



ALBERTA
HEALTH

*Office of the Minister
MLA, Calgary-Acadia*

AR 176263

His Worship Naheed Nenshi
Mayor, City of Calgary
Historic City Hall
8069, 700 Macleod Trail S
Calgary AB T2P 2M5

Dear Mayor Nenshi:

Attached, you will find a letter from Alberta's Chief Paramedic Darren Sandbeck that I have sent to all Calgary MLAs and City Councillors detailing the rationale for the consolidation of EMS dispatch in Lethbridge, Red Deer, Wood Buffalo, and Calgary announced on August 4th.

As you know, the decision to consolidate EMS dispatch has been thoroughly examined and researched over the last decade and has been recommended by both the Ernst and Young AHS Review and by the Health Quality Council of Alberta.

The consolidation of most of Alberta's EMS dispatch happened nearly a decade ago. Right now, AHS dispatches ambulances for 60% of the population of Alberta, including large centres like Edmonton and Medicine Hat. EMS data shows that fears of service delays that stemmed from the first wave of consolidation were unfounded. AHS reports that EMS calls are answered within 10 seconds, 95% of the time and that no calls to 911 have ever been left waiting.

The first transition was successful and this one will be too. **There will be no delays in emergency response and Albertans who request EMS will notice no change.** A borderless and consolidated dispatch system will in fact provide better patient care.

Chief Paramedic Sandbeck has my full confidence, and I trust that he will not only maintain patient safety throughout this process, but improve it.

Sincerely,

Tyler Shandro, Q.C.
Minister of Health

Attachment: Letter from AHS

cc: Calgary Caucus
cc: Calgary City Council

On August 4, AHS announced its plan to consolidate EMS dispatch in Calgary, Lethbridge, Red Deer and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, aligning these centres with the rest of the province. I'd like to take this opportunity to further clarify the rationale for this decision, provide factual information and help you understand why we are consolidating EMS dispatch.

As always, patient safety is at the core of every decision we make at AHS. This includes our approach to dispatching of EMS services across Alberta. I can assure you that patient care and ambulance response times will not change as a result of this transition and 911 callers will notice absolutely no change. 911 calls that are currently being answered in the affected municipalities will be transitioned to either the Northern Communications Centre (NCC, in Peace River), the Southern Communications Centre (SCC, in Calgary) and Central Communications Centre (CCC, in Edmonton), as is the way calls are answered throughout the rest of the province.

The decision to consolidate EMS dispatch has been thoroughly researched, and analyzed and the municipalities that are the last to transition have been consulted repeatedly over the years since the rest of the province moved to EMS dispatch nearly a decade ago.

That change has been successful, and AHS currently already dispatches ambulances for approximately 60% of the population of Alberta, including other large centres like Edmonton and Medicine Hat. Callers to 911 will notice absolutely no change to service or delay in response.

This transition affects EMS 911 dispatch services only; all local municipal fire, police and Medical First Responders (MFR) will continue to be dispatched by the local municipalities. That means that if both a fire crew and EMS are dispatched, both will continue to arrive, even following this transition.

Implementing a province-wide EMS dispatch system will allow for better efficiency and better co-ordination of all resources, allowing EMS to send the nearest available ambulance to a patient regardless of any geographic boundaries. AHS EMS is well equipped to respond to any and all emergencies, and answers tens of thousands of 911 calls each month.

AHS will maintain the Computer Assisted Dispatch (CAD) interfaces with each of the communities to ensure seamless dispatching of Medical First Response (MFR) resources. Currently in Calgary, Red Deer, Lethbridge and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, when a 911 call comes in it is answered by a municipal call taker. If the caller is requesting an ambulance that call is transferred by the push of a button across the room to another EMS-trained dispatcher who is employed by the municipality. That employee uses AHS computer resources and EMS tools to dispatch an AHS ambulance. When the transition is complete instead of that call being transferred across a room to a municipal employee, the calls will be transferred with that same touch of a button to one of the EMS dispatch centres. This happens instantly.

