

# **CPSA**



**COMBINED PENSIONERS  
& SUPERANNUANTS  
ASSOCIATION OF NSW INC**

## **Submission to the Australian Government Department of Communications**

### **Review of the National Triple Zero (000) Operator**

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*CPSA is a non-profit, non-party-political membership association founded in 1931 which serves pensioners of all ages, superannuants and low-income retirees. CPSA has 130 branches and affiliated organisations with a combined membership of over 30,000 people living throughout NSW. CPSA's aim is to improve the standard of living and well-being of its members and constituents.*

CPSA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Review of the National Triple Zero (000) Operator Discussion Paper.

## **Community needs and expectations**

Australia's Triple Zero service is highly regarded and efficient at directing people to the services they need at times of great stress and uncertainty. CPSA agrees with the list of community expectations outlined in the Discussion Paper and stresses that it is vital that these expectations be met. It is paramount that all Australians continue to be able to contact Triple Zero anywhere, anytime, easily, quickly and free of charge.

That Triple Zero calls can be made when someone does not have credit on their mobile phone and that mobile phones roam to other networks when the person's own network is out of range and are given priority by telecommunication networks is crucial to ensuring that the service is accessible. It is imperative that all these features including the specified timeframes to answer calls are maintained.

Of utmost importance is the retention of calls being answered immediately by a person. CPSA is strongly against any move to an automated system of "press one for police, two for ambulance or three for the fire brigade". Automated answering services can be difficult to navigate, particularly for people who are distressed; older people; people not fluent in English; people calling from a noisy environment; and those who are hard of hearing. Given the high stress and anxiety experienced by people contacting Triple Zero it is crucial that all calls are quickly answered by an individual who is also able to advise when required whether police or ambulance would be appropriate for a certain situation. CPSA can envisage confusion with a move to an automated system, particularly in situations where more than one emergency service is needed. For example, ambulance and fire brigade to a car accident.

## **Other ways of requesting emergency assistance**

Whilst recognising that other communication methods are now available to many people, including SMS, email, social media and instant messaging and smartphone apps, CPSA is very reluctant for them to be key ways to access emergency services. It seems this point of view is reflected in the consumer research undertaken in 2012 which appears in appendix A of the Discussion Paper. CPSA upholds that voice calls (and TYY for hearing impaired people) must remain the primary way for contacting Triple Zero. Whilst open to other options being investigated to complement voice calls, CPSA sees other methods such as text, email and apps as too risky. The sender can often be unsure if such messages have been received and the messages may not have the detail required by emergency services personnel. Having to go back and forward via these means is likely to take longer than being asked relevant questions over the phone.

## **Improving information**

Whilst CPSA is supportive of accessing data available to confirm a person's location and contact details, CPSA is hesitant about relying on apps and other measures to do so. At present, such location devices on smart phones do not always accurately pinpoint where a person is located and can jump into another location easily or be off by a number of streets. Asking someone this detail is much more reliable (assuming they are able to tell you where they are). This may change as technology improves but it is vital that receiving details from a caller is first and foremost. CPSA is concerned about the reliability of additional products and ways of accessing Triple Zero, particularly apps, as it is not something which people are able to try and test until an emergency arises.

CPSA is also concerned that automatically obtaining detailed information about a caller; including geocoded address information may raise privacy concerns and in particular prevent some people, particularly in the case of witnesses to a crime from making a Triple Zero call.

## **Existing funding and delivery model for the emergency call service**

CPSA seeks assurances that adequate funding will be available for both the delivery of Triple Zero in the future and also the state emergency services that Triple Zero links to. CPSA opposes the implementation of any measures which will result in the loss of any current services.

Should a change of provider take place after the upcoming tender process, CPSA is anxious that the changeover be seamless and that the service continue to be provided at the highest standard with the current benchmarks, including answering and transfer targets remaining in place. CPSA does not want organisations bidding to run Triple Zero as cheaply as possible at the expense of the quality of service. Similarly, CPSA does not want to see 'regulatory burden' being used as a reason for downgrading Triple Zero's vital service. The obligations of telecommunication companies to prioritise calls and to contribute to the running of the service through a levy should remain.

It is crucial that Triple Zero staff are highly trained to work in a high stress environment and deal with a diverse range of people and situations. Measures should also be in place for people who have difficulty communicating in English. It is also vital that for the caller, the process is seamless: they are quickly connected to the relevant emergency service in their state and it appears to the caller as a cohesive process.