

MANITOBA GOVERNMENT SILENT DURING PARAMEDIC SERVICES WEEK

Budget Commitment to Hire 35 Additional Paramedics Impossible Task

May 27, 2022 Winnipeg, MB - During Paramedic Services Week which is from May 22 to 28, the Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals (MAHCP) is calling attention to the mounting paramedic staffing crisis affecting emergency medical services in rural Manitoba. Despite an as-yet unfulfilled 2019 commitment by the Manitoba Government to hire 80 additional paramedics – a commitment renewed in Budget 2022 – all available evidence points to increasing staffing vacancies, out-of-service hours and response times for rural ambulances.

“Frontline paramedics are reporting around 50 vacancies in the Prairie Mountain Health operational area alone, and there are three other regions that are desperately short-staffed,” said MAHCP President Bob Moroz. “With the busy summer season bearing down, the situation is only going to get worse. Our already burnt-out paramedics are bracing for chaos in the coming months.”

Shared Health has reportedly struggled to fill paramedic vacancies in recent years. Manitoba’s flagship Primary Care Paramedic program at Red River College Polytechnic recently extended training from a one year to a two-year program and is therefore not turning out any graduates this year, making hiring even more challenging. Shared Health is also competing for paramedics with the City of Winnipeg, where wages are up to 25% higher and recruitment efforts have intensified, as well as other municipalities (Brandon and Thompson), and a small number of private providers (e.g., STARS, Fisher EMS) that hire paramedics.

“The health minister is telling Manitobans not to worry, that the recent budget has money to hire 35 additional paramedics,” said Moroz. “That commitment is part of a 2019 pledge they haven’t met, and it’s going to be impossible because there are no paramedics to hire. Shared Health can’t fill the vacancies they have now, let alone adding staff, and meanwhile ambulances are taking longer to respond to medical emergencies in rural Manitoba.”

Shared Health has not released information on paramedic staffing levels to show the status of the government’s 2019 hiring commitment of 80 additional equivalent full time (EFT) positions. An MAHCP freedom of information request for detailed data on the number of frontline positions and vacancies was denied, with Shared Health claiming that “records do not exist” and stating that it is “working on a process to have vacancy and position information readily available.” Information previously obtained by MAHCP showed out-of-service hours due to staffing shortages for rural ambulances spiking, reaching 19,000 hours in December 2021.

MAHCP wrote a letter to Health Minister Audrey Gordon in January demanding an urgent plan for paramedic training, recruitment and retention but has not received a response to date. The union is calling on the Manitoba Government to take immediate steps to build more training opportunities for rural paramedics, including working with partners in Brandon and restoring rotating programs at rural and Northern sites that were previously cut. Shared Health must also work with frontline paramedics to alleviate understaffing, burnout and fatigue in the short term and retain as many paramedics as possible.

The Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals is the union representing over 7000 members from all over Manitoba, including over 800 rural paramedics. MAHCP represents 85% of Allied Health Care Professionals in Manitoba, working in more than 190 disciplines in health care settings across the province.

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