



## AMBULANCE FACT SHEET

# Health Services Amendment

## (Ambulance Fees) Act 2014

### NEW LEGISLATION FOR PAYMENT OF OUTSTANDING AMBULANCE FEES

The overwhelming majority of NSW Ambulance patients pay their invoices, have private health cover or qualify for payment exemptions (such as pensioners). However, approximately 9% of patients each year (68,000 people) do not pay or settle their invoices.

The Health Services Amendment (Ambulance Fees) Act 2014 is an Amendment of the Health Services Act 1997 designed to address significant unpaid debts owed to NSW Ambulance by NSW residents who fail to pay when invoiced for ambulance services. The Act provides the Commissioner of Fines Administration with powers to take action to recover ambulance fees by any one or combination of:

- property seizure order
- garnishee order
- charge on land.

### WHO PAYS FOR AN AMBULANCE?

There is a common yet incorrect perception in the community that ambulance services are free of charge. Under NSW legislation, the person who is liable to pay the ambulance fee is the person who received the service. In the case of a child (a person under 16 years of age), liability rests with their parent or legal guardian.

Since the Health Insurance Levies Act 1982, all NSW residents have the opportunity to access private health insurance or ambulance-only cover (approximately \$100 per year for families) to avoid the risk of incurring charges to NSW Ambulance in the event they or their family members require an ambulance service.

### AVERAGE COSTS OF AN AMBULANCE SERVICE

Ambulance fees are based on a call out charge plus a per kilometre charge. Kilometres are based on the round trip between the ambulance station, pick up address, destination and return to the ambulance station.

NSW residents only pay 51% of the actual charge as the NSW government subsidises the service for NSW residents. The average charge for a NSW resident for an emergency road transport is approximately \$400. Current charges are on the NSW Ambulance website at [www.ambulance.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ambulance.nsw.gov.au)

### PATIENTS EXEMPT FROM PAYING FOR AMBULANCE SERVICES

Some ambulance services are provided free of charge to people who meet certain criteria:

Pensioners/Concession Card holders

- Health Care Card
- Pensioner Concession Card
- Commonwealth Seniors Health Care Card
- Gold Repatriation Health Card (emergency services only)
- White Repatriation Health Card (only for specific conditions).

#### Other exemptions

- children/young people in the care of the State under the Children and Young Person's (Care and Protection) Act 1998
- victims of sexual assault, domestic violence or child abuse
- patients being taken involuntarily to a declared mental health facility under the Mental Health Act.

#### Ambulance services are also provided at no cost to the patient if the patient is covered by:

- a private health fund
- a school or group contribution
- a workers compensation, motor accident or third party insurance claim
- the Lifetime Care and Support Authority.

### PROCESS TO RECLAIM OUTSTANDING FEES

Prior to any fee recovery action being taken, the legislation provides for two distinct formal steps for payment of ambulance fees:

1. Patients will receive an invoice which contains information about the ambulance service provided and the basis for the fee.
2. If payment is not received seven days after the due-date on the invoice, a debt notice will be sent. This notice will explain the consequences of non-payment, including that the debt may be referred to the Commissioner of Fines Administration for fee recovery action.



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If payment is not received after a further 28 days, the debt may be referred to the Commissioner of Fines for fee-recovery action which may include:

- a garnishee order in relation to wages, salary or other amounts payable to the debtor
- a property seizure order in relation to any property of the debtor
- a charge on land owned by the debtor.

Both fee invoices and debt notices must include information about the right of an individual to seek a fee review.

If the debt is referred to the State Debt Recovery Office to take fee recovery action, the debtor is charged an additional fee recovery cost of \$65, plus the Sheriff's additional costs if applicable.

### FEE REVIEW POLICY

All people who are charged an ambulance fee have a right to request review by the Secretary, who has 42 days within which to conduct a fee review. During the period in which a review application is being considered, fee recovery action is effectively stayed.

The Secretary may take a range of actions following a fee review, including revoking the decision to charge the fee, waiving the fee in full or in part, confirming the decision to charge the fee and issuing a new fee invoice.

Patients who are not exempt but are experiencing financial or other hardship can apply for a fee review. A fee review may result in the fee being waived in full or in part or alternative payment arrangements may be put in place.

Additional grounds on which NSW Ambulance will consider waiver of charges include:

- people who are not concession card holders, but who have made an application for a card
- people who have been granted or have applied for refugee status
- good samaritans, i.e. people who render assistance to a person or people placed in a life-threatening position
- children whose parents or guardian have been killed in an accident or incident
- parents of a deceased child.

This list is not exhaustive and applications are considered by NSW Ambulance on a case-by- case basis.

### MORE INFORMATION

Contact NSW Ambulance Manager Revenue on 9320 7691.