

Provincial EMS Service Planning Current State Survey

March 17 to April 8, 2022

What We Heard Summary

Alberta Health Services (AHS) has heard from hundreds of Albertans as part of our EMS Current State Survey. This survey is one step in creating the long-term EMS Service Plan, and is a component of the engagement work being undertaken, provincially, to inform the future of EMS. This work also aligns with the more immediate work already underway, via the AHS EMS 10 point plan. For the latest news on all ongoing EMS work, click [here](#).

Background

Emergency Medical Services (EMS) is a critical component in Alberta's healthcare system. EMS provides emergency response to 911 calls for patients across the province, treats patients in their homes, as well as handling transfers for patients needing medical care between hospitals and medical facilities.

AHS has been experiencing extremely high call volumes, resulting in longer response times and impacts on both patients and staff.

As one component of the EMS 10 Point Plan, the Minister of Health asked AHS EMS to work with Alberta Health to create a long-term Service Plan for EMS; this plan is to be completed by September 30, 2022. The EMS Service Plan is to be inclusive of all EMS services (AHS direct delivery and those provided by contracted service partners), and to reflect how EMS integrates into Alberta's health system. It will provide the vision and direction for EMS in Alberta for the next five years and set out a clear roadmap on how to get there.

Current State Survey & Engagement

In order for AHS to understand where we need to go and how best to serve Albertans, we first needed to hear from Albertans to understand our current state and identify priorities. To do this, we began targeted focus group discussions with Indigenous communities and AHS clinical operations; and invited Albertans to share their views by taking the Current State Survey online. From March 17 to April 8, Albertans were asked to share what they thought was working, and what isn't, to help us build on strengths and plan for improvements. 1946 responses were received.

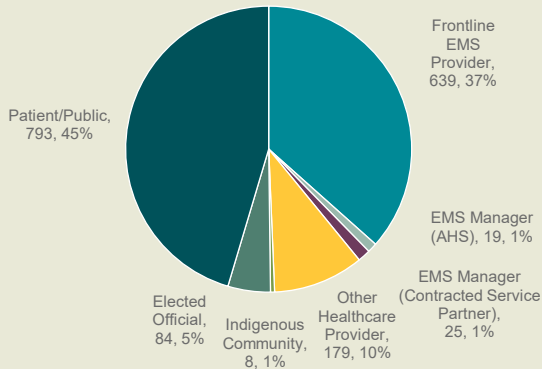
In the Current State Survey, we asked respondents to share their perspectives on a series of questions, including:

- What EMS is doing well and where they could improve
- What the role of EMS in Alberta should be
- What would help EMS better respond and prepare for the future

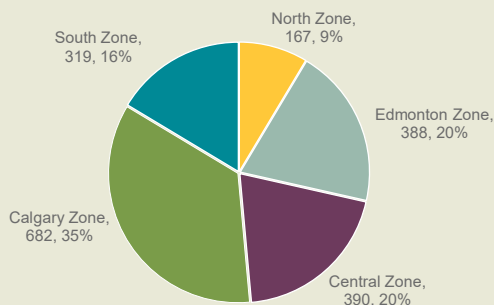
Who We Heard From

1946 Survey responses

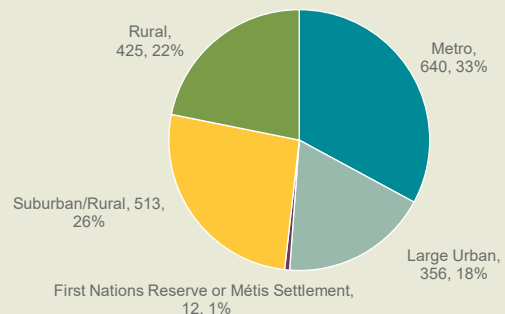
Which perspective do you represent?



Which AHS geographic Zone do you currently reside in?



What type of community do your perspectives represent?



Highlights

- People said that staff provide excellent care, work hard and are highly skilled
- Albertans are concerned that the current EMS workload is unsustainable and that staff are under strain
- Many expressed concern about the appropriate use of ambulances, and noted that there is a need to clarify EMS roles and responsibilities in the healthcare system
- Relationships with Indigenous communities are important and need to be built and fostered over time
- People are concerned about ambulance availability and getting paramedics out of hospitals and back in their home communities
- People acknowledged that not every situation requires an emergency response – how can EMS support patients & families in [knowing their care options?](#)

Themes that emerged

What people feel is going well

When asked to identify what EMS does well, people said that paramedics are skilled professionals who provide quality and compassionate patient care. Respondents indicated that they felt that EMS's primary role should be to respond to 911 calls.

