

Joint Standing committee on the National Capital and External Territories ----15th April 2015

As requested by Senator Chris Back, I am forwarding additional information relating to the Ambulance Volunteer Service on Christmas Island and my rational to improve the service moving forward.

The Christmas Island St John Ambulance sub centre was established over 20 years ago to help provide an ambulance service to the Christmas Island community. During this time the sub centre has supported the Indian Ocean Territories Health Service (IOTHS) by providing volunteer ambulance officers to attend to the community's needs. These volunteer officers have assisted the health service by attending ambulance calls, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

During the past 20 years ambulances and equipment have been provided by the IOTHS however, some of this ambulance equipment is now out dated and no longer complies with the St John Ambulance clinical guidelines. In support of this dedicated group of volunteers, the sub centre recently received a generous donation of a second-hand Mark V ambulance from the Beverly sub centre in Western Australia. The cost of equipping and transporting this ambulance to the island was met by the Christmas Island Sub Centre.

As health services on the island are funded by the Australian Federal Government, no fee for service is charged for ambulance use by the community or the hospital on the island. This significantly reduces the ability of the sub centre to generate income to support itself and it has relied on the IOTHS to provide vehicles along with capital and consumable items to stock the ambulances.

The establishment of the immigration detention centre has enabled the sub centre to invoice the Department of Immigration and Citizenship for ambulance transports to hospital, generating a small income for the sub centre over the past 18 months. This revenue stream has already substantially reduced from the previous 12 months and is not anticipated to continue as a reliable revenue stream into the future.

Although ambulance services are funded through the IOTHS, training and support to the volunteer ambulance officers has always been provided by St John Ambulance Western Australia from its pool of volunteer trainers based in Perth. Funding of around \$50,000 per annum was previously provided by IOTHS for this training and support to the volunteers, but in recent years this funding has ceased and all costs have been met by Perth St John training department budget and this department is no longer funded to provide this service into the future.

During a recent visit to Christmas Island in support of the volunteers, St John management identified a number of risks that have the potential to impact the community and the service being provided. Numerous audits in relation to the ambulances, equipment and training resources were completed which identified significant areas of non-compliance in line with St John Ambulance Clinical Governance policies and the lack of equipment considered standard items at all other St John Ambulance sites.

The Volunteer Ambulance Officers are at crisis point as they continue to volunteer their services using equipment that does not comply with St John Ambulance Clinical Standards and Guidelines which in itself causes training issues. There is a considerable risk to the community that a clinical incident or critical event may occur on Christmas Island due to the sub-standard equipment and the minimal training and experience of the volunteers. These areas require significant investment if St John is to continue to provide ambulance services to Christmas Island and ensure it maintains its high standards.

We are waiting for some new equipment which will be provided by St John, partly funded through a recent federal grant, with the remainder coming from the C I sub centre funds. This will almost certainly take all of the surplus funds that the sub centre has.

The volunteers urgently require a period of intensive training, mentoring and support to improve service delivery on the island, along with training on the new updated equipment.

As a solution, in order to mitigate the risks and resolve the training and support of the volunteers, St John needs to send a Community Paramedic to Christmas Island. The Community Paramedic can conduct intensive volunteer training sessions, assist the volunteers on callouts, mentor and support the volunteers and conduct a recruitment drive to ensure that the ambulance service will remain fully operational and sustainable on the island.

Once this has been completed, regular on-going training and support of the volunteers should be provided with an ongoing funding agreement with IOT administration. If the IOT Administration is unable to deliver

appropriate funding the St John Ambulance volunteer model will be at risk and then the responsibility will fall to the health service (IOTHS) to provide alternate ambulance services on Christmas Island.

This proposed plan is for a Community Paramedic to visit Christmas Island for an initial period of 4 weeks. The Community Paramedic will train all of the current volunteers in the new ambulance volunteer training modules and ensure they are trained to a high standard, using the St John Clinical Practice Guidelines.

As part of the volunteer training program the Community Paramedic should up-skill 2 volunteers to become Volunteer Development Officers. These VDO's will be responsible for maintaining the training of volunteers while the Community Paramedic is away from the island. They will also be responsible for inducting newly recruited volunteers.

The Community Paramedic should return for the second 4 week period to consolidate all of the previous training with the volunteers and up-skill the newly recruited volunteers as well as mentor them when they respond to ambulance calls.

The provision of a Community Paramedic and associated costs for the initial program includes two 4 week blocks of Community Paramedic wages, allowances, flights, accommodation, car hire, training resources and materials.

Total costs for the initial 2 Community Paramedic visits over 3 months (\$75,000.)

A further proposal should be developed for a maintenance plan moving forward that will include scheduled Community Paramedic visits to ensure appropriate training levels are maintained. As there will be a lack of revenue stream in the future, any maintenance plan should also include an agreement that equipment and consumables are maintained at the appropriate levels as determined by St John Ambulance guidelines. This is an over view of what is essential for this service to continue on Christmas Island.

As I stated at the Joint Standing Committee, our service has been neglected by the IOTHS for many years. Of the 17,000,000 dollars allocated to run the IOTHS, zero dollars are allocated to support our ambulance service. The words sub centre described throughout this correspondence is used very broadly as the truth is that we have no such sub centre. In fact until recently we have never had a designated space to call our own. We now have a room inside the IOTHS. Ideally this group of volunteers should have autonomy, their own stand alone Sub Centre to do their training, protect and secure their ambulances and to congregate in the same way 150 other volunteer ambulance sub centres do across WA . There should be a yearly allocated budget set aside for this emergency service to operate and grow on Christmas Island.

The ongoing budget needed to sustain this service should cover communications equipment, training costs, professional development including airfares, uniforms, vehicle upgrade, all equipment servicing, maintenance, and a plan to build a standalone sub centre in the near future.

Right now we only have 8 volunteers to cover a 24 hours 7 days a week roster. We are unable to advertise for any new recruits as we have no qualified training officer. There is an unbearable load on the dedicated volunteers to continue this service. The hospital management (IOTHS) is fully aware of our situation and are doing little to support us. At our most recent committee meeting it was suggested by some of the volunteers that they are close to withdrawing their services due to pressure and lack of support. As a retired full time WA paramedic with over 25 years of ambulance service experience I am ashamed to say that this service has been neglected to the point that I believe the community has been placed in jeopardy.

Regards

Stephen Watson