

Report highlights

What the report is about

Effective radio communications are crucial to NSW's emergency services organisations.

The Critical Communications Enhancement Program (CCEP) aims to deliver an enhanced public safety radio network to serve the five emergency services organisations (ESOs), as well as a range of other users. This report assesses whether the NSW Telco Authority is effectively managing the CCEP.

What we found

Where it has already been delivered (about 50% of the state), the enhanced network meets most of the requirements of ESOs.

The CCEP will provide additional infrastructure for public safety radio coverage in existing buildings agreed to with ESOs. However, radio coverage inside buildings constructed after the CCEP concludes will be at risk because building and fire regulations do not address

the need for in-building public safety radio coverage.

Around 98% of radios connected to the network can be authenticated to protect against cloning, though only 42% are.

The NSW Telco Authority has not settled with ESOs on how call encryption will be used across the network. This creates the risk that radio interoperability between ESOs will not be maximised.

When completed, the public safety radio network will be the only mission critical radio network for ESOs. It is unclear whether governance for the ongoing running of the network will allow ESOs to participate in future network operational decisions.

The current estimated capital cost for the NSW Telco Authority to complete the CCEP is \$1.293 billion. This is up from an estimated cost of \$400 million in 2016. The estimated capital cost was not publicly disclosed until \$1.325 billion was shown in the 2021–22 NSW Budget Papers.

We estimate that the full cost to government, including costs to the ESOs, of implementing the enhanced network is likely to exceed \$2 billion.

We made recommendations about

- The governance of the enhanced Public Safety Network (PSN) to support agency relationships.
- The need to finalise a Traffic Mitigation Plan for when the network is congested.
- The need to provide advice to the NSW Government about the regulatory gap for ensuring adequate network reach in future buildings.
- The need to clarify how encryption and interoperability will work on the enhanced network.
- The need for the NSW Telco Authority to comply with its policy on Infrastructure Capacity Reservation.
- Expediting measures to protect against the risk of cloning by unauthenticated radios.

Fast facts

85%

geographical coverage of the PSN after CCEP completion, up from 26% in 2016

99.7%

population coverage of the PSN after CCEP completion, up from 80% in 2016

300%

approximate percentage increase in estimated capital cost of the CCEP to the NSW Telco Authority from 2016 to 2023

\$2 billion

estimated minimum whole-of-government cost of the enhanced PSN

2027

revised completion date for the CCEP, seven years later than estimated in 2016

42%

proportion of radios using the PSN that are authenticated to reduce the risk of cloning