



March 10, 2021

The Honourable Adrian Dix  
Minister of Health  
PO Box 9050 Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister,

**Re: Emergency Medical Care in BC**

We are extremely concerned to hear about the impact that BC Ambulance Service staffing shortages are having on ambulance response times and patient care across BC, and are once again urging you to work with local governments to address the consequences for BC residents.

On February 19, 2021, the Ambulance Paramedics and Emergency Dispatchers of BC reported that 30 of the 120 ambulances across the Lower Mainland were unstaffed. As you are aware, this is not an isolated incident and it is being exacerbated by the current Opioid and COVID-19 crisis.

We are aware that you are working to resolve this complex issue, however, we need to utilize the resources that we have in place now, for the benefit of all our residents. The COVID-19 pandemic combined with the ongoing overdose crisis means that now more than ever, help is required to meet emergency medical needs in the province. The challenges faced by our communities during the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the need for us to work closer together and maximize our resources to respond to the overdose crisis.

As you know, many municipal fire departments have implemented emergency medical response protocols, whereby firefighters are trained and licensed to administer an enhanced level of emergency medical care to patients. Since 2015, thousands of residents have benefitted from this service. For example, in connection with a recent suspected drug overdose, fire personnel arrived within 4 minutes of receiving the 911 call, however, there was a delay of 50 minutes before BCAS was able to reach the scene.

... 2

As noted in the February, 2019 Auditor General report "Access to Emergency Health Services", better coordination and collaboration between the Provincial and local governments is needed to capitalize on the pool of trained and licensed emergency response personnel that is ready and available to provide critical support for patients until an ambulance arrives and that improved co-ordination of response would support improvements to patient care.

We wrote previously on this issue (April 3, 2020 letter to Stephen Brown, Deputy Minister, enclosed) asking the Provincial government to expand the range of emergency medical events to which municipal emergency medical responders are called to attend. We urge you once again to reconsider your position on this issue and ensure that resources, including medically-trained and/or EMR-trained firefighters, are dispatched to provide the highest available level of care for BC residents.

Now more than ever we need to work together to ensure public safety and in particular, that those most vulnerable and in desperate need of our services, have access to it in a timely fashion.

Yours truly,



Mayor George V. Harvie  
City of Delta



Mayor Brad West  
City of Port Coquitlam



Mayor Malcolm Brodie  
City of Richmond



Mayor Jamie Ross  
Village of Belcarra



Mayor Bill Dingwall  
City of Pitt Meadows



Mayor Mike Hurley  
City of Burnaby



Mayor John McEwen  
Village of Anmore



Mayor Val van den Broek  
City of Langley



Mayor Darryl Walker  
City of White Rock



Mayor Linda Buchanan  
City of North Vancouver

Enclosure



Office of Mayor George V. Harvie  
*City of Delta*



MAYOR'S OFFICE

Delta

April 3, 2020

Stephen Brown, Deputy Minister  
Ministry of Health  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor, 1515 Blanshard Street  
Victoria, BC V8W 3C8

Dear Mr. Brown,

**Re: Provincial Health Officer Dispatch Concerns**

On March 31, 2020, Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer, ordered restrictions on the call types that First Responders will now be attending due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Henry has ordered that Fire Departments in British Columbia will now only attend Purple coded events (highest acuity, immediately life threatening such as cardiac arrests), Motor Vehicle Incidents and events where First Responder technical expertise is required. Prior to this order, Fire Departments attended all Red coded events (immediately life threatening or time critical such as chest pain) and Orange coded events (urgent/potentially serious but not immediately life threatening such as abdominal pain) when BCAS crews were delayed greater than 10 minutes.

We fully acknowledge and respect the great work Dr. Henry has done while navigating the Province through this Provincial Emergency. We are very fortunate to have such strong leadership as Dr. Henry's during these unprecedented times. However, we are concerned that Dr. Henry may not be fully apprised about the serious unintended consequences of this decision to limit our Firefighters to only attend Purple events and to only be 'considered' for Red events, if BCAS is delayed more than 20 minutes. This delay or non-response puts our citizens at serious risk.

The definition of the Red coded events includes: immediately life threatening or time critical. I have attached the list of medical events as defined by BCEHS and it is quite alarming to see the types of Red coded events our Fire Departments will no longer automatically attend. As you are aware, time is of the essence in response to these types of events.

As an example, the following is a non-exhaustive list of some of the Red coded events that we will no longer automatically attend:

- explosion/burns to greater than 18% of the body/multiple victims/unconscious,
- chest pain/difficulty breathing,
- choking,
- seizures,
- unconscious diabetics,
- drownings,
- electrocutions,
- falls greater than 30ft,
- unconscious lacerations,
- fentanyl overdoses,
- emergency childbirth, and
- gunshot wounds and stabbings.

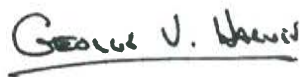
We understand and support the rationale to limit the exposure of First Responders to patients with respiratory, influenza or COVID-19 symptoms, however, this order extends far beyond the people suffering from pandemic like symptoms. We need to ensure a continuity of care for those that fall outside of this and ensure we provide the best care possible.

Our Firefighters are equipped with all the necessary Personal Protective Equipment, are trained on proper usage of the PPE, and follow all the guidelines of BCEHS and BCCDC. They are professionals trained to respond to exactly these types of incidents and they should be allowed to attend to our citizens in such times of need. It is at critical times like this that we must pull together to work on behalf of our respective communities. More than ever Firefighters will be needed to respond to these calls as other resources are diverted to COVID-19 related calls.

We respectfully request that the Provincial Health Officer order restricting First Responders notification to only attend Purple coded events be reconsidered or that at a minimum this discussion be referred to BCEHS and BC Fire Chiefs COVID-19 Task Force to provide alternate solutions. The current direction puts too many citizens at unnecessary risk.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Respectfully,



Mayor George V. Harvie  
City of Delta



Mayor Jonathan Cote  
City of New Westminster



Mayor Brad West  
City of Port Coquitlam



Mayor Robert Vagramov  
City of Port Moody



Mayor Neil Belenkie  
Village of Belcarra



Mayor Malcolm Brodie  
City of Richmond



Mayor Mary-Ann Booth  
District of West Vancouver



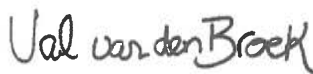
Mayor Bill Dingwall  
City of Pitt Meadows



Mayor Mike Hurley  
City of Burnaby



Mayor John McEwen  
Village of Anmore



Mayor Val van den Broek  
City of Langley

*"Mayor Darryl Walker"*

Mayor Darryl Walker  
City of White Rock



Mayor Linda Buchanan  
City of North Vancouver

*"Mayor Mike Little"*

Mayor Mike Little  
District of North Vancouver

Enclosures



## FACT SHEET

Patient Condition	Colour
Immediately life threatening (Eg. Cardiac Arrest)	Purple
Immediately life threatening or time critical (Eg. Chest Pain)	Red
Urgent / Potentially serious, but not immediately life threatening (Eg. Abdominal Pain) *	Orange
Non-urgent (not serious or life threatening) (Eg. Sprained Ankle)	Yellow
Non-urgent (not serious or life threatening). Possibly suitable for treatment at scene <b>** NOT Being implemented immediately</b>	Green
Non-urgent (not serious or life threatening) Further clinical telephone triage and advice Referrals to HealthLink BC (8-1-1 calls)	Blue

**Contact:** BCEHS Communications  
[media@bcehs.ca](mailto:media@bcehs.ca)

Media Line: 778-867-7472