

MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

What is the *Paramedics and Palliative Care: Bringing Vital Services to Canadians* collaboration?

The Canadian Foundation for Health Care Improvement (CFHI) and the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer (the Partnership) are partnering to support the spread of *Paramedics and Palliative Care: Bringing Vital Services to Canadians*. The program supports people living with life limiting conditions who to gain improved access to palliative and end-of-life care in their homes. Through this program, trained paramedics provide patients with in-home support when they have a palliative emergency, with pain and symptom management at home, or when they have an unexpected health event.

By spreading this approach, already available in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Alberta, CFHI and the Partnership aim to increase capacity and capability in the delivery of palliative and end-of-life care at home, potentially avoiding a trip to the hospital and the use of health system resources. Paramedics have been providing support to people with palliative goals of care and have reduced unwanted intervention and transfers to hospital in NS, PEI and Alberta since 2013.

The two organizations will jointly provide up to \$5.5 million over the next four years to expand access to training for over 5,000 paramedics in six provinces in providing palliative and end-of-life care to people in their homes. CFHI and the Partnership will support provincial health authorities and organizations across the country to adopt and adapt best practices.

This program will run from fall 2018 to spring 2022.

Where and when will this program be available?

Teams in six provinces will participate in *Paramedics and Palliative Care: Bringing Vital Services to Canadians*. They include:

- British Columbia Emergency Health Services
- Saskatchewan Health Authority Regina Area
- Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority (Manitoba)
- York Region Paramedic Services (Ontario)
- Ottawa Hospital Research Institute
- New Brunswick Department of Health
- Eastern Health (Newfoundland and Labrador)

Participating regions are working with their community partners to design their programs. Exact timing of implementation of the service will vary by region and will be made available locally.

What is palliative care?

Palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problems associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual.

By focusing on care that is guided by a patient's values and best interests, palliative support leads to increased comfort, better quality-of-life and satisfaction with care received.

While palliative care is often viewed as care received in the final stages of life (and used interchangeably with "end-of-life" care), the two types of care are different. Recent evidence has shown that early integration of palliative care for people with cancer (at the beginning of treatment) led to an improved quality of life, better symptom control and reduced anxiety and pain.

Why is it better to have palliative care provided in one's home?

Many people express a wish to be cared for in the familiarity and comfort of their own home. A recent national survey (CPAC, 2016). found that Canadians expressed higher satisfaction in receiving palliative care at home compared to in a hospital or long-term care facility. Other reviews have found that palliative care provided in the home improved the experience, comfort and quality of life for people with chronic and debilitating illnesses, as well as their families.

Why is a program like this needed?

Access to comprehensive, integrated palliative care in Canada is uneven. Patients and families may experience sudden changes in care and/or gaps in access to needed resources for a variety of reasons and turn to 911 as their safety net. Traditional emergency medical service response is based on principles of assessing, treating and transporting patients to the emergency department. The result of calling 911 may be a rapid response, but through a system of care that is not designed for the needs of patients at the end-of-life.

Most patients with life-limiting illnesses prefer to be cared for in their homes and communities. This programming will improve access to palliative care supports regardless of location and time of day; improve paramedic comfort and competence providing palliative care; bridge support for patients/families until their usual care team can take over; and reduce avoidable emergency room visits and hospitalizations.

The three main components of this collaboration include:

- 1) knowledge and skill development in palliative care;
- 2) supporting and leveraging the use of a centralized database for communication and identification of patients with palliative care needs;
- 3) planning and patient management including screening symptoms, and linking paramedics to emergency physicians, and/or to palliative care clinicians (e.g. palliative care nurse or physician) and to home care organizations and providers.

What will be different following the education of paramedics? What will they learn?

Once trained through the educational workshops, paramedics will be better able and more comfortable in assessing people in their home for symptoms of pain and discomfort, and then treating them on the spot thereby preventing transport to hospital – if the symptoms are too severe, they will proceed with getting the patient to the hospital for further care.

How was this program selected?

In 2017, CFHI identified 26 innovations from the *Call for Innovations in Palliative and End-of-Life Care*. Eight were selected by an external merit review panel to present at CFHI's 2017 CEO Forum and to receive a CFHI Innovation Award. Of the eight showcased at the CEO Forum, the Paramedics Providing Palliative Care at Home Program in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island and Alberta Health Services Provincial Emergency Medical Services Palliative and End-of-Life Care Assess, Treat and Refer Program ranked as the highest innovations.

From 2012-2018, the Partnership supported implementation of the *Paramedics Providing Palliative Care at Home Program* in Nova Scotia and PEI. In 2016-2017, CFHI collaborated with Nova Scotia- PEI paramedics project, as well as a similar project in Alberta, to support ongoing program evaluation through return on investment (ROI) analysis. The evaluation found that having paramedics provide palliative and end-of-life care to people in their home reduced avoidable trips to emergency departments and improved the experience, comfort and quality of life for people with chronic and debilitating illnesses, as well as their families.

How will *Paramedics and Palliative Care: Bringing Vital Services to Canadians* transform palliative care?

Paramedics and Palliative Care is part of ongoing efforts by CFHI and the Partnership to ensure high-quality healthcare is delivered to those in need, and to support innovative programs that make the delivery of health services more sustainable. By spreading this innovative approach, CFHI and the Partnership aim to increase capacity and capability in the delivery of palliative care at home and to avoid unnecessary emergency room visits and hospitalizations.

CFHI and CPAC are not-for-profit organizations funded by Health Canada.
The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada.

REFERENCES

Alberta Health Services Assess Treat and Refer: Palliative Care.

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page14899.aspx> Accessed on November 9, 2018.

Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association. Fact Sheet: Hospice Palliative Care in Canada. 2014.

http://www.chpca.net/media/330558/Fact_Sheet_HPC_in_Canada%20Spring%202014%20Final.pdf Assessed on September 10, 2018.

Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. Palliative and End-of-life Care in Canada. 2017.

https://content.cancerview.ca/download/cv/quality_and_planning/system_performance/documents/palliative_end_of_life_care_report_enpdf?attachment=0 Accessed on September 10, 2018.

Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. Canadians' Views of Palliative Care: National Online Survey. 2016.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5755e91b044262d8f43cf6fa/t/58209f5ef7e0abaa8f492eb7/1478532961492/Roulston-Ipsos.pdf> Accessed September 10, 2018.

Carter AJE, Arab M, Harrison M et al. Paramedics Providing Palliative Care at Home: Paramedic Comfort and Confidence Providing Palliative Care. PEC 2018; 22(1):101-15

Carter AJE, Arab M, Harrison M et al. Paramedics Providing Palliative Care at Home: Patient and Family Satisfaction with a Novel Model. PEC 2018; 22(1):101-150.

Paramedics Providing Palliative Care at Home Program in Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island.
<https://novascotia.ca/dhw/ehs/palliative-care.asp> Accessed on November 8, 2018.

World Health Organization. Definition of Palliative Care. <http://www.who.int/cancer/palliative/definition/en/>
Accessed September 4, 2018