

8.6 Ambulance services

Ambulance services are often critical to a person's chances of surviving an acute illness or trauma. They provide emergency pre-hospital patient care, offer transport in response to sudden illness or injury, transport patients between hospitals, conduct specialised rescue services and coordinate patient services in multi-casualty events.

What resources are available?

- In 2012–13, Australian ambulance services had a salaried workforce of 15,220 full-time equivalent (FTE) personnel and a volunteer workforce of 7,456 FTE personnel.
- About 82% of the salaried workforce and 92% of the volunteer personnel were operational (such as patient transport officers, base-level ambulance officers, qualified ambulance officers, other clinical personnel and communications operatives).
- Services operated from 1,161 locations using 5,219 vehicles (including 3,137 general purpose ambulances) (SCRGSP 2014).

How many ambulance services are provided?

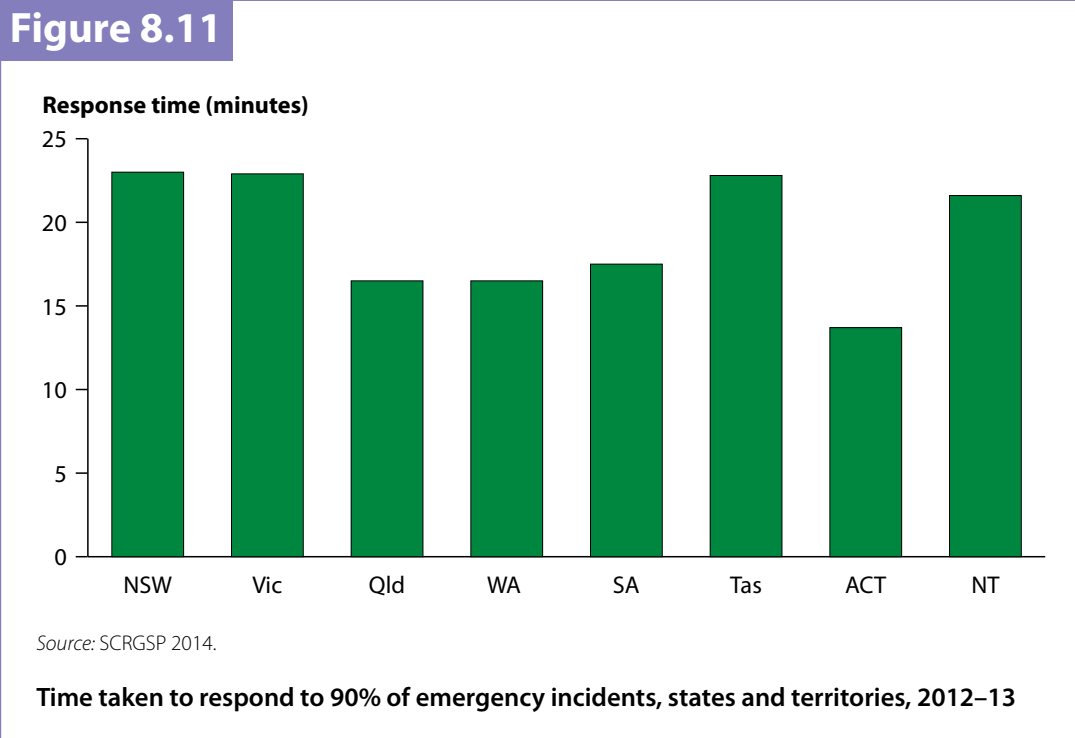
An incident is an event that results in a response by an ambulance service. A response is where an ambulance vehicle or vehicles are sent to an incident. There can be multiple responses to a single incident.

Incidents

- There were 2.9 million incidents in 2008–09 rising to 3.3 million in 2012–13.
- The number of incidents per 1,000 people rose from 136 in 2008–09 to 144 in 2012–13.
- In 2012–13, 44% were classified as emergency (immediate response under lights and sirens required). Others were classified as urgent (undelayed response required without lights and sirens, 24%) or non-emergency (non-urgent response required, including patient transport 32%).
- The proportion of emergency incidents increased by 5 percentage points from 39% in 2008–09 and non-emergency incidents fell by 3 percentage points from 34%.

Responses

- The number of responses increased from 3.4 million in 2008–09 to 4.1 million in 2012–13. The number of responses per 1,000 people increased from 160 to 179.
- In 2011–12, the time taken to respond to 90% of emergency incidents ranged from 14.8 minutes for the Australian Capital Territory to 22.5 minutes for New South Wales and the Northern Territory (Figure 8.11).



How many patients receive ambulance services?

An ambulance patient is a person who has been assessed, treated or transported by an ambulance service.

- The number of ambulance patients grew from 2.7 million to 3.2 million and the number of patients per 1,000 people rose from 127 to 138 between 2008–09 and 2012–13.
- In 2012–13, the number of patients per 1,000 people ranged from 97 for the Australian Capital Territory to 200 for the Northern Territory.
- About 1 in 4 (24%) of all emergency department patients (or 1.6 million patients) arrived at the emergency department by ambulance, air ambulance or helicopter in 2012–13.

Aero-medical health services

Aero-medical health services include services using helicopters and aeroplanes. In Australia these services are provided by many different organisations, including the Royal Flying Doctor Service, CareFlight Australia, the Newborn and Paediatric Emergency Transport Service and the Australian Defence Force.

- There were 45 aeroplane and 35 helicopter ambulance aircraft available in Australia in 2012–13, similar to the 43 and 35 available, respectively, in 2008–09.
- During 2012–13, aero-medical services involved around 15,300 aeroplane and 10,700 helicopter flying hours (SCRGSP 2014).

**What is missing from this picture?**

The Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, with the assistance of the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council, the Australian Council of State Emergency Services and the Council of Ambulance Authorities, is working to improve the comparability and accuracy of ambulance services data and to expand the scope of performance reporting.

Where do I go for more information?

More information on ambulance services in Australia is available at the Council of Ambulance Authorities website www.caa.net.au. More information on the Royal Doctor Flying Service is available at [Royal Flying Doctor Service](#).

Reference

SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) 2014. Report on Government Services 2014. Vol. D, emergency management, Chapter 9, fire and ambulance services. Canberra: Productivity Commission. Viewed 30 January 2014, <http://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/132331/rogs-2014-volumed-chapter9.pdf>.