



Consultation Paper

Paramedicine: Building a future-ready workforce

Why are we consulting?

The Australasian College of Paramedicine (the College) is inviting feedback on the consultation paper Paramedicine: building a future-ready workforce. This consultation is not comprehensive; rather it aims to highlight themes identified by the College, capture ideas or concerns from respondents, and engage the wider health profession in planning for the future. The feedback collected through the consultation process will be used to support and guide the College in its pursuit to improve person-centered care and advance paramedicine through advocacy with government and key stakeholders across Australasia.

The College has developed this consultation paper in response to the health workforce crisis affecting Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand and the need to plan for, and build, a sustainable paramedicine workforce that supports the growing and evolving demands on Australasian healthcare systems. To complement this work on building a future-ready workforce, the College has embarked on a Paramedicine Workforce Research study – the first of its kind carried out across Australasia. Year 1 of this study will be undertaken in the next six months. Visit the College website for more information <https://paramedics.org/news/workforce-research-partner>

There will be further opportunities post this consultation to engage with the College on this important topic.

The preliminary consultation process will involve two phases:

1. An online survey where stakeholders can provide feedback on the needs of the paramedicine workforce to help clarify what areas require further improvement.
2. Small group online forums to further explore workforce needs.

Providing feedback

The College has opened this consultation paper to gather wider feedback on paramedic workforce strategies required to build a future-ready profession for the growing and changing healthcare needs. The College will review the feedback and report necessary recommendations.

Data gathered through the consultation will be stored in accordance with the [College's Privacy Policy](#).

You can provide your comments by completing a short [survey](#).

Submissions close at 5pm AEST Sunday 21 May 2023

Publication of submissions

The College reserves the right to publish de-identified submissions to inform members and stakeholders, and to encourage discussion.

The College will not publish submissions that contain offensive or defamatory comments, or which are deemed outside the scope of the subject of the consultation.

If you do not wish to have your de-identified submission published, please email the advocacy team at policy@paramedics.org

An overview of the healthcare situation

Across Australasia, health workforce reform is a top priority for governments as ailing systems grapple to meet the evolving healthcare needs and demands of individuals and communities, which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The ageing population, increased chronic health conditions, primary care accessibility barriers especially for people in rural and remote areas – with greater access barriers to healthcare for First Nations peoples, workforce burnout, government legislation, policies, and outdated funding models contribute to system and workforce challenges.

To guide the next decade of person-centred care across Australasia, a sustainable, innovative and multidisciplinary health workforce approach needs to be taken to deliver high-quality person-centered care in emergency, urgent and primary care settings, while simultaneously improving career opportunities and wellbeing for paramedics.

The Strengthening Medicare Taskforce report articulates:

‘Coordinated multidisciplinary teams of providers working to their full scope of practice provide person-centred continuity of care, including prevention and early intervention; and primary care is incentivised to work with other parts of the health system, with appropriate clinical governance, to reduce fragmentation and duplication, and deliver better health outcomes’.¹

The College communicates and works with governments and stakeholders to look at the existing paramedic workforce and its unique capabilities — as well as the next generation of students and graduates — and promotes opportunities to implement new models of care in emergency, urgent and primary care settings that will: improve person-centered care and health outcomes, particularly for First Nations peoples; enhance career pathways, employment flexibility and wellbeing; build and promote workforce diversity, inclusion and cultural safety; and action common concepts known to retain the workforce.

The paramedic workforce is:

- a registered health profession in Australia since 2018 (Ahpra) and Aotearoa New Zealand (Kaunihera Manapou) since 2021;
- educated and trained as independent clinical decision-makers from the moment they graduate and enter first employment;
- highly experienced in delivering and assessing out-of-hospital care, working in changing environments, and communicating and navigating various health systems to identify appropriate referral options for patients; and,

- increasingly working outside jurisdictional ambulance services (JAS), providing high-quality urgent and primary care through state hospital systems, community and private providers.

Furthermore, paramedics’ unique capabilities need to be more broadly utilised across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote healthcare settings to meet the increasing needs and demands on the healthcare systems.

Building a future-ready workforce

The College is future-focused and committed to enhancing person-centred care through sustainable approaches and holistic contemporary workforce initiatives that see paramedics recognised, valued and utilised across healthcare systems for their unique capabilities – today and into the future.

To build a future-ready workforce, the College has identified priority areas where the paramedic workforce could be empowered and strengthened to help address the healthcare system and wider workforce needs across Australasia driving a connected, multidisciplinary approach to high-quality person-centred care in all communities.

