



CITY OF
Lethbridge



July 24, 2020

The Honourable Tyler Shandro
Minister of Health
423 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Shandro,

Thank you for meeting with us on July 15, 2020 to discuss the potential changes to Emergency Medical Services (EMS) dispatching resulting from the AHS review of the Ernst and Young (EY) report on potential cost savings and performance improvement and to hear why Lethbridge, Red Deer, Wood Buffalo and Calgary all support maintaining the current integrated emergency dispatch model. We do not support the consolidation of dispatch in the north and south zone and the dismantling of the regional dispatch system. All four municipalities strongly urge you to simply rule out the proposed EMS dispatch consolidation prior to receiving AHS's proposed implementation plan for the EY report.

Any expected savings, which we do not accept will necessarily materialize, would be offset by significant reductions in the quality of the service. Avoiding a siloed approach in emergencies is critical to ensuring that EMS, fire and police first responders can address complex, risky or dangerous situations more effectively. These clear benefits significantly outweigh the relatively small expected savings, particularly considering the admission that changes to the dispatch model will result in longer response times to medical emergencies which is likely to drastically impact patient outcomes in certain emergencies.

All four of our municipalities have enjoyed a collaborative relationship with AHS since its inception and our citizens have experienced the benefits of this intergovernmental cooperation. Creating further coordination issues and red tape by splitting off the dispatch of EMS is not in the public interest. The capability to simultaneously coordinate dispatch for police, fire and EMS is critical to achieving the best response in the shortest time. When a citizen phones 9-1-1, they are often in the midst of one of the most stressful, difficult situations they have ever experienced. Our integrated emergency dispatch model ensures that callers do not have to repeat their story multiple times to receive help from multiple agencies, which would be the case under the new dispatch model that the EY report is proposing.

In 2019, the Red Deer Fire Department had 3,505 medical co-responses. In 40 percent (1,398) the fire engine arrived first. In Red Deer, the de-integration of services would mean that fire resources would no longer be able to respond to medical incidents. In Calgary, the Calgary Fire Department's Medical First Responders are rapidly dispatched as part of the current model and attend almost 25,000 calls each year and are on scene first in almost half of all critical events. In Lethbridge in 2019, of the 16,901 Medical Incidents and Motor Vehicle Collisions, a fire apparatus responded first 4,703 times. Municipal fire departments attending to citizens in medical emergencies alongside EMS saves lives.

Calgary 9-1-1 has been dispatching EMS since its inception. A centralized dispatch system would be the first time that the Calgary tri-services model has ever been fractured. This integrated tri-service dispatch model reflects the industry best practice – a model that many agencies are trying to replicate. Indeed, the recent hailstorm Calgarians experienced on June 13 reinforced the value of the all-hands-on-deck, integrated dispatch model as significant damage and flooding occurred extremely quickly. Responding to emergencies in the midst of this COVID-19 pandemic is becoming more complex.

As was stated on our call, there is an opportunity to address the related issue of the patient transfer system. In principle, we support the red tape reduction, and the cost-efficiency of changes to inter-facility transfer. However, the need to maintain our emergency response capabilities as we confront an increasingly uncertain and unpredictable world is critical.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,



Naheed K. Nenshi
Mayor, City of Calgary



Tara Veer
Mayor, City of Red Deer



Chris Spearman
Mayor, City of Lethbridge



Don Scott
Mayor, Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo

cc: **The Honourable Jason Kenney, Premier**