

SA Ambulance Service fact sheet

Employers supporting SA Ambulance Service volunteers and their communities

August 2019

Welcome to SA Ambulance Service (SAAS). One of your employees may be thinking about helping the community as a volunteer with SAAS, or you may already have had a SAAS volunteer in your employ. Either way, we thank you.

SAAS values businesses and organisations that allow their employees to respond to ambulance cases during work. The aim of this fact sheet is to provide some understanding of the important role your employee plays (or could play) in the local community, what the role involves and the benefits for you.

Volunteers are vital

When someone needs emergency ambulance care in country communities, it's usually volunteers who respond.

They treat people with chest pain, asthma and other life-threatening medical conditions, and they provide prompt care for people injured in falls, fires and motor vehicle accidents. Our volunteers save lives.

SAAS volunteers also provide non-emergency transport service, transferring patients from hospitals to other healthcare facilities. In addition, they are well prepared to respond to disasters and major incidents.

It's only with the help of volunteers that we are able to provide local ambulance services right across South Australia.

The important role of employers

Benefits for your workplace

You will have a fully trained ambulance officer on-site who has the skills to save lives. Volunteers complete advanced first-aid training and learn the additional skills that ambulance officers need.

Employee confidence and communication

Volunteering for SAAS gives our volunteers many additional and transferable skills. Through their training and experience as ambulance officers they learn to work under pressure. They gain confidence and they learn to communicate better. These are skills that they bring back to your workplace.

A personal link with the community

Businesses that support their employees in volunteering show a commitment to working with the community. An enhanced reputation, increased consumer loyalty and greater attractiveness to prospective employees are possible benefits.

Unlike financial donations and in-kind support, helping your employee in their volunteering role allows you to foster a more personal link with the community. You're sharing your human resources with others in need.

A great place to work

Your employee will appreciate your support in helping them to help others. It shows you care about the community and your staff. This can positively affect their attitude, productivity and job satisfaction. They'll be more likely to feel it's a great place to work and spread the good word about your business.

How does it all work?

Generally, volunteers are placed on an on-call roster. They undertake their normal day-to-day activities unless they are paged to respond to an ambulance case.

They are only required to wear their SAAS uniform when they are called to respond to an ambulance case.

When a case occurs, the volunteer will be dispatched via their pager. They make their way to the ambulance station, team up with another ambulance officer, take the ambulance out and respond to the case. Cases can range anywhere from 20 minutes to a couple of hours, depending on the nature of the case.

Volunteering-in-the workplace agreements

It's a good idea to talk to your employee and negotiate arrangements for when they need to respond to an ambulance case. This may be a verbal agreement or a more formal written one.

Having an agreement will ensure that you and your employee know in advance what is expected when it comes to responding to a case during work.

If you don't already have a written agreement, the things you might like to consider including are:

- How many hours a week can I release my employee to respond to ambulance cases?
- What days of the week would provide the least disturbance to the business if an employee needs to respond to an ambulance case?
- Can my employee attend cases outside of the local area or undertake transfers during work time, or only attend local emergency cases?
- What happens if responding to an ambulance case leaves the business unattended?
- Could my employee commence work later than their usual start time if they have responded to a case at night? (Fatigue is a really important factor to consider in these circumstances.)
- How and when will my employee provide me with information needed to seek lost wages reimbursement from SAAS?
- How will my employee notify me if they are attending a case which will affect their usual work hours?
- Do I need to make it clear that my employee must return to work if the emergency duty ceases before the end of their normal working hours?

If you would like assistance to prepare a volunteering-in-the workplace agreement, one of our managers will be happy to help you. Your employee will know who to contact in this situation.

What about night shifts?

Sometimes volunteers are rostered on at night. Volunteers may deal with long and traumatic cases. They may get very little sleep before coming into work.

You may want to discuss night shifts with your employee and agree to a strategy to manage fatigue as part of your workplace agreement. Some employers allow their employees to arrive later to work. In these circumstances, the employer can claim for reimbursement of lost wages.

Insurance

SAAS holds insurance for professional indemnity, public liability, personal sickness and accidents. All SAAS on-road and support volunteers are covered for personal accidents and any claims made against them for civil liability while undertaking their volunteer activities as per the *Volunteer Protection Act (SA) 2001*.

Volunteers who are injured will be compensated and benefits payable in line with the *Return to Work Act 2014* as if the volunteer were an employee of SAAS.

