

Consultation Paper

Paramedicine: Recognition as a standalone profession

Why are we consulting?

The Australasian College of Paramedicine (the College) is inviting feedback on the impact of the recognition of paramedicine as a standalone health profession by governments, stakeholders and the wider healthcare workforce across Australasia. The College has developed this consultation paper in the context of the health workforce crisis facing both Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand and the need to look at the critical factors contributing to workforce barriers and consumer access. It addresses Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand separately where necessary.

The College is future-focused and committed to enhancing person-centred care through sustainable, evidence-based approaches and holistic, contemporary workforce initiatives that see paramedics and their unique capabilities recognised, valued, utilised and appropriately funded across healthcare systems.

The feedback gathered through the consultation process will be used to support the College in its efforts to advance paramedicine through advocacy with government and key stakeholders.

Providing feedback

The College has opened a consultation process inviting feedback from key stakeholders, governments and paramedics via forums, presentations, and an online survey. The College will review the feedback and progress necessary recommendations.

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

Participants will receive communication updates via email.

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

Submissions close at 5pm AEDT, Sunday 26 March.

Publication of submissions

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

Published submissions will include the names of the individuals and/or organisations who made the submission unless confidentiality is requested. Please advise us via email if you do not want your submission published at policy@paramedics.org

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

Background

Paramedicine is unique in its historical, cultural, and industrial context, as well as in its domains and scope of practice. Having achieved professional registration in 2018 in Australia through the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra), and in 2021 in Aotearoa New Zealand through the Kaunihera Manapou Paramedic Council / Paramedic Council New Zealand, the next important objective is the appropriate recognition and representation of paramedicine at national and state levels. For paramedicine to continue to mature, the recognition and representation of all paramedic practice contexts and models of care, separate of employer relationships, is vital.

Increasingly, paramedics are working outside of jurisdictional ambulance services, with abundant opportunities for paramedics to be utilised more widely in urgent and primary care. Health departments have a growing understanding of what paramedics can do and the benefits they can deliver for the health system, but without appropriate representation they may simply "fill the gaps" rather than being more broadly integrated across health systems, to support and build a sustainable, team-based healthcare workforce.

Relationship to Allied Health

In Australia, paramedicine is not professionally aligned with other health workforces, although there is an evident push towards allied health in some jurisdictions. While there may be some short-term advantages of joining allied health, ultimately the unique capabilities of paramedics in emergency, urgent and primary care do not align and are not the optimal fit.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, paramedicine is presently seen as part of allied health. This grouping, which occurred prior to registration, could potentially limit the level of healthcare that paramedics can deliver and future opportunities to utilise the paramedic workforce beyond ambulance-based roles.

While there are indeed aspects of paramedicine that "fit the mould" of an allied health professional, there are significant aspects that don't align.

- ✓ As with allied health practitioners, paramedics work unsupervised in a variety of patient-care settings and initiate and implement care based on their body of clinical knowledge and in accordance with professional practice guidelines.
- ✗ Unlike allied health practitioners, paramedics are often the first point of contact for patients in the health system and provide assessment, diagnosis and treatment for a broad range of undifferentiated conditions, which are then managed in situ or referred to other health professionals for ongoing care.

In providing a pragmatic, holistic, responsive health service that spans all facets of community and out-of-hospital care, paramedics do not neatly fit into the allied healthcare stream. Unlike allied health professions, paramedics are capable of and well-placed to deliver unplanned, ad hoc care for emergency, urgent and primary care presentations within the community, and hence can be utilised more broadly across urgent and primary care settings in providing much-needed, accessible healthcare for communities.

Relationship to Medicine

Paramedicine and medicine, as separate health professions, have a strong history of working together in emergency health care. With the expansion of paramedic roles and capabilities over decades, patients now increasingly receive life-saving treatment and out-of-hospital care from paramedics.

While the two professions share complementary skills and workplace connections, paramedics have unique capabilities that benefit standalone representation and recognition that is separate to medicine, to ensure the profession charts its own course.

We do know that medicine has strong representation and is listened to by governments and stakeholders alike, which is attractive, but paramedicine would likely be lost in medicine, with little focus on paramedicine fulfilling its full potential.

