

March 20, 2009

EMS transition on track for April 1

CALGARY – April 1, 2009, brings a fundamental shift in the way ground ambulances will be governed and administered across Alberta. In all other matters, it is business as usual.

“When Albertans phone for emergency medical services (EMS) on or after April 1, 2009, EMS will be available,” says Brenda Fischer, Senior Vice President, EMS with Alberta Health Services. “Our first priority remains unchanged. We are committed to providing Albertans with safe, quality and timely patient care.”

Alberta Health Services (AHS) has been working closely with the 74 municipalities and organizations in Alberta that currently provide emergency medical services to ensure a smooth and seamless transition of responsibilities. All service providers were given the option to continue providing services under contract or transfer service to AHS.

“The hard work and collaboration of the transition project team, providers and municipalities to ensure emergency medical services continues with no gaps or decrease in patient care is commendable,” says Fischer. “Throughout the entire process, everyone involved has remained clearly focused on the best interest of the patient.”

In addition to governance and service provider agreements, work is also underway to consolidate more than 30 EMS dispatch centres to three within the next 18 to 24 months.

“EMS dispatch is a vital component in the overall delivery of patient-centred, provincewide EMS,” says Jim Garland, EMS Director of Dispatch, AHS. “The consolidation of dispatch services is a key deliverable of a more coordinated and efficient provincewide EMS system that will be better integrated into the continuum of health services.”

EMS is still in the early stages of transition and much work remains to be done to create a strong foundation for EMS services within the health system. With many of the immediate issues such as governance and contracts resolved, focus can shift to identify priority initiatives to move towards fully integrating EMS into health services.

“By integrating health services, the Minister of Health has provided us with an opportunity to improve Albertans’ access to emergency medical services, no matter when or where they find themselves in need of emergency care,” says Fischer.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than 3.5 million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

* Backgrounder attached

- 30 -

For media inquiries, please contact:

Sheila Rougeau
Alberta Health Services - Communications
(403) 944-3661 or (403) 816-0553 (cell)