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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health

### **B.C. acting to improve ambulance response times, support emergency workers**

VICTORIA – The Province is strengthening B.C.’s ambulance system to ensure it is faster and more responsive to British Columbians, a better place to work for paramedics and dispatchers, and able to rapidly meet changing demands and needs through focused and direct leadership.

“When we call for help, we need to know that help is on the way and that it will arrive quickly. Immediate action on operations, as well as stronger leadership and increased investment at BC Emergency Health Services, will deliver a more effective ambulance service for patients and families who depend on it. Better support for paramedics and dispatchers will help them do the vital work we count on every day,” said Health Minister Adrian Dix.

To ensure direct leadership of ambulance services, Dix is reconstituting the BC Emergency Health Services board of directors to focus solely on ambulance services. It will be directly accountable to the health minister with a clear mandate to ensure better service for patients and families who rely on the services — and better supports for workers who deliver the service.

Dix has appointed Jim Chu, former chief constable of the Vancouver Police Department, to chair the board.

“Jim Chu has extensive experience leading front-line emergency services in British Columbia. I am confident he will provide the focused governance leadership BC Emergency Services needs to be an effective and high performing ambulance service,” Dix said.

“I am enthusiastic to bring what I have learned from my time as chief constable of the Vancouver Police Department to this important role. I look forward to working together with the Ministry of Health, BC Emergency Health Services management, paramedics and dispatchers to ensure the ambulance service provides timely and exceptional help for British Columbians, and that it’s an outstanding employer for workers,” Chu said.

Darren Entwistle, President and CEO of Telus, will serve as a special advisor to the board.

As well, Minister Dix has directed that BC Emergency Health Services now be led by a Chief Ambulance Officer responsible for the day-to-day management of the BC Ambulance Service.

Dix has appointed Leanne Heppell to serve as B.C.’s new Chief Ambulance Officer on an interim basis. She is a trained clinical nurse specialist currently service as Chief Operating Officer Acute Care and Chief of Professional Practice and Nursing at Providence Health Care, and with 20

years' experience of senior leadership at Vancouver Coastal Health, Fraser Health and the BC Ambulance Service.

The Province is also acting immediately to reinforce ambulance operations by providing funding for:

- 85 new full-time paramedics
- 30 full-time dispatchers
- 22 new ambulances
- Converting 22 rural ambulance stations to 24/7 ALPHA stations to enhance ambulance coverage for these communities, starting with six conversions in October 2021, and plans for up to 16 other stations by October 2021.

To get paramedics and ambulances back on the road to respond to patient calls more quickly, the Province is also directing health authorities to add additional staff to receive patients and care for them when they arrive at emergency departments.

The Province is also taking Immediate action to support workers. That includes a direction that BC Emergency Health Services to contract a team of mental health and wellness professionals to work directly with dispatch staff and paramedics to address chronic stress, fatigue and support wellness among staff (including access to trauma-informed therapy).

The new board chair, working with the BC Emergency Health Services Board and Chief Ambulance Officer, will ensure the BC Ambulance Service has the vision and strategy to secure its renewal, and will present the approach to the Health Minister for consideration of additional action for 2022/23 and beyond.

To ensure British Columbians who call for help get the quickest and best possible emergency health response, the Province will return to the pre-COVID-19 first-responder dispatching practices for 911. The Province is also directing the Emergency Medical Assistants Management Licensing Board to examine expanding firefighters' scope of practice. The deadline for recommendations will be September 6, 2021.

These measures will benefit from continued collaboration between the BC Emergency Health Services and the Ambulance Paramedics of BC. They are working together to identify a range of measures to address employee wellness, operational performance, workload, response times, recruitment and retention, and public engagement. The Province recognizes the importance of this work and strongly supports this constructive and cooperative approach.

The measures announced today build on the Government's record of investment in provincial ambulance services. Since 2017, the BC Emergency Health Services annual budget has increased from \$424.25 million to \$559.12 million a year, doubling the average annual spending increases compared to the previous year.

This has meant more paramedics, more dispatchers, and more ambulances on the road. Between 2017 and 2019, BC added 115 paramedic positions to support direct patient care, improve service and response times, and modernize dispatch operations. Since January 2021, 271 paramedics have been hired by BC Emergency Health Services.

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## Backgrounder

### Biographies

#### **Biography of Jim Chu**

Jim Chu currently is senior Vice President with the Aquilini Group. He joined Aquilini after he retired from the Vancouver Police Department in May 2015 where he served 36 years, including eight years as Chief Constable. He holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from Simon Fraser University and a Master of Business Administration from the University of British Columbia.

He was elected president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and served from 2012 to 2014. He has received an honorary doctorate from the Justice Institute of BC, an Outstanding Alumni award from Simon Fraser University, a Queen's Diamond Jubilee medal, and was invested into the Order of Merit of Police Services by the Governor General. He has previously served on the boards of the Streethome Foundation, the Justice Institute of BC, the Richmond Public Library, and TransLink.

#### **Biography of Leanne Heppell**

Leanne Heppell was appointed as Chief Operating Officer Acute Care & Chief of Professional Practice & Nursing at Providence Health Care in April 2015. Prior to this role, Leanne was Providence's Vice President, Patient Safety and Innovation; and Chief of Professional Practice and Nursing, having been appointed in May 2013. Leanne brings to her role over 20 years of senior leadership experience, including with Vancouver Coastal Health, Fraser Health and the BC Ambulance Service.

Heppell is a registered nurse with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of Victoria. Leanne graduated from UBC as a clinical nurse specialist in the Masters in nursing program, and completed a Masters in Leadership from Royal Roads University in 2003. She is also an academic supervisor of leadership studies at Royal Roads University. She completed a Doctorate of Business Administration in 2016.