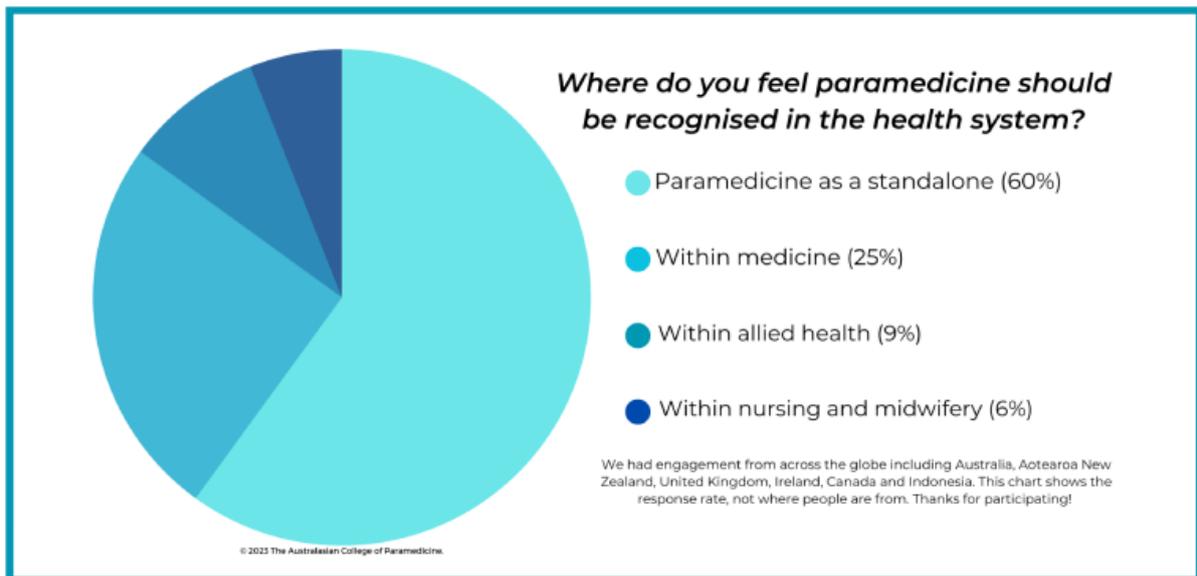
Current situation

Operating independently of other professions would allow for self-determination for paramedicine. Joining with other health professions, such as allied health or medicine, limits the opportunities for the profession to operate to its fullest potential.

Against a backdrop of complexity and rapid change, and without direct representation to government (with only a Chief Paramedic Officer in Victoria at present), this is by no means a straightforward option. Rather, it requires sustained effort by the profession to both advocate for and navigate the path forward.

Strong support for a standalone profession

A poll conducted by the College in February 2023 shows strong support (60%) for paramedicine being recognised as a standalone profession. A connection with medicine is next with 25%, although this is not considered a viable option for the appropriate representation of paramedicine. Allied health is largely unsupported, including by respondents from Aotearoa New Zealand, where it currently sits.



Current working definition

In 2021, researchers from Monash University proposed an international consensus definition of paramedicine to provide clarity for providers of out-of-hospital healthcare, as well as for other healthcare disciplines, policymakers, the general public, and the media:

- Paramedicine is a domain of practice and health profession that specialises across a range of settings including, but not limited to, emergency, urgent and primary care.¹

- Paramedics work in a variety of clinical settings such as emergency medical services, ambulance services, hospitals and clinics, as well as in non-clinical roles, such as education, leadership, public health, and research.¹
- Paramedics possess complex knowledge and skills, a broad scope of practice and are an essential part of the healthcare system. Depending on location, paramedics may practice under medical direction or independently, often in unscheduled, unpredictable, or dynamic settings.¹

What is a "standalone" health profession, and what difference will it make?

There is no clear, singular, definition of a "standalone" health profession. For the purpose of this consultation paper and the pursuit of professional recognition, a standalone health profession is one that is not grouped with another healthcare profession; rather, it is recognised for its unique capabilities and scopes of practice, and hence stands alone.

Funding, flexibility, career opportunities and wellbeing

Paramedicine in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand is a registered health profession with its own unique set of capabilities, yet it does not receive the same level of funding, career opportunities, employment flexibility, and wellbeing considerations as other health professions.

Services provided by paramedics in Australia have traditionally been part of the National Hospitals Reform Agenda that articulates responsibilities for funding "ambulance services" to states and territories. This approach is sufficient for the most fundamental of services provided by paramedics; that is, emergency response, stabilisation, and referral to hospital, but it fails to recognise the expanded roles in which paramedics are engaged and their contributions to primary and out-of-hospital care.

