

# CAA

The Council of Ambulance Authorities  
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## Professional Competency Standards

# Paramedics

# Paramedic Professional Competency Standards

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Version 2.2

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*‘Providing Leadership for the  
Provision of Ambulance Services’*

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*‘Experience is a harder teacher,  
because she gives the test first,  
the lessons afterwards.’ – Vernon Law*



**PARAMEDICS**  
A U S T R A L A S I A

# Contents

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<b>FOREWORD</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>PROFESSIONAL EXPECTATIONS OF A PARAMEDIC</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND SKILLS REQUIRED FOR PRACTICE</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>DEFINITIONS</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>FURTHER INFORMATION</b>	<b>16</b>

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# Foreword

Paramedic professional practice within Australia and New Zealand has undergone rapid change in the past decade with significant advances in the range of clinical treatments and technology used to support the delivery of high quality healthcare to the community.

This rapid change accompanied by a increasing move toward pre-employment Paramedic education within the higher education sector, has required a review of previous Paramedic competencies and skills frameworks resulting in their translation into contemporary Paramedic 'Professional Competency Standards' which reflect current industry requirements.

The Council of Ambulance Authorities (CAA) represents the ambulance services within Australia and New Zealand that are in the main, the statutory providers of pre-hospital care and as such, are the major employers of qualified Paramedic professionals in the region.

The development of the following 'Paramedic Professional Competency Standards' have been informed by those used by the Health Professions Council in the United Kingdom for the registration of Paramedics. In addition the CAA has also partnered with the Australian College of Ambulance Professionals (ACAP) who represent the professional interests of Paramedics in Australia.

The Council of Ambulance Authorities is confident that these 'Paramedic Professional Competency Standards', which form the foundation of education, training and practice for operational service delivery, are fit for purpose and reflect contemporary thinking across member ambulance services and benchmark international services.

We commend these 'Paramedic Professional Competency Standards' to both the ambulance industry in Australia and New Zealand and to higher education providers for use as a key reference in the development of their tertiary paramedic education programs.

Greg Sassella  
**Chairman**  
**Council of Ambulance Authorities**

Ray Green  
**Chair**  
**Ambulance Education Committee**

# Acknowledgements

- The UK Health Professions Council (HPC) was established under the Health Professions Order 2001 (UK) to protect the public in respect to the professional practice of fourteen health professions in the United Kingdom.
- Paramedic practice is regulated in the UK by the HPC using 'Standards of Proficiency' first published in 2003 which Paramedics are required to achieve and maintain. Recognising the similarity of paramedic practice in the UK with Australia and New Zealand, the work of the HPC has been used as the foundation in the development of the CAA 'Paramedic Professional Competency Standards'.
- The Council of Ambulance Authorities (CAA) Paramedic Education Program Accreditation Committee (PEPAC) for their work in the development of the Paramedic education program accreditation model which utilises these professional competency standards as an integral part of the Paramedic education programs accreditation process.
- The extensive work of the CAA Ambulance Education Committee Working Group for the completion of these standards for use in Australia and New Zealand.
- The Australian College of Ambulance Professionals (ACAP) for their continued support and input provided by their representatives into the development of these standards.
- David Melville APM for his commitment and leadership of the CAA Ambulance Education Committee (AEC) and the PEPAC during the development phases of these Standards and the higher education Paramedic programs accreditation process.

# Introduction

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## **Background**

The *Paramedic Professional Competency Standards* have been prepared by the Council of Ambulance Authorities Inc (CAA) on behalf of the member ambulance services of Australia and New Zealand, and overseen by the Ambulance Education Committee.

The ultimate vision for this project is a set of competency standards for entry-level paramedics which reflects contemporary and future paramedic practice and is consistent with current thinking.

**Phase 1:** The priority to begin with was to identify the current key influences on paramedic practice and tertiary education providers with a view to achieving wide consensus of what constitutes competent practice. A draft Competency Standards document was developed by the Ambulance Education Committee Working Party, with reference to international paramedic standards, other health professional competency standards and research literature on professional competence, which after review by members of various jurisdictions, then required validation through wide consultation with all stakeholders.

**Phase 2:** A widely consultative process was initiated consisting of representatives from stakeholder organisations including on-road paramedics, union and professional association members, academics, educators and other ambulance service personnel. Workshops were held in each state of Australia with representatives from all jurisdictions (including New Zealand) attending. The participants engaged in activities that required them to discuss and analyse the draft document with regard to its relevance, application, content, as well as list benefits, issues and concerns.

The data from Phase 2 was the basis for a further complete review of the draft document. The result of the consultation process is this document which will now be promulgated for use as intended.

