



Office of the Chair

March 18, 2016

Resolution Number 2016-144

The Honourable Eric Hoskins
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
10th Floor, Hepburn Block, 80 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, ON M7A 2C4

Dear Minister:

Subject: Ambulance Communications and Dispatch Services Advocacy

I am writing to advise that Regional Council approved the following resolution at its meeting held on Thursday, February 25, 2016:

Resolution 2016-144:

That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care be requested to expedite the improvements related to the ambulance dispatch system by implementing the Medical Priority Dispatch System, as described in the report of the Commissioner of Health Services titled "Ambulance Communications and Dispatch Services Advocacy", across the Province of Ontario;

And further, that the Mississauga Dispatch Centre, given the call volumes, be given priority for implementation;

And further, that a copy of the subject report be sent to all designated delivery agents for land ambulance in Ontario, the boards and CEO's of the Local Health Integration Networks, the Community Care Access Centres and hospitals serving Peel, and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, and the Association of Paramedics Chiefs, for endorsement.

A copy of the subject report is enclosed.



Office of the Chair

Frank Dale
Regional Chair and Chief Executive Officer

FD:hg

c: Janette Smith, Commissioner, Health Services, Region of Peel

Also sent to:

James Price, Executive Director, Ontario Association of Paramedic Chiefs
Scott McLeod, Central West Local Health Integration Network, Chief Executive Officer
Bill MacLeod, Mississauga Halton Local Health Integration Network, Chief Executive Officer
Cathy Hecimovich, Central West Community Care Access Centre, Chief Executive Officer
Caroline Brereton, Mississauga Halton Community Care Access Centre, Chief Executive Officer
Pat Vanini, Executive Director, Association of Municipalities of Ontario
Michelle DiEmanuele, Trillium Health Partners, President and Chief Executive Officer
Matthew Anderson, William Osler Health System, President and Chief Executive Officer
Municipality of Chatham-Kent
Northumberland County
Lanark County
Elgin County
City of Thunder Bay
Brant County
Rama First Nation
Middlesex County
City of London
City of Hamilton
City of Niagara Falls
Oxford County
City of Ottawa
Halton Region
Town of Rainy River
City of Toronto
Bruce County
Beausoleil First Nation
York Region
Frontenac County
Essex County
Town of Cochrane



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Hastings County
Renfrew County
Grey County
Town of Parry Sound
City of Kawartha Lakes
City of Timiskaming Shores
City of Guelph
Norfolk County
Durham Region
Haldimand County
Huron County
ORNGE
Lambton County
Dufferin County
Perth County
City of Thunder Bay
City of Greater Sudbury
The District Municipality of Muskoka
Algoma Township
City of Cornwall
Manitoulin-Sudbury
Peterborough County
City of Sault Ste. Marie
City of Kenora
Simcoe County
County of Lennox Addington
United Counties of Leeds and Grenville
Haliburton County
United Counties of Prescott Russell

DATE: January 22, 2016

REPORT TITLE: **AMBULANCE COMMUNICATIONS AND DISPATCH SERVICES
ADVOCACY**

FROM: Janette Smith, Commissioner of Health Services

RECOMMENDATION

That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care be requested to expedite the improvements related to the ambulance dispatch system by implementing the Medical Priority Dispatch System, as described in the report of the Commissioner of Health Services titled “Ambulance Communications and Dispatch Services Advocacy”, across the Province of Ontario;

And further, that the Mississauga Dispatch Centre, given the call volumes, be given priority for implementation;

And further, that a copy of the subject report be sent to all designated delivery agents for land ambulance in Ontario, the boards and CEO’s of the Local Health Integration Networks, the Community Care Access Centres and hospitals serving Peel, and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, and the Association of Paramedics Chiefs, for endorsement.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Since 2010, the Region of Peel has taken leadership on Council-endorsed advocacy directed at the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to improve ambulance dispatch.
- Implementing a better dispatch system would allow Peel Regional Paramedic Services and Greater Toronto Area (GTA) partners to reassess how it allocates resources across its ambulance fleet, further improving response times for those calls prioritized as life-threatening, and ensuring patients receive care within a time period that more accurately reflects their condition.
- The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has stated its intention to improve ambulance dispatch by the year 2018; while this indicates progress, the Region will continue to advocate that improvements need to be expedited, and that the Mississauga Dispatch Centre, given the call volumes, should be a priority for implementation.

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DISCUSSION

1. Background

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is responsible for oversight of land ambulance in Ontario, sharing land ambulance operating costs on a 50:50 basis with municipalities. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care also funds all 22 ambulance dispatch centres in Ontario and directly operates approximately half of these dispatch centres, with four operated by municipalities. The provincially-operated Mississauga Central Ambulance Communication Centre (dispatch centre) deploys and coordinates ambulances operated by Peel Regional Paramedic Services and some neighbouring ambulance services. An overview of oversight and funding of paramedic services is provided in Appendix I.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's 'Action Plan for Health Care' that was released in 2012, and updated in 2015, set out the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's priorities for the health system, including implementing reforms to improve patient care, in part by ensuring patients receive the 'right care, at the right time, in the right place'. However, the Action Plans did not specify details for paramedic services, a contributor to the health system.

