

MEDIA RELEASE

RURAL AMBULANCES TAKING UP TO 30% LONGER TO RESPOND IN INTERLAKE, PRAIRIE MOUNTAIN

Paramedic vacancies more than triple in two years.

May 25, 2023 | Winnipeg, MB – Rural emergency medical services (EMS) response times and call volumes have increased substantially, according to data obtained by the Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals (MAHCP) from Shared Health through Freedom of Information requests.

Response compliance data from the third quarter of 2022 show that rural paramedics are taking up to 30% longer to respond to the most serious medical emergencies (Priority 1-3) compared to the fourth quarter of 2018, the last time government publicly reported response compliance data. The highest response times, and the most dramatic increases, are in Prairie Mountain and Interlake Eastern regions where many Manitobans will be travelling this summer.

"We have been calling for action to address critical paramedic staffing shortages for years, but it has only gotten worse," said MAHCP President Jason Linklater. "Manitobans are waiting dangerously long for emergency medical care as a result."

Paramedic staffing data released yesterday by the Manitoba NDP, while troubling, did not reveal the full extent of the staffing shortages as it includes casual employees who only pick up shifts sporadically. Staffing numbers obtained by MAHCP focus on full-time and part-time (permanent and term) paramedic positions.

The data show that nearly one in three (30%) full-time and part-time rural paramedic positions is now vacant, with only 499 positions filled out of 717 total positions. The rural paramedic vacancy rate has risen dramatically in a short period of time, more than tripling in the past two years from 8% in December 2020 to 30% of positions unfilled by January 2023. Shared Health has seen a significant net loss of 108 full-time and part-time paramedics in that period.

The Manitoba Government has set some paramedic staffing targets but has not met those commitments. Most recently, Budget 2022 committed to "hiring 35 more paramedics", but Shared Health's own monthly vacancy data reveal a net loss of 35 paramedics since that budget was released.

Call volumes have also increased significantly, according to Shared Health data, with an average increase of 50% in the number of emergency medical calls across all rural regions compared to 2018.

MAHCP is calling on the Manitoba Government to take immediate steps in order to retain the experienced paramedics still working today and begin rebuilding rural EMS, including:

- Settle a fair, competitive collective agreement for allied health professionals after more than five years of delays;
- Extend all retention incentives announced in November 2022 to allied health;
- Work with frontline paramedics and the union on common-sense solutions to improve working conditions and work-life balance;
- Develop and fast-track new, accessible paramedic training opportunities for rural Manitobans;
- Create career advancement opportunities for rural EMS, including Advanced Care Paramedic positions; and
- Resume public reporting of response compliance data, which ended after 2018.

"Emergency call volumes are up, response times are up, the number of rural paramedics available to respond is way down," said Linklater. "With more people on the highways in the summer and significant paramedic vacancies that continue to rise, Manitobans need action now."

The Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals is a union representing over 7000 allied health professionals working in more than 40+ disciplines across Manitoba. MAHCP members have been without a contract for over 5 years and took a strike vote of 99% in April 2023.

