

July 23, 2012

Dear Colleagues,

**RE: PARAMEDIC REGISTRATION AND REGULATION**

It is our great pleasure to send you a personal copy of the National Council of Ambulance Unions (NCAU) publication, *About Paramedic Regulation*. This booklet has been designed to provide consistent information across each state and territory to inform members about the federal government consultation process now being undertaken, which is looking at options for the regulation of paramedics.

NCAU consists of the five unions representing Australian Paramedics. It was created to address issues affecting paramedics across state and territory boundaries. Paramedic registration has been the key national issue for the NCAU since our inception. Registration has been endorsed at every subsequent NCAU National conference since 2008.

*About Paramedic Regulation* informs how the current consultation process came into being. It examines the four possible options for paramedic regulation proposed in the consultation paper, *Options for Regulation of Paramedics*, coordinated by the Health Workforce Principal Committee (HWPC) on behalf of the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (AHMAC).

*About Paramedic Regulation* explains why NCAU supports National Registration + National Regulation. **Most importantly, *About Paramedic Regulation* details why NCAU supports OPTION 4.**

Only *Option 4: Registration of paramedics under the National Scheme*, addresses the priorities our members have advised us are most important to them, in particular, greater flexibility in employment options and portability of qualifications across state and territory boundaries.

Please read *About Paramedic Regulation* carefully. If other options are progressed at the expense of National Registration + National Regulation, paramedics may incur extra costs and compliance burdens, without extra benefits.

To ensure we get the best regulation model possible, it is vital that widespread discussion takes place. NCAU encourages you and your colleagues to read about the issues, to talk about the issues, to think about the issues and, most importantly, to Have Your Say!

NCAU strongly encourages you to write a submission in response to the *Options for Regulation of Paramedics* consultation paper. You have just 40 days to make a difference! **The closing date for submissions is September 3, 2012.** We need as many frontline paramedics as possible to write a submission.

NCAU will supply more information in coming weeks. In the meantime, if you have any questions or want further information, please visit NCAU's official website [www.ambulanceactive.com.au](http://www.ambulanceactive.com.au) and feel free to participate in the online forum.

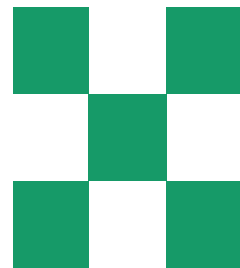
Yours sincerely,



Steve McGhie  
National President



Tim Jacobson  
National Secretary



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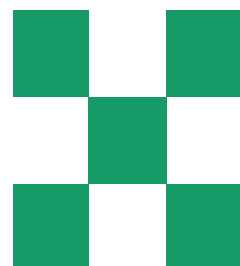
Wayne Carty  
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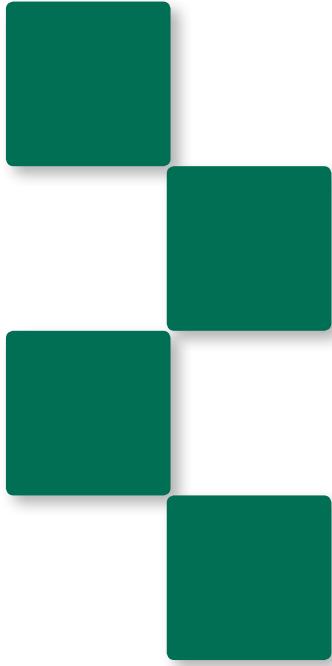
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# ABOUT PARAMEDIC REGULATION

AN INFORMATION BOOKLET FOR  
PARAMEDIC MEMBERS OF UNIONS  
AFFILIATED WITH THE *NATIONAL  
COUNCIL OF AMBULANCE UNIONS*

HSU EAST (NSW)  
AEA (VIC)  
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UNITED VOICE (NT)  
HACSU (TAS)  
TWU (ACT)



NCAU JULY 2012



# Emergency

*The National Council of Ambulance Unions, (NCAU) was formed to address issues of national significance affecting paramedic union members across state and territory boundaries. Since our inception in 2008, National Registration has been consistently reaffirmed as the leading priority issue for the NCAU.*

# PARAMEDIC REGULATION AND PARAMEDIC REGISTRATION POTENTIALLY AFFECT YOU.

THINK ABOUT IT.  
READ ABOUT IT.  
TALK ABOUT IT AND  
HAVE YOUR SAY!



# IN A NUTSHELL . . .

In Australia, health professions can be regulated under the *Health Practitioner National Law Act 2009 (the National Law)* if the government believes they have potential to pose a risk of harm to the health and safety of the Australian public. The *National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the National Scheme)* arising from this law commenced operation in 2010. Fourteen health professions are now included in the *National Scheme*. Individuals in these professions are regulated by a National Board and registered to practice in all Australian states and territories.