2. Findings

Pressures from population growth and a growing seniors population in Peel are increasing ambulance call volume by 4.7% annually, from a current 103,771 calls (2014) to an estimated 227,000 calls by 2031. Similar demands are being made on other parts of the health system, such as increases in hospital emergency department visits and growing demand for home and community care.

As reported to Council in 2010, in a report entitled "Greater Toronto Areas Ambulance Communication and Dispatch Services Review" the provincially-operated Mississauga dispatch centre uses technology that does not accurately prioritize ambulance calls. This continues to be true today as this dispatch centre, in 2014, dispatched 72 per cent of all calls as life-threatening (requiring lights and sirens response) while upon patient assessment, paramedics only transported about 20 per cent of these responses on a life-threatening basis to hospital as reported in the Paramedic Services 2014 Annual Performance Report. This is a problem, as continued over-prioritizing of emergency calls places increased demands on the system by assigning more ambulances to life-threatening emergency response than what is necessary. This can leave fewer or no ambulances to respond to new calls that are truly urgent. This issue has been identified in several external reports and has been reported to Regional Council over the past five years.

a) Review of Ambulance Dispatch

By way of history, the Region of Peel along with the Regions of Durham, Halton, and York, and the County of Simcoe commissioned a review of ambulance dispatch centres serving their municipalities. The Pomax review and findings (2009) were reported to, and endorsed by Regional Council on September 9, 2010 in the report titled "Greater Toronto Area Ambulance Communication and Dispatch Services Review". The Pomax report recommendations to improve ambulance dispatch included:

- Adopting patient triaging technology that more appropriately and accurately triages ambulance calls; and

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- Adopting communications and dispatch systems to provide real-time business intelligence about the location and call status of ambulances so that ambulance resources can be allocated more efficiently.

Additionally, in 2013 the Auditor General recommended that the province assess the effectiveness of the two communications dispatch protocols in use in Ontario, and adjust protocols to reduce over-prioritization of patients. Most recently, research directed by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, completed by the Sunnybrook Centre for Pre-Hospital Medicine, and reported in the 2015 Auditor General's report, concluded that the Medical Priority Dispatch System is the more accurate dispatch system. In dispatch centres where Medical Priority Dispatch System is used, approximately 40 per cent of calls are triaged as life-threatening (as opposed to 72 per cent in Peel). The Medical Priority Dispatch System is already used in dispatch centres operated by the City of Toronto and Niagara Region, and has enabled ambulance dispatch centres to build in options, such as diverting low-acuity 9-1-1 calls to Telehealth Ontario. The Mississauga dispatch centre operated by the province does not use Medical Priority Dispatch System.

Implementing Medical Priority Dispatch System in the Mississauga dispatch centre would allow Peel Regional Paramedic Services to reassess how it allocates resources across its ambulance fleet, further improving response times for those calls prioritized as life-threatening, and ensuring patients receive care within a time period that more accurately reflects their condition. Confirmation that Medical Priority Dispatch System is a more accurate system is promising. However, as reported in the Auditor General's report, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care reports that implementation of improvements will take up to three years to complete.

b) Regional Advocacy

In 2010, after endorsement of the Pomax recommendations, Regional Council directed the Regional Chair and senior staff to work with the province and GTA Regional Chairs and Warden to ensure the findings from the Pomax report were included in the provincial government's agenda. Since then, the Region and its GTA partners have been active in engaging the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care on the dispatch issue. Since 2010, the Region of Peel has led these advocacy efforts by engaging senior Ministry staff and the Minister of Health in meetings and briefings to outline the need for dispatch reform.

As a result of this advocacy, a Dispatch Working Group was formed by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care in 2014, whose membership included the Chief and Director of Peel Regional Paramedic Services. In 2015, the Dispatch Working Group provided a confidential report to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care which included recommendations to improve the dispatching of ambulance services and the prioritization of emergency calls.

In a letter to the Region, received in the Fall of 2015, Health Minister Hoskins indicated his Ministry's commitment to improve ambulance services. With respect to dispatch reform, he notes that any changes must be evidence-based and contribute to improving patient outcomes, financial sustainability and government priorities. However, as noted above, according to the Auditor General, the Ministry has indicated that it will take until late 2018 to plan and complete improvements and there has been no response to the Dispatch Working Group's recommendations.

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CONCLUSION

It is encouraging that the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has stated its intention to improve ambulance dispatch. While this indicates progress, the Region will continue to advocate that improvements need to be expedited and that the Mississauga Dispatch Centre, given the call volumes, should be a priority for implementation.

