

## **Position Statement: Chief Paramedic Officers**

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### **Key Statement**

The Australasian College of Paramedicine (“the College”) calls for the establishment of Chief Paramedic Officers across each of the Commonwealth, state, and territory governments in Australia.

### **Background and Rationale**

#### Senior Officers in Health

Across Australia, governments have established roles within their respective Health Departments for Chief Clinical Officers. Most commonly, these roles extend to Chief Health and/or Medical Officer, Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer, Chief Allied Health Officer, and Chief Psychiatrist, among others.

The role of these Senior Officers is to provide expert leadership, professional representation, strategic clinical advice, and advocacy to all aspects of government and the health care system. They also play a key role in supporting high-quality relationships between government departments, the profession, professional colleges, universities, and other key stakeholders.

The Victorian Government is the only jurisdiction in Australia that has a Chief Paramedic Officer specifically charged with providing oversight of the out-of-hospital care sector and advice related to the professional discipline of paramedicine.

The absence of Chief Paramedic Officers across other jurisdictions means that the paramedic profession is absent from this high-level professional leadership. This highlights a lack of representation, perspective, and consideration regarding quality and safety matters relating to paramedicine, the role that paramedics can play in the wider health sector and in the development of innovative solutions to meet the health care needs within the community.

We acknowledge the role of Chief Executives of established emergency ambulance services in advising government; however, these service providers do not represent all paramedics employed in their jurisdictions, are subject to commercial or policy/employer relationships with government, are bound by their industrial and operational environment, and do not have the breadth of perspectives that professional representation brings. A considerable and growing part of the paramedic

workforce is employed outside of these emergency service providers, and reliance on advice from statutory providers results in many paramedics, in a variety of extended care roles, at risk of not being considered a part of broader health sector initiatives or solutions to improve health outcomes for the community.

### Paramedicine

Paramedics are highly skilled clinicians who work across a range of different health care settings throughout Australia. Paramedics are traditionally associated with the provision of emergency or unscheduled care for acutely ill or injured persons, predominantly in an out-of-hospital environment. This may involve autonomous practice, complex patient assessments, and the delivery of treatment that may include invasive procedures and the administration of scheduled or restricted medicines.

Paramedics attend to a wide variety of patient presentations, ranging from critical, traumatic injury to chronic, complex medical syndromes in aged care facilities, mental health illness, substance use disorders, and palliative and end-of-life care.

Paramedicine has been a registered health profession in Australia since late 2018, whereby professional standards, the accreditation of education, a robust professional practice framework, and notification and compliance measures ensure public safety. As of June 2021, there were 21,492 paramedics holding general registration to practice within Australia. See the full details of Australian registration by state below.

Since the introduction of paramedic registration, paramedics are increasingly working across a variety of health care settings, not just jurisdictional ambulance services. The challenge for paramedicine is that regulation either impedes or does not support paramedics working independently or from taking up opportunities in other health care settings, such as primary care.

Each year, approximately 2,100 student paramedics graduate from their degree program. Jurisdictional ambulance services collectively employ about 1,200 graduate paramedics annually, leaving 800-1,000 graduate paramedics qualified and available to enter the workforce each year, but who are not utilised.

Increasingly, various primary, community or extended paramedic models of care are being implemented internationally. These models utilise the highly qualified paramedic workforce that is uniquely placed to support existing health infrastructure to deliver responsive, flexible, high-quality, and affordable primary and community health care services.

With primary health in Australia under increasing pressure, and health workforce shortages seen across the country, paramedics are the workforce that the health system could be utilising beyond traditional ambulance-based roles to deliver connected, high-quality, community-based health care.

## Role of Chief Paramedic Officer

The role of the Chief Paramedic Officer would sit alongside other Chief Clinical Officers as part of the clinical leadership team for health. The role is critical to ensure that difficult problems facing health systems can be addressed with a co-designed, multidisciplinary, interprofessional approach. A Chief Paramedic Officer would enable governments to have an expert paramedic available to advise how paramedics could contribute to existing health systems through their unique clinical skill set and help to address some of the health workforce challenges seen across the health system.

Paramedicine is distinct from other health roles, as paramedic experience and skills are more specifically geared toward holistic emergency, primary and palliative care as part of multidisciplinary teams. While the College acknowledges that the paramedicine workforce is currently small, the ability for paramedics to play a vital role in the delivery of ad-hoc, responsive and diverse care makes the Chief Paramedic Officer a necessity.

The key accountabilities of a Chief Paramedic Officer should include:

- Provide expert and authoritative advice to government, health leadership and external stakeholders on health policy, paramedic practice and clinical safety and quality.
- Collaborate with the relevant health leaders about workforce strategies and activities that have relevance for the present and future paramedic workforce, and how paramedics could be utilised to complement and strengthen existing models of health care.
- Provide senior clinical and professional leadership for all paramedics in the health system, and together with the Chief Medical Officer, Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer and Chief Allied Health Officer work collaboratively with clinicians, patients, and agencies to support a safe and high-quality health system.
- Provide high-level leadership, vision, and guidance to the paramedic profession by building and sustaining effective relationships with executive and leadership teams at ambulance services, relevant health service leaders, and other senior stakeholders in health services and health-sector related organisations.

The College believes that the current supply of graduate paramedics in excess of the emergency ambulance service recruitment should be utilised by governments at all levels to help address health workforce shortages. A Chief Paramedic Officer would be best placed to work with government departments on the appropriate mechanisms for employing and utilising these registered health practitioners across the health system.

The experience in Victoria, with an established Chief Paramedic Officer, has seen paramedics utilised more widely, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. This role has been effective in promoting the use of paramedics outside of the ambulance service, such as in testing, vaccinations, contact tracing and as health support staff, reducing the pressure on the health system and the ambulance service whilst meeting the health needs of the community. This has been achieved because the Chief Paramedic Officer has been able to engage with the health system executive leadership, ensuring that the knowledge, experience, skills, and ability of paramedics can be best utilised across the spectrum of health services. The College is keen to see this kind of leadership and strategic use of

paramedics more broadly adopted and believes Chief Paramedic Officers would be uniquely placed to help deliver this, ensuring safety and efficiency.

### **Recommendation**

The Australasian College of Paramedicine calls for the establishment of Chief Paramedic Officers across the Commonwealth, state, and territory governments in Australia.

The College believes that this role should sit in a suitable governmental entity, but outside of jurisdictional ambulance services, to fully encompass and represent all paramedics working across a variety of health settings.

### **Australasian College of Paramedicine**

The College is the peak professional body representing and supporting more than 10,000 paramedics and student paramedics across Australia and New Zealand. ACP champions the role of paramedics in emergency, and out-of-hospital primary and palliative care, and we are committed to enhancing patient-centred care. The College is future-focused and brings together paramedics from across Australasia to represent, advocate, promote and celebrate the achievements of this important health profession.

### **Paramedic Registration information (as of June 2021)**

Total Registration by State	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	No PPP	Total
<b>Total</b>	336	5,525	200	5,526	1,403	607	6,181	1,399	315	21,492

Source: Paramedicine Board of Australia Registrant Data Table: June 2021