In 2009 the ABC TV 4 *Corners* program *Out of Time* detailed four deaths arising from

inadequate ambulance responses in WA. In February 2010, following the subsequent St John Ambulance WA Public Inquiry, the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council (a standing committee of the Council of Australian Governments) requested advice on a proposal from the WA government to include paramedics as a profession in the *National Scheme*.

A consultation paper, *Options for Regulation of Paramedics (the Consultation Paper)* has now been developed by the Australian Health Ministers Health Workforce Principal Committee (HWPC). It was released for limited consultation on July 2, 2012.

## **The Australian Health Ministers Health Workforce Principal Committee (HWPC) is now seeking feedback from stakeholders on four proposed options for paramedic regulation**

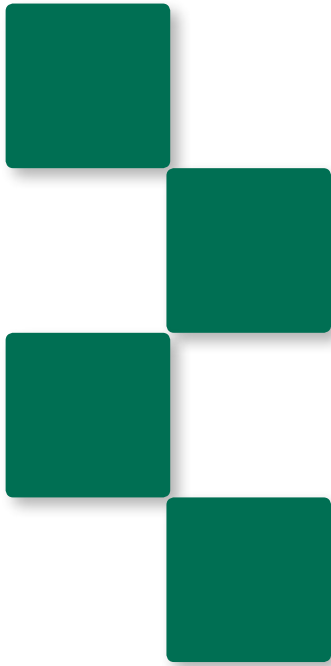
**Option 1: No Change—Rely on existing regulation and a voluntary code of practice.**

**Option 2: Strengthen health complaint mechanisms by introducing a statutory code of conduct and powers to prohibit those who breach the code from continuing to provide health services.**

**Option 3: Strengthen state and territory regulation of paramedics.**

**Option 4: Registration of paramedics through the *National Scheme*.**

# THE NCAU SUPPORTS OPTION 4



The NCAU believes the HWPC's four proposed options for regulation of paramedics can be re-categorised as:

*Option 1. Do nothing*

*Option 2. Regulation by code of conduct*

*Option 3. Jurisdictional regulation—more of the same*

*Option 4. National Registration*

The NCAU rationale for supporting paramedic registration is based on the following issues of importance for our members:

- **FLEXIBILITY IN EMPLOYMENT AND PORTABILITY OF QUALIFICATIONS**
- **PROTECTION OF 'REGISTERED PARAMEDIC' TITLE**
- **CONSISTENT AND TRANSPARENT HANDLING OF COMPLAINTS AND FITNESS TO PRACTICE ISSUES**
- **PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY**

**THE NCAU'S POSITION IS CLEAR: ONLY THE FOURTH OPTION, NATIONAL REGISTRATION VIA INCLUSION IN THE *NATIONAL SCHEME*, ADDRESSES ALL THE ISSUES OUR MEMBERS BELIEVE ARE IMPORTANT.**



The NCAU firmly believes the other options may lead to an unacceptable situation whereby paramedics are subject to increased costs and scrutiny, with no real benefits in terms of flexibility in employment nor portability of qualifications.

**Most importantly, the NCAU believes protection of the public and the safety of patients is best served by paramedic inclusion in the *National Scheme*.**

# ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

The National Council of Ambulance Unions (NCAU) has produced this booklet to provide members of affiliated unions with information on the important issue of national registration.

There are pros and cons to regulation. People have different points of view.

**Whatever your views, the NCAU firmly believes feedback on the recently released HWPC Consultation Paper will lead to the biggest change ever for Australian out-of-hospital emergency medical services.**

The NCAU encourages all paramedic union members to think about this issue and how it may affect you and your practice as a paramedic into the future.

The Consultation Paper proposes four options for the future regulation of Australian paramedics.

The NCAU believes only one—*Option 4: Registration of paramedics through the National Scheme*—addresses the concerns and priorities raised by paramedic union members across Australia's states and territories.

Information in this booklet is designed to give you a brief overview of the pros and

cons of the four options in the Consultation Paper, and some idea of what might happen if paramedics were to be regulated under them.

This booklet explains why we believe *Option 4* is the only option to address members' priorities for regulation and registration into the future.

This subject is complex. We have tried to keep the information simple and straightforward.

You will probably have questions and a point of view after you have read this material.

We have established an online discussion forum dedicated to this important issue at [www.ambulanceactive.com.au](http://www.ambulanceactive.com.au).

**The online forum has further detail about the different aspects of regulation, you can ask questions and have them answered, participate in discussions, and let us know what other information you'd like.**

**Formal consultations are being held in every state and territory throughout July and August.**

Please take the time to read this booklet before you attend a consultation forum, so you can participate more fully in the process.

