

Ambulance Victoria survey results have laid bare the extent of the organisations failure to respect their staff and to listen to their concerns.

In November, Ambulance Victoria released the results of their 2021 People Matter Survey (PMS). The survey results were released less than two weeks before the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) releases Volume One of its yearlong review of the culture and harmful practices of Ambulance Victoria.

Although we expected that the results of the survey would show that Ambulance Victoria is in urgent need of repair, the stark reality of the outcomes makes for difficult reading.

### **2021 Ambulance Victoria People Matter Survey**

Areas with the most damning results such as recruitment, senior leadership and AV's response to previous surveys must surely bring into question the ability of the current executive to lead the organisation in the response to the VEOHRC review.

The most concerning results from the survey include:

- 18% of AV staff believe recruitment is fair & based on merit.
- 34% of AV staff believe senior leaders demonstrate honesty and integrity.
- 16% of AV staff believe AV have taken positive action as a result of 2020 survey.
- 23% of AV staff believe they have an equal chance of promotion.
- 33% of AV staff believe senior leaders consider psychological health as important as performance.

The survey also asked about future plans for staff. For those that are planning to leave in the next two years the survey asked for the reasons. The two main reasons cited for leaving the organisation were lack of confidence in senior leadership and limited future career opportunities. Excessive workload was only the 5<sup>th</sup> most popular reason for leaving AV with four of the top five related to senior leadership, recognition or opportunities for promotion or gaining experience.

### **Data manipulation**

These results are however not an anomaly. Successive PMS's have shown that the culture within AV was damaging and issues with senior leadership were apparent before the pandemic put more pressure on everyone. But the issues have been consistently down-played and data has been engineered to make things look better than they really were.

The Victorian government requires that public sector health services publicly report on eight questions that are asked in each PMS. The questions are the same for each of these health services. The questions cover patient safety criteria and are used in the annual report under the heading of "Strong governance, leadership and culture".

The Victorian government has provided guidelines on how the outcomes of the PMS should be publicly reported. The methodology results in a figure that distorts the raw results of the survey. The requirement is that the "Don't know" and "Neither agree or disagree" responses are completely removed from the equation.

For an example of how the methodology is used, consider 100 people answered the question “Do you feel safe?” 50 people answer yes, 20 people answer no and 30 neither agree or disagree. Most would believe the correct figure for how many feel safe is 50%. The methodology removes the mid range from the calculation so the percentage reported would be 50/70 or 71%. Discarding the mid-range responses ignores valuable information. If a respondent is not sure whether they feel safe this should not be ignored and should not be removed to inflate the reported figure.

The formula is repeated across all eight questions and the reporting then provides an average as an indicator of those with an “overall positive response to safety and culture questions”. By using this form of data management AV adjusted their average figure for 2019/20 from 67% actual to 85% reported.

|   | 2016/17 |          | 2017/18 |          | 2018/19 |          | 2019/20 |          |
|---|---------|----------|---------|----------|---------|----------|---------|----------|
|   | Actual  | Reported | Actual  | Reported | Actual  | Reported | Actual* | Reported |
| People Matter Survey - percentage of staff with an overall positive response to safety and culture questions**                                    | 57.5    | 79       | 64      | 84       | 63      | 83       | 67      | 85       |
| People matter survey – percentage of staff with a positive response to the question:  |         |          |         |          |         |          |         |          |
| “I am encouraged by my colleagues to report any patient safety concerns I may have”   | 59      | 86       | 68      | 91       | 67      | 91       | 71      | 90       |
| “Patient care errors are handled appropriately in my work area”   | 58      | 84       | 66      | 88       | 63      | 88       | 61      | 85       |
| “My suggestions about patient safety would be acted upon if I expressed them to my manager”   | 53      | 80       | 60      | 84       | 60      | 85       | 64      | 86       |
| “The culture in my work area makes it easy to learn from the errors of others”  | 51      | 69       | 59      | 78       | 57      | 75       | 61      | 78       |
| “Management is driving us to be a safety-centred organisation”  | 71      | 87       | 80      | 93       | 79      | 91       | 76      | 92       |
| “This health service does a good job of training new and existing staff”  | 45      | 64       | 53      | 73       | 52      | 71       | 61      | 79       |
| “Trainees in my discipline are adequately supervised”   | 43      | 63       | 45      | 63       | 45      | 62       | 56      | 76       |
| “I would recommend a friend or relative to be treated as a patient here”  | 80      | 96       | 84      | 96       | 84      | 97       | 84      | 97       |
| * No actual data to compare against as the PMS does not indicate these questions were asked in survey. Comparator numbers obtained from 2020 PMS. |         |          |         |          |         |          |         |          |
| ** Average of the 8 questions   |         |          |         |          |         |          |         |          |
| Note: the relevant data is from the year before as a result of when PMS Report is prepared. Eg. Data reported in 2016/17 is from the 2016 PMS.    |         |          |         |          |         |          |         |          |

The Victorian government directive to report the data in this way is a requirement for public hospitals, public health services and multi-purpose services listed in the *Health Services Act 1988 (Vic)* unless otherwise specified.

### Impact of not telling the full story

The impact of reporting the data this way should now be called into question given the outcomes of the 2021 Ambulance Victoria PMS and the announcement in 2020 that VEOHRC would be conducting an independent review into workplace equality. The numbers reported by AV to the government and to the public from the PMS appear to show a workforce that was not under strain and was generally positive. The reality behind these engineered figures is very different and it could be argued they were a clear indication that the workforce was under strain.

Possibly the most important consideration is whether these figures have influenced not only Ambulance Victoria but also the government in their resourcing decisions. Have the extravagant figures been used as evidence of a workforce not under pressure and generally positive about their environment? Has the reported satisfaction of the workforce hidden the underlying issues which have now been exposed for all to see?

When these are the only publically reported indicators of governance, leadership and culture, it seems inexcusable that we would allow those figures to be manipulated using what some have called “creative accounting”.

The AEAV is asking the Victorian government to review the Business Rules relating to these figures in light of the outcomes of the 2021 AV PMS and the VEOHRC review.