



FACT SHEET

Paramedic Connect

Paramedic Connect is a collaborative initiative between NSW Ambulance and NSW Health 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 such as 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.

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 to better meet community needs in rural and remote areas. The view of communities and health care workers is essential in shaping this model of care which is patient-centred and designed to provide value-added services to rural and remote communities.

This initiative came about as the result of a successful pilot that yielded a range of benefits for the community, paramedics and local health care providers.

The changing role of NSW Ambulance

NSW Ambulance has traditionally been seen as a provider of emergency care and transport and recognises 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 patient referral and alternative destination initiatives 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 mobile health services 'taking care to the patient'. There are numerous examples both in Australia and overseas of paramedics assisting health services in areas of health care outside of the traditional role of the ambulance services.

In recent years, changes within NSW Ambulance have seen priorities shift to developing the role of ambulance services 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.





FACT SHEET – PARAMEDIC CONNECT

Health partnerships in rural and remote communities

In preliminary discussions with Local Health Districts (LHDs), opportunities have been identified where NSW 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 promotions activities such as the Aboriginal Cardiac Care and *Life, Live it Save it* programs 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 demand 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 out-of-hospital emergency care. Paramedics could be involved in providing support to local EDs in a range of different ways, including participation in clinics and continuity of care of patients transported by NSW Ambulance.

Implementation process

A strong consultation framework has been developed to engage local health service staff and paramedics in implementing Paramedic Connect. The nature of 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 through consultation by paramedics and health management at a local level. NSW Ambulance only engages 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. These sites have been initially identified on the basis of the volume of activity for both NSW Ambulance and other health services as well as the capacity for potential collaboration.

Benefits of the program

The Paramedic Connect trial revealed increased paramedic satisfaction and retention in remote areas. Other benefits include less hospitalisation for low acuity and chronic disease conditions due to improved health access for rural communities, improved engagement of the community with NSW 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.

The principles underpinning these broad Paramedic Connect proposals are:

1. NSW Ambulance's core function will not be compromised.

2. Each support activity is not a substitution for existing services, but is an enhancement to what is already being provided.

