

AMBULANCE EMPLOYEES AUSTRALIA - VICTORIA SUBMISSION

National Registration of Paramedics

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Standing
Committee



Ambulance Employees Australia -Victoria Submission
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Introduction

Ambulance Employees Australia Victoria (AEAV), a section of United Voice Victoria, welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on behalf of our members regarding the establishment of a national registration system for Australian Paramedics.

Ambulance Employees Australia Victoria represents members engaged in the ambulance industry in Victoria in both the emergency and the non-emergency patient transport (NEPT) sector.

In Victoria the public sector, Ambulance Victoria, employs approximately 3,500 paramedics and the private non-emergency sector engages approximately 800 individuals as both Ambulance Attendants and Patient Transport Officers.

The scope of practice of Victorian paramedics has expanded significantly over the past decade and has become increasingly professional in nature. This is demonstrated by the fact that the minimum entry requirement for Ambulance Victoria is now a three year undergraduate degree and that all paramedics are expected to undertake on-going professional development both in person and online.

The Victorian community is reliant upon the paramedic profession to provide pre-hospital emergency care and this has evolved from paramedics providing basic first aid interventions to paramedics becoming the leaders in the provision of care to patients in the emergency pre-hospital environment.

Executive Summary

This submission puts forward the case for the establishment of a mandatory system of national registration for Australian Paramedics. For the system to truly be national then all states and territories must participate.

The possibility of an “opt-out” system would undermine the integrity and purpose of national registration.

With the possibility of employers electing not to participate there would be no national system of regulation and accreditation for paramedics. There would be nothing to stop rogue employers from electing not to participate and, as such, the model would provide no protection to the title of “paramedic” or the community.

Recommendation

- 1. That the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Standing Committee find that all States and Territories must progress national paramedic registration.**

National Registration

Registered Health Practitioners

The Australian Health Practitioner Registration Agency currently regulates the work of the operations of the following fourteen health professions:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practice
- Chinese Medicine
- Chiropractic
- Dentists
- Medicine
- Medical Radiation Practice
- Nursing and Midwifery
- Occupational Therapy
- Optometry
- Osteopathy
- Pharmacy
- Physiotherapy
- Podiatry
- Psychology

National registration for the above health professions is governed by the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law 2010* which came into effect on 01 July 2010. This meant that for the first time there was a consistent nationwide standard governing the registration and accreditation of individuals working in the above industries.

Paramedics, for various reasons, including the reluctance of certain jurisdictions, were excluded from the AHPRA scheme.

The AEAV notes that currently New South Wales is the only state or territory within Australia which remains reluctant to support the establishment of a national registration system for paramedics.

Options for Registration

The Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council (AHMAC) put forward the following four options for the regulation of the paramedic profession in July 2012¹:

1. No change to existing practice- rely on current regulatory and non-regulatory mechanisms and a voluntary Code of Practice/
2. Strengthen statutory health complaint mechanisms- strengthen code of conduct and powers to prohibit those who breach the code from continuing to provide health services.
3. Strengthen State and Territory regulation of paramedics
4. Registration of paramedics through the national scheme

The AEAV is strongly of the opinion that the best model to ensure public and community safety is option four as it is the only one which ensures that all Australian paramedics are held to the same standard of practice.

Rationale for Pursuing Paramedic National Registration

The benefits of a national registration system for Australian paramedics include:

- Consistent and transparent handling of complaints from patients
- Consistent and transparent handling of authority to practice matters
- Improved public safety
- Flexibility in employment and portability of qualifications
- Protection of the title of “Paramedic”

The costs of national registration

- Registration Fee
- Compulsory continuing education
- Professional indemnity insurance

¹ Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council, “Consultation Paper: Options for the Regulation of Paramedics”, July 2012: p. 59-60

The AEAU submits that it is clear that the Standing Commission should support national registration for paramedics when taking into account the costs of national registration to individual practitioners compared to the benefits to the safety of the Australian community.

Conclusion

The adoption of any system which allows jurisdictions to “opt-out” from national registration is a second best system and undermines the integrity of a national registration model. It seems counter intuitive to introduce a national registration scheme which may not cover paramedics in all states and territories.

All paramedics, irrespective of their work location, should be held to the same standards and the only way to achieve this is for all states and territories to commit to national paramedic registration.

For the reasons outlined in this paper the AEAU submits that:

[t]he Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Standing Committee should find that all state and territory governments must progress national paramedic registration.

The AEAU is a member of the National Council of Ambulance Unions (NCAU) and we support the submission in full of NCAU to this Committee.