **Awards and Acknowledgement of our Healthy Workplace Strategies**

Our initiatives under the Respectful Workplace Framework have been formally recognised in a number of forums.

In 2011, the Healthy Workplace Strategies Program won the *NSW Treasury Management Funds, Risk Management Leadership Award*. Also during this year, our Ambulance Management Qualification was awarded the *Rob Goffee Award for Talent Management* by the Australian Human Resources Institute.

In 2012, Phase Two of Respectful Workplace Training won the NSW Public Sector Risk Management Association Innovation Award.

This was followed in 2013 by the *Martin Seligman Award for Health and Wellbeing* from the Australian Human Resources Institute Award, which we received for our Healthy Workplace Strategies program overall.

In 2016, the NSW Public Service Commission used our Healthy Workplace Strategies work among reference materials for their *Positive and Productive Workplaces Guide* (2016).

### **Flexible Work Practices**

NSW Ambulance recognises that many staff have responsibilities for care arrangements and seeks to accommodate this. This in turn promotes participation in the workplace and prevents discrimination from occurring. There are a range of flexible work practices available to all staff to support the variety of staff needs and to assist our employees in reconciling work and life responsibilities.

These flexible work practices in place can be described as supporting the needs of staff for family responsibilities, aged care, in times of illness, career breaks, study, personal carer's, maternity, adoption and parental leave.

There will be different approaches in the consideration of leave arrangements depending on whether the staff member is a rostered 24/7 front line operational worker or works in corporate support on a Monday to Friday arrangement.

Staff have access to three days, commencing in their first year of employment, for Family and Community Services (FACS) leave, available to staff with family or community emergencies with additional concessions for bereavement purposes and family violence leave. There is also an option to access already accumulated untaken sick leave for up to three weeks under the personal carer's leave arrangements. These conditions can assist staff with care for the disabled as well as aged care.

Other types of leave include sick leave, study leave, union leave, annual leave and long service leave. The amount of leave accumulated or taken will depend on the award provisions applicable to the occupation.

### **Options for working arrangements**

Whilst most of our staff are full time employees, staff can apply for permanent part time, less than full time hours (and return to their permanent position wherever possible), and casual work. Approximately 38% of the current NSW Ambulance workforce is female (1645). Flexible working conditions including part-time employment, is accommodated with 393 operational paramedics currently fulfilling their duties on a part-time basis, this amounts to approximately 10% of our operational workforce.

The following tables outline our current part-time staff:

<b>Part time staff NSW Ambulance 1 May 2017</b>	<b>Headcount</b>
Business Innovation and Planning	1
Clinical Services	12
Finance	9
Health Emergency & Aeromedical Services	41
Operational Logistics	47
People & Culture	13
Service Delivery	352
<b>Total</b>	<b>475</b>

<b>NSW Ambulance Gender Split</b>	<b>Headcount</b>	<b>% Female part time staff in NSW Ambulance</b>
Female	360	
Male	115	
Total	475	75.80%

<b>NSW Ambulance Gender Split – Service Delivery</b>	<b>Headcount</b>	<b>% Female part time staff in Service Delivery</b>
Female	264	
Male	88	
Total	352	75.00%

### **Challenges in providing flexible work conditions**

For operational staff, the granting and scheduling of leave can depend on roster requirements that can vary depending on the type and size of the station, the location and geographical area. The availability of staff to fill the minimum operating levels to maintain emergency services to the community at each location influences decision-making. There is also an impact on rosters arising from the availability of staff to back fill positions where sick leave, workers compensation and other types of leave is taken.

Other impacts which influence flexibility, especially in more remote regional locations, is the meeting of on-call arrangements at stations that operate over five days and must have staff ready to respond to calls.

The PRN utilises staggered rosters with varying start and finishing times for shifts which assist in meeting peak service demands, provide variety in the shifts offered to staff, and a better opportunity for staff with family responsibilities to complete duty closer to time by having overlapping shifts.

The application process takes into account the needs of balancing service provision to the community and the individual's needs. As such negotiation is often required, over a period

of time to meet this balance. This has on occasion been a source of complaint amongst some staff.

NSW Ambulance, in comparison with the public sector generally, enjoys a low rate of separation, namely 4.3 percent<sup>12</sup>,

<b>Rates of Separation, Public Sector</b>	<b>Separation Rate</b>
Public Service	10.3%
NSW Health Service	11.3%
NSW Police Force	3.0%
Teaching Service	2.6%
Transport Service of NSW	12.4%
Other Crown Services	7.0%
<b>Total Government Sector</b>	<b>8.4%</b>
State-owned Corporations	14.7%
External to Government Sector	17.7%
<b>Total Public Sector</b>	<b>8.7%</b>

Attrition rates between NSW Ambulance operational units for the 12 months preceding June 30, 2016<sup>13</sup> are:

<b>Staff Category Breakdown</b>	<b>Resignation %</b>
Ambulance Clinical (Mobile)	3.7%
Ambulance Staff (Control Centres)	7.5%
Corporate Services	11%
Maintenance & Trades	4.5%
Medical	35.0% (2)
Nursing	2.3%
Hospital Support Workers	1

<sup>2</sup> Medical resignation figures appear high as a result of Junior Medical Officer/Registrar placements occurring on a 6 to 12 month rotation basis.

## **Speak up culture**

NSW Ambulance encourages all staff to 'speak up' and report issues affecting them. This includes potential breaches of the code of conduct; unlawful, illegal or inappropriate behaviour; corrupt conduct; or, anything that causes them concern. On 18 April 2017, the Chief Executive presented information to all staff via an emailed video, outlining his expectations with regards staff 'speaking up'<sup>14</sup>

In 2016, an updated Public Interest Disclosures Policy<sup>15</sup> and Operating Procedure<sup>16</sup> was released. This procedure created a greater number of persons to whom a protected disclosure could be made, increasing accessibility of the program to staff.

<sup>12</sup> Public Service Commission Workforce Profile Data, 30 June 2016

<sup>13</sup> NSW Ambulance Headcount data

<sup>14</sup> 'Speak up' video

<sup>15</sup> NSW Ambulance PD2016-010 *Public Interest Disclosures – Policy Directive* 20 July 2016

<sup>16</sup> NSW Ambulance PRO2016-014 *Public Interest Disclosures Operating Procedure* 20 July 2016

It is recognised that being a complainant often puts an employee in a difficult situation. In order to ensure greater supports for these staff in relation to misconduct matters, the PSU has recently enhanced complainant supports. These include connecting complainants with Peer Support Officers and closer liaison with local managers to identify and monitor support needs at key stages of the process.

As with any administrative decision making, it is accepted that not all complainants will be satisfied with any decision made. NSW Ambulance attempts to address these issues with complainants so that whilst they may not be satisfied with the decision, they are content that the process applied was fair and reasonable.

On some occasions, despite great efforts to ensure complainants appreciate the reason for given outcomes, it becomes apparent that these complainants are unable to be satisfied. If the behaviour of the complainant becomes unreasonable, for example - unreasonable persistence; unreasonable demands; unreasonable lack of cooperation; unreasonable arguments; or, unreasonable behaviours, NSW Ambulance implements the NSW Ombudsman 'Unreasonable Complainant' guidelines<sup>17</sup>. This can include refusing to deal further with a complainant on the issue.

Currently, NSW Ambulance has determined that two complainants<sup>18</sup> should be dealt with in this manner. It must be noted that correspondence from these persons are not ignored, but assessed to ensure no new issues or further evidence have been reported. If this has not occurred the correspondence is noted and filed.

### **3. Mental Health Support Services<sup>19</sup>**

#### Mental Health and Resilience

The role of the modern workplace in promoting mental health and wellbeing amongst its employees continues to gain momentum. NSW Ambulance recognises that for paramedics, who make up over 90% of our staff, this is crucial given the risks and challenges of the role and the essential service they perform for the community.

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<sup>17</sup> Ombudsman NSW *Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Model Policy* February 2013

<sup>18</sup> Neither of these two complainants are current NSW Ambulance employees. One is a previous employee.

