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MCGUINITY GOVERNMENT IMPROVING AIR AMBULANCE SERVICES
*New Organization Appointed To Co-ordinate Emergency Operations, In Response To Coroner's
Jury Recommendations*

TORONTO – The McGuinty government is improving air ambulance services by appointing a new organization that will co-ordinate all aspects of Ontario's air ambulance system, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

“Ontario has the biggest and most active air ambulance system in North America. It is a world leader, but it has been operating under a fragmented system that must be improved,” Smitherman said. “We are appointing Ontario Air Ambulance Services Corporation to begin working with us to streamline our air ambulance system to better ensure that emergency coverage improves across the province, especially in northern and rural communities.”

The Ontario Air Ambulance Services Corporation is a non-profit body that will be responsible for all air ambulance operations including medical oversight of all air paramedics, air dispatch and authorizing air and land ambulance transfers.

Previously, operation of the air ambulance program has been divided between the Emergency Health Services Branch, the Sunnybrook and Women's College Health Sciences Centre and private air operators. An audit recommended by a 2001 coroner's jury suggested the creation of a non-profit entity that would be responsible for all aspects of air ambulance direct service delivery.

“Having all air ambulance services under one organization will make the system more accountable, more efficient and easier for front-line health care workers and Ontarians to use and to trust,” Smitherman said. “As demand for health care services continues to grow across this province, we are building a system that will be up to meeting that challenge.”

The new Ontario Air Ambulance Services Corporation, which will be accountable to the Ontario government through a performance agreement, will bring about:

- Increased access to air ambulance services in the north
- One point of contact for the entire system with better co-ordination and quicker patient transfers
- Direct medical supervision reaching every part of the operations, ensuring safe, effective treatment of patients
- Dispatch and operations working together for more effective use of air ambulance resources
- Improved awareness for health care service providers, of available air ambulance services.

The minister also introduced Dr. Chris Mazza as CEO of Ontario Air Ambulance Services Corporation.

”Over more than a quarter of a century Ontario’s Air Ambulance program has grown to become one of the largest and most sophisticated in the world,” Dr. Mazza said. ”Today’s announcement builds on that success, creating a new organization that is unified, patient-focused and ready to meet the future demands of Ontario’s health care system.”

This initiative is part of the McGuinty government’s plan to build a health care system that delivers on three priorities - keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to doctors and nurses.

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