



## EMS BACKGROUNDER

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### Issue

Alberta's Emergency Medical Services (EMS) system is experiencing many difficulties. Alberta Health Services' centralized EMS dispatch approach is not working well, ambulances are often slow to respond, EMS is often intermittent, and emergency medical personnel are experiencing exhaustion and burn out.

The Government of Alberta [announced](#) the creation of a provincial emergency medical services (EMS) advisory committee in late January 2022 in response to demands for more reliable EMS service across the province. The committee submitted its initial formal report to the Minister in May 2022, and its final report with long-term recommendations in July 2022. The final report will be made public in late 2022.

The committee's work, combined with actions already underway, is expected to improve EMS capacity in the coming months and will help inform a long-term EMS service plan for the province. The service plan is currently being developed by Alberta Health Services, in collaboration with the Alberta Health.

### Alberta Municipalities' actions to date

- *In 2021 –*
  - o Alberta Municipalities members [passed a resolution](#) at the 2021 Convention calling for the Government of Alberta to undertake an independent third-party review of the Alberta Health Services (AHS) emergency ambulance dispatch system and to investigate the increase in response times and the technical outages that have occurred since the ambulance dispatch transition began in Alberta in 2009.
  - o Members passed a [second EMS-related resolution](#) at the 2021 Convention. It calls for the Government of Alberta to immediately consult with municipalities and the Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA) to develop a plan to make urgently needed improvements to the delivery and performance of the ambulance system, where municipalities are recognized and compensated for the roles they play in support of the provincial health care system.
  - o Members passed a [third EMS-related resolution](#) at the 2021 Convention. This resolution relates to the stresses an ineffective provincial EMS system places on municipal services – especially on fire and police services. This 'backfilling' creates

mental health issues for firefighters and police officers and diverts resources from their intended purposes (i.e., from firefighting and policing).

- *In 2022 –*
  - o Conducted media interviews about the issue to add our members' voices to the discussion and encouraged the provincial government to act.
  - o In response to the province's January 24 announcement, President Heron said "Alberta Municipalities is pleased that the provincial government has responded to our call to action to review and address the current state of Alberta's Emergency Medical Services (EMS). We look forward to working closely with the provincial government to ensure Albertans receive the agile, responsive, and effective EMS system they need, now and for decades to come."
  - o President Cathy Heron is Alberta Municipalities' representative on the provincial EMS advisory committee.
  - o In June 2022, President Heron said that the issues facing EMS are "complex systems problems" that go beyond the provincial ambulance dispatch system. She acknowledged that attracting and retaining paramedics is difficult due to the stress associated with the job. She also pointed out that many Alberta communities are experiencing a shortage of family doctors. The misuse of the 911 emergency response system by some Albertans is also making the situation more dire.
  - o Minister of Health, Jason Copping told 1100 municipal leaders at Alberta Municipalities' Convention 2022 in Calgary in late September that he has taken steps to address the EMS issue:
    - Requested a [10-point plan](#) from AHS
    - Invested \$64m to increase capacity with more ambulances, more staff, and to stabilize funding for air ambulances
    - Hired an outside firm to investigate the dispatch system to determine what might be done to improve response times
    - Struck an advisory committee which reported on October 4, 2022

#### Online resources (related links)

- [Alberta EMS Provincial Advisory Committee](#) was established on January 25, 2022, to address the growing demand for EMS across Alberta.
- [Health Sciences Association of Alberta](#), the trade union representing Alberta's more than 28,000 paramedical technical, professional, and general support employees in the public and private-sector health-care sectors.
- The Government of Alberta [announced nearly \\$1.5 million in funding](#) to four non-profit organizations and seven researchers through its Supporting Psychological Health in First Responders program in early February 2022. The funding will provide more mental health supports to firefighters, police officers, paramedics, sheriffs, corrections officers and emergency health-care workers across Alberta.

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