<sup>19</sup> The focus of provision of support is necessarily on operational paramedics, however, the following are available to all NSW Ambulance staff and volunteers.



It is well understood that staff engagement increases when staff believe they are well supported by their organisation. Flow-on benefits include reductions in workplace injury, reduction in sick leave and increased staff satisfaction.

The NSW Ambulance mental health and wellbeing program includes a range of programs and services which are designed to improve mental health, physical fitness, address occupational risks and support all staff in the performance of their roles and service to the community.

Since 2012, all Paramedics have attended mandatory training during Induction on Coping with Occupational Stress and Building Resilience. This course addresses occupational stress, identifying common stressors for paramedics, understanding critical incidents, early identification of warning signs of stress, case studies, key ways to develop emotional resilience, self-care strategies as well as developing individual resilience building plans. During their initial training Paramedics are also provided training on how to cope with grief and loss which they will invariably see during their careers. This course provides Paramedics with specific skills on what to say to the dying and to the loved ones of those patients who have passed away. Prior to becoming a fully qualified paramedic, paramedics attend a final module on mental health and resilience entitled 'Supporting your Buddy'. This course has been in place since 2012 and recognises the role that colleagues play in supporting each other and facilitates an understanding of how to identify when and what support to provide to a colleague who may not be doing well. Tailored programs are offered to other staff in specific areas of the business, such as Control Centres, in order to meet the unique needs of these roles.

The remainder of our staff are currently able to attend a half day workshop on Building Resilience and Managing Stress via the Learning & Development (L&D) staff training calendar. To date, 434 staff have attended this training course since 2011. At this point in time, paramedics are unable to attend this program on duty due to operational requirements.

In 2015, NSW Ambulance established a dedicated Employee Mental Health and Resilience Programs Coordinator position. The role is a specific resource and has been used to develop ongoing education, awareness, promotion of good mental health practices, and referral and support options through regular events, such as R U OK? Day and Mental Health Month as well as monthly published articles and 'Wellbeing Wednesday' emails from the Chief Executive<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Various awareness campaigns regarding mental health

NSW Ambulance Wellbeing initiatives will be further enhanced by a recent increase in funding of approximately \$30 million over 4 years.

### Research and Development of Mental Health Programs

NSW Ambulance supported the development of the Expert Guidelines: Diagnosis and Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Emergency Service Workers and was consulted on the beyondblue 'Good practice framework for mental health and wellbeing in first responder organisations'. In addition, NSW Ambulance participated in the development of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy for First Responder organisations in NSW, launched in October 2016. NSW Ambulance is also part of the National Mental Health Study of First Responders being conducted by beyondblue with the expected completion at the end of 2017. The NSW Ambulance Chief Executive is representing the Australian ambulance sector on the expert advisory committee undertaking this research. These strategic partnerships assists NSW Ambulance to meet the needs of our staff and reflect best practice and this was reflected in an independent review undertaken by the Black Dog Institute (BDI) on our existing health and wellbeing programs.

In 2016, NSW Ambulance requested BDI to map our support programs against the beyondblue Good Practice Framework for Mental Health and Wellbeing in First Responder Organisations and the key strategic objectives outlined in the Mental Health and Wellbeing strategy for First Responder Organisations in NSW. The BDI reviewed the body of international research evidence highlighting the mental health problems faced by paramedics and other ambulance staff members, taking into account organisational, work-related and individual factors.

The BDI commended NSW Ambulance in a number of key areas including its leadership around mental health and wellbeing, utilising a broad cross section of staff to inform programs, the visibility of organisational values, a comprehensive policy framework, our training programs, factsheets and willingness to collaborate in research projects. BDI also made recommendations to improve current support programs, including:

- NSW Ambulance Wellbeing Strategy to be finalised, implemented and promoted;
- Evaluation and review of recently commenced interventions, which are to be included in the terms of reference for the Work Safety Wellbeing Resilience Advisory Committee (WSWRAC), for example, First Contact Coordinators Program and Staff Support Activation and Significant Events Register

- Continued visible support and engagement by senior management with mental health and wellbeing activities to maximise reach and effectiveness of interventions;
- Transition to retirement;
- Review content of pre-employment psychological screening;
- Develop policies around established workplace mental ill health risk factors
- Increase physical activity as part of mental health prevention;
- Specific training for all management levels in relation to identification and support for staff with mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues;
- Develop information booklets for staff on how to access evidence based treatment for mental health symptoms; and
- Collect longitudinal data from recruitment to retirement and make recommendations over time to continuously improve staff mental health and wellbeing.

Work has commenced on all suggestions, apart from the amendment of the WSWRAC terms of reference and the collection of longitudinal data, both of which are pending.

#### Work Safety and Wellbeing Resilience Advisory Committee

NSW Ambulance has an established Work Safety and Wellbeing Resilience Advisory Committee (WSWRAC) that meets quarterly. The WSWRAC commenced in 2014 as part of a revised corporate governance framework. It replaced the Wellbeing Resilience Advisory Panel which had commenced in 2010. The Committee considers matters related to staff wellbeing and the mental health impact of any new policies or procedures under consideration. It has a role in monitoring the performance of existing mental health initiatives and input into new initiatives.

The committee is attended by executives, external experts and a broad cross section of staff to ensure staff input into new and existing mental health initiatives<sup>21</sup>.

#### Staff Wellbeing and Resilience Summit

In 2016 NSW Ambulance held its inaugural Staff Wellbeing and Resilience Summit to expand opportunities to consult with staff and focus on improving staff wellbeing. Over 200 frontline staff attended the day together with industry experts including:

- John Feneley – the NSW Mental Health Commissioner,
- Allan Sparkes – PTSD survivor and Cross of Valour recipient,

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<sup>21</sup> NSW Ambulance *Work Safety and Wellbeing Resilience Advisory Committee* Terms of Reference September 2014

- Michel Pietrus – Director of Mental Health First Aid, Canadian Mental Health Commission,
- Deb Swain – a family perspective from the wife of a PTSD survivor and
- Dr Sam Harvey – NSW Ambulance research partner specialising in workplace mental health with particular reference to emergency services and key author of the Expert Guidelines: Diagnosis and Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Emergency Service workers.

Group activities engaged staff and challenged all in attendance to explain ‘What “well” looks like at NSW Ambulance?’ During the day 835 feedback items were collected including formal feedback forms, typed and handwritten notes, sticky notes and emails.

Overwhelmingly staff agreed that the Staff Wellbeing and Resilience Summit was a very worthwhile venture. The feedback received was collated and has been integral to informing mental health initiatives for the future.

#### Other action related to issues discussed at the Staff Wellbeing and Resilience Summit

In response to the feedback from staff the following action has taken place:

- the expansion of mental health training programs mentioned;
- workplace culture improvements including the launch of Respectful Workplace Training Phase 3;
- additional Peer Support Officers and Chaplains;
- retraining of existing Peer Support Officers and Chaplains;
- improvements in the management of workers compensation claims through the establishment of First Contact Coordinators;
- 1800 information line;
- simplified letters and
- access to early treatment of mental health issues and psychological injuries.

These initiatives have been accompanied by improved support for families (who are often the first people to notice signs our staff may not be OK) by establishing a “Welcome to NSW Ambulance - Supporting Our Families” during Paramedic induction classes<sup>22</sup>. Work is also underway to provide connections and services for former staff. NSW Ambulance Legacy has commenced and in 2017, a working group has been established.

The relationship between mental health and physical health is well understood. NSW Ambulance has recognised that the provision of life-saving care in medical emergencies by

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<sup>22</sup> Wellbeing Wednesday ‘Welcome to NSW Ambulance – Supporting our Families’ workshop

Paramedics is physically demanding, and that it has a duty of care to ensure that Paramedics are medically and physically capable of performing these duties.