Patient care was brought forward as the most important part of EMS's work and something paramedics do well - helping patients was overwhelmingly what frontline staff indicated to be what they liked best about their job.

"When I did have to call EMS they were at my house within minutes, they were professional, they gave me instant reassurance and I felt safe. They also helped my daughter cope."

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Where people identified areas of concern and need of improvement

“I live rural – I want my ambulances available for the area.”

While respondents agreed that EMS staff are very good at what they do, they are also very concerned that the current workload is unsustainable, acknowledging there has been a 30 percent increase in call volumes.

“Response times need to improve, communities need coverage.”

People expressed that they felt that additional ambulances, staffing and funding are necessary to allay the current pressures, and they believe this would in turn increase community ambulance availability and lower response times.

Another large area of concern had to do with patient flow through the health system. The process of transferring a patient from EMS care to hospital care was an area that Albertans felt needed to be greatly improved. The Interfacility Transfer (IFT) process was also cited as a process that could be improved.

“When you go to an emergency room and see all the EMS waiting with patients while someone in the community needs them it is frustrating.”

There were also concerns expressed about how ambulances are dispatched, and that more clarity could be provided regarding how calls are triaged and prioritized.

Communication to both EMS staff and communities was highlighted as an area that could be improved.

“Better public education, more non-ambulance options, more responsibilities for paramedics.”

“Planning for growth matches population group, increasing and enhancing paramedic skills to provide more meaningful treatments and care. Providing ongoing and value-added training to keep paramedics at the top of their skill level and continuously improving with changes in medical research.”

Where people felt we should focus for future planning

As we look to plan for the next 5 to 10 years, Albertans told us that they think EMS should focus on:

- Our people
- Paramedic scope of practice
- Increasing use of virtual health care options
- Exploring other patient care pathways and options other than transport to emergency departments
- Building and strengthening relationships with Indigenous partners
- Connecting with the public and leveraging partnerships
- Preparing for population growth and an aging population

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Areas of Priority

Based on what we heard, we have created 6 working groups to focus on Future Planning. Each group will focus on a specific theme:

Building & Strengthening Relationships with Indigenous Partners

Listening to the needs of First Nations, Métis Settlements, and other Indigenous communities, and then acting on what is heard.

Patient Care Pathways & Options

Developing and implementing options other than transport to hospital and educating the public about options.

EMS Pre-Hospital Operations

Improving response times for time-sensitive calls by ensuring ambulances are available when and where they are needed.

Interfacility Transfers (IFT)

Improving IFT performance and exploring other options when an ambulance is not needed.

EMS Recruitment Process & Career Development

Preparing paramedics for today and for the future, and ensuring paramedics are available where they are needed.

Working Conditions

Addressing communication and other cultural elements, as well as the impacts of shift work.

What happens next

Now that we have assessed our current state and identified priorities, we will begin the Future Planning Process. This kicks off with the formation of working groups, one for each of the Areas of Priority listed above. Members of these groups will provide subject matter expertise in order to identify initiatives for their respective priority area. Suggestions from the [Alberta EMS Provincial Advisory Committee](#) will also be incorporated into the priorities for these working groups.

About the working groups

The working groups will be comprised of subject matter experts who have been selected for their expertise from a number of different disciplines across AHS, Alberta Health and other partner organizations.

The first step that the working groups will undertake will be to brainstorm initiatives to address the priorities, and we invite Albertans to share their ideas for the working groups to consider. Share your thoughts and innovations [here on Together4Health](#).

The working groups will then develop a set of recommendations and initiatives that will be considered in context of the EMS 10 point plan, the recommendations from the Minister's Advisory council, and AHS' larger strategic plans. Then, these concepts will be rolled up into objectives and overarching goals as part of the Provincial EMS Service Plan. Through the plan, concepts will be formalized, staged, and ultimately, implemented.

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Thank you

Thank you to everyone who took the time to share your perspectives. We received a lot of insightful feedback, and we appreciate your honesty, candor and advice.

EMS continues to be here for all Albertans. We are working together with our people, our patients and our partners, to ensure our system is robust and sustainable. We thank everyone for their involvement and support, and hope that you will continue to work with us as we progress through the Service Planning process.

If you have further reflections, please feel free to reach out to us via the [Provincial EMS Service Planning Together4Health Page](#).