These priority areas include:

	PRIORITY AREAS
1	Create positive work environments
2	Support diversity, inclusion and cultural safety in the workforce
3	Support and engage paramedics and their employers to work to their full potential
4	Education and qualifications – aligning capabilities and the impact of new roles on the workforce
5	Attract and retain the workforce

A closer look at the priority areas

By taking a closer look at the priority areas we get a better picture of what foreseeable opportunities there may be to empower and strengthen the paramedic workforce, and what barriers are holding back the profession that may ultimately impact best practice person-centered care. Recurring themes such as workplace and profession-wide flexibility, workforce wellbeing, career opportunity and enhanced person-centred care are interrelated and therefore overlap the priority areas.

1. Create positive work environments

It has been well documented that some of the current healthcare workforce is experiencing burnout due to workforce pressures brought about by workforce shortages. We know that the nature of paramedic work is demanding and has health impacts for individuals. Improving workforce wellbeing requires governments and employers to place a greater value on improving workplace flexibility, resourcing, career opportunities and introducing meaningful wellbeing programs and initiatives.

Opportunities:

- Programs and initiatives that help the workforce feel valued, productive and supported;
- Programs and initiatives that help the workforce manage workload and stress;
- Programs and initiatives that support positive workplace culture;

- Workplace flexibility initiatives that help the workforce maintain a balanced life; and,
- Career advancement and pathways that deliver a rewarding career.

2. Support diversity, inclusion and cultural safety in the workforce

A future-ready workforce reflects the communities in which paramedics work. A diverse, inclusive and culturally representative workforce is collaborative, open, supportive and respectful, and workplaces need to continually strive to better understand and empower staff, while also exploring innovative recruitment models.

Opportunities:

- Beyond the workplace, diversity and inclusivity begins with providers of entry-to-practice education increasing efforts to better understand what existing or perceived barriers might deter individuals from considering or embarking on a career in paramedicine.
- Cultural safety is an increasingly important focus in healthcare to ensure the health and cultural needs of communities are met. Collaborative and co-designed efforts could be made by governments, stakeholders, employers and communities to better understand and support workforce diversity.
- Similarly, to meaningfully improve health outcomes for First Nations peoples, continued collaborative and co-designed efforts should be made by governments, stakeholders, employers and communities to better understand and support consumer health needs.

3. Support and engage paramedics and their employers to work to their potential

To ensure the paramedic workforce is future-ready, it needs to be supported through career pathways and opportunities, workplace flexibility, opportunities to work with and within multidisciplinary teams, funding reform and health workforce literacy programs for both professional practitioners and consumers.

Career pathways and opportunities:

- The full utilisation of the capability of paramedics at the foundation paramedic level to deliver high quality care;
- Growth of advanced practice models to enable higher levels of capability in specialist roles;
- Upskilling paramedics through ongoing professional development, led by the profession, above the minimum registration requirements of Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) and Te Kaunihera Manapou | Paramedic Council New Zealand to raise clinical standards and practice to deliver higher-quality person-centred care;
- Establishing a Career Framework for Australasia to define the clinical, education, research, management and leadership opportunities for paramedics now and into the future and their utilisation across the health systems; and
- Building on the experience and expertise of jurisdictional employers, regional health systems and regulatory environments, while ensuring consistency across the region in titles, scope and capabilities.

Workplace flexibility opportunities and barriers:

Workplace flexibility is an ongoing challenge for employers and the wider profession, and requires thoughtful discussion, research and meaningful change that considers the impact that a more flexible workplace will have on workforce wellbeing and life stages, an employer's remit to deliver care, and quality of person-centred care.

Existing barriers such as lack of employment opportunity and financial instability can have an enormous impact on a paramedic's decision to pursue a career outside of traditional patient care roles, including education or research, as discussed here:

“For many clinicians, the desire to participate in research, higher degree research, or postdoctoral work is driven by a sense of passion and purpose, to enhance patient outcomes, staff welfare, system efficiency, and to progress the profession. Paramedics should be supported to pursue these ideals whilst maintaining clinical practice”.²

Multidisciplinary team opportunities:

Paramedics are well-placed to deliver urgent and primary care in primary healthcare multidisciplinary teams, and other employment contexts, particularly in rural and regional areas where access to primary care is limited due to the strains on the existing workforce and the lack of integrated health systems and funding models.

The College actively engages with governments to implement the community paramedicine model of care to improve person-centred care particularly in regional, rural and remote settings, ease pressures on the wider healthcare workforce and increase career opportunities for paramedics.

Funding reform opportunities and barriers:

Current funding models and work incentive programs are creating barriers for both public and private healthcare providers to employ paramedics in multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary teams to support their community's needs, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas.