As a result, in 2010, NSW Ambulance developed a Paramedic Health Standard<sup>23</sup> (PHS) that defines the level of health and fitness required to perform the inherent requirements and demands of the Paramedic role. The PHS is used as the primary reference for all health assessments in relation to a Paramedic's capacity to meet the inherent requirements of their duties. This includes assessments related to pre-employment, fitness for duty, workers compensation and any other appropriate job related assessment.

The PHS is also intended to provide paramedics with a clear statement of the health and fitness requirements of the job. With this in mind, the NSW Ambulance Health and Wellness Program, which complements employee mental health initiatives, is designed to support paramedics to improve personal health outcomes and to assist them in meeting the occupational requirements of their job.

The Health and Wellness Program provides a range of programs to employees to assist them to maintain their health and fitness, as well as reducing the risk of chronic disease. These programs are tailored and strategic and also offer early intervention strategies.

## **Current Programs**

### Staff Support Services

NSW Ambulance has a comprehensive range of support services available to staff (and their families) which are designed to support them in the performance of their roles and service to the community. These include Peer Support Officers, Chaplains, Grievance Contact Officers and external Employee Assistance & Psychological Services. These services provide information on referral sources in the local community and are available for support in relation to exposure to traumatic events, personal issues, organisational change, workplace conflict and grief and loss.

The NSW Ambulance Staff Support Services and the dedicated coordinator roles of Senior Chaplain and Peer Support Coordinator, are often the first point of contact for all levels of staff seeking advice and guidance on early intervention strategies to assist colleagues. This provides real time advice for managers to identify employees or teams who may require support and who initially may need to overcome their reluctance to engage with support services.

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<sup>23</sup> NSW Ambulance *A guide to your Paramedic Health Assessment Program*

Early access to support is important as the research into early intervention indicates that the re-establishment of a sense of safety and care, as well as predictability and continuity, are all fundamental in prevention and mitigation of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other mental health issues. Current research also indicates that recovery time and the ability to refer to social support services is best served when available in the first instance within organisational support services and programs.

Contact details for 'Our Support Services' were produced and distributed to workplaces in Z-Card format, i.e. a wallet-sized foldout card, with information about Grievance Contact Officers, Peer Support Officers, Ambulance Chaplains, the Employee Assistant Program, and Straight Talk™.

#### Staff Support Activation and Significant Events Support Register Operating Procedure

In July 2016, a new Policy Directive<sup>24</sup> and Operating Procedure<sup>25</sup> was launched providing comprehensive guidance to ensure that staff are supported and receive follow up after attending significant events. The purpose of this policy is to assist staff in accessing appropriate support following exposure to events and incidents that are challenging or confronting. It also provides managers with the instructions and resources to effectively document significant events in a dedicated register, which ensures staff are supported and receive future follow-up support.

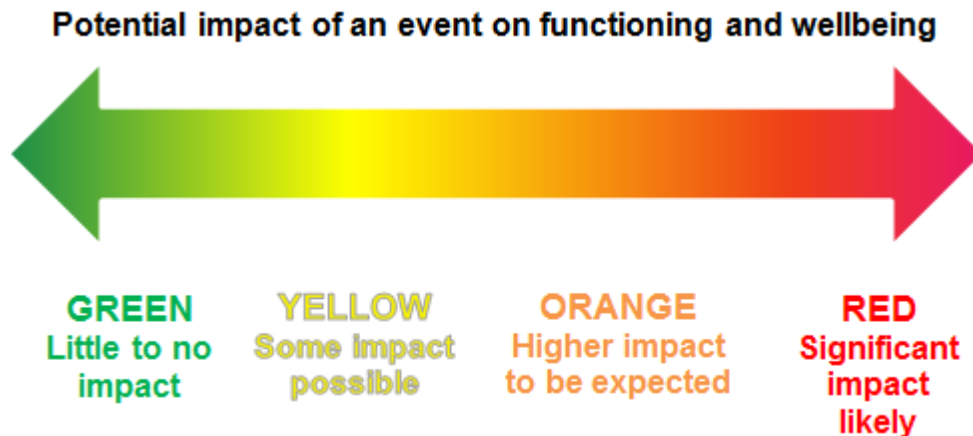
This policy was mandated by the Chief Executive and applies to all NSW Ambulance staff including paramedics, Control Centre staff, flight nurses, doctors, volunteers, corporate staff, and contractors.

It is noted in this policy that exposure to significant events can affect staff in different ways and can cause disruption to normal functioning and wellbeing. To help guide managers and staff, the Staff Support Activation and Significant Events Support Register Operating Procedure, provides colour coded categories to signify the likely impact events may have and the appropriate support that should be activated at each level.

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<sup>24</sup> NSW Ambulance Policy Directive PD2016-009 *Staff Support Activation and Significant Events Support Register Policy Directive* 1 July 2016

<sup>25</sup> NSW Ambulance Operating Procedure PRO2016-013 *Staff Support Activation and Significant Events Support Register Operating Procedure* 1 July 2016



Examples are given to guide managers in activating the right level of support for each type of incident, and step-by-step instructions are provided to help ensure an appropriate level of support, notification and documentation are provided for each event.

NSW Ambulance Staff Support Services that may be activated include Peer Support Officers (PSO), chaplains and specialist trauma clinicians. Grievance Contact Officers (GCO) can also assist staff affected by workplace conflict and related issues. Onsite Post Incident Support is designed to provide a face- to-face opportunity for staff to defuse, receive support and psycho-education from specialist trauma psychologists. NSW Ambulance PSOs or chaplains can assist with this process and may provide immediate onsite support prior to the arrival of a trauma specialist. Onsite Post Incident Support must be provided for “Red” Incidents and may be provided for “Orange” Incidents.

This policy introduced as a new initiative a **Significant Events Support Register**. The register provides each Directorate and work area (25 areas in total), with a database in which to record the details of staff exposed to significant events, as well as record the follow up provided over time.

All events classified under the policy as either “Orange” or “Red” must be documented and recorded in the register. Information for the Register will be provided by the manager, who assists the affected staff after the timely provision of support and welfare actions, and the register will be maintained by a senior manager delegated for each area and access will be limited to the delegated manager. The details of the actual support delivered to individual staff continue to remain confidential.

While early access to support reduces the impact of events and risk of mental health issues, all staff maintain the right to decline support and/or seek assistance outside of NSW Ambulance.

As part of the policy, monthly reports are collated and reviewed by the relevant senior managers or Executive Director for further action as required. A copy of monthly reports are sent to the Director, Healthy Workplace Strategies who can then report on trends and issues as they arise.

The Staff Support Activation and Significant Events Support Register Policy Directive and Operating Procedure was a further development and replacement for the previous Staff Support Services Standard Operating Procedure issued in May 2011<sup>26</sup>. This SOP gave advice to managers on the various staff support options available to their staff, defined three “categories” of incidents where different levels of support may be required, and guided managers in how best to provide that support in each case via a comprehensive flowchart.

### Peer Support

The Peer Support Program in NSW Ambulance was established in the 1980’s and is highly regarded by staff. Over 150 trained PSOs provide state-wide coverage to employees and volunteers. In NSW Ambulance, the majority of PSOs are paramedics who are respected by their peers and are selected through a rigorous recruitment process. Based on their own experiences they can provide confidential practical and emotional support to their colleagues. They attend a formal induction training program and attend refresher training to ensure they are up to date with current practice. PSOs are trained in listening skills, psychological first aid, self-care and the options available for referral pathways.

The program provided in NSW Ambulance is supported by the recommended guidelines in the 2011 Delphi study on the “Development of guidelines on peer support” conducted by the Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health (now known as Phoenix Australia). This states that peer support in high risk organisations should have well planned, integrated and tailored peer support for employees in improving psycho-social outcomes through providing a listening ear, low level psychological intervention, identification of colleagues who may be a risk to themselves or others and to facilitate pathways to professional and community support services.

PSOs in NSW Ambulance are managed and coordinated by the Peer Support Team Coordinator and attend clinical supervision every six months.

