

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee
Inquiry into the 2022-23 Budget Estimates
20 May 2022

PORTFOLIO: AMBULANCE SERVICES

Witnesses:

- Ms Lizzie Blandthorn (Chair)
- Mr Danny O'Brien (Deputy Chair)
- Mr Rodney Barton
- Mr Sam Hibbins
- Mr Gary Maas
- Mrs Beverley McArthur
- Mr James Newbury
- Ms Pauline Richards
- Mr Tim Richardson
- Ms Nina Taylor

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

QUESTION 1 (directed to Acting Chief Executive Officer, Ambulance Victoria)

- a. How often is it dipping into the 50th percentile?**
- b. Have you got any more recent data relating to April at a time when it was dipping into that 50th percentile?**

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. Acting CEO Murphy, I am referring to the budget line item on page 230 of BP3 in relation to timeliness of code 1 incidents. That is the times—the lights and sirens—where there is a requirement to attend within 15 minutes 85 per cent of the time. I have seen data from April showing that that is now dipping into 50th percentile, which means almost half of the time that is not being met. How often is it dipping into the 50th percentile?

Ms MURPHY: It has dipped into the 50th percentile, and we continue to work very, very hard to serve the community. I would have to take on notice how many times it actually has happened, but we are averaging at the moment in the 60s.

Mr NEWBURY: In the 60s, did you say?

Ms MURPHY: Yes. There have been times it has tipped into the 50s though.

Mr NEWBURY: Could you also take on notice—I am aware of 18 deaths between October and March that are linked to delays in ambulances arriving. Have you got any more recent data relating to April at a time when it was dipping into that 50th percentile?

Budget Estimates Hearing Transcript – Ambulance Services, p. 2

Name of Committee member asking questions: Mr Newbury

RESPONSE

Answer:

Ambulance Victoria reports publicly on its Code 1 performance every quarter via its website. The last quarter available publicly is Quarter 3 for the Financial Year 2021-22. Data for this quarter shows that Ambulance Victoria responded to 66.8 per cent of Code 1 cases within 15 minutes, compared to 66.5 per cent to the previous quarter.

This quarter (Quarter 3 for the Financial Year 2021-22) was Ambulance Victoria's busiest quarter on record.

The average Code 1 performance response time for the same quarter (i.e., Quarter 3) in 2021-22 was 15 minutes and 15 seconds. This is the best indicator of overall performance for the quarter.

Source:

Ambulance Victoria: <https://www.ambulance.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-performance/>

QUESTION 2 (directed to Acting Chief Executive Officer, Ambulance Victoria)

Can I ask for an update on the figure [people sent a taxi by AV in the previous financial year] is so far for this year?

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Ms Murphy, can I ask: the Herald Sun reported in July last year that there were 9,651 people sent a taxi by AV in the previous financial year. Can I ask for an update on the figure is so far for this year?

Ms MURPHY: I do have that figure. It is about 9000, but I can give you the exact figure that was active up until the 19th, if you will just excuse me. While I am actually just looking for the data, can I perhaps give some clarity around why taxis are called and be quite definite about the fact that taxis do not replace ambulances or an ambulance service or a paramedic service. What they are used for are situations where people require a lesser service other than an immediate paramedic but they require some medical intervention, so things that we usually see in relation to taxis may be someone who cannot be connected with something like telehealth, because they are an older person at home who does not—

...

Mr D O'BRIEN: Chair, sorry, I just—

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien?

Mr D O'BRIEN: I just wonder if Ms Murphy was able to find that figure she was looking for.

Ms MURPHY: Yes. For the first three quarters—so, between 1 July 2021 and 31 March 2022—there were 9,492 taxis that were dispatched to people who did not require an ambulance, who, however, went through to secondary triage, and it was a total in 2020–21 of 10 743 cases, which avoided tying up ambulances.

Budget Estimates Hearing Transcript – Ambulance Services, p. 5 and p. 10

Name of Committee member asking questions: Mr O'Brien

RESPONSE – as a response was subsequently provided, there is no need to expand further on this matter

Answer:

Not Applicable – refer to comment above

Source:

Not Applicable – refer to comment above

QUESTION 3 (directed to Acting Chief Executive Officer, Ambulance Victoria)

How many other sentinel events have there been so far for 2021–22—that is, not necessarily deaths but serious issues?

