

The Regional Municipality of York

Regional Council
Community and Health Services
February 27, 2020

Report of the Commissioner of Community and Health Services

Response to Ontario Ministry of Health's Discussion Paper on Emergency Health Services Modernization

1. Recommendations

1. Council approve Attachment 1 as York Region's response to the Ontario Ministry of Health's Discussion Paper on Emergency Health Services Modernization.
2. The Regional Clerk circulate the Region's response to the following: Ministry of Health, Members of Provincial Parliament in York Region, Clerks of the nine local municipalities, Southlake Community Ontario Health Team, Eastern York Region and North Durham Ontario Health Team, Mackenzie Health Hospital, Association of Municipalities of Ontario, Ontario Association of Paramedic Chiefs and CUPE 905 — York Region Unit.

2. Summary

This report seeks Council approval of the Region's proposed response (Attachment 1) to the Ministry of Health's (Ministry) [Discussion Paper: Emergency Health Services Modernization](#), which seeks feedback on how to improve emergency health services in Ontario communities.

Key Points:

- York Region supports the Ministry's actions to modernize emergency health services, which align with previous Council and staff positions to modernize dispatch and changes to the *Ambulance Act* and *Health Insurance Act*
- York Region's overarching advice to the Ministry is to accelerate modernization of dispatch technologies to enable efficient use of paramedic resources
- Other advice for the Ministry includes the following:
 - Fully integrate Paramedic Services into the health care system for improved coordination and better patient outcomes
 - Partner with hospitals and enable new models of care that will reduce offload delays, which in turn will improve ambulance availability
 - Scale up innovative programs developed by the Region to meet resident needs, decrease 9-1-1 calls and reduce emergency department visits

- Build the knowledge and capacity of Paramedic Services to improve health equity and access to service
- Maintain the current municipal governance model for emergency health services, provide funding at 50% of actual operating costs and provide funding for capital costs
- These actions will enable more efficient use of paramedic resources, help patients receive the right care in the most appropriate settings, support the Region to achieve its vision of healthy communities and contribute to ending hallway health care

3. Background

The Province is transforming the health care system to improve the patient experience, strengthen local services and end hallway health care. In [October 2019](#), the Province of Ontario appointed Jim Pine, Chief Administrative Officer of Hastings County, as the Provincial Advisor to lead province-wide consultation on emergency health services modernization. In November 2019, the Ministry launched its consultation by releasing a [Discussion Paper: Emergency Health Services Modernization](#), inviting stakeholders to provide advice on the following five well-established challenges affecting delivery of critical emergency health services.

1. Outdated dispatch technologies
2. Lengthy ambulance offload times and delays in transporting medically-stable patients
3. Lack of coordination among emergency health service system partners
4. Need for innovative models that improve care
5. Health equity, or access to services across regions and communities

The Region was invited to a Provincial consultation scheduled for January 28, 2020, which was postponed by the Ministry on January 27, 2020 to enable readiness planning for the COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019). At this time a new date has not been set for the consultation.

In [January 2020](#), staff presented and received feedback at Committee of the Whole on the proposed advice to be shared with the Ministry.

4. Analysis

Staff's response is grounded in Paramedic Services' experience

The proposed response (Attachment 1) provides background on York Region Paramedic Services, including its integration within the Region, community partnerships and innovative programs to meet community needs, populations served and key performance outcomes achieved.

The Discussion Paper is organized around five key challenges identified by the Ministry, and the Region's response follows the same format. For each challenge, the Region's response describes existing experiences, mitigation strategies and innovations implemented to address the challenge and the Region's advice for positive system change. The response is not limited to questions in the Discussion Paper; it also includes recommendations regarding governance, purchasing and funding.

The Region supports modernization of emergency health services

The need for modernizing emergency health services and addressing the many challenges identified in the Discussion Paper has been discussed for years in the sector. The Region has advocated for modernized dispatch technologies since 2002 and supports the Ministry's direction, but seeks faster implementation.

