

MEDIA RELEASE	North West Emergency Medical Services: PSA demands immediate intervention
DATE	10 September 2025
EMBARGO	None
ENQUIRIES	communication@psa.co.za

The Public Servants Association (PSA) is concerned that the North West Emergency Medical Services (EMS) are in a state of collapse, with dangerously long response times putting lives at risk.

The province requires 370 ambulances to meet national standards, yet only 72 are operational, leaving patients vulnerable during medical emergencies. Severe staff shortages and inadequate maintenance of vehicles exacerbate the crisis, rendering many ambulances idle and unfit for deployment. The shortage of trained paramedics and operational vehicles directly endangers those who rely on emergency services for life-saving care.

The core of the crisis includes a severe ambulance shortage with only a fraction of required ambulances being operational. Staff shortages and the lack of trained paramedics prevent full deployment of available vehicles and increase response times. Poor vehicle maintenance means that many ambulances remain non-operational owing to mechanical failures, further limiting service capacity and extending response times. Patients are forced to wait hours for emergency assistance, turning otherwise treatable conditions into life-threatening situations.

The underlying causes are an overburdened system with ambulances frequently being used for non-emergency patient transport, diverting resources from urgent calls. A lack of funding and resources hinders vehicle procurement, equipment availability, and system expansion. Infrastructure deficiencies, including limited transport alternatives, force communities to rely on ambulances for basic clinic-to-hospital transfers. In addition, there are allegations of corruption with reports of inflated invoicing and questionable contracts with private ambulance providers who exacerbate financial and operational strain.

The PSA demands urgent ambulance procurement. Government is acquiring new vehicles, but numbers remain insufficient. There is a need for staff recruitment and the urgent hiring of paramedics to staff idle ambulances. The introduction of maintenance programs where proper vehicle maintenance must be prioritised to ensure ambulances are operational. Alternative patient-transport systems must be planned to free ambulances for emergencies. Collaboration with private sector is required to supplement emergency coverage where possible.

The PSA calls on the North West Premier and Health MEC to take urgent action, provide transparent reporting on ambulance availability and staffing levels, and implement measures to ensure operational readiness. The PSA will continue to monitor the situation and escalate advocacy, including legal action and public campaigns, until the North West EMS system is fully restored and capable of delivering safe, timely, and adequate emergency services.

END