



Pre Budget Consultation Submission to Finance Canada ahead of Budget 2026

Submitted by: Paramedic Chiefs of Canada

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About the Paramedic Chiefs of Canada:

The Paramedic Chiefs of Canada (PCC) is the national association representing leaders of municipal, regional, provincial, and Indigenous paramedic services from across the country. PCC provides leadership on issues affecting emergency medical services, advocates for evidence-informed policy, and works collaboratively with governments, healthcare partners, public safety organizations, and other stakeholders to strengthen Canada's paramedic profession and improve patient care. Collectively, PCC members oversee paramedic services that respond to millions of calls each year, making them uniquely positioned to identify emerging health trends, operational challenges, and opportunities to strengthen Canada's health system and emergency preparedness.

Introduction:

Canada's paramedics are an essential yet underutilized component of the country's healthcare system. Every day, paramedics deliver urgent care, respond to public health emergencies, support vulnerable populations, and serve as the first point of contact for Canadians experiencing medical crises. In doing so, they gain a unique understanding of emerging health challenges, including the toxic drug crisis, mental health pressures, an aging population, and the increasing complexity of emergency care needs.

Despite their critical role, frontline emergency health professionals are not always meaningfully incorporated into national policy discussions. Paramedics and other frontline providers often have immediate insight into changing community needs, emerging public health threats, and opportunities to improve how care is delivered. Better leveraging this expertise can help the Government of Canada make more informed decisions, strengthen emergency preparedness, and improve health system efficiency.

Strategic federal investments that better integrate frontline perspectives and address operational pressures within emergency healthcare delivery will generate significant benefits for Canadians. By ensuring those closest to patients have a meaningful role in shaping policy, while supporting innovative approaches that improve patient flow and system capacity, the Government of Canada can strengthen health outcomes, support workforce wellbeing, and ensure more effective use of public resources.

Recommendation 1: Establish a national frontline emergency health roundtable series to strengthen federal health policy, emergency preparedness, and evidence-informed decision-making.

The PCC is a nationally connected stakeholder representing paramedic leadership and the frontline health care professionals who deliver care directly in communities often before patients reach hospitals and frequently serve as the first point of contact within the health care system for emergency medical attention. Paramedics provide critical first-response care to Canadians across a wide range of circumstances and are also one essential piece of the broader health care system, working alongside other health and medical professionals to save lives and inform policies that can remain responsive to the ebbs and flows of critical health care needs and the social and environmental factors that shape them.

To support a more cohesive approach to the federal government's role in strengthening Canada's health care system, advancing innovation, and ensuring that federal health and public safety policies remain responsive against changing needs, the PCC recommends that the Government of Canada establish a national frontline emergency health roundtable series, co-led by Health Canada and Public Safety Canada.

The roundtable series would create a regular forum for engagement among trusted leaders in Canada's frontline health care professionals, emergency responders, public health experts, Indigenous health leaders, and health system partners. Meeting approximately four times annually, the roundtable series will provide an ongoing collaboration for federal decision-makers to hear directly from those delivering care and responding to emergencies in communities across our country. It would also ensure that federal health and public safety policies are informed by the experiences, expertise, and real-time insights of those delivering care in communities across Canada.

The PCC believe it is imperative to elevate paramedic perspectives in federal decision-making, particularly as paramedics are often the first health professionals to encounter emerging public health risks, community-level overdose trends, mental health crises, and emergency preparedness gaps. These and other unique pressures are contributing to significant challenges for paramedic workforce sustainability, and as many other frontline health care professionals are facing similar and various other pressures. These pressures can contribute to early departures from the professions, creating gaps across the health care provider system and ultimately placing additional strain on the health care system and its capacity to care for patients. Therefore, it is crucial that the roundtable also examine policies and programs that can support the mental health and wellbeing of frontline health care providers and contribute to retaining the experienced workforce

needed to continue delivering the high-quality care that Canadians and health system partners rely on.

The roundtable series would also create an opportunity to identify emerging health challenges earlier, share frontline perspectives and promising practices, strengthen coordination across jurisdictions, and support more effective and evidence-informed federal decision-making. Discussions could address issues including the toxic drug crisis, mental health, emergency preparedness, health system pressures, community-based care, and workforce sustainability, as well as opportunities to improve outcomes where care is provided outside traditional hospital settings.