### Chaplaincy

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<sup>26</sup> NSW Ambulance Standard Operating Policy SOP2011-002 *Staff Support Services* 4 May 2011



Throughout the history of NSW Ambulance, clergy and people of faith have been connected with the organisation in localised ways, providing counsel and support to Paramedics for personal issues and in relation to the incidents they attend in the course of their duties.

The NSW Ambulance chaplaincy was formally established in 1990 as the demand for chaplaincy services continued to grow.

From the beginning, the chaplaincy program has been seen as a valuable non-denominational support option for staff and their families as well as to community members during times of tragedy.

Ambulance chaplains are available to provide confidential individual counselling and support, pastoral care and assistance to employees, volunteers and their families, as well as to patients and their families, and to bystanders following traumatic incidents. Chaplains also provide spiritual support and counsel to employees regarding personal issues that may have wide ranging impacts, referrals to community based faith groups and special services on request, such as baptisms, weddings, funerals, commemorations or dedications.

Since the formalisation of the program, the number of volunteer chaplains and the diversity of the team has grown substantially. NSW Ambulance currently has 44 chaplains and also includes an Islamic Chaplain.

It is expected that the chaplaincy program will continue to grow as NSW Ambulance recruits suitable candidates to ensure that sufficient volunteers are available to staff and volunteers across NSW, and to maintain sufficient rostered coverage to attend the traumatic incidents that occur on a regular basis. At a strategic level, the goal is to maintain a minimum of two volunteers per Zone and more in areas that are geographically larger, or have a higher workload.

Since 2012, the chaplaincy program has also extended coverage into more specialised areas of the organisation, and along with peer support officers, now has specialist chaplains supporting the following workplaces:

- Aeromedical Operations (helicopters and fixed wing aircraft)
- Control Centres (Sydney, Northern, Southern and Western)
- Special Operations
- Volunteer and First Responder Units
- Education
- Risk and Safety Unit
- Aboriginal pastoral care and support

Ambulance chaplains are now recruited into the volunteer program through a formalised merit selection process and they undertake referee checks, National Criminal Record Checks and Working with Children Clearances. They attend a formal 2 day induction program which orientates new chaplains to the emergency services environment, psychological first aid, self-care and the options available for referral pathways within the organisation.

Chaplains also attend an annual training conference for their professional development and receive regular clinical supervision. In addition to peer support and chaplaincy, NSW Ambulance has an external program of Employee Assistance and Psychological Services.

#### Response Agencies Staff Support Alliance

The Peer Support Team Coordinator and Senior Chaplain work closely with other emergency services and are members of the Response Agencies Staff Support Alliance (RASSA).

This network is set up to enhance interagency operability and relationships across the emergency services for staff support services in NSW. The network provides the opportunity for participating in and contributing to research studies, understanding challenges faced within the health and emergency services sector, promotes services available and builds operational relationships.

#### Employee Assistance and Psychological Services

NSW Ambulance offers Employee Assistance and Psychological Services (EAPS) to staff and volunteers and their families with a professional, telephone and face to face support service free of charge. NSW Ambulance actively promotes all staff support services extensively to reduce stigma and encourage access to early support. This has contributed to an EAPS utilisation rate of 9.67% in comparison with other public sector organisations (including emergency services) which is currently around 4.50%<sup>27</sup>.

The current EAPS provider is Davidson Trahaire Corpysc (DTC) and the following services are provided:

- traumaAssist – an early intervention service delivered by professional trauma psychologists for onsite post incident support and/or individual telephone trauma counselling. Trauma psychologists providing this service practice

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<sup>27</sup> Davidson Trahaire Corpysc, 31 March 2017

evidence based trauma focused therapy model. 100% of the usage of this service is for work related incidents.

- employeeAssist - Employee Assistance Program (EAP) – this is a short term solution focused counselling service and staff and volunteers and their families can access *four* sessions *per issue* per year. Self-referral rate for NSW Ambulance is currently 61% with usage for presenting issues at 67% for personal matters and 33% for work related.
- managerAssist – this is an advisory service for managers and team leaders to support them in understanding the options available to them when supporting a staff member through a personal or work related matter.
- Program Management and Education activities – from time to time education and support is accessed to facilitate education for teams of staff using the psychologists of our EAPs provider.

## Health

All staff are able to access the NSW Ambulance Health Coach. All contact with the Health Coach is voluntary as well as confidential. The Health Coach provides individualised programs which target specific health/ and or functional issues. This can include observation of individual paramedics on duty to tailor an appropriate program.

Health Coaching is designed to increase fitness and health, as well as reduce the risk of injury by focusing on behavioural change. Health Coaching supports individuals through knowledge, skills and tools to build their confidence and ability to make healthy lifestyle choices and be an active participant in managing and being responsible for their own health.

Health Coaching can also be helpful in engaging paramedics who are returning to work following lengthy absences.

Staff also have access to discounted gym membership through Fitness Passport. Currently 1349 staff and 1899 family members have obtained a Fitness Passport. Gyms are located across the metropolitan area as well as selected regional cities across NSW. This program continues to grow with more regions involved and is available to over 80% of all NSW staff across the state. Additional facilities continue to sign up allowing for more opportunities for staff to get fit.

As a way to help provide motivation to continue with an exercise program, employees are encouraged to get involved in a variety of work sponsored physical activity programs including:

- Pedometer Challenge – held each year in spring
- Local community sporting events i.e. fun runs, cycle events etc
- Weekly exercise class at State HQ for those attending education classes

NSW Ambulance recently participated in a trial of the NSW Get Healthy at Work Program across one metropolitan and one regional zone and de-identified results were provided which have been used to inform programs. Based on the success of the program in the regional zone, this program will now be rolled out in all regional areas as well as all Control Centres. The Get Healthy at Work program will be rolled out progressively in the remaining regional zones and all control centres. The suitability for metropolitan staff will be reviewed again in the future.

As part of ongoing education and providing useful information for staff, regular articles are written for the Sirens staff publication on a range of topics, including fitness, diet, lifestyle and positive health behaviour. This information, as well as information that can be obtained on the Intranet, can help provide guidance and support to help Paramedics stay fit and healthy<sup>28</sup>.

NSW Ambulance has also partnered with Charles Sturt University (CSU) to study the physical demands of paramedics and their effect on job specific skills. This study will provide information that will help shape our health and wellness strategy and the future development of health and wellness programs. This comprehensive study was started in 2015 and is due to be completed in 2019.

### Organisational Promotion of mental health initiatives and strategies

Induction, training and promotional events are attended by the members of the teams involved with the NSW Ambulance staff support services with peer support officers and chaplains attending and participating in Mental Health Week, RU OK day and Men's health initiatives. Organisational correspondence and information on the Intranet refers to the services available in Staff Support Services and also promotes usage<sup>29</sup>.

### RUOK? Day

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<sup>28</sup> Various awareness campaigns regarding fitness, diet, lifestyle and positive health behaviour

<sup>29</sup> Various awareness campaigns regarding services available

Since 2012, NSW Ambulance has promoted the annual RUOK? Day mental health and suicide prevention strategy participating with a concerted effort to introduce staff and volunteers across the state to the importance of trying to reduce Australia's suicide rate by proactively reaching out and making contact with others, and helping people connect with support if they are struggling with depression or suicidal ideation. This message has been an important adjunct to the mental health work that paramedics do in the community by taking the suicide prevention message into the workplace and promoting supportive conversations and dialogue.

NSW Ambulance encourages staff at all workplaces to spend time on RUOK? Day talking and sharing the RUOK? message. Cobranded RUOK? merchandise is distributed to staff and updated information was provided on the staff support services available at NSW Ambulance.

The campaign launch in 2012 was hugely successful and led to NSW Ambulance being awarded the Australian HR Institute RUOK? Day Award for 2013. Subsequently, NSW Ambulance Senior Chaplain Paul McFarlane was appointed by RUOK? Day as a Community Ambassador. He now speaks regularly to business and community groups on behalf of NSW Ambulance and RUOK? Day about how to have supportive conversations in the workplace.

