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REPORT TITLE: **Provincial Policy Framework for Community Paramedicine**

FROM: Nancy Polsinelli, Commissioner of Health Services

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## RECOMMENDATION

**That in alignment with advocacy efforts by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and the Ontario Association of Paramedic Chiefs (OAPC), the Region of Peel advocate for the provincial government to introduce legislative measures to formalize community paramedicine, and to provide full and sustained provincial funding to municipalities for community paramedicine programs;**

**And further, that a letter from the Regional Chair on behalf of Regional Council, along with a copy of the report from the Commissioner of Health, listed on the March 10, 2022 Regional Council agenda, titled “Provincial Policy Framework for Community Paramedicine” be sent to the Minister of Health, Minister of Long-Term Care, all Peel MPPs, AMO, and OAPC, for their information and consideration.**

## REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Paramedic services across Ontario, including Peel, operate community paramedicine programs to support vulnerable residents.
- While these programs have proven to play an integral role in supporting vulnerable populations, community paramedicine programs operate outside of the *Ambulance Act*, which governs emergency medical response by paramedics.
- A legislative framework that establishes provincial and municipal roles and responsibilities is needed to protect municipalities and paramedics and ensure paramedics can quickly respond and adapt to new or emerging needs.
- Sustainable and predictable provincial funding for community paramedicine will enable Peel Paramedics to continue to deliver vital services and make a sustained contribution to planning and service delivery with health system partners in Peel.
- Sector leadership through AMO and OAPC is calling on the provincial government to create a legislative framework and sustainable funding for community paramedicine programs.

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## DISCUSSION

### 1. Background

The Ministry of Health (Ministry) and municipal responsibilities for 9-1-1 ambulance response are set out in provisions and regulations of the *Ambulance Act*. The Ministry is responsible for certification of paramedic services, establishing patient care standards for

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paramedic practice, and for licensing and monitoring paramedics' practice for compliance with provincial standards. The Ministry also subsidizes 9-1-1 ambulance response on a 50:50 cost-sharing basis with municipalities, and fully funds base hospital programs that provide medical oversight to paramedics providing pre-hospital care. Ontario's upper and single-tier municipalities are responsible for the provision of land ambulance service, and paramedic services operate with a mandate to deliver 9-1-1 ambulance response and pre-hospital care within Ministry standards under the *Ambulance Act*.

Beyond these mandated responsibilities, most paramedic services in Ontario, including Peel Paramedic Services, also operate community paramedicine programs to support vulnerable residents within their community and to help to ease pressures on hospitals, community care, paramedic call volumes, and long-term care home waitlists. Increased provincial government funding and growing evidence regarding the effectiveness of community paramedicine (CP) programs are demonstrating that these programs are nimble and adaptable and continue to make valuable contributions to local health systems and to health system transformation in Ontario.

While community paramedicine programs leverage paramedics' training and capabilities in delivering 9-1-1 ambulance response, these programs operate entirely outside of the provisions in the *Ambulance Act* and have no legislative framework overseeing their delivery. As previously noted, the Ontario Ministry of Health oversees paramedic services, but most provincial CP funding is currently through the Ministry of Long-Term Care. Despite their widespread adoption and proven effectiveness, CP programs remain funded by both the Ministry of Long-Term Care and the Ministry of Health (through Ontario Health) as time-limited pilot programs that have no sustainable, predictable, and permanent provincial funding.

### a) Community Paramedicine Expansion in Peel

Peel Paramedic Services has expanded CP programs as part of interdisciplinary care teams across three separate program streams. This expansion has been a positive development for health service delivery in Peel, engaging paramedics in advancing innovative health services and wraparound care for vulnerable seniors and supporting Peel residents to remain living safely in the community and rely less on the 9-1-1 system for their care needs.

Since 2018, Ontario Health (previously Local Health Integration Networks) has funded Paramedic Services to operate paramedic-led seniors wellness clinics in Peel Living seniors' buildings. As reported to Regional Council on April 8, 2021, in the report titled, "Building an Enhanced Community Paramedicine Program in Peel", Paramedic Services has expanded community paramedicine programming to include home visiting to seniors at risk of avoidable emergency department visits or hospitalization, or admission to long-term care. These programs operate with pilot funding (100 per cent) from both the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Long-Term Care. Planning and implementation of these programs has been subject to some disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Medical direction for these programs is provided by Dr. Sudip Saha, Senior Medical Director for Long Term Care, Seniors Services Development, and Community Paramedicine. This arrangement allows for more effective coordination and integration across all areas of Peel seniors programs.

