

# BCEHS, Ambulance Paramedics and Dispatchers

Actions to Further Strengthen the Capacity of the BC Ambulance Service and Support Staff

July 14, 2021

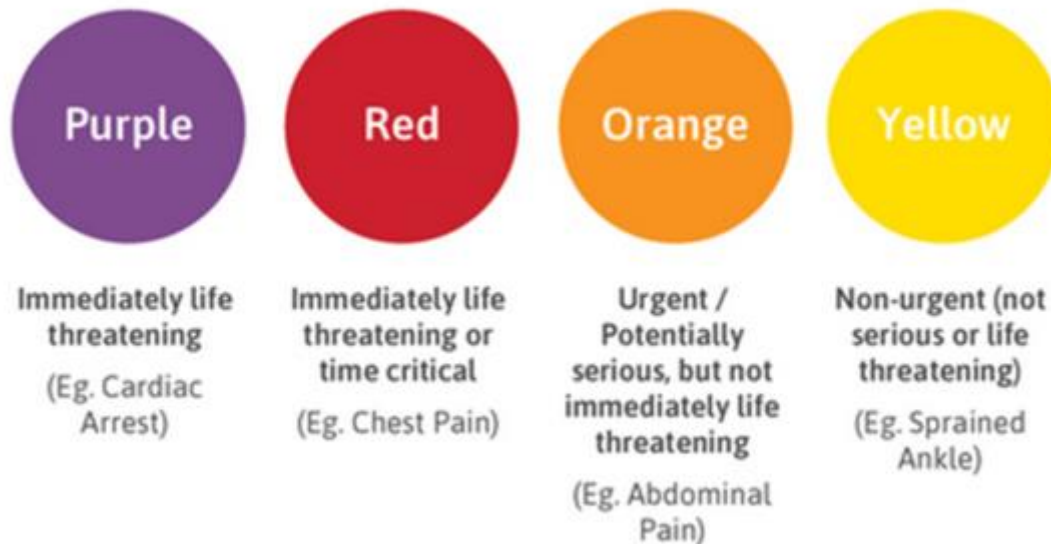


Ministry of  
Health

# Background

- The BC Government is strongly committed to an effective and high performing ambulance services.
- Government has made significant investments in BCEHS. Over the last four years the budget for BCEHS has increased by 31.8%.
- As the provincial restrictions relaxed as part of the COVID-19 restart plan, BCEHS has experienced significant increases in demand. This demand escalated with a recent heatwave. This is on a base level of sustained demand from the ongoing overdose emergency.

# Context – Call Types



- There is an increasing demand across the Medical Priority Dispatch events over the last three years.
- Continuing sustained year over year growth in the highest to high acuity calls (purple, red and orange events).
- The yellow events or moderate acuity represent a large volume of calls and have remained constant over the three years.

# Event Volumes and Response Times

- BCEHS has been reporting median response times which have generally been maintained in metro areas, however when looked at using the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile (this will be the new requirement for reporting going forward), there are longer response times than the 9 minute median target in metro for the most critical events
- Events with the largest increases (Q1-Q2 2021 vs Q1-Q2 2019):
  - Overdose / Poisoning (Ingestion) (28% increase; 3,530 increase in events)
  - Chest Pain (Non-Traumatic) (11% increase; 2,136 increase in events)
  - Abdominal Pain (14% increase, 1,174 increase in events)
  - Heart Problems / AICD (24% increase; 1,068 increase in events)

# Time Waiting for Patient Transfer at Emergency Departments

- The amount of time ambulances are unable to leave emergency departments and respond to 911 calls is also increasing and contributing to extended response times.

- Based on the continued sustained pressure on the BC Ambulance through increased volumes of calls and events the Minister of Health is directing that the BCEHS to focus on two specific goals:
  - Provide timely and exceptional service to British Columbian's when and where they need ambulance services
  - Be an outstanding employer in supporting the wellness of call takers, dispatch, and paramedic staff

# Governance and Leadership

- The appointment of a new chair and reconstituted board of BCEHS that is focused solely on ambulance services and its staff accountable directly to the Minister of Health focused on getting meaningful results linked to the two goals.
- The appointment of a new senior executive VP as the Chief Emergency Health Services Officer reporting to the BCEHS board and a member of the senior executive team of PHSA.
- The Chief Emergency Health Services Officer will be solely focused on providing senior executive leadership for the BC Emergency Health Services and the achievement of the two goals working collaboratively with the BC Emergency Health Services senior management team, ambulance paramedics, and the ambulance union leadership.