It is more likely than not that regulation will occur.

**Submissions to the Consultation Paper must be received by September 3, 2012**

**SUPPORTING OPTION 4 IS THE ONLY WAY TO ENSURE THE ADOPTION OF A REGULATORY MODEL THAT COVERS OUR PRIORITIES.**

# THE SAME BUT DIFFERENT: REGULATION & REGISTRATION

## HOW DOES REGULATION DIFFER FROM REGISTRATION?

**REGULATION** is made up of a set of rules you are required to follow (because they have been established by law), if you are a member of the group to which those rules apply.

Under the *National Law*, National Registration Boards are appointed by the Minister for Health to oversee the practice of health professionals from the 14 groups already registered under the *National Scheme*.

National Registration Boards are responsible for making sure everybody within professional group complies with these rules. An example would be the Nurses & Midwifery Board of Australia.

**REGISTRATION** occurs when you apply, and are accepted, to become part of a group of people that is covered by those rules.

Your name is added to a document (known as a Register) that has on it the names and certain details of people regulated within that professional group under that National Board.

Register information about practitioners covered by a National Board, includes your name, scope of practice, qualifications and whether you have a current practising certificate.

The *National Law* stipulates this Register must be published—either in printed or electronic form—so the public can be fully informed about the status of individual health professionals.





# THE REASON FOR REGULATION

The Australian government regulates groups of health workers where it thinks the public needs protection. Regulation is a way of protecting the public from the risks of health practice by making sure health professionals are competent to practice.

The Consultation Paper highlights four key problems and deficiencies within the current system of paramedic regulation, most of which arise due to the absence of national uniformity in regulation of paramedics:

- 1. The wide diversity in scope practice of paramedics, which is determined by individual employers**
- 2. The variability in paramedic education, training arrangements and standards and the absence of compulsory national accreditation standards for education and training**
- 3. The absence of mechanisms to prevent paramedics with significant health, conduct or performance issues moving from one employer to another, or one jurisdiction to another and continuing to work as a paramedic;**
- 4. The lack of standardised or comparable complaints and clinical incident data collection across jurisdictions.**

*Consultation paper: Options for regulation of paramedics (HWPC 2012), p27.*

The Consultation Paper also attempts to quantify the risks inherent in paramedic practice. Prior to the establishment of the *National Scheme*, 13 specific risk factors were used to evaluate whether individual professions posed a risk to the public.


The Consultation Paper concludes that if the same criteria were applied to paramedics, based on a typical scope of practice, **'paramedic practice currently involves more risk factors than 11 of the 14 Australian health professions already registered under the National Scheme'**.

*Consultation paper: Options for regulation of paramedics (HWPC 2012), p35.*

A recent UK Department of Health research paper on extending Professional Regulation lists factors likely to increase the incidence of poor, unethical or incompetent practice and increased risk to the public. These include Practitioners:

- working in isolation from peer or supervisor support;
- suffering physical or mental impairment.
- who are unqualified;
- with criminal histories, false identities of false qualifications;
- working with vulnerable or isolated individuals;
- working in organisations with inadequate managerial assurance systems;
- working in systems without regular and effective continuing professional development and appraisal.

*The Report of the Working Group on Extending Professional Regulation (UK Department of Health 2009) p21*



NCAU believes the issues highlighted in the Consultation Paper arising from the absence of national uniformity, along with the serious risk factors identified as inherent in paramedic practice, pose serious potential risks to public health and safety.

Many of the additional factors likely to increase the incidence of poor, unethical or incompetent practice identified in the UK Department of Health research paper are also commonly present in Australian jurisdictions. They have been highlighted in evidence to various government inquiries in recent years.

**THE NCAU'S FIRM POSITION IS THAT THESE SHORTCOMINGS CAN ONLY BE ADDRESSED VIA NATIONAL REGULATION AND NATIONAL REGISTRATION.**

# WHY THE NCAU SUPPORTS NATIONAL REGULATION AND NATIONAL REGISTRATION

FLEXIBILITY IN EMPLOYMENT AND PORTABILITY OF QUALIFICATIONS

PROTECTION OF 'REGISTERED PARAMEDIC' TITLE

CONSISTENT AND TRANSPARENT HANDLING OF COMPLAINTS AND FITNESS-TO-PRACTICE ISSUES

PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY

Members have identified these four issues as their principal concerns.

The NCAU believes only *Option 4: National Registration via inclusion in the National Scheme*, will address members' aspirations around these issues.

However, National Registration on its own will not ensure all our members' priorities are addressed.