If one of your employees has been injured during ambulance duties and is unable to perform his or her duties at work, please contact the SAAS Claims Officer on 8274 0492.

Reimbursing lost wages

By maintaining your employee's salary or wage while they are responding to an ambulance case, you are entitled to seek reimbursement from us. Reimbursement will be for the wages you paid your employee while they were attending an ambulance case.

To claim lost wages you will need to submit a tax invoice to SAAS. You will need to include the date and duration your employee was absent from work and the financial value (such as the hourly rate) for that period of time. Make sure you claim as soon as possible, and no later than the end of the financial year in which the claim was incurred. Your employee will advise you on where to send the invoice.

In many circumstances, employers and employees have an agreement that states how and when the employee will provide these details (for example, on a weekly or a monthly basis).

How do current SAAS volunteers and their employers make it work?

Example 1

Matt Lampard is the Assistant Vineyard Manager at Treasury Wine Estates (TWE) Padthaway Vineyard. He works in the viticulture team, growing premium wine grapes. He outlines his commitment to SAAS, below:

"The SAAS workload at Padthaway is generally light, so although I usually spend around 15 hours per week on roster during work hours, I've only needed to respond to four cases which have impacted on work time in the last four months. The infrequent nature of callouts means this isn't a problem for TWE and we're also fortunate to have a very capable team on site that can cover short absences.



When my pager beeps I immediately call in to the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) to acknowledge the page, and then make a quick call or text to at least one other member of the management team on site, to inform them that I'll be off site attending a SAAS callout. I live on site in the vineyard, so it only takes me a couple of minutes to get home, change into my green uniform and then travel to the ambulance station."

Vineyard Manager David Edwards says Matt understands that he needs to manage his time around any possible call outs during business hours, with the varying hours and shift work at the vineyard, and he hasn't had any issues balancing his commitments. "SAAS is critical to the region and our location on the Riddoch Highway, so we're very happy that Matt is able to provide this support to our community", says David

Example 2

Peter Cochrane works for Adchem at their Burra production facility. He is a Senior Plant Operator who helps oversee production of high purity chemical products converted from low grade copper materials. Peter says:

"My interest in health care began about 25 years ago when my manager was encouraging employees to study a first aid course. From there, I started volunteering with SAAS and have been a volunteer for the past 24 years.



Adchem have been very supportive of my Ambulance Officer role and genuinely value having a trained first responder on site. There have been a few medical emergencies at Adchem in the past and being able to help out has been greatly appreciated. Adchem know that they can claim reimbursement from SAAS for my lost wages, but they choose not to as they value the benefits of having my skills on site."

"I always inform Adchem if I am on call for ambulance duty before I start my shift. I generally respond to local emergencies only rather than completing ambulance transfers which can be time consuming. If I need to attend call outs off-site, I tell another employee who then informs the shift boss. Someone else covers my role until I am able to return. Also, I try to only volunteer for ambulance duty when I know that somebody else at work is available to cover me if I have to leave. It's about finding a balance and not abusing the system and the trust that I've built up with my employer".

Example 3

Chantelle Snart is the Senior Records Management Officer and Accredited FOI Officer for the Mid Murray Council. Chantelle is responsible for Council's records management compliance and is the Customer Service Coordinator for the Mannum Office. Chantelle says:



"Council is very supportive of staff who volunteer with emergency services and who are able to respond to the community when needed. I am able to manage my workload and have flexibility with my hours if there is a deadline to meet. My employers allow me to respond during work time because they know services are limited in rural and remote areas, allowing staff to volunteer and respond from work is keeping the service alive for the community. If Mannum did not have a volunteer crew rostered, people would experience delays in receiving emergency medical attention.

I do an average of three ambulance shifts a week, depending on my workload. I only respond to local/emergency cases in the surrounding area. I don't do transfers during work hours as this will take me out of the office for too long. When the pager goes off I simply screen lock my computer, call into the EOC to acknowledge the page whilst my colleague updates my office status to say 'I'm out'. Then I head across the road to the Ambulance Station, get changed and attend to the case once the full crew is ready. My colleagues will either leave work on my desk or catch up with me once I return. My employer claims lost wages reimbursement if I am taken out of the office for hours on a particular case. This is a rarity though. I don't usually claim for smaller cases as it's a service we can give back to our ratepayers and community."

For more information

We want it to be simple and rewarding to be a business or organisation that supports our volunteers and local communities. If you would like to help your community in this way, please call us to find out more.

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