



# NEWS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release**

February 27, 2019

## **Patient access to emergency health services needs improvement**

VICTORIA – The Office of the Auditor General of British Columbia has released a new report: *Access to Emergency Health Services*.

Overall, the office found that British Columbia Emergency Health Services (BCEHS) is effectively managing access to ambulance and emergency health services in some areas. However, performance against key targets for patient care is in need of improvement and co-ordination of access to emergency health services with fire departments needs to be strengthened.

For example, BCEHS sometimes takes longer than it would like to, to reach patients requiring time-critical care. This increases the risk that some patients do not receive the care they need, when they need it.

“BCEHS is in the midst of a transformational change of its service to better match its resources to patient needs,” said Carol Bellringer, auditor general. “This includes increasing the number of paramedics and ambulances as well as introducing a new dispatch approach, with the goal of shortening response times for patients who need care the most.”

Also, BCEHS is pursuing alternatives to traditional emergency response for patients who do not require transport to a hospital. This includes options such as providing medical advice over the phone, transporting patients to a health clinic, or having paramedics provide treatment in private homes or the community.

The goal of BCEHS is to ensure that patients receive timely and appropriate access to emergency care in every community across the province.

BCEHS works with fire departments in a number of ways, but its collaboration efforts have not resulted in a co-ordinated approach to accessing emergency health services across the province. Improved co-ordination with fire departments is needed to support consistent application of medical standards, information sharing, and improvements to patient care.

For a number of reasons, improving co-ordination will not be easy. One challenge is that fire department first responders are employed by local governments, while BCEHS is part of the provincial government. Further, BCEHS and some municipalities have different views on how fire department first responders can best support BCEHS in providing effective access to emergency health services. Support from the provincial government may be needed to improve co-ordination between BCEHS and fire department first responders across the province.

In British Columbia, BCEHS is responsible for the delivery, co-ordination and governance of emergency health services, including call intake and dispatch.



OFFICE OF THE  
**Auditor General**  
of British Columbia

The full report is available on the Office of the Auditor General website at [www.bcauditor.com](http://www.bcauditor.com).

Bellringer will answer questions pertaining to the report via a news conference.

News Conference Date: Wednesday, February 27, 2019

Time: 12:30 p.m. (Pacific time)

Dial-in Information:

From Vancouver: 604 681-0260

From elsewhere in Canada and the USA: 1 877 353-9184

Participant Pass Code: 44848#

During question and answer period, to ask a question: Press 01

During question and answer period, to exit the question queue: Press #

**About the Office of the Auditor General of British Columbia**

The auditor general is a non-partisan, independent officer of the legislature who reports directly to the legislative assembly. The *Auditor General Act* empowers the auditor general and staff to conduct audits, report findings and make recommendations.

Contact us:

To speak to the Auditor General, call Hannah English: 250-419-6260

For general questions, call Colleen Rose, Manager, Communications: 250-419-6207

[www.bcauditor.com](http://www.bcauditor.com)

Subscribe to receive report e-notifications at [www.bcauditor.com/reach/subscribe](http://www.bcauditor.com/reach/subscribe)