

Hon Casey Costello

Minister of Customs
Minister for Seniors
Associate Minister of Health
Associate Minister of Immigration
Associate Minister of Police



10 February 2025

Lauren Doocy

By email: fyi-request-29026-6393def4@requests.fyi.org.nz

Ref: CCHOIA-319

Dear Lauren Doocy

Response to your request for official information

I acknowledge your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) on Monday 16 December 2024:

“Please answer the question as to what specific interventions are being introduced to address what appears to be recurrent avoidable deaths due to systemic issues including underfunding of the ambulance system, and what steps you have undertaken as minister for ambulances, to address that concerns. Outline the number of meetings you've had with ambulance organisations over the past year, including any visits to stations, any sessions in which you've met or listened to paramedics and ambulance staff.”

The Ambulance Team manages emergency ambulance services on behalf of both Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora (Health NZ) and Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) (the Purchasers).

The Ambulance Team has quarterly meetings and more frequent regular meetings with all emergency ambulance service providers (road and air) to discuss funding, performance and risk. The Ambulance Team does not routinely meet with operational ambulance staff.

Recent Purchaser-funded interventions being introduced, include the introduction of the enhanced clinical hub and increased staffing.

The enhanced clinical hub (ECH) ameliorates the challenges associated with the primary triage system. The ECH provides secondary clinical triage to lower-acuity incidents, ensuring they are appropriately prioritised. This enables the urgent dispatch of ambulances to high-acuity patients with the priority of incidents upgraded as required post a clinician call back. This process ensures the severity of the patient's condition is understood so they can get the care they need if it is more urgent and thereby improving health outcomes.

Emergency Road Ambulance Service (ERAS) provider funding increases are based on ambulance activity and resource modelling. The increases include funding for approximately 300 additional FTE frontline staff over the last two years. The full financial costs of the increased resources are 100% funded by the Purchasers.

With the funding for (300) additional staff, the Ambulance Team has observed improved provider performance since 2022. Response performances to PURPLE-triaged incidents

(suspected cardiac and respiratory arrest) have steadily improved in both rural and urban categories. October 2024 had the best urban PURPLE 6-minute performance (65%) in almost 10 years. Likewise, RED-triaged incident (appearing immediately life- or limb-threatening or time critical) performance has also been improving due to the increased resource funding and provider performance improvement action plans. Hato Hone St John's (HHStJ) urban RED 8-minute performance has improved 8% since June 2022. Similarly, Wellington Free Ambulance's (WFA) urban RED 8-minute October 2024 performance was their highest since April 2022.

Health NZ is conducting a re-design of Rural Unplanned and Urgent Care (RUUC). The Health NZ RUUC review (in collaboration with ACC) is intended to improve access to urgent and unplanned care for rural whānau, and ultimately to improve rural health outcomes. The scope broadened from a review of Primary Response in Medical Emergencies (PRIME) to ensure system level improvements could be made. The review is completed and the final decision document related to the future rural urgent unplanned care landscape will be released in February 2025. Greater contextual information can be found on the [Rural Unplanned Urgent Care re-design webpage](#).

There has been a significant increase in annual ERAS funding from the Purchasers, from approximately \$164M in FY2016/17 to \$393M in 2023/24. Since 2022, HHStJ and WFA have received a combined \$148 million in additional funding to address increases in inflation, front line staff, and volumes. In late October 2024, the Government announced additional Health NZ and ACC funding of \$21 million for HHStJ, which accounts for inflationary pressures, resource requirement changes, and updating staff indices. The corresponding additional funding for WFA is yet to be announced.

I have had six meetings with ambulance organisations over the last year, in which I meet with ambulance staff and/or paramedics, my most recent being a shift with HHStJ in Christchurch on the 23 November 2024.

Under section 28(3) of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by calling 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely



Hon Casey Costello
Associate Minister of Health