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. You mentioned the three deaths directly attributable to AV. How many other sentinel events have there been so far for 2021–22—that is, not necessarily deaths but serious issues?

Ms MURPHY: Could you just bear with me, please, and I will be able to tell you I think, but that may be on notice. There are a number of categories of sentinel events which get referred to Safer Care Victoria. There have been a number obviously of delays, but the actual number of total sentinel events I will also have to take on notice. I am sorry.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Again, if you have got it there with you, I would appreciate if you can give it to me—

Ms MURPHY: No. The total number, including the 1s, 2s, 3s and 4s, I will have to come back to you on.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Whatever you have got there, and if you can provide that taxi number once you have found it, that would be great.

Ms MURPHY: Yes, sure.

Budget Estimates Hearing Transcript – Ambulance Services, p. 6

Name of Committee member asking question: Mr O'Brien

RESPONSE

Answer:

The most serious adverse events occurring in healthcare are known as sentinel events. They are considered to be wholly preventable and where there is serious harm to, or the death of, a patient.

All health service agencies including Ambulance Victoria are required to notify the Victorian Safety and Quality Agency, Safer Care Victoria, of sentinel events. A formal review takes place to establish the facts, determine likely causes or contributing factors and provide recommendations for improvement.

Each year, Safer Care Victoria publishes the number of sentinel event notifications received each year. The 2020-21 Annual Report shows that 10 sentinel events were reported to have occurred in an ambulance.

Background

There were 18 cases put to Ms Murphy during the PAEC hearing which related to cases involving delays to call answering by Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA) that are under investigation. The three cases involving Ambulance Victoria (AV) that were mentioned during the hearing are all currently the subject of review. As there are formal investigations currently underway, it would be inappropriate to pre-empt any findings.

When incidents occur, Ambulance Victoria is open and transparent about those issues and undertakes the formal review to understand what happened and why. Ambulance Victoria also meets with the families where such serious events occur to apologise; discuss what happened; and, importantly, learn from and improve its practices so that those issues never happen again.

Source:

SCV Annual Report 2020-21: <https://www.safercare.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/Sentinel%20Event%20Annual%20Report%202020-21.pdf>

QUESTION 4 (directed to Minister Foley who defers to Acting Chief Executive Officer, Ambulance Victoria)

Do you have any data on the number and frequency of ambulances used to deliver released prisoners to hospitals?

Mr HIBBINS: ... I want to ask about ambulance transfers from prisons, and this goes to the ambulance services not meeting their timeliness targets in the budget. The royal commission into mental health noted that some mentally ill people are released from prison straight into waiting ambulances and taken to the nearest hospital because their untreated mental illness is so severe. Do you have any data on the number and frequency of ambulances used to deliver released prisoners to hospitals?

Mr FOLEY: I might defer to Ms Murphy in a moment after I perhaps very briefly set the context of both what the royal commission spoke about and the broader relationship between AV, the health services and justice. The release of particularly people either from prisons or from remand into our health services, but particularly AV, is a significant issue. We see all too often people released without the appropriate supports, but increasingly health justice and the work that they are doing in coordinating their efforts, particularly at remand and the Royal Melbourne, is an important part of dealing with really high risk patients. The number of people with acquired brain injury, alcohol and drug injuries and other really complex cases coming out of the justice system is the highest of any community in the state, and the complexity of that into our healthcare system and AV is quite a challenge. As to the specifics of justice—prisons—into AV release, I might, if it is available, ask—

Ms MURPHY: It is something I would have to take on notice. I apologise. For this financial period, you are talking about? I will have to take that on notice, sorry.

Budget Estimates Hearing Transcript – Ambulance Services, pp. 9-10

Name of Committee member asking questions: Mr Hibbins

RESPONSE

Answer:

Data on the number of ambulances used to take released prisoners to hospitals is not readily available.

Significant work would be needed to manually extract this data from our patient care records and is not possible within specified timeframes for response to this Committee.

Source:

Ambulance Victoria