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To: Committee of the Whole  
Meeting Date: November 9, 2023  
From: Katherine Chislett  
Commissioner of Community and Health Services  
Re: **Update: Prevention and Mitigation of External Violence Towards York Region Paramedics**

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This memorandum provides Council with an update on current measures and advocacy efforts taken to address the impacts of external violence towards paramedics while on duty, since the last report to Council in [September 2021](#).

**External violence against paramedics remains an issue, with the number of reported cases increasing since last reported to Council**

Paramedic exposure to any form of violence (e.g., verbal abuse, physical assault, threats to physical safety and/or sexual harassment), remains a serious concern in York Region. As reported to Council in [September 2021](#), there were 18 cases of violence reported by paramedics on the job in 2020. Reported incidents of violence increased to 41 cases in 2021, 44 cases in 2022 and 60 cases as of September 12, 2023. These incidents of violence occur at all hours and areas of York Region, on various call types.

Table 1 below illustrates that verbal abuse, physical threats and physical assault are the most commonly reported. Efforts to encourage reporting have led to a wider range of violent incidents being reported (such as spitting, intimidation, racial slurs). Regardless of the severity, each individual's experience can lead to personal trauma and requires appropriate supports so they feel safe and remain at work.

**Table 1**  
**Number of Reported Incidents, 2021 - 2023**

Incident Type	2021	2022	2023*
Verbal Abuse	13	10	17
Physical Threat	16	8	9

Incident Type	2021	2022	2023*
Physical Assault	5	16	23
Racism	2	0	3
Intimidation	0	4	6
Sexual Harassment	4	4	1
Sexual Assault	1	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>60</b>

\* January 1 to September 12, 2023

## Paramedics Services continues to implement a multi-step approach to address external violence

Improved awareness has led to increased reporting of violence against paramedics. This has enabled better follow-up and support for staff. One of the first steps to address the issue was to change the culture of acceptance of violence as an inherent “part of the job” to a culture of zero tolerance. This shift in mindset is a pivotal move towards positive change.

The following actions are currently underway to prevent and mitigate violence against paramedics.

- **Zero Tolerance Position Statement:** The Position Statement empowers staff and reinforces that violence will not be tolerated. A staff-level communication campaign was implemented with Zero Tolerance stickers placed in ambulances outlining steps staff can take if they experience violence and the type of support they can expect from their leaders.
- In 2024, a public awareness campaign on violence towards paramedics will be launched, educating on the prevalence and negative effects and the Region’s zero tolerance position.
- **Threat Management Training:** 575 paramedics and supporting staff received a first in province Threat Management Training on de-escalation, disengagement, and conflict resolution techniques, emphasizing situational awareness. The training enhances their understanding of risks and provides them with practical and situation-based skills for both physical and psychological safety, acknowledging that violent incidents can occur anywhere and anytime in the Region.

- York Region Paramedic Services leads the province in delivering this program, assisting other services, like the Region of Durham, Peel Region and County of Simcoe Paramedic Services, in developing similar training programs.
- **New Safety Equipment:** In 2024, paramedics will receive additional safety devices such as soft restraints and spit hoods, aligning with Ministry of Health standards, to protect against physical assault. Staff will receive training that supports safe, equitable, diverse and inclusive use for patients and providers.

The following actions are underway to monitor incidents and support planning and decision making:

- **New Reporting Tool:** A user-friendly, accessible reporting tool for paramedics to report incidents of violence using a QR code. The tool is compliant with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and enhances incident tracking, includes hazard flagging (reporting an address of a patient known for violence), and provides timely access to post-incident supports and resources for staff.
- **Post-incident Supports:** Since 2021, incidents of violence have resulted in at least nine occurrences of lost staff time ranging from days to months or longer. Ongoing refinement of supports, including individualized follow-up, aims to mitigate lost time and ensure staff feel safe at work. Ongoing evaluation of these supports will be conducted to understand how they contribute to staff feeling safe at work and mitigate lost time due to staff absenteeism and workplace safety and insurance board claims. Leaders also provide assistance filing police reports to help deter future incidents and to protect health and safety.
- **Collaboration Activities:** Paramedic Services partners with York Region Police to improve communication between police and ambulance dispatch; provide more relevant scene information; plan threat management training; and clarify roles and responsibilities. Paramedic Services is also working with other services to collectively build sector-wide awareness, emphasizing a culture of safety.