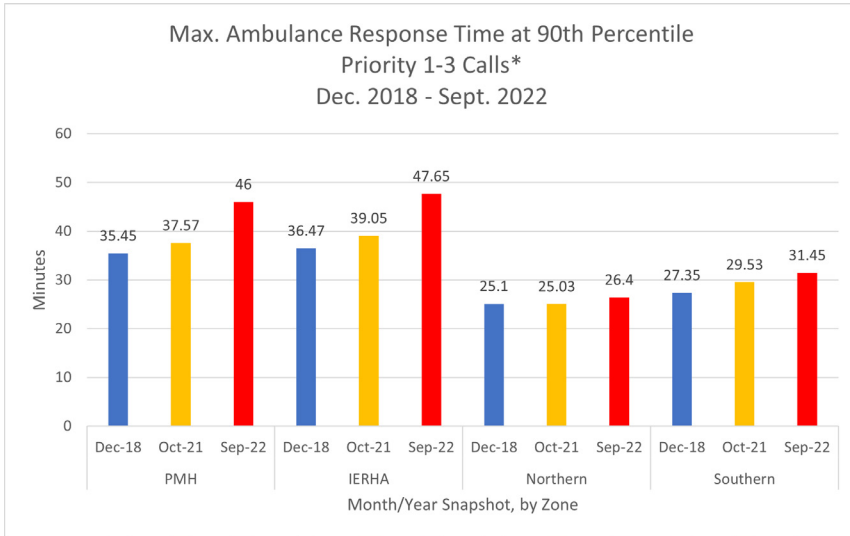
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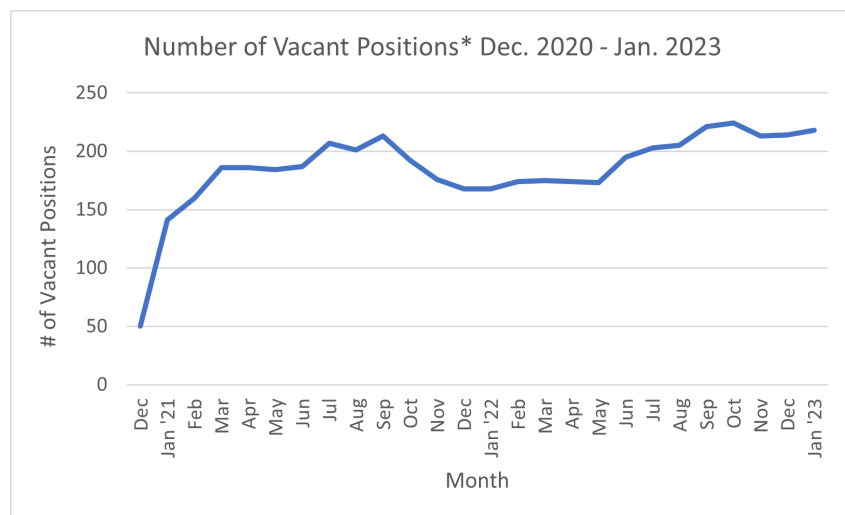
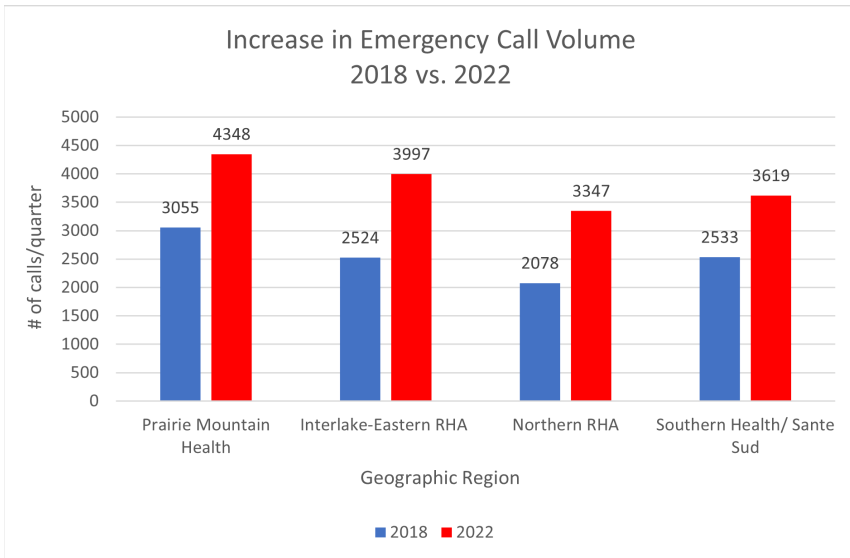
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BACKGROUND INCLUDED

BACKGROUND



*Priority 1-3 are highest priority calls based on nature of medical emergency



*Includes full-time and part-time (permanent and term) paramedic positions in primary care, intermediate care and advanced care paramedic classifications.