

## IMPROVING ONTARIO'S AIR AMBULANCE SYSTEM

Ontario's air ambulance services play a critical role in providing access specialized medical services rapidly, particularly for people living in remote northern areas of the province. They also play a key part in the province's disaster response system and Ontario's organ recovery and implantation services. The service has become an integral component of the larger emergency health system in communities across the province.

### Current Air Ambulance System

Ontario's air ambulance system, the first of its kind in Canada, was established in 1977 to transport critically ill patients to hospital using helicopters. The system is the largest and most active in North America and a leader in the world, handling the transportation of more than 17,000 patients each year. It is also one of the most complex systems with a number of organizations involved in various air ambulance operations:

- The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Emergency Health Services Branch administers air ambulances services – including contracting air operators for aircraft, crew and paramedic staff and dispatching air ambulances through its Medical Air Transport Centre
- Sunnybrook and Women's College Health Sciences Centre administer the Ontario Air Ambulance Base Hospital Program, including training and medical oversight of the paramedics
- The Ontario Air Ambulance Services Corporation co-ordinate air and land ambulance transfers through the Provincial Transfer Authorization Centre.

### Improved System Under Ontario Air Ambulance Services Corporation

The McGuinty government is appointing a new non-profit organization, Ontario Air Ambulance Services Corporation, to begin working with the air ambulance system and the government to streamline processes and improve service co-ordination. The new organization will eventually control all aspects of the air ambulance system including:

- Flight paramedics who provide front-line medical care to patients transported by air ambulance. These paramedics have the highest level of training and certification in Canada.
- Medical Air Transport Centre which dispatches the appropriate aircraft and crew to match the medical needs of a call.

- Patch physicians who provide 24-hour, on-line medical direction, to flight paramedics in the field via satellite phone. These physicians also help determine continuing education activities for paramedics.
- Medical Advisory Committee which provides medical supervision and direction for all operations, determines protocols and standards for medical care, and evaluates and certifies flight paramedics.
- Provincial Transfer Authorization Centre which screens every patient transfer from one health care facility to another to protect against infectious diseases, and assigns special resources for high-risk transfers.
- Emergency Medical Assistance Team, a mobile 56-bed acute care field unit designed to respond to a major health emergency anywhere in the province.