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Expanding CP programs in Peel has been one important element to Peel's broader work to provide wraparound care for a growing seniors population. Integrating this type of care with Peel's senior services and other community supports is critical to allowing seniors an often-preferred option to age in place, whenever possible.

### 2. Advocacy to Enhance Community Paramedicine Programs

In 2021, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and the Ontario Association of Paramedic Chiefs (OAPC) released a joint position paper that raises important questions for municipalities operating CP programs. This position paper has served as the basis for ongoing advocacy in the sector to recognize the successful contributions of CP programs, and immediately move forward with i) a legislative framework for community paramedicine, ii) standardized medical oversight, and iii) sustainable funding.

#### i) Legislative Framework

Municipalities need the provincial government to establish a legislative framework for CP programs. Amendments to the *Ambulance Act* or new legislation are required to define the scope of practice, competencies, and qualifications for CP paramedics, and to address gaps and risks regarding clinical practice, quality management, privacy and liability for paramedics and municipalities. Despite years of expanded CP programming and provincial funding, Ontario lacks both policy and legal frameworks for community paramedicine, like those in place for 9-1-1 ambulance response through the *Ambulance Act* and regulations.

#### ii) Standardized Medical Oversight

The provincial government should create a province-wide system for medical delegation for CP paramedics through self-regulation for paramedics under the *Regulated Health Professionals Act*. In the interim, regional medical advisory councils and standardized Ministry-approved guidelines for adoption by all paramedic services would standardize medical oversight for CP programs. Medical direction through base hospital programs for 9-1-1 ambulance response is not appropriate or funded to support community paramedicine.

#### iii) Sustainable Provincial Funding

The provincial government must recognize and fully fund CP programs, based on the principles that: (1) programs contribute to delivering primary care in the community, and (2) municipalities not be at risk of funding CP programs, in addition to mandatory funding for 9-1-1 ambulance response, and Public Health.

A copy of the joint position paper "Community Paramedic Policy Framework" is included as Appendix I. The Director and Chief of Paramedic Services has been engaged in development of the joint position paper and in ongoing discussions with provincial leadership on its recommendations.

### 3. Implications for Peel

While Paramedic Services continues to operate successful CP programs, the issues raised by AMO and the OAPC have implications for the Region of Peel and the continued evolution of programming to meet the needs of the Peel community.

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Peel Paramedic Services' continued expansion of community paramedicine programs needs the clarity and certainty provided by a legislative framework that establishes provincial and municipal roles and responsibilities with respect to CP programs. The lack of formal and consistent regulation (including standardized medical oversight) is rare within the health sector and creates a level of uncertainty for municipalities that are expected to assume new responsibilities for community paramedicine. While Paramedic Services has built capacity to manage without a policy framework and has strong clinical oversight for the program through the Senior Medical Director, the AMO and the OAPC recommendations for a legislated framework for community paramedicine would provide needed clarity for municipalities at a time when programs are expanding throughout Ontario.

A lack of predictable and sustainable provincial funding from multiple provincial sources has been a challenge for Paramedic Services when required to ramp-up and wind-down CP programs in response to time limited funding opportunities. A commitment to sustainable provincial funding would enable Peel to plan and resource programs in a more predictable way, quickly respond and adapt to new or emerging needs, and make a sustained contribution to planning and service delivery with health system partners such as local Ontario Health Teams. Sustainable provincial funding would help ensure that funding for Peel is adequate and equitable.

### **RISK CONSIDERATIONS**

Supporting the AMO and the OAPC recommendations and Region of Peel advocacy for a formal legislative framework for community paramedicine programs aims to reduce potential risks to the Region for current and any future CP programs in Peel.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Current capital and operating expenses for Paramedic Services' CP programs have been fully funded for the defined periods by the provincial government. Recommendations by AMO and the OAPC are intended to reduce risk that future programming costs are carried by municipalities through the local tax base.

### **CONCLUSION**

Paramedic Services' expansion of these programs in recent years is making a valuable contribution to supporting vulnerable residents of Peel. Regional advocacy to the provincial government for a legislative framework as well as full and sustained provincial funding for community paramedicine will ensure that programming is well positioned to respond to new and emerging health needs of Peel residents.

### **APPENDICES**

Appendix I - Community Paramedic Policy Framework

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