What we have now is a duplicate system where municipal call takers are duplicating the work we already do for the rest of the province in our AHS dispatch centres and have done successfully for a decade. This duplication costs over \$6 million dollars every year; money which is better spent on patient care.

Conversations regarding the consolidation of EMS dispatch services have been ongoing, and in the past some municipalities were opposed, suggesting service delays, decreased levels of care and poor integration with other response agencies including medical first response. EMS research and data has shown this is not the case. In fact, our time-to-call-answer is measured by TELUS and is reported monthly. Calls to EMS are answered well over 95% of the time in less than 10 seconds, and AHS EMS has never had 911 calls waiting in a queue. In May 2020 alone, our EMS team managed over 23,000 911 events without any issues related to lost callers. You may have recently received correspondence from the Mayor of Calgary suggesting that a number of issues may arise out of this change. I'd like to take this opportunity to set the record straight on a number of these points:

- There are no additional steps in the dispatch process post consolidation. In 2016 AHS moved all EMS dispatch, including the municipal satellite centers, onto our provincial Computer Assisted Dispatch (CAD) program, telephone system and voice logging system. This also standardized all policies and procedures. These municipal employees are using AHS provided equipment. After consolidation, calls transferred from the municipal 911 operator will be transferred, with a single button to an AHS EMS dispatcher instead of a municipal employee.
- Medical First Response (MFR) will not change in the consolidated model. Since 2016 we have used CAD to CAD technology to communicate directly with the Fire program in Calgary and the other municipal centers. This means that if MFR is required – our CAD communicates electronically and instantly with their CAD. There is no transferring of the caller and callers do not need to “tell their story multiple times.”
- The recent example of the June 13 hailstorm in Calgary of the “all hands on deck” requirement of dispatch is actually quite interesting. What actually happened that day, and happens with other significant weather and natural events, is that the Calgary 911 system became quickly overwhelmed and stopped processing EMS 911 calls, simply transferring them to our Southern Communications Center to manage those EMS calls that were occurring at the time. This has happened in the past during the unusual September snowfall and winter ice storm events. In fact, AHS EMS routinely does anywhere from 7% to 30% of the EMS call volume of these municipal centers.
- The Mayor of Calgary continues to make statements that “People are going to die” and quote AHS as saying this is “no big deal as few people die in the first few minutes anyway.” This is untrue and disrespectful. AHS has never made such a statement. AHS is a dedicated and committed healthcare organization, to suggest that we would do anything to put patients at risk is absolutely untrue.
- The City of Calgary does not appear to have an ongoing vested interest in EMS. Calgary was the first municipality to signal intent to transition EMS to the provincial health system when the transition was announced by the then government in 2008. The City of Calgary does not own or

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control the EMS resources in their city, and they appear to not understand or appreciate opportunities afforded by a health based EMS dispatch model.

Other interesting facts:

- Every single 911 call to RCMP in this province is answered by a municipal 911 call answer center and transferred to one of a number of RCMP dispatch centers. This happens thousands of times a day provincially.
- All of the existing municipal dispatch centers hold contracts to provide dispatch services to other municipalities. As an example, Red Deer dispatches the Airdrie Fire Department, while Calgary dispatches the Canmore Fire Department. AHS EMS dispatches EMS successfully in both of these communities.

This dispatch transition is evidence based and supported by thorough research and investigation. Alberta Health first approved the province-wide consolidation plan in 2009 to help reduce the costs associated with running duplicate parallel contracted dispatch centres. In 2013, the Health Quality Council of Alberta also recommended consolidation. More recently consolidation was recommended by Ernst and Young during the recent AHS review.

AHS EMS looks forward to continued collaboration with our municipal partners and the Government as we phase in this transition and I invite you to connect with me if I can be of further assistance.

Kind regards,



Darren Sandbeck M.A., ACP, CHE
Senior Provincial Director & Chief Paramedic
Alberta Health Services