NSW Ambulance continues to support this initiative each year and will once again be involved in promoting the RUOK? Day message with staff and volunteers on Thursday 14 September 2017.

### **Current research and considerations**

The Health and Wellness team is working with CSU on a trial program called Medic Fit. This will be a randomised controlled trial investigating the effects of a workplace exercise program on physical fitness and injury rates of paramedics. The program will be trialled for six months in two regional zones with the aim of improving the staff fitness levels and reducing injury rates.

This evidence based research will investigate whether a 24-week workplace exercise program improves job-related fitness and decreases work-related injury rates in paramedics. This study is awaiting final ethics approval and is expected to commence in September/October 2017. This program will be supported by the Health Coach who will visit stations to enable direct staff interaction and further engagement.

NSW Ambulance hopes to be able to encourage all staff to participate in a voluntary Employee Health Check. This check will provide staff with a wellness snapshot of their current health situation and will include blood pressure, weight, resting heart rate and a waist measurement. Depending on their results and age, further recommendations will be made and assistance provided regarding exercise programs and nutrition advice.

A Voluntary Physical Readiness Check is also under consideration. This program is modelled on an existing program used by NSW Police and includes Functional Movement Screens (FMS) which will align to the PHS. The FMS will assist with the development of generic and specific work hardening/musculo-skeletal conditioning programs to address most common work place injuries.

### **Workers compensation and Recovery at work**

NSW Ambulance identified that compensable injuries and illnesses made up a large component of staff absences, with approximately 738 in 4200 employees (18%) having current Workers' Compensation claims<sup>30</sup>. It was identified that this was having a direct impact on our ability to proactively manage our claims, as well as continue to provide front line services and premium care to the community.

Following participation in the *Workers Compensation Taskforce*<sup>31</sup> and analysis of available historical data, a number of areas of improvement were identified in 2015/16. NSW Ambulance was responsible for designing, developing and implementing, appropriate solutions. On 12 January 2017, an updated operating procedure<sup>32</sup> was issued.

Other significant developments included the establishment and recruitment of two, First Contact Coordinators (FCC) and, the 1800 hotline in 2016. The purpose of the FCC was to enable a more streamlined claims lodgement with easy access via the 1800 hotline. The primary responsibility of the FCC, being the first point of contact for employees, was to provide advice on workers compensation matters such as how to lodge a claim, how to manage an injured worker, or how injured workers are paid.

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<sup>30</sup> As reported by QBE in February 2017

<sup>31</sup> The Taskforce consisted of nominees from NSW Ambulance, Ministry of Health, Health Services Union, Australian Paramedics Association, Claims Manager (QBE), and paramedics who had previously utilised the workers compensation system.

<sup>32</sup> NSW Ambulance Operating Procedure PRO2016-035 *Workers Compensation and Recovery at Work Operating Procedure* 12 January 2017

The Recover at Work hotline (1800 NSW AMB/1800 679 262)<sup>33</sup> is open from 0830 to 1700 Monday to Friday. When the line is unstaffed, bearing in mind that NSW Ambulance is a 24 hour business, a recorded message is activated providing information about how to lodge an injury claim.

As part of NSW Ambulances' commitment to providing innovative staff support solutions including building and maintaining strong and resilient staff mental health, further initiatives were created to help break down stigmas surrounding mental health and wellbeing, as well as to promote what can be done to enhance staff resilience. Commencing in 2016, staff now have the opportunity to attend up to 10 psychological sessions, with their own nominated provider at no cost to them<sup>34</sup>.

FCC can approve up to five psychological treatment sessions with a WorkCover accredited provider that the employee has been referred to. Staff only need to provide evidence of a referral along with contact details of the psychologist or psychiatrist to enable payment of these sessions. Should the treatment provider request additional sessions a request is forwarded to the FCC who is able to approve payment of up to 10 appointments.

NSW Ambulance is the only Health agency to offer these additional support services for psychological injuries as an initiative to help staff recover from their injuries in a durable and timely manner.

Collaboration between NSW Ambulance and QBE<sup>35</sup> resulted in the implementation of Early Stakeholder Intervention (ESI) calls. The ESI call process is an information sharing session in the initial stages of a challenging claim, to enable liability determination and formulation of an action plan between all parties. The process ensures all information is made available and explored in order to formulate an agreed strategy that returns the injured worker to the workplace as quickly as possible. The Recover at Work Coordinator and/or QBE case manager will identify if a new claim requires an ESI discussion and will arrange an urgent teleconference by day 3 of the claim being lodged.

Triggers for an ESI call may include difficult claims (sick leave/grievance); claims from frequent claimants; claims with pre-existing conditions; serious injury claims; all psychological claims; and, claims of concern.

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<sup>33</sup> Information Sheet – First Contact Coordinators

<sup>34</sup> Information Sheet – Conditions and access to psychological support

<sup>35</sup> 2017-18 Partnership Plan NSW Ambulance Service TMF QBE

Attendees for this teleconference from NSW Ambulance include the Recover at Work Coordinator, Workers Compensation Manager and the First Contact Coordinator. Attendees from QBE include the Case Manager, Service Manager, Technical Manager and Injury Management Advisor.

The ESI call program has also been rolled out across NSW Health however NSW Ambulance remains the agency that has implemented the most ESI calls on new claims and is already indicating an improvement in management of claims.

Work Injury Screening and Early Intervention (WISE) screening, a NSW Health initiative, has also been implemented on physical claims where 5 or more days of time lost has occurred. During the initial contact process the injured worker is asked 10 specific questions from the Örebro Musculoskeletal Pain Questionnaire (OMPQ) questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire is to establish if the injured worker requires any psychological referrals for anxiety management and/or coping strategies because historically physical injuries have developed into secondary psychological injuries. To try to prevent this, if an injured worker scores more than 50 on the questionnaire they will be referred to additional psychological services.

NSW Ambulance has had improved recovery rates due to the implementation of these initiatives. For example, the average time lost for physical claim has reduced from 33 weeks in 2015 to 18 week at the end of 2016. Psychological claims duration has also reduced from 41 weeks in 2015 to 19 at the end of 2016. In the final six months of 2106, there has been a 46% reduction in overall cost of claims.

NSW Ambulance staff have been kept up to date with the implementation of each of these initiatives via various communication platforms including the intranet, email, SIRENS and relevant newsletters<sup>36</sup>.

#### **4. The Protected Paramedic**

##### **The protected paramedic**

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<sup>36</sup> Various awareness campaigns regarding returning to work



Unfortunately, research has shown that our paramedics are subjected to the following types of assaults: punching, kicking, spitting, scratching, strike to various body parts, kneed, slapping, head-butting, pushing, verbal threats (to kill/harm/intimidate), stalking, threaten with knife, punching window of ambulance, threatening gestures towards paramedics, knife to throat. This behaviour is unacceptable to NSW Ambulance as an employer and to the public of NSW generally.

### **Paramedic Assaults**

Being aware of the acts of violence that our paramedics are subjected to when trying to perform their duties and provide clinical assistance to the community, NSW Ambulance has historically taken steps, not only to minimise the likelihood of violence as noted above, but also to ensure appropriate action is taken against alleged perpetrators and that paramedics the subject of such abuse are supported.

Currently NSW Ambulance endeavours to report all instances of assaults on staff to NSW Police. Standard assault provisions found within the *Crimes Act 1900* such as:

- s61 Common assault - maximum penalty 2 years
- s59 Assault occasioning actual bodily harm - maximum penalty 5 years. If the offender is in the company of another person - maximum penalty 7 years
- s54 Assault causing grievous bodily harm - maximum penalty 2 years
- s35 Reckless grievous bodily harm - maximum penalty 10 years. If in the company of another person, 14 years
- s33 Grievous bodily harm with intent - maximum penalty 25 years

These provisions are available to NSW Police when preferring charges against offenders who are alleged to have assaulted a paramedic.

