



FACTSHEET

Paramedic Connect

A collaborative health program between NSW Ambulance and Local Health Districts (LHD) to increase health access in small rural and remote communities.

Paramedic connect is a collaboration initiative between Health and Ambulance to increase paramedic engagement with communities and increase access to health services in rural and remote communities.

BACKGROUND

Health services worldwide face many challenges in providing timely health care to their communities. It is evident through a number of health reviews and more recently highlighted in the Garling Report that increasing pressures caused by an ageing population, changes in technology, community expectations and demands on the health care workforce are significant demand drivers influencing the delivery of health care, particularly in rural and remote communities (Garling 2008).

In order to meet these challenges health service providers are identifying opportunities to develop collaborative and flexible service models that could enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of existing health care services

A successful pilot of what is now known as Paramedic Connect was undertaken in Hillston in 2007 and yielded a range of benefits for the community and the paramedics who work there.

THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE AMBULANCE SERVICE

NSW Ambulance has traditionally been seen as a provider of emergency care and transport

and recognises that this will continue to be its core role. In recent years, NSW Ambulance has implemented innovative models of care to support rapid developments in technology and clinical advances in the field of out of hospital care such as Low Acuity Pathways, pre-hospital thrombolysis and major trauma programs to assist in managing demand due to increased pressures within the health system.

As clinical capabilities and treatments improve, ambulance services everywhere are transforming from emergency transport providers “taking the patient to care” to emergency health services “taking care to the patient” (Garling 2008). There are several examples both in Australia and overseas, of paramedics assisting health services in areas of health care outside of the traditional role of ambulance services. (*Mulholland 2009; Wingrove & Laine 2008*).

In recent years, changes within NSW Ambulance has seen priorities shifting to develop the role of ambulance in supporting a broader range of health care, building a clinical workforce that can be more responsive and systematised in interactions with health and social service partners.

HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS IN RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

In preliminary discussions with LHDs, opportunities have been

identified where Ambulance might contribute to enhancing the delivery of health services in designated sites in rural communities.

Potential activities identified to be part of the program include:

HEALTH PROMOTION: Providing information and community education enables the community to respond more effectively to changes in their health and better prepares them for experiencing health emergencies. Specific health promotion activities such as the *Aboriginal Cardiac Care* and *Life, Live it Save it* programs will target specific groups within the community to improve health awareness and health outcomes.

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE: Managing low acuity and chronic disease patients at home supports independence and reduces demands on hospitals. It also creates relationships between paramedics and people in the community with a higher risk of an acute health emergency. Paramedics would be included in activities such as care in the home, chronic disease management, patient monitoring, clinics, drop-in visits, medication management and post-operative observations.

EMERGENCY CARE: Paramedics are health professionals with specific expertise in acute pre-hospital emergency care. Paramedics could be involved in providing support to local



emergency departments in a range of different ways including participation in clinics and continuity of care with patients who have been transported by ambulance.

The principles underpinning these broad proposals are that:

- The core function of NSW Ambulance will not be compromised; and
- Each support activity is not a substitution for existing services but is an enhancement to what is already being provided.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

A strong consultation framework has been developed to engage local health service staff and paramedics in implementing the program. The nature of the program activities will be specifically linked to community need in each location based on a needs assessment process which aims to maximise opportunities for paramedics to assist in improving health status in their communities.

Strong business rules underpin the program protecting NSW Ambulance's core functions in the community. A clear suitability assessment framework guides the selection of paramedic activities and patients.

Following the consultation period, an implementation plan for each location will be prepared that will detail key functions, milestones, evaluation and reporting processes.

A comprehensive monitoring and review process will allow key stakeholders to provide feedback on program activities and ensure they are responsive to community needs.

The range of activities undertaken at each site is determined by a community needs assessment and thorough consultation by paramedics and health management at a local

level. Ambulance stations will only engage in activities which are logistically achievable and sustainable.

PROPOSED SITES

NSW Ambulance has initially identified over 30 sites throughout rural and remote NSW where potential collaboration opportunities could be undertaken. Those sites have been identified on the basis of the volume of activity for both the NSW Ambulance and LHDs and the capacity for potential collaboration.

BENEFITS OF THE PROGRAM

A range of benefits have been identified from the Paramedic Connect program. Experiences in the trial have revealed an incensement in paramedic job satisfaction and job retention in remote areas. Likewise, improved health access for rural communities results in less hospitalisation for low acuity and chronic disease conditions, improved engagement of the community with ambulance, and better recognition of paramedics as key health professionals in rural communities. Paramedic Connect empowers paramedics to have a key role in addressing issues of health access and health outcomes facing rural and remote communities.

CONCLUSION

This communiqué has outlined plans for Ambulance and Health Care Facilities to collaborate in providing enhanced services to communities in rural and remote areas. While the Ambulance Service's core function will be maintained its primary role they will also assist other existing services. The view of communities and health care workers is essential in shaping this model of care which is patient-focussed and designed to provide value-added services to rural and remote communities.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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