



# ACT AUDITOR-GENERAL'S OFFICE



## MEDIA RELEASE

PA 08/18

18 June 2009

### Performance Audit Report

## Delivery of Ambulance Services to the ACT Community

The ACT Auditor-General, Mrs Tu Pham, has today presented a Performance Audit report titled '**Delivery of Ambulance Services to the ACT Community**', to the Speaker for tabling in the ACT Legislative Assembly.

The audit examined the ACT Ambulance Service (ACTAS)'s operational performance and its ability to meet the needs of the Canberra community.

The ACT Ambulance Service is responsible for the provision of emergency, non-emergency and aero-medical ambulance services to the Canberra community. In 2007-08, ACTAS attended 32,481 incidents involving 34,030 responses. Audit acknowledges the complex and high pressure working environment of ACTAS staff and observed that staff conducted themselves in a professional and dedicated manner.

#### Audit Conclusions and Key Findings

ACTAS has delivered a complex range of services against growing demand and limited capacity. There was significant scope for improvement in various aspects of ACTAS' operation:

- Response times to emergency incidents have worsened in recent years and have not met targets set by government.
  - The Government's target requires ACTAS to respond within eight minutes or less for 50 per cent of Priority 1 emergencies. ACTAS was able to meet some 37 per cent of all Priority 1 emergencies within the target response time across all Canberra suburbs.
  - ACTAS only achieved the response rate of eight minutes or less for Priority 1 emergencies in 16 out of 101 Canberra suburbs.
  - Poor response times, both overall and by suburbs, mean that the Canberra community has not always received care on a timely basis, which is needed in a life threatening out-of-hospital event, such as a cardiac event.
- Clinical governance systems currently in place were not sufficiently robust to provide assurance of a quality service on patient care.
  - ACTAS has recognised the importance of ambulance officer qualification attainment and maintenance of intensive care paramedic (ICP) skill levels. However, on-going clinical education (in-service) programs have not been provided to Ambulance Support Officers.

- Some ambulance officers without Intensive Care Paramedic (ICP) qualifications were dispatched to respond to an emergency when an ICP Crew was unavailable. On these occasions, there was a risk of an adverse patient outcome.
- Internal reviews of Patient Care Records and other reviews were not robust and did not provide assurance of effective follow-up actions to address identified problems.
- There is no clinical care information database to enable tracking and monitoring of patients' care records, or to inform ACTAS management about patient types and trends.
- Ambulance data were not appropriately collected and analysed. In particular, modelling of ambulance data was not sufficiently developed to enable ACTAS to effectively target service delivery to the Canberra community and to strategically plan for ACTAS' future operations.
- Non-emergency response services (patient transfers) were not well coordinated and efficiently delivered.
- There were deficiencies in ACTAS planning, documentation of policies and procedures, risk management and performance management and review.
  - ACTAS did not have a sufficiently comprehensive performance management framework by which to manage and monitor performance of service delivery.
  - ACTAS was aware of a number of risks areas which required further consideration, assessment and actions to manage.
  - There was no overarching policy and procedures in place to guide staff on how feedback and complaints obtained by ACTAS would be monitored or used to improve service delivery.
- The government has recognised and responded to the increased demand for ACTAS services by providing additional funding in the 2007-08 and 2008-09 budgets. The Emergency Service Agency has put in place a number of initiatives in recent years, seeking to improve ACTAS' operational capacity to deliver its services.

### **Recommendations**

The audit made seventeen recommendations to address the issues raised. The Department of Justice and Community Safety, agreed, or agreed in part, with most recommendations.

### **Further Information**

For further information, please contact Rod Nicholas, Director, Performance Audits and Corporate Services on 6207 0833. Copies of the report are available from the ACT Auditor-General's Office (Level 4, 11 Moore Street, Canberra City) and from its website, [www.audit.act.gov.au](http://www.audit.act.gov.au).