

**Submission
No 102**

INQUIRY INTO EMERGENCY SERVICES AGENCIES

Organisation: Health Services Union

Date received: 24 July 2017

21 July 2017

Hon Robert Borsak MLC, Chair
Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Legal Affairs
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir,

Inquiry into emergency services agencies

The Health Services Union welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry on the issues of workplace bullying and harassment. This union's Ambulance Division is the dedicated union for paramedics and support staff.

We are aware of allegations of victimisation and substance abuse that have been raised in the news media, particularly in *The Daily Telegraph* in September of last year. Many of our members contacted us at the time to express their concerns over these stories.

Paramedics are highly trained clinicians who conduct themselves with professionalism and integrity. We hope that this will soon lead to paramedic registration and professional recognition. The HSU will continue to encourage the profession to be viewed by all stakeholders in a very positive light.

There is no doubt that an amount of bullying from individual, old school managers exists within NSW Ambulance Service. The HSU is prepared to work with the Chief Executive and senior management to stamp it out.

We acknowledge that morale is low in many areas, nevertheless NSW paramedics are a highly patient-focused group of professionals who would never knowingly put their patients or colleagues at risk by being impaired on the job. We have not detected any culture at all of paramedics (or other staff) drinking before or during shifts.

Paramedics not only perform in a highly stressful environment, but they have access to addictive medications, and for this reason there may be some who are stuck in a cycle of abuse. We support the current method of detection (being audits of stocks of medications usage over periods of time), and the current approach by NSW to see this as a health issue, rather than a disciplinary one.



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Last year, HSU NSW accepted an invitation from our construction industry colleagues in the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union to partnership in Foundation House, which runs assistance programs for our members, including a 28- day drug, alcohol and gambling residential rehabilitation program with a 12-step abstinence-based living skills component. Any HSU member looking for support with addiction issues is entitled, and we actively encourage them, to free enrolment in such programs.

I would welcome the opportunity to address the committee directly should its members require any further information about these issues.

Yours sincerely,

Gerard Hayes
Secretary
HSU NSW/ACT/Qld.