**THIS IS WHY THE NCAU BELIEVES NATIONAL REGULATION AND NATIONAL REGISTRATION MUST BE IMPLEMENTED.**



## **FLEXIBILITY IN EMPLOYMENT AND PORTABILITY OF QUALIFICATIONS**

This has consistently been cited as the key issue for NCAU members. Registration, if it proceeds, imposes rights and responsibilities on individual clinicians. However, portability of qualifications and mutual recognition will only be achieved across state and territory boundaries if registration is underpinned by a national scope of practice, national competencies and national accreditation and monitoring of educational prerequisites for entry into the paramedic profession.

## **CONSISTENT AND TRANSPARENT HANDLING OF COMPLAINTS, PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT AND FITNESS-TO-PRACTICE ISSUES**

The NCAU strongly believes that in many current jurisdictions, employers act as judge, jury and sometimes executioner in many of these cases. The potential for abuse of this position of power has been highlighted in numerous inquiries by Auditors General, Public Accounts Committees and Parliaments into Australian ambulance services. The NCAU fundamentally supports Registration as it should transfer responsibility to an independent third party, thus promoting transparency and openness. Such processes are central to maintaining public confidence in the competence and professionalism of practitioners.

***The current multi-jurisdictional approach to these issues is inefficient. It cannot provide these assurances. It is full of duplication. It provides different levels of care between different states and territories depending on locally dictated scopes of practice.***

***The NCAU believes a truly nationally accredited regulatory model is the only way of ensuring consistent, cost-effective and quality out-of-hospital emergency medical care for all Australian communities, regardless of the state or territory in which they are located.***

## **PROTECTION OF ‘REGISTERED PARAMEDIC’ TITLE**

Currently there is no nationally agreed definition of what constitutes a paramedic. Indeed, anyone can refer to themselves as a paramedic regardless of their qualifications or experience.

As private sector employment of paramedics grows, particularly in remote, resource-rich jurisdictions, it is even more important that the public is assured those practising as registered paramedics (RPs) meet minimum requirements in terms of qualifications, competency, ongoing professional development and character.

These assurances can only be provided by an independent, nationally constituted body with statutory authority to oversee the profession.

## **PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY**

The final and most important beneficiary of a robust national regulation system. The NCAU strongly believes the only way the public can be fully assured of high-quality consistent out-of-hospital emergency medical care is via a system based on national competencies, delivered by registered professionals who have been assessed as qualified on the basis of consistently accredited educational qualifications and ongoing certification.

# OVERSIGHT OF THE PROFESSION

## STRONG REGULATION DEMANDS ROBUST OVERSIGHT AND CONTROL

The NCAU's position is that registration of paramedics through the *National Scheme* should proceed and further, that the *National Law* should be amended to enable the establishment of a National Board—the Paramedic Board of Australia—for the profession of Paramedicine.

The NCAU believes the Paramedic Board of Australia should be responsible for establishing, in consultation with the profession:

- standards of clinical competence
- a national scope of practice
- a national code of conduct
- national paramedic competencies

The Paramedic Board of Australia would also have oversight of:

- national accreditation and monitoring of educational institutions providing an agreed qualification to enable registration as a paramedic
- complaints handling; professional conduct and fitness to practice review processes
- the establishment of a Register of paramedic professionals
- conditional licensing of out of hospital emergency medical providers
- continuing professional development and Annual Practice Certification compliance
- liaison with national boards of other health professions on matters of common interest

**THE NCAU BELIEVES THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PARAMEDIC BOARD OF AUSTRALIA IS VITAL TO THE SUCCESS OF STRONG NATIONAL REGULATION.**

# **NATIONAL REGULATION AND NATIONAL REGISTRATION**

**THE ONLY WAY TO ENSURE ALL AUSTRALIANS RECEIVE  
THE CONSISTENTLY HIGH QUALITY OUT-OF-HOSPITAL  
EMERGENCY CARE THEY DESERVE, REGARDLESS OF THE  
STATE OR TERRITORY THEY LIVE IN.**



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A photograph showing two paramedics in high-visibility yellow and blue uniforms attending to a mannequin on a stretcher. In the background, a police officer in a yellow vest with 'POLICE' written on it stands near a red and white striped barrier. Other people, including a cameraman, are also visible. The scene is outdoors on a paved area.

SUBMISSIONS CLOSE SEPTEMBER 3, 2012



**FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT THE OFFICIAL WEBSITE  
OF THE NCAU [WWW.AMBULANCEACTIVE.COM.AU](http://WWW.AMBULANCEACTIVE.COM.AU)  
OR CONTACT THE UNION REPRESENTING PARAMEDICS  
IN YOUR STATE OR TERRITORY.**

Produced for the National Council of Ambulance Unions by Jim Arneman, NCAU National Paramedic Registration Project Officer, and Brian Mitchell Media Business.

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ABOUT PARAMEDIC REGULATION—NCAU—JULY 2012