RESEARCH AGENDA
for Australasian Paramedicine

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RESEARCH AGENDA

OVERVIEW

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1. **PARAMEDICINE RESEARCH AND THE NEED FOR AN AUSTRALASIAN AGENDA**

Paramedics play an integral role in the delivery of mostly unscheduled healthcare for patients across the spectrum of acuity and in various settings. Whilst paramedics continue to fulfil their traditional role of providing care and referral for those with urgent or life-threatening illness or injury, models of care have progressed, paramedic capabilities have expanded, and the role of paramedics continues to diversify.\(^1\) Besides working in ambulance services, paramedics increasingly work in other clinical settings and in non-clinical roles. Over the past few decades, paramedicine practice has become more professionalised. Together with a strong professional college, the transition from vocational to tertiary education, and professional regulation, the development of a discipline-specific body of evidence is a key element of the professionalisation of paramedicine.\(^3\)

Indeed, the evolution in paramedic practice has been paralleled by a significant growth in paramedicine research capacity and activity. A strong academic culture in Australasia emerging from its tertiary-based paramedicine education pathways positions it well amongst the leading regions for paramedicine research.\(^4\) The absence of a research agenda, however, presents a risk of research activities lacking direction and collaboration, being scattered and potentially duplicated, and being ill-supported by resources. A research agenda provides direction and priorities, can draw researchers together, promotes collaboration, discussion and resource sharing, and facilitates efficiency from the research resources available and impact of the research outputs.\(^5\)

2. **OBJECTIVES AND APPROACH OF THE PROJECT**

With the aim to create and prioritise consensus-based items forming an Australasian paramedicine agenda, the objectives of this project were:

1. To conduct a survey of Australian and New Zealand paramedicine industry to identify research priorities, and the barriers and enablers to achieving these.

2. To conduct a consensus study to create the Research Agenda for Australasian Paramedicine.

3. **RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL**

This research project was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Western Sydney University (Approval Number H14650).
When developing a national research agenda, it is essential to also identify barriers and enablers to conducting the prioritised research and implementing the findings. As such, the first phase of this project utilised a cross-sectional survey of Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand paramedicine stakeholders to establish a preliminary list of research agenda items and to inquire about perceived barriers and enablers of conducting paramedicine research.

Of the 341 people who participated, 223 (65.4%) were male and 114 (33.4%) were female. The participants worked in various roles and in all geographical regions of Australasia (see figures below).

Participants provided comments on perceived barriers and enablers which were qualitatively analysed by the research team to generate thematic categories. Analysis resulted in identification of three themes for both barriers and enablers: ‘systems’, ‘processes’, and ‘human’. There is a disconnect between stakeholders and the provision of resources such as funding, time, training, roles and data which form significant barriers to conducting paramedicine research. In the right ‘work conditions’, ‘worker profile’, and ‘workplace’, participants felt that paramedics have the necessary ability and capacity to lead and undertake paramedicine research.
Following thematic analysis of the research agenda items collected in Phase 1, a provisional agenda consisting of 109 perceived research priorities was created for submission to Phase 2. Next a three-round consensus process was conducted with key paramedicine profession stakeholders to generate a research agenda.

Of the 63 key paramedicine profession stakeholders who participated, 15 (24%) were female and 48 (76%) were male. Similar to phase 1, they worked in various roles and in all geographical regions of Australasia (see figures below).
Using a systematic consensus process (Delphi method), participants achieved agreement that 37 of the 109 research agenda items should be included in the Research Agenda for Australasian Paramedicine. These items can be clustered into six areas of research: ‘Safety & Quality’, ‘Systems & Processes’, ‘Expanded Roles and Practice Settings’, ‘Education & Training’, ‘Workplace Culture & Wellness’, and ‘Clinical Pathways & Models of Care’.
SUMMARY

Research is essential to ensure that paramedics provide the best possible patient care and to facilitate the continued development of paramedicine profession. The development of the Research Agenda for Australasian Paramedicine provides meaningful direction for more coordinated, collaborative, and efficient paramedicine research activities in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. It does not represent a strict assignment for paramedicine researchers but a consensus-based guide and focus point to stimulate discussion, a catalyst for collaboration, and an evidence-based rationale for resources.

For more information on how the College supports paramedicine research, visit https://paramedics.org/research

REFERENCES