## **Professional Competency Standards**

Competency can be described as skills, attitudes and other characteristics (including values and beliefs) attained by an individual through knowledge (gained through vocational study) and experience (gained 'on road'), which together are considered adequate to enable the individual to work as a paramedic. Competence is the consistent application of knowledge and skill to the standard as required by the industry in the workplace; it embodies the ability to adapt to new situations and environments.

Professional competency can be described as skills, attitudes and other attributes (including values and beliefs) attained by an individual based on knowledge (gained through study at bachelor's degree level at least at university) and experience (gained through concurrent or subsequent practice) which together are considered sufficient to enable the individual to practice as a paramedic. Professional Competence reflects the standard required by industry of graduates in the workplace.

It should also be noted that the delivery of professional services requires personal competence as well as quality procedures if the service is to be delivered to a standard that is acceptable to both consumers and professional peers, has credibility in a professional sense and meets all regulatory requirements. Professional standards relating to the systems, procedures and information used by individuals to achieve a level of conformity and uniformity for a given paramedic practice, are described in other jurisdictional standards and guidelines and should be used in conjunction with the Professional Competency Standards.

### **This document**

This document is designed for use within the tertiary education sector as a guide as to the expectation of industry of entry-level paramedic professionals. It is expected that this document will assist educators to develop programs with the understanding of:

- paramedic work and what it involves
- the particular proficiency needed to perform the work
- the knowledge and skills that are required to perform the work
- the generic work skills (or employability skills) that are needed

At the end of the graduate degree program, the graduating paramedic should have the core foundation elements to practice under supervision, and that, at the end of the graduate induction period of up to one year, the paramedic should be ready to practice independently. Graduate paramedics need to meet and maintain the standards in this document for employment within the major ambulance services of Australia and New Zealand.

The standards explain the key obligations expected of Paramedics. These are not intended to be exhaustive of all the areas that each standard covers, rather are intended to be used to guide Paramedic practice for those seeking entry to the Paramedic workforce within Australia and New Zealand.

### **Continuing development of these Standards**

It is expected that a document of this kind will fundamentally always be subject to review. At the very least it will be reviewed every five years using a consultative approach as has occurred with this current process. There may be more frequent reviews and updates in the interim should a need arise.

Changes will be notified to the major employers, paramedic education program providers and professional bodies representing Paramedics in Australia and New Zealand. The standards will be published on the CAA website [www.caa.net.au](http://www.caa.net.au) as the central reference point for version control.

# Professional Expectations of a Paramedic

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## **1. Acts in accordance with accepted standards of conduct and performance**

- 1.1 Maintains expected standards of conduct and performance
- demonstrates accepted standards of personal conduct
  - provides their employer with relevant information that may affect their ability to practice
  - limits their work or stops practicing if their performance or judgment is affected by their health or other personal factors.
  - behaves with honesty, integrity and impartiality to ensure that their behaviour does not damage the public's confidence in themselves or their employer

## **2. Makes informed and reasonable decisions**

- 2.1 Operates within a framework of making informed, evidence based, reasonable and professional judgments about their practice, with acting in the best interests of their patients as their prime concern.
- makes sensible, practical decisions about their practice, taking account of all relevant information and the best interests of the people who use or are affected by the service that is being provided.

## **3. Demonstrates professional autonomy and accountability**

- 3.1. Practices within the legal and ethical boundaries of their profession:
- acts in the best interests of patients and service users at all times;
  - operates within the requirements of approved Paramedic Professional Competency Standards and their employment conditions/relationship;
  - demonstrates the need to respect, and so far as possible uphold, the rights, dignity, values and autonomy of every patient/service user. This includes their role in the diagnostic and therapeutic process and in maintaining health and wellbeing;
  - operates within the current legislation applicable to ambulance operations and paramedic practice;
  - practices in accordance with the applicable legislative requirements in the country or state of employment governing the use of prescription-only medicines by Paramedics;
  - practices in a non-discriminatory manner, regardless of individuals or groups race, culture, religion, age, gender, sexual preference, physical or mental state;
  - maintains the privacy and confidentiality of information;
  - obtains informed consent wherever practicable.

- 3.2. Exercises a professional duty of care:
- assesses a situation, determines the nature and severity of the problem and calls upon the required knowledge and experience to provide a response that is in the best interest of the patient/s;
  - exercises personal initiative in providing care that is in the best interest of the patient/s.
  - effectively supervises tasks that they have asked other people to perform
- 3.3. Practices within an approved scope of practice:
- operates within the limits of their practice, seeks advice or refers to another professional;
  - recognises that they are responsible for and must be able to justify their decisions within the particular employers approved scope of practice;
  - utilises a range of integrated skills and self-awareness to manage clinical challenges effectively in unfamiliar circumstances or situations.
- 3.4. Applies effective self-management of workload and resources and is able to practice accordingly within the individual activity.

