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

TORONTO, July 20, 2005 /CNW/ - 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.

This news release, along with other media materials, such as matte stories and audio clips, on other subjects, are available on our website at: <http://www.health.gov.on.ca> under the News Media section.

For more information on achievements in health care, visit:
<http://www.resultsontario.gov.on.ca>.

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 18,000 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 ambulance 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.