



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

Private Members' Statements

7 June 2022

AMBULANCE RAMPING

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) (18:47):

I was shocked but not surprised when I saw the pictures. I saw the first one on Friday 22 May—at least 10 ambulances parked out the front of the John Hunter Hospital waiting to off-load patients to an understaffed, overworked and overwhelmed emergency department. I got the second picture on Sunday 29 May—more ramping. My shock turned to anger. How can the Government let this happen? How can the Government allow bed block and ambulance ramping to get to this point? It is a crisis called ambulance ramping because that is an emergency department at or beyond capacity, with ambulance and health staff stretched to breaking point. The pictures shared by my constituents are hard evidence of the crisis, and yet the Government flatly denies that there is a problem.

The pictures reinforce the statistics. One in three paramedics are reporting they spend between four to six hours ramped outside hospitals, facing bed block. Fifty-five per cent reported that they have been ramped for between two to four hours. Nine out of 10 New South Wales paramedics believe that the current crisis in the NSW Ambulance network leads to patient deaths. The ambulance network is regularly hitting status three, the highest emergency response level, while paramedics try to respond to increasing demands with fewer staff and resources both in the ambulance service and hospitals. The secretary of the Australian Paramedics Association, Gary Wilson, said:

We have the worst response time in history, worse than any other state, and delays in response times leads to deaths.

And what has been the response from this Government? "There is no problem", "Everything is okay". No-one would ever doubt the professionalism or commitment of our ambos. Unfortunately, more and more find that they just cannot do the job anymore. They have reached the limits of their mental and physical health. Sixty-seven per cent of paramedics reported doing forced end-of-shift overtime in the past month. Three-quarters of paramedics reported feeling too tired to drive home safely after work. That is dangerous. Mr Wilson made clear:

The system is buckling and the only thing that has kept it afloat is that paramedics are breaking themselves to look after the community.

Is it any wonder so many of them are facing burnout? Is it any wonder we are having difficulty retaining staff? On a per capita basis, New South Wales is 1,500 paramedics behind Queensland and Victoria, whilst our paramedics deal with more than their colleagues in other States. Figures from March show that NSW Ambulance had the highest number of responses since 2010: 320,729 ambulance responses, out of which almost 9,000 were priority cases. These are cases where patients were facing life-threatening conditions.

No-one denies that our health staff and ambulances have faced extraordinary and unprecedented challenges over the last two years. They have stepped up, and while we are all thankful for what they have done, they deserve more than thanks. They deserve to be listened to and to be supported. They deserve a government that does not stick its head in the sand and does not say that there is not a problem and that everything is okay—because it is not. I have the pictures and the statistics to prove it. The Government must listen to the unions and the workers because they know what the problems and challenges are. They know what is facing them and how to get the work done. I urge the Government, please listen to your workers.