#### **4. Develops and maintains professional relationships**

- 4.1. Works, where appropriate, in partnership with other professionals and support staff.
- builds and sustains collaborative professional relationships as a member of a team;
  - makes appropriate referrals to other health care professionals/service providers;
  - demonstrates an understanding of the range and limitations of operational relationships between Paramedics and other healthcare professionals;
  - demonstrates an understanding of the principles and practices of other healthcare professionals and healthcare systems and how they interact with the role of a Paramedic;
  - consults effectively with relevant health care professionals and service providers to facilitate continuity of care.
  - contributes effectively to work undertaken as part of a multi-disciplinary team.

- 4.2. Demonstrates effective and appropriate skills in communicating information, advice, instruction and professional opinion to colleagues, service users, their relatives and carers;
- communicates effectively in English;
  - identifies that communication skills affect the assessment of patients and how the means of communication should be modified to address and take account of factors such as age, physical ability and learning ability;
  - selects, moves between and uses appropriate forms of verbal and non-verbal communication with patients and others;
  - identifies the characteristics and consequences of non-verbal communication and how this can be affected by culture, age, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs and socio-economic status;
  - provides patients (or people acting on their behalf) with the information necessary to enable them to make informed decisions;
  - uses an appropriate interpreter to assist patients whose first language is not English, wherever possible;
  - recognises that relationships with patients should be based on mutual respect and trust, and is able to maintain high standards of care even in situations of personal incompatibility; and
  - identifies anxiety and stress in patients, carers and others and recognises the potential impact upon communication.
- 4.3. Effectively communicates throughout the care of the patient:
- uses interpersonal skills to encourage the active participation of patients;
  - utilises appropriate communication skills to effectively manage avoidance, confusion and confrontation.
  - utilises appropriate communication skills when dealing with the patient's relatives and carers

# Knowledge, understanding and skills required for Practice

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## **5. Demonstrates the knowledge and understanding required for practice as a paramedic**

- 5.1 Understands the key concepts of the bodies of knowledge which are specifically relevant to Paramedic practice:
- understands the structure, function and pathophysiology of the human body, relevant to their practice, together with knowledge of health, human growth and development, disease, disorder and dysfunction;
  - understands the principles and applications of scientific enquiry, including the evaluation of treatment efficacy and the research process;
  - understands the theoretical basis of and the variety of approaches to assessment and intervention;
  - knows human anatomy and physiology sufficient to understand the nature and effects of injury or illness and to conduct assessment and observation in order to establish patient management strategies;
  - understands psychological and social factors that influence an individual in health and illness;
  - understands the clinical sciences underpinning paramedic practice, including physiological, pharmacological, behavioural and functional.

## **6. Operates within a safe practice environment**

- 6.1 Acts in accordance with applicable health and safety legislation, and any relevant safety policies and procedures.
- 6.2 Develops and maintains personal health and wellbeing strategies
- practices safe manual handling techniques within the scope of paramedic duties.
  - maintains physical health, fitness and nutrition.
  - maintains psychological wellbeing:
  - actively maintains a safe working environment for self and partner;
  - identifies, uses or establishes personal support networks and shares experiences with colleagues related to professional issues
- 6.3 Applies infection control procedures which minimise risks to patients and those treating them.

## **7. Identifies and assesses health and social care needs in the context of the environment**

- 7.1 Analyses the situation, gathers appropriate information and selects and uses appropriate assessment techniques:
- undertakes and records a thorough assessment.
  - frames questions that indicate the use of a structured approach
  - conducts a thorough and detailed physical examination of the patient using observations, measurement and other assessment skills to inform clinical reasoning;
  - conducts a detailed physical examination of the patient to inform clinical reasoning
  - considers the health and social care needs of patients and carers in the assessment process
  - maintains self control in the clinical setting and under stressful conditions

## **8. Formulates and delivers clinical practice to meet health and social care needs within the context of the environment**

- 8.1 Uses clinical reasoning and problem-solving skills to determine clinical judgments and appropriate actions:
- demonstrates a logical and systematic approach to problem solving and situation analysis;
  - analyses and critically evaluates the information collected to make clinical judgments;
  - recognises that clinical judgments involve consideration of conflicting information and evidence;
  - formulates a diagnosis informed by the patient assessment and analysis of context and situation;
  - identifies the time criticality of treatment and transport.
- 8.2 Draws on appropriate knowledge and skills in order to make professional judgments:
- selects or modifies approaches to meet the needs of patients, their relatives and carers, when presented in emergency and urgent situations;
  - changes their practice as needed to take account of new developments;
  - demonstrates a level of skill in the use of information technology appropriate to their practice.