In 2010 an amendment to the *Health Services Act 1997*, inserting section 67J occurred. The amendment created two new offences – intentionally obstructing or hindering an ambulance officer; and, intentionally obstructing or hindering an ambulance officer by an act of violence. The new offences were considered to send the strongest possible message to the community that violence towards paramedics carrying out their duties would not be tolerated.

### **Monitoring and support**

NSW Ambulance has a number of initiatives to encourage paramedics and managers to report assaults and to support victim paramedics through the related police investigation and criminal prosecution processes.

As a result of the Zero Tolerance policy, paramedics are encouraged to report assaults in the first instance to their Duty Operations Manager, who can assist with reports to Police. The Duty Operations Manager lodges a timely report through the chain of command via NSW's internal SharePoint system and contacts support services for the paramedic.

In August 2014, and as an additional support, the PSU provided a monitoring and advisory role to paramedics and their managers. This PSU function includes tracking the investigation and prosecution (where relevant) of all assaults upon paramedics.

The PSU receives reports of assault from line managers via SharePoint. Upon receipt of a report, the PSU allocates the case to a PSU case officer to track the progress of the report and to liaise with the assaulted staff member, their manager and other relevant stakeholders.

The PSU case officers have particular expertise in police and court processes. The PSU case officer is able to explain key steps in the criminal investigation or court process to the victim paramedic as each matter progresses, including explaining the complexities of particular criminal charges and sentencing outcomes. The PSU case officer is also able to liaise with police to explore issues that might arise, for example: potential delays with an investigation or a witness' concerns about giving evidence.

The support function provided by the PSU is communicated to the paramedic workforce by their local management team and via whole staff communications strategies<sup>37</sup>.

The PSU reports on assault prosecution outcomes each month to the Chief Executive. The PSU also assists by analysing sentencing outcomes, comparing the average terms imposed on offenders who have assaulted paramedics with the average terms imposed for all assaults and other acts intended to cause injury in the Local Court. Since August 2014, the PSU has monitored hundreds of investigations and prosecutions of assaults upon paramedics. Specifically, the PSU tracked:

<b>Period</b>	<b>Multiple Staff Victims</b>	<b>Single Victims</b>	<b>Total no. victims</b>
Aug to Dec 2014	19	53	72
Jan to Dec 2015	50	117	167
Jan to Dec 2016	40	125	165
Jan to May 2017	30	63	93

The functions undertaken by the PSU are in addition to ongoing support for affected staff

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<sup>37</sup> Sirens articles August 2014, April 2015 and June 2016

provided by their line management team, which includes organising staff support services such as Peer Support, Chaplains, the Employee Assistance Program and accompanying staff to court when they are required to give evidence.

### **Occupational Violence Prevention**

In early 2016, the Chief Executive and the Executive Leadership Team directed additional work be undertaken for a more strategic, organisation-wide and streamlined approach to strengthen and enhance the safety of all NSW Ambulance staff.

As a result, the Occupational Violence Prevention Strategic Advisory Group (OVPSAG) was commissioned in April 2016. Led by the Executive Director Clinical Services as Chair, the group was established in May with the mandate of conducting an overarching occupational violence prevention strategic review of current initiatives and advise on opportunities for improvement across NSW Ambulance. This was to be achieved by delivering a methodical, measured approach to exploring prevalence and causal factors of occupational violence, as well as assessing prevention strategies, current interventions and their efficacy. These strategies included anti-violence training, the implementation of a broad suite of staff support systems along with various public awareness campaigns which have been conducted in the past decade.

The OVPSAG was made up of a wide cross-section of corporate and operational NSW Ambulance staff from metropolitan and regional locations, joined in partnership with representatives from the NSW Ministry of Health and industrial bodies. Individual members provided expertise and valuable firsthand experience across all functional areas within the organisation and in the wider health landscape.

The OPVSAG was tasked to review existing NSW Ambulance strategies and policies, contemporary research and approaches utilised by other ambulance services in relation to occupational violence related risk. Areas for improvement were identified by exploring these risks, practices and policies. Deliverable solutions for reducing the risk of occupational violence to NSW Ambulance staff were then examined. The findings and recommendations in the final report provided a policy framework for occupational violence prevention within NSW Ambulance.

Recommendations included: reduced incidents of occupational violence against NSW Ambulance staff through the development of an improved system of managing, monitoring and mitigating these events, and an endorsed position in relation to education, data management, policy framework and reporting.

The OVPSAG report was finalised, endorsed by the NSW Ambulance Executive Leadership Team and published in November 2016<sup>38</sup>. The report contained 29 recommendations. Implementation of the recommendations will occur as part of the larger NSW Ambulance Health and Wellness project.

### **Workplace Violence Prevention strategies**

Over the last decade, NSW Ambulance has implemented a comprehensive organisational strategy to reduce the risk of violence towards paramedics. Examples include:-

- Pre-employment psychometric screening (staff resilience)
- On-going Community Public Awareness Anti Violence Campaigns<sup>39</sup>  
NSW Ambulance commenced an ongoing campaign to minimise the likelihood of assaults on paramedics in December 2013. The first phase, aimed at raising community awareness was the 'If You Hurt a Paramedic' poster campaign. In conjunction with Clubs NSW, over 3500 posters have been distributed in pubs, clubs, emergency departments, and ambulance vehicles throughout NSW. Since 2013, regular campaigns have been issued. In 2017, a campaign specifically directed at Call Taker Abuse was launched. All paramedic safety campaigns are now also promoted via social media and to date, have received the overwhelming support of the public and frontline staff.
- Policies, Procedures and Protocols – various policies, procedures and protocols exist to assist all staff to maintain their safety. Examples include:
  - SOP2013-006 Caution Note, Medical Note and Access Note Management Policy – the policy requires the creation and review of appropriate notes that will alert paramedics responding to an incident of any known potential hazards or risks to their personal safety and/or additional information to aid in the access and treatment of patients<sup>40</sup>.
  - Medical Priority Dispatch System scene safety questions, Procedure CT 2.15, 2.17, Protocol Dispatch 9<sup>41</sup>
  - Enhanced treatment management protocols including the Management of Acute Severe Behavioural Disturbance Protocol: A7<sup>42</sup>
- Arrangements with NSW Police

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<sup>38</sup> NSW Ambulance *Occupational Violence Prevention Strategic Advisory Group Report* November 2016

<sup>39</sup> Examples of anti-violence campaign materials

<sup>40</sup> NSW Ambulance Standard Operating Policy SOP2013-006 *Caution Note, Medical Note and Access Note Management Policy* 30 January 2013

<sup>41</sup> Procedure CT 2.15; Procedure CT 2.17; Protocol Disp 9; MPDS question examples

<sup>42</sup> Protocol A7 Management of Acute Severe Behavioural Disturbance

A Joint Communications Policy currently exists between NSW Ambulance and NSW Police. The Policy provides direction with regards to the exchange of information between the agencies in respect of responding to incidents including where the safety of attending paramedics may be in question<sup>43</sup>.

A Memorandum of Understanding has been entered between NSW Ambulance, NSW Police and NSW Health with regards to dealing with mental health patients<sup>44</sup>. This MOU has recently been updated and is pending implementation.

- Staff Training
  - 2009-2011 Mental Health training – this one day course outlined the provisions of the *Mental Health Act 2007* including authorisation of paramedics to use reasonable force to exercise their functions under the Act; restrain patients; sedate patients if necessary to transport safely; search patients for items that may present a danger; and, seize and detain any such dangerous items.
  - 2012-2013 Mental Health training – use of the mechanical restraint device
  - 2014 Anti-violence training – the aim of this program was to increase paramedic safety and minimise the risk of assault when attending an incident. The focus of the training was on increasing situational awareness and avoiding confrontation in operational settings. The training session was delivered throughout the State via a DVD presentation, facilitated by local managers.
  - 2015-2016 Patient Management – Sedation and Restraint of Mental Health patients
  - CORE training – Scene Management (including managing a routine scene; promoting public safety; implementing safe access and egress in an emergency).
  - CORE training – Responding to Challenging Behaviour
  - 2015-2016 Hunter New England Sector – Paramedic Safety training program built on the principles of 2014 Anti-Violence training. This arose as a result of a noted increase in incidents involving violence towards paramedics.

