



Martin Foley MP

Minister for Health
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BAC-CO-23890

Brett Adie
Secretary
Ambulance Employees Australia Victoria

Via email: Brett.adie@unitedworkers.org.au

Dear Mr Adie

Thank you for your letter of 24 January 2022 regarding Ambulance Victoria's surge workforce.

I would firstly like to acknowledge the extraordinary contribution and commitment of the entire Ambulance Victoria workforce during the enduring COVID-19 pandemic, and their critical role in ensuring the health and wellbeing of all Victorians. I am continually impressed by their professionalism and dedication across the successive waves of the pandemic response and express my personal thanks to each and every worker.

The global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic continues to have an unprecedented impact on our health system. The volume of calls to 000 for ambulance services and emergency department presentations is significantly higher than pre-pandemic. As you know, this is putting additional strain on all parts of our health system and our healthcare workforce, including 000 call-takers, paramedics, and hospital staff.

The support of Ambulance Victoria's surge workforce has been critical to ensuring the best possible care is available to the community, while managing peaks in demand and growth in the numbers of furloughed staff. This hardworking surge workforce is made up of hundreds of student paramedics and volunteers from agencies including SES, St John Ambulance, Life Saving Victoria, Chevra Hatzolah, CFA, Red Cross, and the Australian Defence Force.

I am advised the surge workforce has received training in: driving ambulances; the safe manual handling of patients; donning and doffing Personal Protective Equipment; and providing CPR, and is similar to the training provided to Ambulance Victoria's First Responders. I am further advised Ambulance Victoria endeavours to roster surge staff with the most experienced available AHPRA registered paramedics.

Ambulance Victoria, like many other workplaces across the country, experienced significant and rapid growth in the number of furloughed staff. To assist in managing this challenge, AP12 paramedics have been partnered with a surge responder on limited occasions during the past month. As you are aware, AP12 paramedics are AHPRA registered and have completed the 12-month Graduate Ambulance Paramedic Program under supervision of a Clinical Instructor, and achieved their Authority to Practice. Further, these paramedics are qualified to practice

independently, supported by Ambulance Victoria's Clinical Practice Guidelines, with clinician support available via phone/radio, as required.

Thank you for the suggestions provided in your correspondence. I am advised, at this stage, it is intended that the Medium Acuity Transport Service run as planned. I am further advised that Ambulance Victoria has prioritised the work of operational managers to support the welfare of staff and engage with health services at the Ambulance Victoria/emergency department interface, including rostering them to the Hospital Ambulance Liaison Officer role.

Whilst Ambulance Victoria experienced a significant increase in COVID+ staff and those furloughed as close contacts since early in January 2022, that number has substantially reduced in recent weeks, and Ambulance Victoria will accordingly adjust the response required to ensure continued service delivery and patient care.

I can confirm the Department of Health is committed to winding back surge workforce arrangements as soon as safely practicable, both in terms of emergency public health settings and workforce surge roles.

The Government is aware of the significant disruption and strain caused to the professional and personal lives of the healthcare workforce during the pandemic. We are deeply conscious of the need to support the health and personal wellbeing of all healthcare workers during the recovery period.

We believe this will best be achieved through the development of a comprehensive recovery plan that reviews surge workforce measures and illustrates a clear pathway back to normal agreed workplace/industrial arrangements. This plan will be developed over coming weeks in consultation with unions, and provide certainty and clarity for health workers, patients, and services on the safe, practicable transition to pre-pandemic models of care.

I trust this information has been of assistance to you and your membership and thank you again for taking the time to write to me about this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Foley', written in a cursive style.

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14/02/2022