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EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES REVIEW LAUNCHED

The provincial government is following through on a commitment to improve emergency medical services (EMS) in Saskatchewan.

Health Minister Don McMorris has announced a province-wide EMS review, to be conducted in consultation with the ambulance industry and regional health authorities. Its recommendations will focus on pre-hospital and inter-hospital transfers, and will form the basis for a long-term plan to improve the province's road ambulance services.

"Saskatchewan people repeatedly tell me that emergency medical services need to be more effective, accessible and fair," McMorris said. "This review gives us an opportunity to be proactive in this area, and make positive changes that will benefit patients, families, health professionals and communities across the province."

Don Cummings, an Edmonton-based consultant with extensive experience in health system issues, has been appointed chair of the EMS review committee.

"I am excited about facilitating the development of a strategic, longer term vision for EMS in Saskatchewan that key stakeholders will endorse," Cummings said. "The process I have begun to lead will produce milestones for a five year plan that are consistent with the EMS vision supported by committee members and their constituents. All stakeholders involved will be aware of their role in achieving the goals within the five year plan, and in supporting our ultimate goal - improvement and innovation in Saskatchewan EMS."

The review is expected to be completed in the spring of 2009. The EMS review committee will include representatives from regional health authorities, the Ministry of Health and the Saskatchewan Emergency Medical Services Association (SEMSA).

"We are looking forward to working with the Ministry of Health and Don Cummings to create a long-term plan for the delivery of Emergency Medical Services," Emergency and Emergency Medical Services for the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region executive director Glen Perchie said. "We are always looking for ways we can improve the services we provide to the people of Saskatchewan."

As a further measure of support for the EMS sector, the province has approved a one-time fuel subsidy of \$1.7 million for road ambulance operators, to help offset recent high fuel costs. Earlier this year, fuel prices were at historic highs, causing financial pressures on both air and road ambulance services. McMorris said the payment recognizes the need to ensure viable, stable ambulance services in challenging economic times.

Air ambulance services are not included in the EMS review. They will be assessed separately in a review that focuses specifically on the addition of a helicopter to Saskatchewan's air medical fleet.

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