



Ambulance services save lives, but ambulance membership fees act as a barrier to people accessing emergency health services. The Greens have a plan to simplify the system and save lives.

Historically, ambulance services provided basic first aid and emergency transport to hospital. Today's services have evolved substantially and now provide an extremely high level of sophisticated care. Paramedics are highly trained professionals who perform clinical procedures, administer drugs, and hugely improve patient outcomes. Ambulances and paramedics save lives on a daily basis.

But Victoria's system of charging for ambulance cover and use means that people aren't always using these vital services when they need them. To be covered for ambulance use, Victorians pay an annual fee (up to \$100 for a family). Those who aren't covered are hit with hefty charges of up to \$1,800 for an emergency trip by road, and \$11,000 by helicopter.ⁱ Research has found that nearly half of Australians would avoid calling 000 in an emergency because of cost concerns.ⁱⁱ

While this system of membership exists in several other Australian states; it's not universal. The Queensland and Tasmanian governments fund their ambulance services to ensure that all residents have access to free ambulances when they need them. It's a simpler, fairer system and one that health and emergency services organisations have been advocating for years.ⁱⁱⁱ

OUR PLAN

Our system is unnecessarily complicated and confusing, but there is an easy fix. The Greens would scrap the ambulance membership system, adopting a similar system to those already operating in Queensland and Tasmania.

The Greens would provide the additional funds to Ambulance Victoria, the equivalent of its income from annual membership fees and income from up-front payments for ambulance services. This would ensure that Ambulance Victoria could maintain its high standard of care and cover, but the service would be free to all Victorians who need it. Ambulances are a public service and as such should be funded primarily from the government.

SAVING LIVES

The ambulance service plays a vital role in early detection and treatment of a range of conditions, including heart attacks, where early diagnosis and treatment is associated with much better health outcomes.^{iv} Delaying treatment for a heart attack allows the heart muscle to deteriorate more, increasing the risk of long-term disability and mortality rates.^v

But research has shown that many Australians wouldn't call an ambulance when they need one because of concerns about costs.^{vi} According to the Heart

FREE AMBULANCE COVER

THE GREENS' PLAN TO SCRAP AMBULANCE FEES



Foundation, thousands of people say they would delay calling an ambulance in a life-threatening situation due to cost concerns. This equates to more than 600,000 Australians potentially risking disability or death because they're worried about ambulance charges.^{vii}

A FAIRER, SIMPLER SYSTEM

Research by the Heart Foundation and other organisations has found widespread confusion about ambulance cover and costs.^{viii} More than 10% of Australians are unsure if they have ambulance cover, and around one million Australians who do have cover are unsure about their entitlements.

A universal scheme that provides ambulance services free of charge would remove this uncertainty. It would create a fairer, more equitable system. And it would ensure that all Victorians have ready access to life-saving care when they need it.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The additional cost to fully subsidise ambulance cover would be \$668 million over the forward estimates. Our policy has been costed by the Parliamentary Budget Office. Improved health outcomes are likely to result in significant savings to the health system, though these have not been quantified.

Foundation, 16 May 2013:

<https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/news/widespread-support-for-universal-ambulance-cover>

^{iv} Hutchison AW, Malaiapan Y, Jarvie I, Barger B, Watkins E, Braitberg G, et al. 'Prehospital 12-lead ECG to triage ST-elevation myocardial infarction and emergency department activation of the infarct team significantly improves door-to-balloon times', *Ambulance Victoria and MonashHEART Acute Myocardial Infarction (MonAMI) 12-lead ECG project. Circulation Cardiovascular Interventions* 2009;2(6):528-34

^v 'Widespread support for universal ambulance cover', the Heart Foundation, 2013:

<https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/news/widespread-support-for-universal-ambulance-cover>

^{vi} National Heart Foundation, 2010 and 2011, op. cit.

^{vii} Heart Foundation, 2013, op. cit. and 'Call for universal ambulance cover', Australian Medical Association, 6 June 2010: <https://ama.com.au/ausmed/call-universal-ambulance-cover>

^{viii} Heart Foundation, 2013, op. cit.

ⁱ Ambulance Victoria fee schedule 2018/19, DHHS:

<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/hospitals-and-health-services/patient-care/ambulance-and-nept/ambulance-fees>

ⁱⁱ National Heart Foundation of Australia. Analysis of the Heart Watch consumer survey 2010, Melbourne: National Heart Foundation of Australia; 2011; and National Heart Foundation Australia. Non-ambulance patient survey analysis. Melbourne: National Heart Foundation Australia; 2011

ⁱⁱⁱ 'Paramedics Australasia supports the concept of universal ambulance cover', 12 December 2013:

<https://www.paramedics.org/paramedics-australasia-supports-the-concept-of-universal-ambulance-cover/> and

'Widespread support for universal ambulance cover', Heart