In early 2018, the Ministry began investing in new medical dispatch technologies and York Region Paramedic Services was selected to test these technologies. The Region worked with the Ministry to develop and test a mobile data application connecting dispatch directly to the Region's ambulances. This technology is now being used in all York Regional ambulances. It provides paramedics with automatic information updates, real time data on patient condition and navigation to 9-1-1 responses, saving time and reducing errors.

The Region supports the Ministry's positioning of Paramedic Services as part of the health care system, as a provider of "out-of-hospital" care. This includes care provided in a patient's home or in clinics, much like the care already provided through the Region's Community Paramedicine program.

Staff's response includes recommendations for governance, procurement and funding – areas not identified in the Discussion Paper

In January 2000, Council assumed responsibility for delivery of land ambulance services in the Region. Since that time, Council has made significant investments and improvements to Paramedic Services including the following:

- Providing annual funding to enable innovation and efficiencies
- Partnering with local hospitals to improve transfer of care times
- Constructing and paying for new stations and equipment
- Approving/setting response times
- Advocating to the province for improvements to the emergency health services system

Working within a municipal corporation, York Region Paramedic Services benefits from the supports it receives from the Region's corporate program areas such as Information Technology, Legal, Risk, Finance, Long-Term Planning, Procurement, Property Services, Communications, Emergency Management and Human Resources. This integration allows Paramedic Services to benefit from economies of scale, to optimize business processes and to have ready access to specialized corporate resources.

Being integrated within the Region makes collaborative emergency planning and training initiatives between York Region Paramedic Services, York Regional Police and local fire departments more efficient. Together they each have a coordinating role in the Region's Emergency Operations Centre if a large-scale emergency event occurs.

The Ministry should maintain the municipal governance model and current service boundaries, so York Region Paramedic Services can continue to leverage the benefits of integrated supports and partnerships

The Province is interested in the potential of cooperative procurement for Paramedic Services across the province to drive efficiencies. Currently there a range of products that are used across Paramedic Services in Ontario, and many have unique technology requirements. The benefits of co-operative procurement would first require cooperative work to determine what the best equipment and technology would be across the system, and York Region staff support working with the Province and our partners to do this analysis.

Lastly, it is recommended that the Ministry provide 50% funding for actual operating costs, discussed in more detail below in the Financial section of this report.

Staff's response closely aligns with feedback provided by the Ontario Association of Paramedic Chiefs and Association of Municipalities Ontario

In January 2020, the Ontario Association of Paramedic Chiefs released two draft documents to members summarizing their position for the Discussion Paper, which closely align with positions and advice in the Region's response.

Similarly, York Region's response supports recommendations provided by the Association of Municipalities Ontario (AMO) to the Province in [October 2019](#) regarding the government's planned changes for emergency health services to end hallway health care, and its formal response released on [February 10, 2020](#).

5. Financial

Provincial funding for Paramedic Services is not keeping pace with the cost of delivering services in a growing Region

Paramedics Services is funded through provincial and municipal contributions. The Land Ambulance Service Grant from the province funds up to 50% of eligible paramedic service costs with the remainder funded by the municipality.

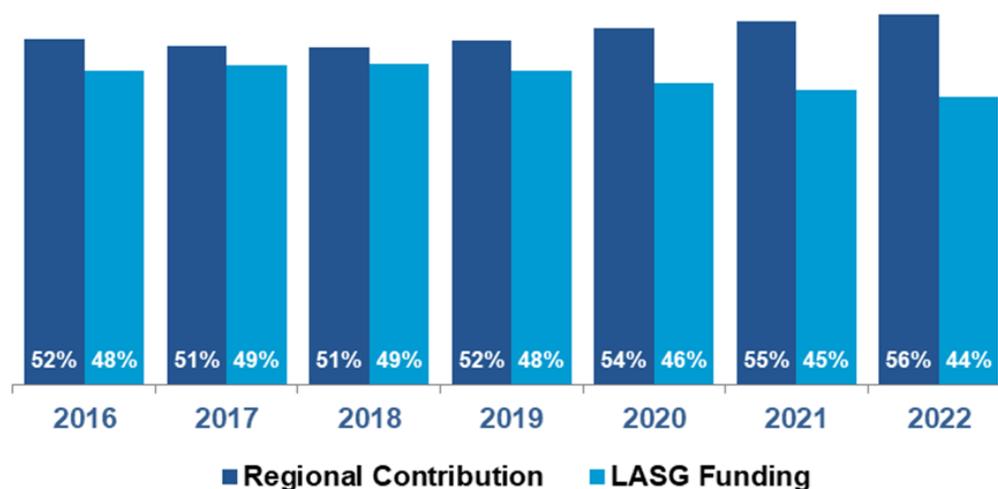
Over the last five years, funding increases from the Province, through the Land Ambulance Services Grant, have ranged from 4.7% to 9.1%, averaging 6.3% annually. These increases have allowed for optimal resourcing to meet response targets mandated by the Province and Regional Council within a rapidly growing Region. However, in 2019, provincial funding increased by only 2.6%. It is anticipated annual increases will continue to remain near this level.