As a standalone profession, paramedicine will have greater opportunities to access alternative funding models and workplace incentive programs that are currently unavailable. In addition, private practices would be empowered to employ paramedics to support their workplace demands as part of multidisciplinary health teams and would not have to bear the financial burdens of employing paramedics as is currently the situation. And, like medical and nursing professions, paramedicine should have career opportunities and avenues for professional advancement, as well as employment flexibility² to improve job satisfaction, workforce retention, and paramedic wellbeing.

It is also important to note that not all paramedics work for jurisdictional ambulance services; about 20% of registered paramedic are privately employed in a range of different work settings. In recognising the profession, we must ensure that all dimensions of practice are represented.

Being recognised as a standalone health profession will enable the College to advocate with governments and stakeholders for the realisation of those opportunities, with positive impacts across the health sector, within the profession, and in communities.

Standalone status will strengthen understanding and awareness of the diverse nature of paramedicine

Many people across Australasia view paramedics through the narrow lens of on-road ambulance services, and while most paramedics are employed in this capacity, such a blinkered perception of their utility ignores the many and varied roles and professional specialisations that paramedics undertake each and every day in such diverse settings as research, education, urgent and primary care, community paramedicine, telehealth, and industry. Standalone status will enable better recognition of and representation for the profession as a whole, which in turn will bolster awareness

among governments, the health sector and the public about the potential for paramedics to contribute more broadly to health system reform.

As paramedicine continues to evolve, challenges remain

The past 25 years have seen the rapid evolution of paramedicine, with milestones including professional registration in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand; the introduction of pre-employment undergraduate degrees and specialist post-graduate degrees to PhD level, which have spawned research and generated an extensive and ever-growing body of knowledge; and, the movement of paramedics into new roles with expanded scopes of practice, greater clinical independence and greater engagement with other practitioners in the health sector.

The work of paramedics has become increasingly complex and has vastly transcended the emergency-response practice framework by which the profession is traditionally associated. These are welcome steps forward in the continued development of paramedicine; however, several challenges remain, including:

- Improving the understanding and visibility of paramedicine across the health system, particularly in relation to raising awareness of paramedics' capabilities
- Agreeing on and articulating standards, requirements, and pathways for areas of advanced and specialist practice
- Providing evidence for health system reform and offering solutions to workforce issues
- Collaborating across disciplines to support systemic reform and improved patient outcomes
- Advocating for/leveraging broader system-wide change to ensure paramedics are integrated across the health system via improved funding and legislative pathways.

Both Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand are experiencing a moment of reckoning as their health systems buckle under the pressure of healthcare models that are no longer fit for purpose. While solutions are being sought at all levels of government and different models of care are being proposed, there is a pressing need to invest in sustainable workforce initiatives and engage with the different health professions for input into the future of healthcare. Recognition of paramedicine as a standalone profession is integral in ensuring the profession has an independent voice and can take its place alongside other health professions in improving access to and delivery of healthcare for all communities.

Conclusion

From the point of registration, paramedics are required to work autonomously, delivering care to patients of all ages, presenting with a broad range of conditions of varying complexity and within a wide range of environments. Very few other health professions do this.

To be recognised as a standalone profession not only makes sense, but it will ensure that governments and stakeholders have a proper understanding of paramedics' capabilities and do not simply look to paramedicine to help "fill the gaps" across health systems and the wider healthcare workforce.

The College does not support paramedics being aligned with allied health or medical streams as the clinical, operational, governance and funding arrangements are sufficiently unique and require an individual, profession-specific approach.

The College champions the important work and roles paramedics do and is focused on advancing the profession for the purpose of building a sustainable, empowered and future-ready workforce

enhancing person-centred care across Australasia. Paramedicine being recognised as a standalone profession is an important step in the right direction.

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

The College is currently accepting responses to this consultation paper via [this online survey only](#). Please read the consultation paper before completing this survey. It is estimated that this online survey will take 15 minutes to complete. Your responses will only be recorded once you complete the survey and press 'submit'. *Indicates compulsory questions.

References:

1. Williams B, Beovich B, Olausson A. The Definition of Paramedicine: An International Delphi Study. *J Multidiscip Healthc* [internet]. 2021 Dec [cited 2023 Mar 15].;14:3561-3570. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.2147/JMDH.S347811>
2. Williams, B., Meadley, B. Monash Lens [internet]. Paramedic pathways and the clinician-academic conundrum – Monash lens. [place unknown]: Monash University; 2022 Dec 13; [cited 2023 Mar 15]. Available from: <https://lens.monash.edu/@medicine-health/2022/12/13/1385123/paramedic-pathways-and-the-clinician-academic-conundrum>