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## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release  
2021HLTH0057-001796  
Sept. 14, 2021

Ministry of Health

### **Province making progress strengthening ambulance system**

VICTORIA – The Province is strengthening its ambulance system with the largest hiring push in B.C.’s history in rural and remote locations.

In October, 24 ambulance stations will be converted from on-call paramedic staffing to 24/7 stations with eight full-time paramedics. This follows through and expands the commitment made when the BC Emergency Health Services (BCEHS) action plan was announced in July by Adrian Dix, Minister of Health, and Jim Chu, the new board chair for BCEHS.

Communities benefiting from the enhanced ambulance service are Lake Cowichan, Port McNeill, Tofino, Cumberland, Bowser, Pemberton, Ashcroft, Barriere, Keremeos, Lillooet, Princeton, Sicamous, Clearwater, Revelstoke, Peachland, Fernie, Golden, Kimberley, Burns Lake, Fort St. James, Houston, Vanderhoof, Chetwynd and Fort Nelson.

As well, 26 smaller stations moving to a scheduled on-call staffing model are getting more permanent, regular paramedic jobs, starting on Nov. 1.

Communities that will see this enhanced service are Alert Bay, Atlin, Bear Lake, Blue River, Cortes Island, Dease Lake, Edgewood, Elkford, Field, Gold Bridge, Granisle, Greenwood, Hudson’s Hope, New Denver, Port Alice, Port Clements, Riondel, Sayward, Seton Portage, Sointula, Southside, Stewart, Tahsis, Texada Island, Wells and Zeballos.

“When we call 911 for help, British Columbians need to feel confident that help is on the way and that it will arrive quickly,” said Dix. “The significant progress made by BC Emergency Health Services over the summer will ensure 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.”

Chu said: “Since I was appointed BCEHS board chair, I have been busy visiting with paramedics, dispatch staff, other BCEHS employees and union representatives, and meeting with our partners in emergency services. I have been going out in ambulances with paramedics and observing dispatch operations to get a better sense of the front-line work. This outreach is informing the work BCEHS is doing with the Ministry of Health as we develop a longer term, three-year action plan to make further improvements to patient services and to support employees.”

These service enhancements are the next part of a series of measures announced in July that will strengthen the provincial ambulance service and ensure a faster and more responsive system. These measures also include:

- hiring 85 new full-time paramedics in Vancouver, North Vancouver, Port Moody,

Burnaby, Surrey, Langley, Richmond, Abbotsford, Kamloops and Prince George plus additional positions assigned to serve metro areas;

- hiring 30 new full-time dispatchers;
- reconstituting the BCEHS board to focus solely on ambulance services; and
- establishing and appointing a new chief ambulance officer responsible for the day-to-day management of the BC Ambulance Service.

BCEHS, under the day-to-day leadership of Leanne Heppell, interim chief ambulance officer, has been working hard to roll out changes to its staffing model throughout the province, to improve services to patients and stabilize paramedic staffing, especially in rural and remote communities.

“We are on track with filling new paramedic and dispatch positions and I know this is going to create more stability in our staffing and improve our emergency medical response and our community paramedic services in rural and remote B.C. in particular,” said Heppell. “We are also working to make BCEHS a truly great employer where our employees are healthy and supported in their important work caring for patients.”

The hiring of the 85 new paramedics and 30 new dispatchers is underway. The positions are expected to be filled between October and December. This is in addition to 295 full-time and part-time paramedic positions posted by BCEHS in early July.

Further to this work, Heppell has been working with paramedic and dispatch leaders to ensure BCEHS is fully prepared for hotter weather and periods of high demand. Measures instituted to date include:

- ensuring flexibility in staffing and resource adjustments as needed;
- increased clinical support in BCEHS dispatch centres to help triage and manage calls;
- 24/7 manager support in dispatch to help with delays and escalation, and increased manager support for front-line paramedics in the field;
- introducing new low-acuity patient transport units (patient vans) for Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley to transport less urgent patients and ensure ambulances are available for high-acuity patient response; and
- working with health authorities to reduce ambulance turnaround times to help paramedics get back on the road and responding to calls faster.

This progress builds on the government’s record of investment in provincial ambulance services. Since 2017, the BCEHS annual budget has increased from \$424.25 million to \$559.12 million, doubling the average annual spending.

This means more paramedics, more dispatchers and more ambulances on the road. In addition, between 2017 and 2019, B.C. 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 BCEHS.

A backgrounder follows.

**Contact:**

Ministry of Health

Communications

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## BACKGROUND

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Ministry of Health

### **Update on ambulance operations in B.C.**

#### **85 new paramedic positions to enhance services in some of B.C.'s larger call-volume communities:**

These paramedic positions will be going to stations in:

- Vancouver (4);
- North Vancouver (4);
- Port Moody (8);
- Burnaby (8);
- Surrey (8);
- Langley (8);
- Richmond (8);
- Abbotsford (8);
- Kamloops (8); and
- and Prince George (8);
- plus 13 positions not assigned to specific stations that will serve metro areas.

#### **Conversion of rural stations to full-time staffing (known as Alpha)**

Starting Oct. 29, 2021, the following stations will be converted to 24/7 Alpha, meaning they will all have a complement of eight full-time paramedic positions. There will be an additional 177 positions associated with these conversions.

- Ashcroft
- Barriere
- Bowser
- Burns Lake
- Chetwynd
- Clearwater
- Cumberland
- Fernie
- Fort Nelson
- Fort St. James
- Golden
- Houston
- Keremeos
- Kimberley
- Lake Cowichan
- Lillooet

- Peachland
- Pemberton
- Port McNeill
- Princeton
- Revelstoke
- Sicamous
- Tofino
- Vanderhoof

As well, 26 smaller stations that have moved to, or will move to a Scheduled On Call staffing model are getting more permanent, regular paramedic jobs, starting on Nov. 1, 2021:

- Alert Bay
- Atlin
- Bear Lake
- Blue River
- Cortes Island
- Dease Lake
- Edgewood
- Elkford
- Field
- Gold Bridge
- Granisle
- Greenwood
- Hudson's Hope
- New Denver
- Port Alice
- Port Clements
- Riondel
- Sayward
- Seton Portage
- Sointula
- Southside
- Stewart
- Tahsis
- Texada Island
- Wells
- Zeballos

**BC Emergency Health Services funding:**

- The average spending increase for BCEHS over the past four years has been 7.95% annually – from \$424.25 million to \$559.141 million. This is over double the percentage from the previous four years.
- In contrast, the average spending percentage increase in the four years before that was less than half that – 3.65% annually – from \$379.77 million to \$424.25 million.

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