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Cynical Ambulance Executive leverage a tragedy to bring in random Drug and Alcohol testing

We are inviting our members to respond to this [survey](#) to provide your opinion on NSWAs surprise announcement on bringing in random drug and alcohol testing. It's a difficult issue for our membership, on the one hand you want to know your workmate is fit for duty at all times, on the other, why should all paramedics be subjected to invasive testing (including while off duty) because of the activities of a small minority? Will NSWA always see drug and alcohol use as misconduct or will it be viewed as health problem?

Firstly, the fact that the CE and other executives are willing to stoop so low as to surprise announce a controversial WHS policy while emotions are raw will not be forgotten easily.

These same senior managers, the same ones that only 20% of NSWA staff say they trust in government surveys, are overseeing the country's worst paramedic safety record, yet still can't tell us how many breaks are being provided to paramedics in Sydney. It's the same organisation that continues to allow the unsafe practice of early morning long distance transfers for patients who aren't sick enough to override the serious risk to the safety of the paramedics involved in the transport. If you want to talk about impairment, how about letting your staff work a whole shift, go to bed, only to be woken up at 2am to drive 3 or 4 hours in difficult conditions on country roads as what happens nightly in rural NSW. Where's the knee jerk reaction to impairment due to fatigue?

We do not condone any union member turning up to work in a manner that is likely to put the risk of their fellow workers in jeopardy. And we want to talk about drug and alcohol related impairment with NSWA. However, each time we sit down to talk to them about it you realise that NSWA isn't really interested in the wellbeing of paramedics, they are worried about the PR risk to themselves and to government on the issue of drugs and alcohol. Each time they have provided us with a draft drug and alcohol policy we've rejected it because all pathways led to disciplinary action. This contrasts the model for impaired doctors and nurses where the Ministry sees it at a health-related concern rather than misconduct.

It's time NSWA sat down and invited its staff through their union to talk about these issues before announcing a policy as if it's a fait accompli – it's not. We expect full consultation before a decision is taken.

Again, please take the time to respond to the [survey](#) to assist ADHSU Council in coming to a union position on this issue.

In the meantime, if you are in anyway struggling with an alcohol, drug or gambling addiction don't forget as a paid up ADHSU member you can enrol in any of [Foundation House's](#) programmes, including its residential programme for free. And it is 100% confidential.

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