By establishing a regular and trusted platform between federal decision-makers and frontline health professionals, the Government of Canada can strengthen its ability to anticipate emerging challenges, assess the effectiveness of existing interventions, and develop policies that reflect the realities of health care delivery in communities. The PCC is well positioned to serve as a leading national partner in this effort, bringing together the experience and perspectives of paramedic leaders from across Canada to help inform a stronger, more responsive, and more resilient health system.

Recommendation 2: Improve health system capacity and emergency response through investments in integrated care models, patient flow solutions, and innovations that reduce ambulance offload delays.

The PCC recommends that the Government of Canada establish targeted support, in collaboration with provinces, territories, and health care partners, to identify, evaluate, and scale innovative approaches that improve patient flow, reduce ambulance offload delays, and strengthen the overall capacity and resilience of Canada's emergency health system.

While the delivery of health care is primarily a provincial and territorial responsibility, the federal government has an important role to play in supporting innovation, convening partners, strengthening the evidence base, and helping successful approaches be identified, evaluated, and shared across jurisdictions. A coordinated federal approach must focus on enabling the adoption of evidence-informed solutions, including improved coordination between paramedic services and hospitals, community paramedicine models, alternative care pathways, and other approaches that allow patients to receive timely care in the most appropriate setting. It should also support improved data sharing between paramedic services, hospitals, public health agencies, and governments so decision-makers can operate from a more accurate picture of community health needs, including overdose responses and other urgent interventions resolved outside hospital settings.

Paramedics are essential frontline health providers who deliver care in communities before, and in many cases outside of, hospital-based care. By fully integrating the experience and expertise of paramedics into federal discussions about health system capacity, emergency preparedness, workforce sustainability, and patient outcomes, policymakers can gain valuable insight into where patients are entering the health system. As well as what care they require, which pressures are emerging in communities, and where alternative pathways may be able to improve outcomes while reducing unnecessary pressure on hospitals.

A challenge that has continued to have a critical ripple effect on life-saving patient care, and a vital area of focus requiring improvement, is reducing ambulance offload delays and improving patient flow. Targeted investment to address these growing pressures can help the federal government support measures that return paramedic teams to service more quickly, improve emergency response capacity, reduce strain on emergency departments, and support better patient outcomes. These objectives are directly connected to the toxic drug crisis, mental health-related calls, and other complex community health needs that paramedics encounter in real time, often before those pressures are reflected in hospital data or traditional system reporting.

Investing in integrated care models and alternative pathways can help ensure that not every patient who requires emergency assistance must ultimately rely on a hospital emergency department as the only space for care. With targeted support, community-based and alternative models can provide patients with more timely and appropriate care in the most appropriate settings, while helping to preserve hospital capacity for those who require it most.

These investments should therefore also recognize the importance of supporting the mental health and wellbeing of frontline health care professionals. Paramedics operate in demanding environments and face significant pressures when community resources are lacking, capacity constraints prevent them from returning to service efficiently, or when they witness Canadians in critical states experiencing delays in accessing the care they urgently require. Addressing these pressures through better system coordination and more effective use of available health care resources can contribute to healthier and more sustainable working environments for paramedics and other emergency health professionals.

Reducing ambulance offload delays and improving patient flow would address pressures that extend well beyond the emergency department itself. When paramedic teams are required to remain at hospitals for extended periods while waiting to transfer patients into hospital care, ambulances and paramedic crews can be unavailable for subsequent calls. Improving the movement of patients through the health system can help return paramedic

teams to service more quickly, strengthening emergency response capacity, reducing pressure on emergency departments, and supporting more timely care for patients.

The Government of Canada has an opportunity to support jurisdictions in testing and advancing practical solutions that strengthen the connections between emergency response, community-based care, and hospital services. By supporting innovation, evaluation, data integration, and the dissemination of successful models, federal leadership can help jurisdictions build on what works and strengthen health system capacity over the longer term.

Conclusion:

The PCC is well positioned to be a national partner in advancing this work. As the leading national voice representing paramedics and paramedicine in Canada, the PCC can help bring together frontline expertise, identify promising practices, support evidence-informed policy development, and help ensure that the perspectives of paramedics are reflected in federal efforts to strengthen Canada's health care system. Supporting paramedic-led innovation and integrating paramedic expertise more fully into health system planning will ultimately help build a stronger emergency health system and better outcomes for Canadians.

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