

■ **EDITORIAL**

Strengthening emergency medical response system is the way to go

The Government says it has a comprehensive plan to strengthen Uganda's emergency medical response (EMS) system. The revelation of this critical intervention arrives at just the right moment because road traffic injuries have tripled from 50,000 to 164,000 cases over the past decade and fatalities surged from 3,000 to 10,000 annually.

We commend the health ministry's clear roadmap to operationalise nine regional ambulance co-ordination centres, with construction nearing completion in the cities of Mbarara, Mbale, Arua and Lira. The planned ambulance registration system within six months shows foresight.

This expansion is also timely since Uganda is facing mounting pressure from severe malaria, non-communicable diseases, mental health crises and other public health. Research confirms strong emergency care systems can reduce preventable deaths by up to 54%.

However, funding cuts in 2025 disrupted essential emergency medical support services. However, lest we forget, a plan is only as good as its implementation. Past efforts have lagged due to financial constraints, poor infrastructure and inadequate human resources.

Even though there has been progress in mortality rates, challenges persist in pre-hospital care and ambulance utilisation. The health ministry should ensure this initiative avoids the pitfalls that have prevented previous health sector initiatives from flourishing.

To succeed, the health ministry needs secure sustainable financing, infrastructure gaps addressed and proper staffing for these new centres guaranteed. The upcoming ambulance registration drive should rigorously be enforced, with clear consequences for non-compliance.

An effective EMS in low-resource settings, like ours, needs structured, adaptable implementation strategies.

The nine co-ordination centres, once fully operational, will go a long way in curtailing deaths arising from ineffective EMS after road crashes.



**27 PEOPLE
DIE EACH
DAY FROM
ROAD
TRAFFIC
INJURIES**