

Terms of Reference

Ambulance Service Structural Review

Background

The purpose of an ambulance service is to deliver high quality pre-hospital care and medical transport services in a time critical manner, underpinned by excellence in care. The service should be delivered through a practical, effective, safe and cost efficient approach ensuring quality medical care and transport to Territorians.

The NT Government is currently undertaking both a financial and clinical review of the current road ambulance service provider, St John's Ambulance. It is timely to consider new models of delivery to take the service into the future through an overarching structural review.

The NT Government invests \$45.9 million per annum in the road ambulance service. This Review has been commissioned to make sure the community and government are getting the best outcomes from that investment.

This Review will examine whether our ambulance service provides a contemporary, efficient and effective service that meets the needs and expectations of Territorians, and keeps communities safe. It is also an opportunity to consider the impact an expanded pre-hospital service can have on the current health services, and how a future service can enable the Northern Territory to meet its commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Scope

Ambulance Service

Ambulance services are generally categorised into the following four elements:

1. Communications: 000 call taking centre and ambulance dispatch service
2. Emergency response: Responding to 000 calls
3. Pre-hospital medical care: Treating injuries and ailments
4. Patient Transport Services: Transporting people post aeromedical retrievals to hospital.

Focus Areas

The Review will consider and make practical recommendations around the following focus areas:

1. Service model design
 - *Assess the current model, including communications, emergency response and patient transport services and dispatch coordination including integration and interactions with other patient transport services.*
 - *Assess the other jurisdictions ambulance/patient transport models as relevant to the NT geography and context.*
 - *Identify emerging issues and trends in ambulance service and patient travel demand and design.*

2. Service delivery and demand management

- *Assess the current service offering, including any gaps or issues across the continuum of ambulance and patient travel services*
- *Assess the drivers of increased demand (potentially including non-emergency patient transfers, alcohol-related transfers and co-response requirements)*
- *Assess the factors impacting ambulance availability (including ramping)*
- *Review the quality and effectiveness of the current service offering and performance metrics, and opportunities to transfer delivery of services to other providers, including options to bundle with broader patient travel services*
- *Make recommendations regarding any required changes to the service model to enable a unified patient transport (including ambulance services) pre-hospital care system*

3. Legislative framework

- *Make recommendations regarding any requirement for legislation to govern ambulance service provision and delivery.*

4. Workforce capacity and capability

- *Identify the current workforce capability and capacity required across the system*
- *Identify any opportunities or barriers to delivering the staffing required to support the system*
- *Review current enterprise agreement arrangements and benchmark against comparable services*

5. Funding

- *Review current investment in the ambulance service and benchmark against comparable services in other jurisdictions for government and non-government service providers*
- *Identify opportunities to link funding, demand for services and performance to enhance accountability*
- *Identify any opportunities for efficiencies and/or revenue opportunities*
- *Undertake a cost benefit analysis to determine cost effective service delivery*
- *Identify and review key causes of current financial pressures (e.g. escalating overtime costs, price increases above funding indexation, declining debt recovery efficiency).*

6. Governance and oversight

- *Assess the adequacy of information systems and data collection to inform demand management and ambulance availability*
- *Assess the adequacy of current governance mechanisms, performance metrics and contract management*
- *Assess the adequacy of current oversight and accountability mechanisms, including reporting.*
- *Determine the measures by which system performance should be determined, measured and reported (e.g. Budget Paper No. 3).*

NT Health is separately finalising a clinical practice review of ambulance services which will provide the broader review recommendations to improve clinical practice and governance in ambulance services.

Membership

An External Reviewer will be engaged to lead and undertake the Review. The Reviewer will have the following skills, knowledge and experience:

- expertise in ambulance service models of care and patient transport in a regional and remote context
- expertise in cost benefit analysis

The Review will be oversighted by a Steering Committee with Members appointed until 31 October 2024, when the final report is provided to Government.

The Steering Committee will be chaired by the Executive Director, Office of the Chief Executive of NT Health and comprise of a combination of senior government officials and senior health practitioners from the following agencies:

- NT Health
- Department of Treasury and Finance; and
- Department of Chief Minister and Cabinet

The Review may engage with independent expert advisors with specialist expertise in areas covered by the Terms of Reference and/or seek additional support by an external consultant to ensure a comprehensive and well-informed assessment.

The Review will report to the Chief Executive Officer, Department of Health and Chief Executive Officer Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

Methodology

The Review will be conducted through a combined methodology, including stakeholder meetings and interviews, document analysis, comparative analysis with other jurisdictions and data analysis. Given previous reviews into St John Ambulance Service NT, by Fong, Paxon and Ellis, the Review will use these recommendations as a key reference point.

A range of stakeholders and existing bodies will be consulted, including:

- St John Ambulance NT;
- United Workers Union;
- NT Health;
- Aeromedical retrieval services;
- Patient transport services;
- Primary Health Care providers; and
- Urgent Community Care providers
- Northern Territory Fire and Emergency Services
- Northern Territory Police

Conflicts of interest

The Reviewer must act with honesty and integrity, be open and transparent in dealings, and avoid a position possessing a conflict of interest. Any actual or potential conflicts of interest must be reported to the Steering Committee if it is likely to have an impact on a discussion or decision being made by the NT Government.

Conflict of interest declarations must be communicated to the CEO of the Department of Health in writing.

Deliverables and timeframe

The Review will commence on 1 July 2024, with a final report to be provided to the Northern Territory Government by 31 October 2024.

Regular progress reports will be made to the CEO of NT Health, and CEO of the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.