### **Survey results indicate that staff feel more equipped to deal with aggressive and/or violent patients after Threat Management Training**

Between January to March 2023, Paramedic Services surveyed staff members on their perspectives about external violence on the job prior to the Threat Management Training compared to after the training and the implementation of service improvements. Five hundred and nineteen staff participated (response rate of 93%). Of the 519 staff survey responses, results show that:

- On a scale of 1 to 10, 78% of staff reported 8 out of 10 or higher that it was important to have de-escalating and conflict resolution training, while only 14% of staff reported they had previously received formal training

- After the training, there was a 35% increase in the number of staff who reported 8 out of 10 or higher that they felt confident about dealing with an aggressive/violent patient, compared to before taking the training
- After the training, there was a 30% increase in the number of staff who reported 8 out of 10 or higher that they would report an incident of violence, compared to before taking the training
- 85% of staff reported 8 out of 10 or higher that they are likely to incorporate what they learned from the Threat Management Training into their everyday practice
- 68% of staff reported 8 out of 10 or higher that they felt safer about their job after taking the Threat Management Training

Overall results from the training demonstrate that staff have improved situational awareness, a better understanding of reportable incidents, and stronger skills in conflict resolution, crisis intervention, and de-escalation to support them on the job.

### **Across Ontario work is underway to enhance the health and safety of Paramedics**

More municipalities are taking steps to implement violence prevention initiatives including, the Region of Durham, Simcoe County, Peel Region and the City of Toronto. While each service is at different stages of implementation, initiatives ranged from improved incident reporting to establishing internal committees and providing threat management training. For example, in [July 2023](#), Peel Paramedics reported success in their public awareness campaign, introduced safety equipment and planned to implement threat management training in the future.

Additionally, in [February 2023](#), the Ontario government announced that it is establishing a paramedic services committee under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. This committee will develop resources to address the unique health and safety risks faced by paramedics. The new paramedic services committee will serve as a platform for experts, employers and workers to make recommendations regarding sector-specific health and safety issues, including recommending regulatory changes and actions on emerging issues and concerns. Paramedic Services has supported sector partners such as the Ontario Association of Paramedic Chiefs in advocating for the establishment of a provincial committee dedicated to paramedics.

### **Legislative changes that could enhance protections for paramedics are being considered**

In [October 2021](#), the Regional Chair, on behalf of Council, advocated to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada for amendments to the Criminal Code. These changes would: (1) provide protections for paramedics, and (2) ensure acts and threats of violence against on-duty paramedics are treated as an indictable criminal offence and carries appropriate sentencing for offenders, similar to existing protections in the Criminal Code for peace officers.

Two government bills addressing legislative change for paramedic protections are currently before Parliament:

- [Bill C-321 An Act to amend the Criminal Code \(assaults against health care professionals and first responders\)](#): The purpose of this Bill is to amend the Criminal Code to require a court to consider the fact that the victim of an assault is a health care professional or a first responder to be an aggravating circumstance for the purposes of sentencing. This Bill has passed second reading and is at consideration in committee in the House of Commons.
- [Bill C-345 An Act to protect firefighters, paramedics and other first responders](#): The purpose of this Bill is to amend the Criminal Code to provide that the murder of a first responder is automatically first degree murder, to increase the maximum term of imprisonment for the aggravated assault of certain persons, including first responders, and to create an offence of assaulting a first responder. This Bill has passed first reading.

If passed, this legislation would advance the prevention of external violence and improve protections for paramedics. Council's advocacy efforts are one of many important steps to making assault against paramedics carry stronger penalties that could deter the prevalence of violence against paramedics on the job. Staff will continue to monitor the status of these Bills.

### **York Region does not tolerate harassment and violence in the workplace and is committed to supporting and protecting its staff**

While maintaining a high-level of customer service is important, York Region has a zero tolerance stance on violence in the workplace as set out in the Region's Preventing and Managing Violence in the Workplace Policy. In addition, the health and well-being of our staff remains a top priority and any form of violence or harassment will not be tolerated. York Region is supporting staff by providing them with new tools to help them more effectively interact with difficult individuals and strategies to disengage from disrespectful and violent interactions in a professional manner.

### **York Region will continue to take proactive steps to increase public awareness and advocate for legislative change to shift the culture**

Since the Region began implementing a comprehensive strategy to change the culture of acceptance of violence, there has been a notable increase in staff reporting and speaking up about violence on the job, demonstrating progress. Paramedic Services will continue to implement preventative measures and seek opportunities for collaboration with the Federal government to sustain this momentum in eliminating external violence against paramedics.

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



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Katherine Chislett  
Commissioner of Community and Health Services



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Erin Mahoney  
Chief Administrative Officer

October 27, 2023  
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