## **5. Leadership Capability**

Organisational values drive the purpose of an organisation and are the benchmark for performance and the way in which decisions are made. NSW Ambulance is a values-based organisation and is contributing to the evolution of the organisations' culture developing the

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<sup>43</sup> NSW Ambulance Policy Directive PD2017-002 *Joint Communications between NSW Ambulance and NSW Police Force Policy Directive* 7 February 2017

<sup>44</sup> Memorandum of Understanding *Mental Health Emergency Response July 2007* NSW Health, NSW Police Force, NSW Ambulance

leaders. Organisational change of this nature is not an overnight process and to produce any variation to culture, the organisation needs to hold true to the direction.

NSW Ambulance Values are the CORE values of NSW Health: Collaboration, Openness, Respect and Empowerment. Leaders who actively model these CORE values have the trust and respect of staff. Staff who trust and respect their leaders are more likely to experience high levels of job satisfaction, increased engagement and heightened performance; leading to better patient outcomes and a pursuit of a mobile health service that is patient-centred and staff-focused.

Reflecting on these values, in 2014 over 100 paramedics, corporate and support staff considered what behaviours were needed to improve the culture of NSW Ambulance. The group identified eight signature behaviours that it was hoped would improve the way we work and ultimately increase the positive culture of our agency<sup>45</sup>. A concentrated campaign, focusing on one of the eight behaviours, took place each month.

The need for NSW Ambulance to work on the development of its managers and leaders was identified in 2008 and since then the organisation has been working on development programs aimed at creating the cultural shift needed to become a values-based organisation. Learning, development and education of staff is undertaken by many areas within NSW Ambulance<sup>46</sup>.

Values based leaders heighten performance and engagement of their teams because they have the respect of the people they lead and they build this respect by empowering their team through open communication, collaborative decision making and trust. Values-based leaders focus on living and communicating the vision of the organisation and finding new ways to develop and engage their staff through that vision.

Due to the nature of emergency work, managers are often time poor and therefore focus on easily measured KPIs and taking corrective action when KPIs are not being met. Values-based leaders understand that by positively working with and encouraging their staff they create an engaged workforce. An engaged workforce generally means the KPIs will, in general, take care of themselves, and if KPIs aren't met, then the team work on improving the team's performance rather than the old school culture of looking for someone to blame.

The Capable Leader program<sup>47</sup> offers a self-driven personalised learning journey, founded in the 70:20:10 model for development, assisting all staff to develop themselves as part of their

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<sup>45</sup> NSW Ambulance *Eight Signature Behaviours*

<sup>46</sup> Overview of learning and development provision throughout NSW Ambulance

<sup>47</sup> Summary of the Capable Leader – a values-based leadership program

everyday work. The program aims to develop all staff, operational and non-operational. Leadership has everything to do with everyday behaviours; that is modelling the CORE values of the organisation – something all staff, not just leaders, across the organisation are encouraged to recognise and to continually aim to achieve.

The L&D All Staff training calendar continues to run from January to June and July to December each year, delivering non-clinical soft skills training across the state. Current topics include; grief support, effective communication, dealing with conflict, root cause analysis, building resilience and managing stress etc. The development is face to face and ranges from full day to half day courses. The topics are delivered by internal as well as external experts.

Delivery of operational services can impact on the ability of remote staff to attend face to face so work on improving consistent access through on line options is a continual focus.

Existing programs include;

- the Ambulance Management Qualification: a nine day frontline management qualification designed for station officers. Commencing in 2008 the AMQ has seen 948 managers complete since the inception of the program
- the Multiagency program: a two day middle managers program run in collaboration with the NSW Fire and Rescue, NSW SES and Rural Fire NSW
- Performance Development Program training: half day manager training tailored to the needs of the specific management group
- Industrial Relations: Local Action, Local Resolution: one day program for frontline and middle managers currently under development
- Health and Education Training Institute programs including the Financial Management Essentials and People Management Skills Program
- Tool Box Talks: currently under development, these short sessions will be run by the Learning & Development team in station meetings, sector forums and upon request and tailored to the needs of the requesting group. Topics include emotional intelligence, DISC and communication, the circle of influence, giving and receiving feedback
- Leaders' Resource Library: Books and DVDs aimed at developing leadership skills and understanding leadership attributes.

## 6. The Uniformed Paramedic

Within NSW Ambulance, only paramedics and control centre staff are required to wear a uniform. These staff are provided with an appropriate uniform to carry out their role in the delivery of pre-hospital care to the people of New South Wales. When considering an appropriate uniform, a number of issues must be considered:

- many and varied body types of paramedics of both genders;
- the duties and situations that paramedics find themselves in when delivering clinical care;
- compliance with work, health and safety issues;
- pregnant paramedics;
- recognition by members of the public, including issues such as rank; and
- the work unit, that is, an ambulance vehicle, where additional uniform items must be stored.

Provision of the uniform is agreed between the employer and the employee in the Operational Ambulance Officer (State) award which requires, in part, that uniforms be provided in accordance with the Uniform Policy Directive. Any change to the policy will be the subject of consultation, detailed below.

The NSW Ambulance Uniform Policy Directive sets the order of dress standards that our paramedics must abide by when wearing the NSW Ambulance uniform. This encompasses additional standards for wearing rank insignia, name badges, authorised embellishments and honours and awards<sup>48</sup>. A new uniform was issued to all paramedic staff in 2015 following extensive consultation. Issue of the new Control Centre Uniform will commence in June of this year.

The NSW Ambulance Uniform Catalogue<sup>49</sup> and associated instructions on how to order uniform items are available on the intranet for all staff. The Uniform Catalogue consists of a mixture of both gender specific items and unisex items. All applications for uniform items are considered for approval by local management taking into account personal circumstances and need.

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<sup>48</sup> NSW Ambulance Policy Directive PD2015-010 *Order of Dress Uniform Policy Directive* 5 August 2015

<sup>49</sup> NSW Ambulance Uniform Catalogue



NSW Ambulance utilises a consultative approach in the development and approval of uniform items and policy. The Uniform Advisory Committee (UAC<sup>50</sup>), whose membership consists of paramedics, union representatives, managers and uniform suppliers (advisory role only<sup>51</sup>), considers feedback from staff and, the available uniform catalogue, ensuring uniform items are kept up to date with changes in technology and requirement. The UAC provides advice to the Uniform Governance Group (UGG<sup>52</sup>) who then, based on business, risk management and budgetary considerations, refers decisions or recommendations to the Executive Leadership Team for approval.

An example of our consultative process is found in relation to the current operational (blue) workshirt. The UAC received negative feedback on the shirt from paramedics including representation from union representatives. The negative feedback of the workshirt has generally surrounded the lack of breathability and increased heat that the shirt caused.

Following this feedback, the UAC liaised with our uniform suppliers, ADA, who agreed to add a softening finish to the workshirt to see if this would improve the breathability of the garment. Feedback was received that this made no difference. The UAC again approached ADA who determined to look at alternate cotton blend materials.

At the UAC meeting in September 2016 it was agreed to trial a 50/50 cotton/polyester blended shirt and that 11 staff would participate in the trial. The trial of the 50/50 cotton/polyester blend shirt commenced in late January 2017 however, the feedback from those in the trial advised that it made no difference.

In February 2017, a further trial of the Victorian Ambulance operational shirt commenced. This shirt is 65% polyester and 35% cotton blended shirt which is the same blend as the current NSW Ambulance workshirt but is slightly heavier at 170gsm against 130gsm. This trial received positive feedback. The trial has been extended to 20 Paramedics from across the State.

