Submission to the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy

National Drug Strategy 2010-2015

Review of the draft provided for public comment

10 December 2010
The Australian College of Ambulance Professionals (ACAP) is the national body representing more than 4000 Paramedics engaged in the delivery of out of hospital Emergency Medical Services (EMS). ACAP is uniquely positioned to provide insights into the delivery of EMS across Australia. (see attachment 1)

ACAP endorses the philosophical approach to health care outlined in the 15 Health Care Principles articulated by the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission (NHHRC). It supports the translation of those principles into the EMS environment.

ACAP acknowledges work undertaken in the development of the National Drug Strategy 2010-2015. It notes that the draft strategy builds on previous strategies in this area and that there is considerable evidence for expanding some programs (eg; needle and syringe), whilst looking for alternatives in others.

Overall, ACAP supports the draft National Drug Strategy 2010-2015. There are two areas that ACAP feels may be enhanced prior to the final strategy being released;

• Prominence of alcohol within the strategy
• Language around Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

Alcohol is discussed throughout the strategy but is not found to be prominent in the title, or in the sub-strategies. With the considerable impact of alcohol on a wide range of aspects across a broad spectrum of the population, ACAP feels that the prominence of alcohol and alcohol related strategies should be elevated throughout the draft NDS 2010-2015.

The draft NDS refers to a range of titles that could encompass Emergency Medical Services (EMS), including using this title at one point in the document. Rather than the variety of titles included in the draft NDS, ACAP proposes that the broad term Emergency Medical Services replace such narrow terms as Ambulance Service, and that Paramedic replace other terms such as Ambulance Worker. (see attachment 2)

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Attachment 1

**Australian College of Ambulance Professionals**

The Australian College of Ambulance Professionals (ACAP) is the national body representing the professional interests of Paramedics. It provides research support; conducts programs of professional development; publication; and other activities designed to enhance the standards of out-of-hospital Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and protect the health and safety of the community.

It supports evidence-based best practices that will ensure optimal patient outcomes and the integration of EMS with other health care programs under the basic principles espoused by the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission (NHHRC).¹

ACAP is thus uniquely positioned to provide insights into the delivery of EMS and policies that affect the access, equity, quality and effectiveness of EMS as a vital part of primary emergency health care.

Drawing on the accumulated knowledge and experience of more than 4000 members, ACAP has a profound appreciation of the impact of workplace conditions on EMS, with members operating under widely divergent levels of infrastructure support across both the private and public sectors and in settings ranging from metropolitan to rural and remote communities.

Establishing a base line philosophy for EMS

The primary goal of ACAP is to help develop the full potential of EMS as part of a health system that will deliver quality health care to all Australians. To achieve this objective, ACAP believes that health care policy should:

- recognise the benefits of holistic care delivered by health professionals operating in a multidisciplinary environment;
- ensure an equitable health system by providing EMS for all Australians according to need and regardless of race, creed, gender, location or economic circumstances;
- establish funding arrangements at Federal, State and Territory levels that facilitate the delivery of integrated health care services and minimise duplication of effort;
- ensure responsiveness, quality and high service standards through governance structures and community engagement that recognises the legitimate role of consumers in the planning and delivery of healthcare as well as involvement in appropriate complaint, resolution and feedback mechanisms;
- provide adequate educational opportunities for the recruitment, training and professional development of EMS personnel to ensure a competent and sustainable workforce; and
- provide a national regulatory regime for the accreditation of service providers and the independent registration of Paramedics that together will ensure consistent service standards and public safety; and facilitate the mobility of the EMS health workforce so as to better service the rural and remote areas of Australia.

ACAP endorses the underlying principles proposed by the NHHRC\(^2\) to shape Australia’s health system. Those principles outline a philosophical basis on which to plan and are divided broadly into two groups comprising system design principles and underlying governance principles. The Principles for Australia’s Health System are reproduced in outline form below:

*Design principles (what we as citizens and potential patients want from the system).*

- **People and family centred**
- **Equity**
- **Shared responsibility**
- **Strengthening prevention and wellness**
- **Comprehensive**
- **Value for money**
- **Providing for future generations**
- **Recognise broader environmental influences which shape our health**

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Governance principles (generally how the health system should work)

- Taking the long term view
- Safety and quality
- Transparency and accountability
- Public voice
- A respectful and ethical system
- Responsible spending on health, and
- A culture of reflective improvement and innovation.

ACAP’s vision of health care is firmly fixed on a dynamic and changing world. As often the first persons to provide care to people in distress, Paramedics are acutely aware of the impact of demographic changes, community expectations, health system pressures and changing health needs.

ACAP also recognises the practical dimensions in bringing appropriate levels of EMS to many diverse settings involving great disparities in geographic isolation, socio-economic status, language, culture and indigenous status.

Paramedics must participate effectively in multidisciplinary teams ranging from working under demanding conditions with law enforcement and emergency response units, to the seamless transfer of patients to expert medical staff in a more definitive health service environment.

There needs to be appropriate sharing of information and a level of transparency and shared support that will ensure informed decisions in dealing appropriately with complex health needs. At all times the Paramedic must recognise and value the important roles and challenges faced by patients, other health care staff and the service provider.

Appropriate clinical practice guidelines, policies and procedures should be in place to ensure an effortless interface between different health professionals with the timely and accurate transfer of information critical to effective patient outcomes.

ACAP accepts and encourages the view that health professionals must be able to adapt to service future health needs, commencing with a firm grounding through accredited education and training in partnership with the education sector.

ACAP agrees with the strong community view (reflected in the 2009 NHHRC recommendations) that the public is entitled to regular reports on the status, quality and performance of health care (which includes EMS).

ACAP considers that particular efforts should be made to ensure the development of evidence-based practice guidelines and that practising Paramedics, educators, researchers and employers should participate in the determination of broader health care policy that impacts the delivery of EMS.

In summary, ACAP endorses the NHHRC principles as articulating a philosophy that should underpin the delivery and governance of EMS and which should be adopted and implemented by all Paramedics and EMS providers.