

MEDIA RELEASE

TUESDAY 7 JANUARY 2025

Increasing trend of adverse incidents and gaps in clinical governance at St John Ambulance a significant concern for the Territory

AMA Northern Territory has serious concerns about the ability of St. John Ambulance Northern Territory (SJA NT) to run a safe and effective ambulance service following reports that serious clinical incidents had not been reported back to the service.

In December last year a report by Northern Territory Health on SJA NT was leaked to the media exposing poor processes that “may have resulted in the deaths of patients”. The report was handed to the government in June 2024.

AMA NT President Dr Rob Parker said that according to media reports, SJA NT CEO Andrew Tombs had emailed SJA staff stating “To date, none of these reported cases have been provided or reported through either St John NT or the NT Health incident management system for investigation”.

“AMA NT finds it impossible to imagine that clinical incidents were not communicated back to SJA,” Dr Parker said.

“If the St John NT CEO is in denial about the reality of this situation, what hope is there that the organisation can be improved.”

Dr Parker said the paramedics union has no confidence in the leadership of SJA NT and while AMA NT has not reached a formal position with regard to confidence, current arrangements could not be considered to be safe.

“Amongst our concerns is the removal of the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) position from the ambulance service, which means that the Northern Territory has the only service in Australia without a CMO, a role responsible for clinical safety and governance,” he said.

“We are calling for the immediate recruitment of a CMO for SJA NT. This role needs to have full autonomy and authority to improve safety for patients and paramedics in the Northern Territory.”

Dr Parker said there had also been multiple reports of SJA NT using lawyers to defend their interests.

“We believe this may have the effect (intended or otherwise) of silencing those with genuine concerns of harm being caused to patients. Indeed, the Ellis review stated the legal involvement was ‘excessive, intrusive, and unhelpful overall to the review’.

“Given all of this it’s not clear to AMA NT that SJA NT is able to run a safe ambulance service in the Northern Territory. All options for how the Territory delivers ambulance services need to be on the table. The current model is not enabling paramedics in the NT to deliver the care our communities need.”

Media Contact:

Fiona Crombie
0419 827 350
fcrombie@amant.com.au