



Media Contact: Natasha Farrell

Mobile: 0427 953 993

Email: natasha.farrell@audit.wa.gov.au

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Western Australia's ambulance service has improved and is more efficient than in 2013, but more needs to be done

In a report tabled in Parliament today, Western Australia's Auditor General Ms Caroline Spencer has found that ambulance response time targets are consistently being met in the most urgent cases, ambulance services are more efficient, and the standard of patient care has strengthened since a 2013 audit.

Despite these advances, there is scope for the Department of Health to improve the ambulance service contract, and a solution to ambulance ramping remains unclear.

[Delivering Western Australia's Ambulance Services – Follow up Audit](#) report assesses if the Department of Health and St John Ambulance WA have effectively implemented recommendations from the Auditor General's 2013 report, and if ambulance service management and delivery has improved.

We also looked closely at ambulance ramping - a practice of ambulance crews waiting with their patients in hospital emergency departments until the hospital takes over the patient's care and the ambulance is free to respond to other calls.

We found that:

- WA's ambulance service is more efficient, but the Department of Health and St John Ambulance WA have made limited progress in improving the contract and measuring performance
- St John Ambulance WA has improved clinical governance and support for volunteers but coordinating services in country areas remains a challenge
- ambulance ramping at hospitals has increased and there is no agreed plan to reduce it.

In 2017-18, St John Ambulance WA answered 592,079 calls to its State Operations Centre and attended 335,609 cases. St John Ambulance WA has continued to achieve its targets for response times to emergencies, despite the average number of cases per ambulance increasing from 552 in 2012-13 to 699 in 2017-18

'Western Australians can be reassured that ambulance service delivery has expanded to meet a rapid increase of emergency cases, and the standard of patient care has increased across the State over the last 5 years,' said Ms Spencer.

In Western Australia, the Department of Health has an ambulance service contract with St John Ambulance WA that provides emergency ambulance services at a cost to the budget of \$147 million in 2017-18. St John Ambulance WA also provides patient transfers between hospitals under a separate contract that includes other providers.

The audit highlighted more work needs to be done to progress towards a new funding model and a contract that further focusses on standards, performance, and risk.



'Future contracts should create a link between funding and performance,' Ms Spencer said.

The report also outlines how the practice of ambulance ramping has persisted in Western Australia, with a significant increase in the total hours an ambulance spends parked at hospitals since mid-2017.

Efforts by the Department of Health and St John Ambulance WA to find a solution to ambulance ramping have proved unsuccessful since 2013.

'Eliminating ambulance ramping would likely require system-wide solutions. An effective joint approach has so far been elusive,' Ms Spencer said.

The report makes a number of recommendations to the Department of Health about improving future contract arrangements, better measuring performance targets, the importance of developing ways to share and analyse patient information, and better coordinating ambulance services in country areas.

You can read today's report at www.audit.wa.gov.au.

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Report resources

- [Delivering Western Australia's Ambulance Services – Follow up Audit](#) – PDF version
- [Delivering Western Australia's Ambulance Services – Follow up Audit](#) – summary video

Previous report

- [2013 Delivering Western Australia's Ambulance Services](#)