Improvements to ambulance dispatch will see better patient outcomes, and contribute to solutions which will help to enhance the overall health system, including hospital emergency department wait times and paramedic demands. This would ultimately provide the 'right care, at the right time, in the right place' thereby helping to fulfill the overall objectives of the Ministry's discussion paper, "Patients First: A Proposal to Strengthen Patient-Centred Health Care in Ontario."



Janette Smith, Commissioner of Health Services

Approved for Submission:



D. Szwarc, Chief Administrative Officer

APPENDICES

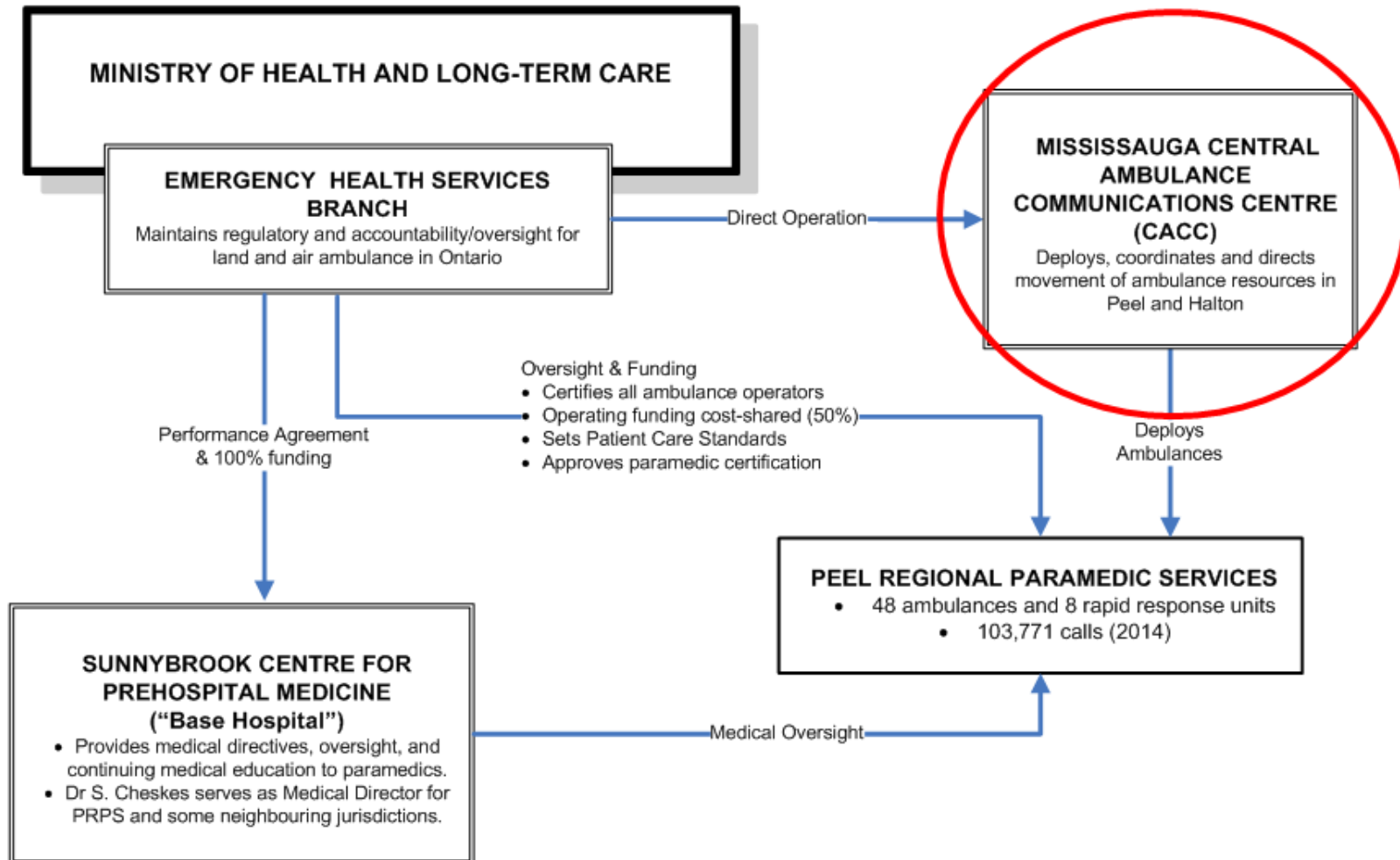
1. Appendix I – Oversight and Funding of Paramedic Services in Peel Region: A Region of Peel Perspective

For further information regarding this report, please contact Dawn Langtry, Strategic Policy, Planning and Initiatives Ext. 4138.

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Appendix I

OVERSIGHT AND FUNDING OF PARAMEDIC SERVICES IN PEEL REGION
A Region of Peel Perspective



May 2015