# Enabler: Enhancing communication

*Ambulance Victoria has several communication avenues. The Commission heard that these could be better used to ensure messaging around workplace reforms is audience-specific and to provide an avenue for leadership to listen to the workforce.*

## Why is this an enabler for reform?

Ambulance Victoria uses various mediums – including emails, internal bulletins, ‘town hall’ meetings and digital platforms – to relay information and maintain staff engagement on workplace equality reforms. During the Progress Evaluation Audit, the Commission heard of organisational communication challenges that impact Ambulance Victoria’s workforce, leadership and service users. These include:

* a lack of employee awareness and engagement in reforms
* disconnection between various staff levels
* lack of trust and transparency
* difficulty engaging with a geographically dispersed workforce
* poor awareness of positive stories and reform progress
* a feeling from the workforce that communication is only top down and there are no clear avenues to ‘communicate up’.

During the Progress Evaluation Audit, some members of the workforce suggested that more effective communication from the organisation with the workforce about reforms would increase workforce awareness, buy-in and participation, which the Commission considers key to progressing reforms.

Communication can provide an avenue for the workforce to provide feedback on and understand progress towards reform progress, which will lead to more purposeful reforms.

To better harness communication as a strategy to enable delivery of the Commission’s recommended reforms, Ambulance Victoria might consider reviewing current communication strategies to:

* commit to transparency in all communications by clearly explaining the reasons behind reform decisions and how they impact the workforce, to enable certainty and build trust
* increase visibility of senior leadership and regional leaders through more regular updates
* increase workforce dialogue to ensure that the workforce feels heard and valued throughout the reform process and to reduce misunderstandings and resistance, paving the way for smoother transitions within the reform environment
* implement dedicated feedback forums where there are obvious links between what is heard and changes made
* leverage digital platforms to help connect geographically dispersed staff.

## What are the impacts of this reform enabler for implementing the Review recommendations?

### Reflective practice recommendations

* Recommendation 1: Learning through reflective practice
* Recommendation 8: Encouraging a ‘speak up’ culture
* Recommendation 16: Embedding a victim-centred approach to processes and procedures
* Recommendation 41: Board learning through reflective practice
* Recommendation 42: Organisational healing and cultural change through reflective practice

These priority recommendations relate to reflective practice. Reflective practice that communicates transparent, humble and honest acknowledgements of missteps to the workforce throughout the reform process is critical to the success of these recommendations. Meeting the intent of these recommendations could therefore be better achieved if the workforce was able to see the practical applications or results of these reflective practices. This could help to bridge the disconnection between staff of varying levels and locations within Ambulance Victoria to support stronger reform implementation.

### Values and governance recommendations

* Recommendation 7: Resetting and embedding organisational values
* Recommendation 12: Supporting robust governance and oversight of reforms
* Recommendation 40: Updating and strengthening governance documents

These recommendations support the workforce’s understanding of reform processes. They could be better enabled through enhanced communication. Enhancing communication would make visible the integration of the new organisational values and other significant reforms into daily operations and decision-making processes.

### Reporting and complaint recommendations

Ambulance Victoria’s communication channels could be harnessed to better support the workforce to know how and when to use the new complaint system. This would enable Ambulance Victoria to more effectively deliver the intended outcomes of the following recommendations:

* Recommendation 13: A victim-centred and fair report and complaint system
* Recommendation 15: Supporting staff to confidently report through anonymous pathways
* Recommendation 18: Developing resources to support accessibility of the report and complaint system
* Recommendation 20: Understanding how the report and complaint system is working
* Recommendation 23: Supporting the effective delivery of reporting and complaint reforms

### Flexibility and safety recommendations

* Recommendation 31: Implementing and tailoring the Think Flex First Framework: Communication can be used to better inform the workforce about the available flexible working options, which would enable Ambulance Victoria to more effectively deliver the intended outcomes of:
* Recommendation 6: Improving safety in isolated environments: Enhanced communication strategies could support Ambulance Victoria to inform geographically isolated staff about reform progress around safety and build support locally for these recommendations.

Select the links above for further information on how this enabler is impacting recommendation implementation.

## What are the impacts of this reform enabler for Ambulance Victoria’s workforce?

### Communicating with the workforce builds familiarity with reforms and investment in cultural change

The Commission acknowledges the work Ambulance Victoria has done to ensure information is being provided to the workforce about the reforms. However, the Commission heard about a lack of consultation with the workforce on the effectiveness of this communication.

When I look at all of the recommendations, there is a huge amount that still haven't been consulted with the workforce to the level or education that they actually understand. Yes, we put VEOHRC out there. Yes, we've said we'll do it. Yes, there's been discussion, but I actually don't think that they actually hear a lot of it because the way we communicate and engage is missing the mark.

Participant

Consistent with the Reform Barrier: Change Management Approach, a lack of employee participation is a known contributor to organisational-change program failure.

### Strengthened communication can improve disconnection between different parts of Ambulance Victoria’s workforce and ensure reform work is informed by both operational and non-operational perspectives

During the Progress Evaluation Audit, the Commission heard regularly about a disconnect between operational and non-operational staff, as well as between the broader workforce and senior leadership. The Commission also found that the disconnection extended to the broader workforce and senior leadership. This was linked to a lack of trust and transparency.

The workforce very much feels disengaged and not listened to. And I don't know the solution to that. And I don't think making one AV website … that's not addressing the actual problem, that's just changing how you look at the symptom of the problem. I'm not convinced that EB [enterprise bargaining] is actually the cause of that. I think it's they genuinely don't feel listened to and genuinely don't feel engaged, especially to the Executive level.

Participant

## What are the impacts of this reform enabler for Ambulance Victoria’s leadership?

### Engaging the geographically dispersed leadership will improve disconnection at Ambulance Victoria and trust in leadership

The Commission heard that some members of the operational workforce do not engage with broader workforce communications, which some employees feel are too frequent and lengthy, meaning that they are unable to discern what is of relevance to their everyday role.

I can tell you no one reads what you put out. And if you say you had eight thousand views of something, you probably did because it showed up in their preview page. But I can tell you it got deleted and they didn't read it. So that that's the feedback I'm getting from the workforce is they don't read it. So, we've got a big problem in that space.

Participant

See Reform Enabler: Harnessing Distributed Leadership.

### Enhancing communication will allow Ambulance Victoria to promote the reform work senior leaders are undertaking

During the Progress Evaluation Audit, the Commission has seen the large amount of work undertaken and underway to make Ambulance Victoria a safer, fairer and more inclusive workplace. Communication issues have meant that some of the good news stories are not being promoted and recognised.