

April 28, 2010

Alberta Health Services/STARS ink 10-YEAR DEAL **Agreement extends funding to Grande Prairie base**

GRANDE PRAIRIE – The Shock Trauma Air Rescue Society (STARS) base in Grande Prairie will receive provincial funding for the first time in its history as part of a new agreement between Alberta Health Services and STARS.

The new agreement, formally announced by Health and Wellness Minister Gene Zwozdesky in Grande Prairie today, commits to long term partial funding for the Grande Prairie base as well as continued partial funding for the bases in Calgary and Edmonton.

“Since opening the Grande Prairie base in 2006, many lives have been saved because of STARS’ ability to provide a timely response throughout the northern region of our province,” says Minister of Health and Wellness Gene Zwozdesky. “The strategic geographical location of this base has a direct impact on successful patient outcomes and STARS is doing a great job in that regard.”

In the new funding model, Alberta Health Services will support STARS with \$5.488 million annually over each of the next 10 years. Approximately 25 per cent of STARS total mission costs is funded by Alberta Health Services and the remaining 75 per cent from STARS fundraising and community partnerships. STARS total operating expenses in 2009 were approximately \$27 million of which \$23.7 million were mission operations.

On April 1, 2010, Alberta Health Services assumed responsibility for ensuring air ambulance services are available across the province. In addition to STARS, which provides dedicated rotary air ambulance through the affiliation agreement, fixed wing air ambulance services will continue to be conducted by 12 providers contracted by Alberta Health Services.

“Equitable access to high quality care for rural Albertans is a strategic priority for Alberta Health Services, and STARS plays an integral role in providing that care,” says Ken Hughes, Alberta Health Services Board Chair. “The integration of ground and air ambulance within the provincewide health delivery system makes this kind of coordinated care and training possible, and is a great illustration of the quality, access and sustainability improvements now within our reach.”

As part of the renewed partnership going forward, STARS will also facilitate a critical care transport medicine education program for all air medical personnel (fixed wing and rotary). This will provide consistent training and equitable education opportunities. STARS will also assume the role of coordinating the movement of critically ill patients from rural hospitals to larger centres.

“Working together toward the common goal of providing a seamless emergency care system provides Albertans with the right resource at the right place at the right time,” says Dr. Greg Powell, president and chief executive officer, STARS. “Today’s announcement heralds the beginning of an enhanced system that addresses the needs of people in rural Alberta to receive timely and sophisticated emergency care.”

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than 3.7 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.

STARS is a well recognized leader in critical patient care, rapid transportation, and emergency medical training and education. The unique model of community, corporate and government support allows continued innovations that provide excellence in patient care.

* Backgrounder attached

MEDIA NOTE: Minister Gene Zwozdesky, AHS Board Chair Ken Hughes and Dr. Greg Powell are all available to speak to media this afternoon after 4 p.m. All will also be in attendance at a Grande Prairie launch this afternoon beginning at 5 p.m. at the STARS hangar near the airport.

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