- 8.3 Formulates specific and appropriate patient care and treatment actions:
- adapts practice to meet the needs of different groups distinguished by, for example, physical, psychological, environmental, cultural or socio-economic factors within their authorised scope of practice;
  - demonstrates sensitivity to the factors which shape lifestyle that may impact on the individual's health and affect the interaction between the patient and Paramedic.
- 8.4 Conducts appropriate diagnostic or monitoring procedures, treatment, therapy or other actions safely. :
- maintains the safety of both patients and those involved in their care;
  - positions for safe and effective interventions;
  - knows the indications and contra-indications of using specific paramedic interventions including their modifications;
  - modifies and adapts their practice appropriate to the emergency environment.
- 8.5 Maintains records appropriately:
- records information systematically in an accessible and retrievable form;
  - keeps accurate, comprehensive, logical, legible and concise records;
  - recognises the need to handle these records and all other information in accordance with applicable privacy legislation, policies, protocols and guidelines;
  - uses only accepted terminology in completing patient care records.
- 8.6 Operates effectively within a mobile environment:
- responds to urgent and non-urgent requests for assistance in a low risk manner in accordance with relevant road safety legislation, organisational directives, policies and procedures;
  - utilises appropriate transport platforms taking into account clinical need, time criticality and environmental considerations;
  - co-operates with and utilises the support of other emergency service and rescue organisations to facilitate patient access / egress / extrication in the most effective manner
- 8.7 Demonstrates the requisite knowledge and skills to participate in mass casualty or major Incident situations:
- demonstrates an understanding of the public health model for response to major incidents;
  - demonstrates a working knowledge of the application of emergency medicine in a mass casualty/major incident event;
  - maintains currency with organisational policy, directions, procedures and guidelines relating to the ambulance major incidents.

## **9. Critically evaluates the impact of, or response to, the Paramedics actions**

- 9.1 Monitors and reviews the ongoing effectiveness of their practice and modifies it accordingly:
- monitors and evaluates the quality of practice and the value of contributing to the generation of data for quality assurance and improvement programs;
  - considers feedback from colleagues about and critically reflects on their own Paramedic practice;
  - makes reasoned decisions to initiate, continue, modify or cease treatment or the use of techniques or procedures and record the decisions and reasoning appropriately.
- 9.2 Audits, reflects on and reviews practice:
- demonstrates the principles, application and need for quality control and quality assurance in Paramedic practice;
  - demonstrates an awareness of the role of audit and review in quality management, including quality control, quality assurance and the use of appropriate outcome measures;
  - maintains an effective audit trail and work towards continual improvement;
  - participates in quality assurance programmes, where appropriate or required;
  - reflects on practice and the application of such reflection to their future practice;
  - participates in case conferences and other methods of review.
- 9.3 Participates in the mentoring, teaching and development of others:
- participates in guiding the learning of others;
  - shares knowledge with colleagues;
  - supports health care students to meet their learning objectives;
  - shares knowledge and experience with colleagues relating to individual/group/unit problems;
  - contributes to orientation and ongoing education programs;
  - acts as a role model to other members of the health care team;
  - participates where possible in coaching and mentoring to assist and develop colleagues;
  - participates where appropriate in teaching others including Paramedic students and those of other health disciplines and developing less experienced Paramedics;
  - contributes to formal and informal professional development;
  - maintains records of their involvement in both formal and informal professional development activities.

9.4 Practices within an evidence based framework:

- recognises the value of research to the critical evaluation of practice;
- participates in and evaluates research outcomes and incorporates these into evidence based practice where relevant;
- participates in review of policies, procedures and guidelines based on relevant research.
- demonstrates awareness of a range of research methodologies;
- identifies problems/ issues which may be investigated through research

# Definitions

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**Standards** – are the explicit requirements recognised for legal, safe and effective Paramedic professional practice when working in the ambulance operational environment.

**Descriptors** – are generic attributes that draw out the key elements of each standard and define the scope of practice.

**Appropriate** – matching the circumstances, meeting the needs of the individual, groups or situation.

**Competence** – the combination of skills, knowledge, attitudes, values and abilities that underpin effective and/or superior performance in a profession/occupational area.

**Context** – the setting or environment where competence can be demonstrated or applied

**Outcomes** – further expand thinking on the professional scope of practice and enable examination of key areas of practice and the associated expectations. Outcomes are measured by performance indicators, quality assurance and audit, which enable determination of compliance with the standard.

## For further information

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Further information or clarification regarding these standards is available from the Director Paramedic Education Programs Accreditation Program, Council of Ambulance Authorities.

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