## **7. The future of the Paramedic – Government Investment**

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<sup>50</sup> NSW Ambulance Uniform Committee – Terms of reference

<sup>51</sup> Uniform Advisory Committee members as at 19 June 2017

<sup>52</sup> NSW Ambulance Uniform Governance Committee Terms of Reference

In February 2017, the NSW Premier pledged an additional \$30 million in funding to protect the mental health and wellbeing of paramedics. The NSW Government has recognised the importance of ensuring that staff are appropriately supported with a range of integrated physical, mental health and wellbeing strategies to help prevent mental and physical injuries. An integral part of health and wellbeing in the workplace is sound leadership and engaged workforce. The bulk of this investment will be used to deliver programs to staff outlined across four key streams: NSW Ambulance Well Paramedic, Safe Paramedic, Capable Paramedic and Protected Paramedic. The proposed programs that make up these streams are based on evidence and best-practice. Links between the programs and anticipated benefits such as the reduction in negative workplace experiences, including workplace injury, work unit disharmony or occupational violence will be able to be demonstrated.

Further benefits of the government investment include an anticipated reduction in workplace injuries and incidents, through the correlation of training, assessment, guidance and engagement for both physical and mental health purposes.

### **Aims, programs and benefits**

#### **1. Capable Paramedic**

NSW Ambulance is a unique organisation; geographically dispersed and operating in a 24/7 emergency environment our leaders are required to be adaptable, approachable and self-aware. This requires a unique set of attributes and capabilities.

NSW Ambulance is committed to values-based leadership; leadership that is guided through the organisational values of collaboration, openness, respect and empowerment (CORE) and includes the continued adherence to our eight signature behaviours.

Staff engagement increases when staff believe they are well supported by their manager and their organisational executives. Expected benefits include reductions in workplace grievances, reduction in sick leave and increased staff engagement and satisfaction. These issues are of major concern based on data for grievances, sick leave and staff engagement surveys. In a service delivery organisation, this has direct flow on benefits to patient care and service delivery.

Relevant benefits derived from the Capable Paramedic program that are relevant to this inquiry can be summarised as:

- improved staff satisfaction with their work environment

- grievances being both effectively managed and minimised through management intervention and staff awareness
- more effective communication between staff and also with their managers
- ensuring managers for emergency services front line staff are highly motivated and engaged, equipped to manage and lead people
- increased staff engagement through understanding the strategic direction of NSW Ambulance

The Capable Paramedic attributes and capabilities have been developed using the Paramedic Chiefs of Canada Leadership Competency Framework<sup>53</sup> as a model and mapped against the NSW Public Sector Capability Framework. As stated by the Paramedic Chiefs of Canada and reflective of the current Australian perspective, *the leaders of tomorrow must be able to lead people whose learning and formative experiences are different from those of the past. They must be able to lead a more diverse workforce, providing varied service delivery models, in new ways. Future leaders will be able to carry out their duties and articulate a shared vision all the more convincingly with the relationship between traditional leadership skills and a well-conceived Leadership Framework that is understood and utilised by all.*

The program has been designed to reinforce the attributes and capabilities that all paramedics and indeed, all staff should be maintaining or be developing, ensuring we have committed values-based staff across the organisation who can step into management and leadership roles confidently and seamlessly. Leaders who promote healthy and collegial working relationships that support staff engagement, satisfaction and overall wellbeing.

The programs that comprise the Capable Paramedic, creating a ‘certified practising manager’ which is linked to annual performance development plans and includes self-assessment that looks at how an individual ‘maps’ to the Capable Paramedic attributes and capabilities; exploring individual areas of strength and development.

## 2. Protected Paramedic

Occupational violence in the workplace can take many forms, ranging from physical assault to homicide, passive aggression to bullying, verbal assault to sexual assault. For the period from July 2015 to June 2016 there were 282 incidents of employee related assault within NSW Ambulance.

As noted earlier, since August 2014 NSW Ambulance has monitored hundreds of investigations and prosecutions of assaults on paramedics that involved 497 victims.

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<sup>53</sup> See Annexure 37

Work was undertaken in 2016/17 to further contribute to the understanding of occupational violence within NSW Ambulance and examination of the extent, impacts and possible solutions to improve the safety of all employees.

Included in the work undertaken in this space was evaluation of existing practices and create an overarching occupational violence prevention strategy, complementing our strategic plan in relation to being 'patient-centred and staff- focused'. This resulted in a total of 29 recommendations covering areas such as:

- Education and training
- Policies and procedures
- Reporting
- Staff complacency
- Security assessments
- Technology, including evaluation of current and potential devices for personal safety
- Interagency dynamics
- Advice from call takers
- Community advice, media and communications
- Billing processes

Funding for additional radio support through the Critical Communications Enhancement Program with provides a single statewide radio network coordinated by NSW Government Telecommunications Authority (Telco Authority) offering better coverage, increased operability and safety, was announced for the 2017/18 Budget.

### 3. Safe Paramedic

NSW Ambulance recognises the biggest injury to effect Paramedics is body stressing and in order to assist in the reduction of these the THINK campaign was implemented. This campaign raised awareness of matters such as appropriate lifting techniques. The campaign resulted in a significant reduction in body stressing injuries and in 2015 it won the Treasury Managed Fund Award for Innovation.

Identifying that more work was required, the Safe Paramedic stream of proposed programs have been developed to change the way Paramedics undertake the work they do each and every day, reducing hazardous manual tasks and providing increased training in innovative ways to move patients from their homes, workplaces or on the street to the ambulance vehicle with minimal lifting. It also includes consideration of purchase of state of the art

equipment and an increased focus on understanding the mechanics of movement and adapting this to the workplace.

The programs are based on the South Australian Hazardous Manual Tasks Program. The Program employed a chief physiotherapist and other technical specialists such as exercise physiologists and occupational therapists to assess the functional aspects of a paramedic's occupation. Based on this assessment, significant changes were made to the completion of manual tasks by paramedics. Paramedics were trained to conduct dynamic risk assessments of any manual task they may be confronted by. This assessment includes determining the best equipment, technique and number of staff to be utilised to avoid injury. In addition a number of their skills were changed to remove the process of lifting a patient completely and replaced it with the equipment, namely belts and slide sheets, to enable them to drag or slide patients onto stretchers or other transport vehicles such as hover mats.

Other targeted projects have commenced to again focus on high prevalence injury reduction. These programs include the Back on Track (BoT), Targeted Injury Prevention Program (TIPP) and the Risk Assessed Pre Injury Duty initiative (RAPID).

#### 4. Well Paramedic

Paramedics perform a unique function within the NSW Health system which carries specific occupational risks and for this reason, a tailored mental health and employee wellbeing program is required.

The Well Paramedic program is a holistic plan to address the mental and physical demands of the Paramedic position. It is intended to cover the full spectrum of employment from trainee paramedic to pre and post retirement stages, along with the variation in responsibilities and demands brought about through promotion. It is evidence based and draws on the knowledge of leaders in the area of mental and physical health of first responders.

The initiatives under consideration are also built on feedback from staff provided through the Staff Wellbeing and Resilience Summit held in July 2016, the First Responder Mental Health Strategy launched by the Premier in October 2016 and guidelines created by beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute.

## **8. Conclusion**

Awareness of issues such as mental health and bullying/harassment in the workplace has increased over the last decade. NSW Ambulance has focused on these issues and their impact on our staff and the workplace in general.

NSW Ambulance recognises the need to address these issues for our staff and to this end has implemented a variety of programs and systems designed to reduce such issues arising and where they do, ensure that appropriate intervention is available.

As with most workplaces within the community, the culture of our organisation is continually evolving. Behaviours of the past are no longer tolerated and support must be provided to those who suffer injury as a result of their work.

NSW Ambulance recognises that in some cases there has been and continues to be dissatisfaction from staff as to the adequacy and consistency of services made available to them. In recognition of the community that we serve and being mindful of the need to provide service to that community on a 24/7 basis, NSW Ambulance continues to actively strive towards equitable implementation of policies and practices, particularly in rural areas.

NSW Ambulance acknowledges that whilst efforts have been and continue to be made to support our staff, there is always more that can be done. Staff support is always an enduring focus and one that requires continual improvement.