The Province should maintain funding at 50% of actual operating costs, provide capital costs and find savings through efficiencies and innovations

For 2020, the Council-approved operating budget for Paramedic Services is \$88.1 million gross and \$47.9 million net, exclusive of corporate and departmental support costs estimated at \$4 million.

The funding forecasted under the Land Ambulance Services Grant for 2020 is \$42.4 million. As demonstrated in Figure 1, despite the Land Ambulance Services Grant 50/50 cost share formula, provincial funding for eligible paramedic service costs is expected to be an estimated 46% in 2020 and only 44% by 2022 as operational growth will outpace expected Land Ambulance Services Grant increases.

Figure 1
Shares of Paramedic Services Operating Funding Contributions, 2016 to 2022



The Region's response requests the Province commit to funding 50% of actual operating costs, which would restore the 50:50 cost share formula and annual increases consistent with funding contributions received prior to 2019.

The Ministry should also provide upfront capital costs to support capital projects such as renovations to existing stations and building new ones, purchasing medical equipment such as stretchers, and purchasing new ambulances and other emergency response vehicles. This recommendation is consistent with other healthcare providers that receive capital funding support, such as the hospital and community services sectors. Between 2005 and 2019, York Region invested \$49.3M in capital funding for paramedic services.

The Dedicated Offload Nurse Program reduces offload times at hospitals, and should be continued

The Dedicated Offload Nurse Program was created in 2008 to 2009 to reduce ambulance offload times. This program provides provincial funding for municipalities to have dedicated nurses in emergency departments to receive low-acuity patients brought by ambulance. Having these nurses in the Region's three hospitals helps to reduce offload times and

enables paramedics to respond to other 9-1-1- calls rather than waiting in emergency rooms. In 2019, a \$1.2 million provincial investment in the Dedicated Offload Nurse Program in York Region saved an estimated 15,300 hours in ambulance time (at a value of approximately \$3.9 million). By making offload faster, paramedic resources returned to the community have helped in meeting legislative response times and responding to growth. Given this strong business case, the Region recommends the Province continue to fund this program.

6. Local Impact

Paramedic Services is an essential service available for everyone in York Region. The York Region Paramedic Services 10-Year Resources and Facilities' Master Plan identifies optimal station locations, staffing and vehicle requirements to meet the needs of the Region's growing population. Paramedic Services also has a Deployment and Response Time Plan to maintain appropriate coverage in all areas relative to demand.

Having Paramedic Services embedded with other Regional services enables efficiencies in service delivery, cost management and seamless customer service. Through the Community Paramedicine's innovative programs, residents receive referrals to health care and social supports to meet their needs, which often help to prevent calls to 9-1-1 and reduce visits to local emergency departments.

7. Conclusion

The Ministry of Health's consultation is an important opportunity for the Region to influence the path forward for modernizing emergency health services across the Province. The Region supports the Ministry's proposed direction to modernize emergency health services and through its response to the Province, offers advice to the Ministry on how to achieve this.

For more information on this report, please contact Lisa Gonsalves, General Manager, Paramedic and Seniors Services, at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 72090. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

Recommended by: **Katherine Chislett**
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

Approved for Submission: **Bruce Macgregor**
Chief Administrative Officer

February 14, 2020
Attachment (1)
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