

AN OPEN LETTER TO ALL SOUTH AUSTRALIANS FROM THE AMBULANCE EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION (AEA)



Dear South Australians,

We are writing on behalf of all our dedicated members in the SA Ambulance Service, who work tirelessly to keep you safe 24 hours a day/7 days a week.

AEA members are there even before your triple zero call, supporting the service from behind the scenes. They are the people who answer your calls for help, who send out the responding ambulances, and who are at your side in your time of dire need.

The AEA is dedicated to looking after our members so they can look after you. Over 99% of frontline Ambos across the state, both in the communication centre and responding in the community, are members of the AEA. They all do their very best to give you the care you need, and are all critical in providing a safe ambulance service. But they are being held back by a miserly Government who refuse to provide funding for more staff. It is an absolute disgrace that there is no part of the service that has enough staff to function safely, except perhaps the “spin” department. **We believe the SA community are at grave risk as a direct result of the State Government’s inaction and chronic neglect of its Ambulance Service.**

So far, South Aussies have been fortunate, in that we have largely avoided the COVID-19 Pandemic and Seasonal Flu; yet the Ambulance Service still cannot cope with the ever-increasing demand for its services. The recent Coroner’s Inquest, into the unfortunate death of an elderly community member last April, has brought the issue of delayed ambulance response into sharp focus. The patient made a call for help which could not be responded to in time, as there were simply not enough ambulances to respond, denying her the only chance she may have had. Sadly, she died alone. This is very distressing for the patient’s loved ones, and also for the Paramedics who eventually attended her. Someone would have been there trying to save her life, if not for the Marshall Government’s failure to act.

The Coroner’s Inquest led to the SA Ambulance Service *reluctantly* releasing a review and report into ambulance delays between July and November last year. The report clearly shows the impact of insufficient ambulance resources on the community; **your** community. We believe that this report only scratches the surface of the true extent of the problems: that the 38 reported cases are just the tip of the iceberg and there are many more unacceptable and preventable risks to patients and missed opportunities to save lives which may not have been reported. This is a source of great distress to the AEA and to its members. The report is available in full on the AEA’s website for all to read.

The AEA alerted the ambulance service and the Government in early 2018 about the risks the community were being exposed to, and the need for an urgent injection of funding for more Ambos to mitigate that risk. There was clearly a need for more ambulance resources then, and that need persists, only more so, to this day. We also alerted them to the very real potential of patients suffering prolonged unmanaged pain and illness, and even death, if nothing was done. These warnings went unheeded, which forced the AEA to take the issue of inadequate ambulance resourcing – resulting in our members operating in unsafe working conditions including a lack of breaks, reliance on overtime, archaic on-call rosters in major country locations and ramping, to the SA Employment Tribunal in early 2020 in an endeavour to find a solution. A decision from the Tribunal is yet to be handed down.

SA Ambulance Service, along with SA Health and the State Government, are very well aware of these problems, but instead of improving the situation they continually attempt to deny, deflect and defend the indefensible. In other words, they rely on spin to mislead you, the SA community.

The latest Productivity Commission Report into Government services demonstrated that ambulance response times in SA have been getting worse year on year, with no sign of improvement. The SA Government continue to deny that this is a problem and justify it as being just another “surge”. The problem is the surges are occurring so often, and with increasing frequency, that the surge is virtually a never-ending one.

Health Minister Wade also repeatedly blames Ambos' working conditions for the Government's refusal to fund SA Ambulance. This includes making false claims that "pay negotiations" are somehow impeding the Government from doing the right thing, blaming and deflecting instead of addressing the inadequacy of ambulance resources and ramping.

This is clearly a dereliction of the Government's duty of care to the SA Community and to their Ambos.

The AEA will continue to raise these serious concerns on behalf of all South Australians. So far our pleas have fallen on deaf ears but we will not give up. The State Government appears more interested in waging an ideological war on its Ambos, and in saving money, than in protecting the lives and easing the suffering in the community they have been elected to serve. South Australians deserve better.

We must all play our part and let those in charge know; this is not right, and it cannot continue.

Help us to help you: sign the petition, and get your neighbours, family and friends to sign too. Contact the Premier to demand that his Government stop playing Russian Roulette with South Australians. Your life might depend on it.

Authorised by Phil Palmer
Secretary
Ambulance Employees' Association of SA



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PETITION

To the Honourable Members of the House of Assembly in Parliament Assembled – The petition of the undersigned residents of Adelaide and greater South Australia:

We draw attention to the inadequacy of resources for the SA Ambulance Service, which is leading to dangerous delays in ambulance responses. The practice of ramping is further exacerbating the situation by denying patients access to medical treatment and tying up ambulances preventing their dispatch into the community. As a result, the community is being exposed to increasing levels of risk from understaffed ambulance services, including the potential for avoidable deaths.

Request:
Your petitioners therefore request that the House will urge the Government to take immediate steps to:

- 1 Provide a long-term sustainable funding stream that provides the resource capacity needed to respond to the escalating demand for ambulance services.
- 2 Eradicate the practice of ramping at South Australian hospitals through whatever means necessary, including additional funding.

Name	Signature	Address (suburb)

“On presentation to the House of Assembly this petition will become a public document”