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## Budget cuts lead to paramedic and patient safety risks

NSW Ambulance has been running over budget for years. This is a symptom of chronic under resourcing which leads to Australia's highest paramedic injury rate, and a very big overtime bill to replace dropped shifts or cover jobs when available ambulance resources are already allocated. Normally the Ministry waives through the overspend because they begrudgingly understand that patient and paramedic safety are paramount. This year is different, and they are forcing NSW to go through the place with a fine-tooth comb.

Ambulance has shocked Inspector and on road paramedic members alike by putting out a work instruction that severely restricts extension of shift overtime (this is not so bad), however it also restricts the calling out of *on call* DOMs unless it's a 1A or B or to provide scene management.

It then goes on to restrict the calling out of off duty paramedics to 1As and Bs only. Regional and Rural communities continue to rely on off duty paramedics volunteering to coming in to respond to a serious job while the duty car is on a job or out of town on a transfer. The other time they'll come in is to back up a single officer, so they don't have to respond alone.

This leaves very sick patients (examples are chest pain, severe haemorrhaging, shortness of breath, strokes, and patients in severe pain) left waiting in the community until a duty crew becomes available or returns from the transfer – all to appease the accountants in Health. It would appear the Ministry's senior bureaucrats have taken compassion fatigue to the next level and are happy to sit on their hands while patients literally suffer in order to save a buck (and protect their fat performance bonuses).

The ADHSU DOM group and the ADHSU Divisional Council both believe this new work instruction should be rejected on the basis that patients and paramedics are likely to get hurt if it continues.

At this point the Service has agreed to back off on the restrictions on DOM call outs and have paused the changes to off duty responses in rural and regional areas. We have made it clear that any restriction on voluntary off duty paramedics backing up duty crews or responding to a community in need will not be accepted and will be met by a vigorous and direct response by on road ADHSU Paramedics and Inspectors. We will not stand by and allow money to be more important than lives.

Gerard Hayes  
Secretary, HSU NSW/ACT/QLD