# Increased Service Capacity

- A series of immediate actions to strengthen ambulance operations focused on increasing the capacity of dispatch and paramedics to respond quickly to urgent patient calls:
  - The Ministry of Health will make available budget resources and direct BCEHS to hire an additional 30 full-time dispatchers and 85 full-time paramedics for Metro Vancouver/Fraser Valley regions beyond hiring already planned for 2020/21.
  - The Ministry of Health will direct BCEHS to bring forward an assessment, recommendations, and an action plan to the Minister by the end of September on the conversion of up to 22 pre-hospital SOC stations to 24/7 ALPHA stations to enhance ambulance coverage for these communities: Burns Lake, Vanderhoof, Fernie, Kimberley, Golden, Revelstoke, Fort St James, Ashcroft, Princeton, Keremeos, Bowser, Pemberton, Sicamous, Lillooet, Peachland, Chetwynd, Houston, Cumberland, Barriere, Fort Nelson, Clearwater, Port McNeil. The plan will set out timelines and prioritization for the conversion starting with six communities October 1 and with completion of all recommended conversions by June 30, 2022.
  - The Ministry of Health will direct health authorities to provide additional and appropriate staff available to receive and care for patients before they can be formally admitted to the Emergency Department, to reduce hand-over times for paramedics and get paramedics and ambulances back on the road to respond to patient calls.
  - The Ministry of Health will provide funding and direct BCEHS to purchase an additional 22 ambulances for the Metro Vancouver/Fraser regions.

# Focused Increase on Permanent Staff

Planned Increases to BCEHS Staffing	Full-Time Employees	Regular Part-Time Employees
<b>Current Staffing as @ June 4, 2021<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>1,471</b>	<b>113</b>
Positions currently in active recruitment - Collective Agreement <sup>2</sup>	152	170
Rural, Remote Indigenous Framework Sustainment Project underway <sup>3</sup>	275	
Increased service capacity to Metro/Large Urban <sup>4</sup>	115	
<b>Planned Increase in CUPE paramedic and dispatch positions by end of FY2021/22<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>542</b>	<b>170</b>
<i>% Change from Current Staffing</i>	<i>37%</i>	<i>150%</i>

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Current staffing represents the total number of employees on record (as of June 4, 2021). The table excludes ~1,500 casual positions to avoid double counting - given ongoing work to convert casual to full-time employment.

<sup>2</sup> Includes positions that are actively under recruitment (as of July 12, 2021): 152 full-time positions (FOX conversions); 170 regular part-time positions (Scheduled on Call implementation).

<sup>3</sup> The Rural, Remote Indigenous Framework is based on 275 new FT staff positions (i.e., to staff 55 ground ambulances).

<sup>4</sup> Includes 85 new paramedic positions predominately within Vancouver and Fraser Valley with additional staff in large urban communities across the province + 30 call taker/dispatch positions.

<sup>5</sup> Includes positions in active or anticipated recruitment status as of July 2021. Excludes completed recruitment activities under the collective agreement.

# Addressing Employee Wellness

- The Ministry of Health will work with BCEHS and the union leadership to take immediate action to better support employee wellness.
- The Ministry of Health will provide funding to contract a team of mental health and wellness professionals to work directly with dispatch staff and paramedics to address chronic stress, fatigue and to support wellness among staff (including access to trauma informed therapy).

# Additional Steps

- The Minister also recognizes and strongly supports the collaborative work of BCEHS and the Ambulance Paramedics of BC union leadership over the past several days. They have identified a range of areas to work collaboratively to improve service and better support dispatch and paramedic staff.
- They have identified a range of areas to work collaboratively focused on employee wellness; operations, workload, and response times; recruitment and retention; building public confidence and understanding of ambulance services

# Additional Steps

- The Minister is directing the Emergency Medical Assistants Management Licensing Board (EMALB) to provide recommendations by September 6 to the Minister for scope of practice changes that will allow firefighters to use an expanded diagnostic skill set to allow for more effective patient assessments for timely information updates for incoming paramedics and the use of expanded skill sets for immediate mitigation of life-threatening medical scenarios in advance of the arrival of paramedics. This will provide the basis for consultation with municipalities and BCEHS on the implementation of Collaboration Agreements in response of the respective service to calls.
- In addition, there will be a return to the pre-COVID-19 pandemic first responder dispatching practices for 9-1-1 which will also alleviate operational pressures caused by the sharp increase in 911 call volumes.

# Additional Steps

- Finally, the Minister of Health has asked the new Board Chair, working with the BCEHS Board and Chief Ambulance Officer, management and staff, to create a refreshed vision and go-forward strategy for the BC Ambulance Service and bring this back to the Health Minister for consideration of additional actions for 2022/23 forward.