

12 December 2023

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Via submission lodgment weblink: [Lodge my submission – Parliament of Australia \(aph.gov.au\)](https://aph.gov.au/submit)

Dear Committee Secretary,

RE: COVID-19 Royal Commission

Thank you for your consideration of this submission to the COVID-19 Royal Commission.

The Australasian College of Paramedicine (the College) is the peak professional body representing and supporting paramedics and student paramedics across Australasia. We are future-focused and committed to sustainable health workforce initiatives that deliver person-centred care and improved health outcomes for all individuals and communities across Australasia.

In preparation for this important inquiry, we consulted the paramedic profession, via a public online survey, to ensure our submission echoed the collective voice of our member base.

Terms of Reference:

A) The appropriate terms of reference for a COVID-19 Royal Commission that would allow all affected stakeholders to be heard.

Person-centred care: equity and inclusivity

- It is important that all Australians, from all communities, are given the opportunity to provide feedback to this inquiry.
- Impacts on health outcomes across all healthcare settings e.g.: hospitals and primary care clinics, public and private providers, civilian and defence, frontline emergency response, nursing homes and in home services.
- Investigate paramedic ratios vs density of population recommendations for improved community outcomes.
- Examine equity, inclusivity, and cultural competencies across all health services.

Workforce support

- Explore the psychological and emotional impact of the pandemic on paramedics, including stress, burnout, and mental health concerns, as well as the impact on families/loved ones of paramedics who were also deeply affected.
- Identify support systems and mental health resources provided to paramedics during and post COVID-19.

- In addition to frontline health professionals, examine impact on support/corporate areas within the service.
- Examine whether the pandemic has caused an increase in paramedics leaving the profession.
- Examine health risks, both short term and long term, to healthcare workforce.
- Examine leave entitlements and types.

Healthcare workforce protection

- The availability and suitability of protective equipment supplied to frontline healthcare professionals and other health provider workers i.e.: receptionists.
- Assess the sufficiency of resources, including personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Assess protective (PPE) training.
- Assess staffing levels for paramedics during the pandemic.
- Investigate any challenges faced in procuring and distributing necessary resources.

Planning and strategy: Response, preparedness, and protocols

- Examine the coordination between paramedic services and health agencies to ensure a well-coordinated response.
- Design mitigation strategies for future COVID-19 waves and/or other health pandemics.
- Examine data captured across all states and territories to identify recommendations e.g.: if the surge workforce in Victoria made a measurable difference to patient outcomes.
- The approach to managing the pandemic spread, and funding, differed across the country.
- Examine the impact of the state vs state health disparities, or perceived disparities, on Australian culture e.g.: impact of lockdown on mental health between states.
- Examine ambulance service preparedness including contingency planning, scaling of response capabilities and categorisation e.g. under a declared state of emergency/pandemic, the response framework could be altered.
- Investigate opportunities to improve system data sharing and record management.
- Evaluate the data collection mechanisms in place for monitoring and reporting COVID-19 cases attended to by paramedics.
- Examine the accuracy and completeness of data reporting to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the pandemic's impact on paramedic services.
- Provide recommendations for future preparedness and response strategies, aiming to strengthen paramedic services in the face of similar public health crises.

Communication, collaboration, and information dissemination

- Examine areas where policy and legislation prevented best practice and/or created missed opportunities for public and private healthcare providers to collaborate and provide a combined response capability.
- Examine the effectiveness of communication channels between health authorities and paramedic services during the pandemic.

- Investigate the collaboration and coordination efforts between paramedic services, hospitals, and other healthcare entities during the pandemic.
- Assess the integration of paramedics into broader healthcare strategies for managing public health emergencies.

Training and professional development

- Review the adequacy of training programs provided to paramedics for handling infectious diseases and pandemics.

Community engagement and education

- Assess the effectiveness of paramedic-led community engagement and education initiatives during the pandemic.
- Assess crisis health literacy of decision makers from government departments, emergency, urgent and primary health workforce, defense personnel and consumers to support decision making process, reduce blocks, and improve healthcare delivery.

In conclusion, it is hoped that the COVID-19 Royal Commission will reveal recommendations that are conducive to a more collaborative, prepared, and effective healthcare system that improves health workforce, healthcare access, and health outcomes for all Australians during times of pandemics and/or other crises. Thank you for your consideration of our submission, we look forward to providing feedback throughout the process of this Royal Commission.