

## Review of Eastern Ontario Paramedic Services “Situational Overview” – Key Messages

### **Background**

The Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus (EOWC) is an incorporated not-for-profit organization comprised of the heads of Council of eleven (11) Counties and two (2) single-tier municipalities in Eastern Ontario. The EOWC works to support and advocate on behalf of the 750,000 taxpayers across rural Eastern Ontario, living within the 13 upper-tier and single-tier municipalities and 90 local municipalities in the region.

The EOWC has a long history of working collaboratively with the Province of Ontario in order to promote shared interests. The EOWC prides itself on its relationship with government, and furthermore, its ability to speak with a unified voice and bring together the entire region of Eastern Ontario at one table. By doing so, we gather the necessary research and provide a portrait of the “situation on the ground,” and help better inform the provincial ministries of the current municipal realities.

In order to be proactive and better positioned to inform provincial discussions on the review of public health care in Ontario, the EOWC commissioned a review of Eastern Ontario Paramedic Services. The primary focus of the review was “to perform an environmental scan of the existing paramedic services including five-year predictive forecasts”.

### **Key Findings**

Based on the review, the EOWC has concluded that governance changes are not the solution to improving Ontario's paramedic service. The following are key findings from the review that suggest three key areas on which the Province should focus:

#### **1. The dispatch system needs to be fixed**

We learned from the review that while over 68% of ambulance calls are dispatched as “highest urgency”, fewer than 26% are actually found to be of highest urgency when

paramedics arrive. Addressing this disparity in the dispatch system will help improve and ensure that the deployment of resources meets actual need.

## **2. Hospital offload delays must be addressed**

We learned from the review that, despite an overall decline in Emergency Department visits at hospitals, the time spent by Eastern Ontario paramedics in hospital offload delay is increasing annually. In Eastern Ontario alone, time lost to hospital offload delay averages 4.83 ambulance shifts per day, at an annual cost of approximately \$4.8 million.

## **3. Community Paramedicine programs must be funded**

We also learned from the review that while seniors age 65+ account for only 22.8% of the population, they generate 55% of all ambulance responses. With an aging demographic, this statistic is anticipated to increase, not decrease, with seniors age 65+ expected to reach 26.9% of the population by 2024, thus substantially increasing paramedic service resourcing needs.

Ontario's Aging at Home Strategy (2010) was intended to provide seniors with a continuum of community-based services that would allow them to live independently in their own homes and reduce the number of patients occupying acute care beds in hospitals. However, funding for the strategy did not extend to paramedic services, for which demand has substantially increased since the strategy's implementation.

Community paramedicine programs that exist in the province have already been shown to reduce hospital visits by seniors. It is suggested that properly funded community paramedicine programs will allow the province to use existing well-trained paramedic resources to reduce hospital visits and calls for emergency service.

## **Conclusion**

The EOWC is a strong and reputable municipal partner. We will continue to work collaboratively with the Province to inform the review of public health care in Ontario, including paramedic services. The EOWC strives to provide front-line insight and deliver well-researched solutions. We look forward to sharing best practices and recommendations with the Province during the renewed consultations on strengthening and modernizing public health and emergency health services in Ontario. The EOWC municipalities have managed and substantially funded paramedic services effectively and efficiently for almost 20 years which is why the review of Paramedic Services is a key priority for the EOWC. The EOWC has a vested interest in helping shape the future of paramedic services delivery in order to ensure the best possible care for Eastern Ontario residents.

## Additional Findings

- Many paramedic services in Eastern Ontario are innovative leaders in community paramedicine and other health care collaborations that improve health and reduce the demand and associated costs on the health care system overall.
- EOWC municipalities have managed and substantially funded paramedic services effectively and efficiently for almost 20 years and have a vested interest in helping to shape the future of paramedic services delivery.
- All EOWC paramedic services are fully compliant with provincial legislation, regulations, standards and principles for land ambulance services operating in Ontario.
- All paramedic services are responsive to local needs and integrated into the provincial health care system provide reasonable ambulance resourcing accessible to all residents. They provide patient transport between health care facilities for medically essential services.
- All paramedic services operate seamlessly across jurisdictions as directed by provincially managed Central Ambulance Communication Centre (CACC).
- With the help of community partners, EOWC paramedic services provide health care support to elderly and vulnerable residents.
- Most paramedic services provide care at both primary and advanced life support levels. All have Implemented Response Time Performance Plans (RTPP) by Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale (CTAS).
- All paramedic services perform well relative to targets. They operate from either fixed stations or central fleet centre.
- All paramedic services use fluid deployment to maintain emergency coverage. They proactively collaborate with one-another and with peers across the country, to maintain leading edge service design, and to coordinate decision-making and delivery.
- All paramedic services provide aspects of community paramedicine programs, formally and informally. Many via provincially funded programs including patient referrals and home visits.
- These services have improved overall patient wellness and reduced 911 calls and repeat hospital admissions.
- All EOWC paramedic services have arrangements for fire department medical support. Most are in the form of tiered response agreements