

MEDIA RELEASE	Northern Cape Emergency Medical Services collapse: PSA calls for intervention
DATE	10 September 2025
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The Public Servants Association (PSA) warns that the Northern Cape Emergency Medical Services (EMS) are in a state of collapse, leaving residents across the Province exposed to life-threatening delays.

Chronic ambulance shortages, inadequate staffing, poorly maintained equipment, and deteriorating infrastructure have created a deadly combination that forces rural communities to find their own transport to clinics and hospitals. Despite the procurement of new vehicles intended to replace aging ambulances, the crisis persists. The Northern Cape, with an estimated population of 1 374 879, requires some 137 ambulances to meet the national standard of one ambulance per 10 000 people. The Department of Health downgraded its operational target from 184 to 130 vehicles, yet even this reduced target remains unmet. Currently, only 46% of the fleet is operational, including around 40 newly acquired vehicles. This leaves the Province with a shortfall of at least 77 ambulances and with rural residents bearing the brunt of delayed emergency responses. Staffing gaps further compound the crisis. The Province employs 653 EMS personnel against a target of 720, leaving 67 positions vacant. Meeting international standards of 95.9 EMS personnel per 100 000 residents would require more than 1 300 skilled employees, exposing a massive deficit that directly endangers public safety.

The Frances Baard District, with a population of 434 284, requires 43 ambulances, whilst only 20 are active and leaving a gap of 23 ambulances. ZF Mgcawu District, with a population of 285 740, requires 29 ambulances, whilst only 13 are active, leaving a gap of 16. John Taolo Gaetsewe District has a population of 257 121 and requires 26 ambulances. With only 12 being active, there is an ambulance gap of 14. Pixley ka Seme District has a population of 221 448 and requires 22 ambulances. With only ten being active, it leave a gap of 12 ambulances. Namakwa District, with a population of 141 357, requires 14 ambulances but only six are active, leaving a gap of eight ambulances. These figures highlight the scale of systemic failure, leaving emergency medical services ineffective and unreliable, particularly in remote and underserved regions. Critical issues that must be addressed urgently are severe staff shortages in all districts, ambulance scarcity (with many vehicles being dilapidated or non-roadworthy), equipment deficiencies that force staff to use personal resources, and infrastructure challenges, including poor roads and long distances slowing response times. Budget constraints, restricting recruitment and fleet expansion, are of further concern.

The PSA calls on the Northern Cape Premier and the MEC for Health to immediately recruit and deploy qualified EMS personnel to all underserved areas. Ambulances must be operational, properly equipped, and regularly maintained. Road access and logistical support must be improved to reduce response times. Sufficient budget must be allocated to expand EMS capacity to meet both national and international standards. The PSA will continue to hold government accountable. Northern Cape residents deserve emergency medical services that are reliable, timely, and capable of saving lives.

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