



Jillian Skinner MP

Minister for Health Minister for Medical Research

MEDIA RELEASE

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NSW PARAMEDICS DESERVE RESPECT NOT RAGE

Health Minister Jillian Skinner today said NSW paramedics have experienced three times more physical and verbal assaults to date than in the same period last year.

Mrs Skinner today joined NSW Ambulance Chief Executive Ray Creen to condemn statistics showing there have been more than 50 separate incidents of physical or verbal assaults on NSW paramedics this year compared to just 16 in the same period last year.

“Assaulting a paramedic is a low and disgraceful act. These men and women enter our homes, workplaces, communities and unfamiliar environments seeking only to provide life-saving care,” Mrs Skinner said.

“That these dedicated paramedics should be harassed, threatened or harmed beggars belief.

“Paramedics have the full respect and support of the NSW Government and we back a zero tolerance approach to any form of violence toward them.

“Since introducing our reform package for NSW Ambulance, which has fostered cultural change within the organisation, more paramedics are reporting these incidents to their superiors.

“I encourage all paramedics who encounter threatening or violent behaviour from patients or the community to report these incidents to NSW Police. Attacks against paramedics will not be tolerated.

“It is an aggravating factor in sentencing if an offence, such as assault, is committed against a health or emergency service worker and courts are likely to punish offences against these vital members of our community more severely,” Mrs Skinner said.

Mr Creen said it is unconscionable that anyone would assault a paramedic while they provide potentially life-saving medical assistance to those in need.

“NSW Ambulance wants to send a clear message to these individuals that we have a zero tolerance policy to any form of violence towards our paramedics.

“Paramedics have my full support and assistance to escalate matters and report these incidents to the NSW Police.

“We will continue to drive home a simple message until it sticks – we are not punching bags and lashing out will not be tolerated.”

Mr Creen said the majority of this year’s 52 incidents have involved members of the public who were intoxicated or drug-affected.

“NSW Ambulance holds the welfare and safety of paramedics as paramount, and has a number of measures in place if there is a threat of potential harm or danger.

“NSW Ambulance currently reports offenders to NSW Police when there is a threat or potential threat to the safety of paramedics. In the most serious cases, paramedics are advised to stand off and await the arrival of police officers before approaching or entering the address,” Mr Creen said.

Under the *Health Services Act 1997* (s67J) it is an offence to intentionally obstruct or hinder an ambulance paramedic providing services to a person, which attracts a maximum penalty of two years imprisonment.

A more serious level of offence if combined with an act of violence attracts a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment.

Training programs (*Violence Prevention and Safe Practices in High Risk Environments*) are in place for all NSW Ambulance paramedics to assist them in dealing with potentially volatile patient situations and to enable them to minimise the risk of assault.

(The current list of 2013 assaults against NSW Ambulance paramedics is attached)