



**Health and Wellness
Office of the Minister**

PO Box 488, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada B3J 2R8 • Telephone 902-424-5818 Fax 902-424-0559 • Health.Minister@novascotia.ca

April 14, 2022

Lindsay (Eddie) Nickerson
Warden, Municipality of Barrington
info@barringtonmunicipality.com

Dear Warden Nickerson:

Thank you for your letter dated March 8, 2022, regarding Emergency Health Services (EHS) ambulance response times in your municipality and your request for system updates around EHS. As the Minister of Health and Wellness, the Premier has asked that I respond on his behalf.

There have been significant changes to the Emergency Health Services system and ongoing work to improve on the response times across the province. As you know, paramedic staffing levels, the COVID-19 pandemic, and ambulance offload times continue to be challenges that EHS is balancing on a daily basis. Unfortunately, the challenges we face in healthcare are not unique to Nova Scotia and we are grateful for the dedicated professionals working to provide care in these challenging times.

In the last year EHS has implemented several new programs and changes to the EHS system that have resulted in a direct benefit to pre-hospital emergency responses, community paramedicine, and inter-facility patient transports. This was done in an effort to better utilize ambulances, transfer vehicles, and our paramedic resources.

In March 2021, EHS introduced a Medical Transport Service (MTS) using four specialized vans and a non-paramedic driver for transport of low-acuity patients in selected areas of the province. Due to the success of this project, in early 2022, EHS expanded the MTS service to ten routes province wide and continues to look for further opportunities to expand in areas that would benefit from this service. The use of MTS transport for low acuity transports enables Patient Transport Units and emergency ambulances to be reserved for higher acuity patients and emergency service response.

The Single Paramedic Emergency ALS/BLS Response (SPEAR) Program was implemented in summer 2021 with a focus on low acuity call responses in the Central region. The introduction of SPEAR units and allowing these units to respond to low acuity calls alleviates some of the need for the reallocation of emergency units from other areas in the province due to increased volumes. EHS operations is currently working with Fitch & Associates to obtain further recommendations on the expansion of the role of ground

critical care with SPEAR units and the geographical expansion of these units across the province, as well.

EHS introduced a new staff position, non-paramedic operators for Patient Transfer Units (PTU), and increased the number of PTU vehicles in service. Hiring and training additional non-paramedic operators has enabled EHS to double the number of PTU teams and vehicles. Since October 2021, EHS has effectively doubled its provincewide operational hours to perform patient transfers. This expansion has not only improved transport response times but also freed up ambulances to respond to emergent and urgent calls.

In November 2021, EHS also introduced a 24/7 physician to the Medical Communications Centre to assist paramedics in providing emergency healthcare and in determining patient transport requirements. This Physician has also been virtually assisting rural community ERs for low acuity patient management.

As mentioned, staffing continues to be a challenge for the EHS system and currently our priority is addressing the recruitment and retention of skilled paramedics and staff in Nova Scotia. Our partners at the College of Paramedics of Nova Scotia made a policy change in February 2022 to grant a restricted temporary license so graduates can start work under the supervision of a licensed paramedic while they wait to write the Canadian Organization of Paramedic Regulators exam. This means more boots on the ground sooner working in the EHS system.

A new Workforce Planning strategy committee has also been developed with key system partners who employ, educate, and regulate Paramedics to help update the provincial workforce plan. This group is working to ensure an adequate supply of Paramedics in order to meet the health care needs of Nova Scotians and identify any new strategies to address gaps within EHS recruitment & retention. There are representatives from the Department of Health and Wellness' Emergency Health Services and Health Workforce Planning & Labour Relations, Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment, the Department of Advanced Education, Emergency Medical Care Inc., Nova Scotia Health Authority, Medavie HealthEd, the College of Paramedics of Nova Scotia (CPNS), and the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 727.

Thank you for taking the time to share Brenda Maxwell's concerns with me and allowing me to share some of the changes being made to improve the EHS system. I am proud of the work being done but also recognize that more needs to be done to address these issues. Long-standing problems need long-term solutions and EHS is committed to working with its stakeholders to improve the system for all Nova Scotians.

Sincerely,



Michelle Thompson
Minister of Health and Wellness

c: Honourable Tim Houston, Premier, Nova Scotia
Nolan Young, MLA, Shelburne