



Community Emergency Response Teams

What is a “Community Emergency Response Team” (CERT)?

Community Emergency Response Teams (or CERTs) are Volunteer Ambulance Officers who attend medical emergencies in a sedan to provide immediate life-saving medical care prior to the arrival of an emergency ambulance.

CERTs are generally located in smaller communities that have an extended response time from the nearest ambulance station.

What is the difference between a CERT and a volunteer ambulance crew?

The only practical difference between a volunteer ambulance crew and a CERT is that CERTs do not transport patients to hospital. CERT members are all volunteer ambulance officers and they attend the same training, wear the same uniform and practice to the same clinical protocols as their colleagues from larger communities.

Where do CERTs exist in Tasmania?

Ambulance Tasmania has four CERTs, located in Port Sorell, Longford, Poatina and South Arm.



Similar systems operate in most other jurisdictions across Australia, with Ambulance Victoria’s CERT program being the largest with 29 teams with 450 members.

Is there any difference in the equipment carried in a CERT vehicle and an ambulance?

CERT vehicles are equipped with an automatic cardiac defibrillator, oxygen-resuscitation kit, trauma kit, cervical collars, towels and blankets, safety vests and wet weather gear. They do not carry a regular ambulance stretcher or other larger items of equipment primarily used when transporting patients.

Is the car an “emergency vehicle”?

CERT cars are not emergency vehicles and there is no exemption under the Motor Traffic Act. As a CERT volunteer you must obey the road rules at all times.

What sort of cases do CERTs attend?

CERTs are dispatched to all emergency and all urgent cases if they are the closest available ambulance resource, unless there is a suitably qualified and equipped health professional already present. The closest available ambulance is automatically dispatched at the same time.

CERTs are not normally dispatched to routine cases where the patient is stable and the primary requirement is to transport the patient to a hospital or other medical facility.

What are the roster requirements?

All CERT teams operate a flexible duty roster and operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. When you are “on-duty” you are free to remain at home, at work (with your employer’s permission, and if your work place is within the CERT’s response area) or enjoy your leisure time, but if your pager is activated you must be able to respond immediately. The only exception is you cannot respond if you have been drinking or would otherwise be precluded from driving a car (eg. because of prescription or other drugs).

How much time is involved?

This is determined by your employment and family commitments. You will be required to undertake rostered duty for a minimum of 40 hours every two months, and attend at least 12 formal training sessions each year.

How will I find out about cases?

When you are on duty, you will be given a pager which will provide case details, including the address to respond to each time a case comes in.

You must immediately contact Ambulance Tasmania’s State Communications Centre (by phone or radio) to confirm you are responding.

Do CERT members work alone?

Normally two CERT members are rostered on-duty at a time, but you might not always have time to wait for your partner before responding, or there might be time to pick them up on the way to a case. There may also be times when you might be first on-scene and working alone. If you are alone, for your own safety you must follow Ambulance Tasmania’s procedures for single officer response until your partner or other emergency service workers arrive.

Can I take the CERT car home or to work while on-duty?

If you are the senior volunteer in the crew, you can take the CERT car home or to work, so that delays are minimised when you are dispatched to cases. Providing it does not delay your response, you may be able to pick your partner up on the way, or they can meet you at the scene.





What are the primary duties that CERT volunteers undertake?

CERT volunteers:

- give immediate life-saving medical care (including for example managing the patient's airway, treating serious bleeding, stabilising spinal injuries or providing CPR or defibrillation) prior to the arrival of an emergency ambulance.
- gather initial information including vital signs (blood pressure, heart rate, oxygen saturation etc.) and the patient's medical history.
- provide situation reports to Ambulance Tasmania's State Communications Centre, including requirements for additional ambulance resources and other emergency services (eg. Police, Fire, SES).
- assist ambulance crews with preparing patients for transport to hospital.

In most cases, CERT volunteers hand over patients to the arriving ambulance crew who will provide additional care and transport the patient to hospital. Occasionally, CERT volunteers may be asked to drive the ambulance or assist with patient care during transport.

What do I need to become a CERT volunteer?

Prospective Volunteer Ambulance Officers must be at least 18 years of age, of good character, hold a current Driver's Licence and pass a Driving Competency test. You must have the physical capacity to perform the required duties, which include lifting and carrying.

You will be asked to complete an application form with your personal details and general health. You will also be asked to authorise a criminal convictions check by Tasmania Police.

You will then be invited to attend an interview. All candidates will be notified in writing of the outcome of their application.

Approval to undertake Ambulance Volunteer responsibilities is at the discretion of Ambulance Tasmania.

Do I need to know first aid?

Knowledge of first aid is not essential.

As a Volunteer Ambulance Officer you will be provided with on-going first aid training.

What if I am injured on a case?

Volunteer Ambulance Officers are covered by Ambulance Tasmania's worker's compensation policy and, as with all emergency service workers in Tasmania, are provided with professional indemnity and public liability insurance cover.

Does Ambulance Tasmania pay my expenses?

You will be provided with a uniform and all training at no cost to you. Ambulance Tasmania will also reimburse you for use of your private car for official purposes in accordance with DHHS policy.

What other support is available?

As a Volunteer Ambulance Officer you will be able to participate in the Department of Health & Human Services Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Ambulance Tasmania also provides a Critical Incident Street Management (CISM) support program.

The Volunteer Ambulance Officers Association of Tasmania (VAOAT) actively supports volunteers and holds quarterly meetings as well as an Annual Gathering. The Association also publishes a quarterly newsletter "First Response".



Where can I get more information?

If you or someone you know would like more information about becoming a Volunteer Ambulance Officer, call 1300 303 196 or email info@www.ambovolunteer-recruit.org.au or visit www.ambovolunteer-recruit.org.au