Governments and stakeholders need to implement or change funding models that ensure equitable access to healthcare for these communities. For example, changes to Medicare allowing certain paramedics to access Medicare item numbers.

Workforce literacy opportunities:

Anecdotally, the extent of paramedic capabilities in out-of-hospital settings is not widely known by the broader health workforce and general population. While most paramedics work in, and will continue to work in traditional ambulance roles, there is a knowledge barrier that needs to be overcome at government, health sector and consumer level.

Health literacy is a two-way street. Paramedics need to be engaged in wider health system literacy programs that support sustainable multidisciplinary teams such as: increased understanding of other health professions and capabilities; and understanding of healthcare options, services and pathways for consumers. These capabilities could be enabled through meaningful opportunities for interprofessional learning in education programs.

4. Education and qualifications – aligning capabilities and the impact of new roles on the workforce

Across the paramedicine workforce there are qualification and terminology discrepancies between new and emerging roles. This can make it difficult for governments to effect change.

Education providers have an opportunity to invest in the ongoing development of new education programs that meet the emerging needs of the healthcare system and address the lack of career growth and workplace flexibility for paramedics. However, the impact of introducing new roles must also be considered in context to the wider health system and regulatory requirements.

As well, new roles are often created by a paramedic employer, most likely determined by the service or community's need, and not necessarily founded in a formal education setting. A wider lens must

be taken to consider the impact that introducing new roles in an ad-hoc fashion has on defining role terminology, workplace flexibility, the existing workforce, and the profession as a whole.

To improve workforce opportunities and career growth or pathways for paramedics, education must play an integral role in shaping a future-ready paramedic workforce.

Opportunities:

- To design education for current and future practice;
- Formal postgraduate education for specialist practice;
- Address the barriers that create limited opportunities for the paramedic workforce to practise outside of emergency response. Most paramedics are employed in JAS and those employed outside of JAS are usually in limited areas of practice (industrial, mining and maritime, events, contracted private emergency response etc.). Note: The College fully understands that paramedics are employed in education, research and in management roles but the clinical domain is the largest group.
- Qualifications linking to career framework, alignment of state level industrial instruments and legislation against a career framework that ensures full utilisation of paramedic capabilities.

5. Attract and retain the workforce

Currently across Australasia, approximately 2,500 students graduate from tertiary paramedicine courses annually however traditionally only half of graduates were employed, the majority through JAS. The pandemic has temporarily, or perhaps permanently, changed the paramedic workforce requirements but, notably in Australia, it is one of few health professions to currently have an oversupply of graduates.

With limited workplace flexibility, limited career growth opportunities outside of traditional ambulance roles and the strain that shift-work can have on the health and wellbeing of paramedics through life's stages, more effort must be taken to retain the paramedic workforce across these areas.

Conclusion

Building a future-ready paramedic workforce requires thoughtful consideration, strategic planning, a roadmap for positive change, and it must also consider the wider healthcare workforce which too is evolving to meet changing healthcare needs. Team-based care has been identified by governments and stakeholders as integral to health system and workforce reform, and the College recommends that paramedicine should be proactive in navigating its course, rather than reactive, which results in low-impact, disconnected, unsustainable short-term solutions.

This consultation does not aim to be comprehensive in providing workforce solutions; rather it aims to open the conversation and inspire 'big picture' thinking about what a future-ready paramedic workforce looks like, and the critical steps required to affect meaningful change for the purpose of delivering the best person-centred care to all people across Australasia.

The workforce conversation is important to the College and will remain a focus area of its work to advocate for the advancement of the profession.

Have your say: complete the online survey [here](#)

The College has opened a consultation process inviting feedback from stakeholders to help further identify the needs required to build a future-ready paramedic workforce.

Please read the consultation paper before completing this survey. It is estimated that this online survey will take 20 minutes to complete. Your responses will only be recorded once you complete the survey and press 'submit'. You will be able to return to the survey and edit your responses until you press 'submit' only if you use the same device and browser. *Indicates compulsory questions.

If you have any problems, please email policy@paramedics.org.

The consultation process will involve two phases:

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References

1. Department of Health and Aged Care (AU). Strengthening Medicare Taskforce report. Canberra, ACT(AU): Strengthening Medicare Taskforce, Department of health and Aged Care; 2022. 12 p. Report No.:1.
2. Meadley BN, Andrews T, Delardes BJ, Shannon BP. The Evolution of Clinician-Academics in Paramedicine: Completing the Picture of Professionalism. *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine*. 2022 Oct;37(5):574-6.