

**PROVINCIAL MARKET SUPPLEMENT PROGRAM**

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**Report of the Market Supplement Review  
Committee**

**Paramedic**

**Final Report**

**August 6, 2002**

## OBJECTIVE

The objective of the Saskatchewan Market Supplement Program is to ensure that Saskatchewan health care employers can attract and retain the employees required to provide appropriate health care services to the people of Saskatchewan.

This program is designed to address specific skill shortages by use of a temporary market supplement to attract and/or retain qualified employees. The program is designed to ensure that temporary market supplements respond to valid labour market criteria to address recruitment/retention pressures.

A temporary market supplement will be an acceptable option only if:

- a) workplace initiatives have not addressed the skill shortage;
- b) labour market data supports a supplement; and,
- c) recruitment/retention is a problem, is affecting service delivery and is well documented.

This report deals with the Market Supplement Review Committee's analysis of the recruitment/retention pressures facing employers with respect to Paramedics

## OVERVIEW

The Market Supplement Review Committee reviewed documentation included in the request for consideration of a market supplement for Paramedics.

A total of 3 employers reported that they employ Paramedics in their Health Districts for the purpose of this report. Of the 3 employers, 1 reports vacancies in this classification. A provincial vacancy rate is 17.6% (April, 2002).

Role of a Paramedic:

*Paramedics provide intervention services to those clients requiring Emergency Medical Services (EMS). These interventions have been demonstrated to be life saving and significantly impact patient comfort and outcome. Paramedics are the only EMS practitioners able to provide the following:*

- *Pain control through the administration of narcotics.*
- *Stabilization of severe respiratory distress.*
- *Diuresis of Congestive Heart Failure patients*
- *Full ACLS resuscitation equivalent to that performed in the Emergency Department.*
- *12 lead ECG interpretation*
- *Cardiac pacing*

A number of Health Districts in Saskatchewan have reported that they contract out or use private ambulance services. This report does not include information from those employers.

Information regarding budgeted positions and vacancies is provided in the following table:

**Paramedic – Table 1**

Districts	Number of Budgeted Positions (April, 2002)		Number of Vacant Budgeted Positions (April, 2002)		% Vacancy	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
South Central Health District	1	0	0	0		
Northwest Health District	1	0	0	0		
Regina Health District	*32	0	6	0	18.8%	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>17.6%</b>	

\*Note: There are also 3 casual staff members

## ANALYSIS

The MSRC discussed the Labour Market Criteria as guided by the Provincial Market Supplement Program framework.

**SERVICE DELIVERY IMPACTS:** *(Employers were asked to provide information that addresses current service delivery impacts resulting from staff shortages, potential staff short term service delivery impacts, potential long term service delivery impacts and options for alternative service delivery models).*

Of the 3 Districts who reported, 2 did not report service delivery issues. One large urban employer reported the following service delivery problems:

- No guarantee a Paramedic will be available to respond to emergency calls requiring Advanced Life Support (ALS). In 2001, one employer dropped 167 shifts from Paramedic coverage to EMT coverage.
- If no ALS (Paramedic) staffed ambulance is available immediately, a Basic Life Support (BLS) ambulance will be sent and the ALS ambulance will also be sent as soon as available.
- Duties are being off-loaded to physicians and RN's (who are already experiencing shortages and may not be the most appropriate care givers for the out of hospital setting) or, patients will not receive certain interventions or levels of care.
- Have had to request other employers to transport patients between Districts at a higher cost because of inability to find staff to cover shifts. This occurred 3 times in February, 2002.
- Approximately 875 shifts i.e. 10,500 hours, were paid at overtime rates to Paramedics in 2001.
- Increased overtime is causing staff to feel tired of being at work and this may play a major role in burnout.
- EMS has increased responsibility to transport patients in and out of one District to receive specialized care. Paramedic shortages will affect the ability to transport those patients receiving specialized care.



**VACANCY RATE ANALYSIS:** *(Employers were requested to provide information about the frequency and timing of vacancy occurrences (i.e., seasonal vacancies; do the vacancies always follow an event; etc.) and to identify trends that may affect recruitment/retention efforts).*

One large employer reported that the average length of vacancy for Paramedics is 15 months.

According to the Canadian EMS Chiefs, there is a growing shortage of Paramedics in North America. In Alberta, the Alberta Ambulance Operators Association (AAOA), recently announced that Alberta ambulance services would, within the next 5 years, require 450 – 650 new Paramedics. Between Alberta and Saskatchewan, approximately 60 – 80 Paramedics graduate per year. The AAOA has targeted Regina and Saskatoon as the 2 most favorable sites in all of Canada to recruit Paramedics because of their excellent experience, comprehensive training and the current wage disparity.

The Paramedic Association of Canada, the Canadian Medical Association, and the Government of Canada have implemented a program that will allow more free movement of EMS personnel from one province to another a part of the Agreement on Interprovincial Trade. Graduates of CMA accredited programs will have licensure reciprocity amongst provinces by summer 2002. The Saskatchewan programs are CMA accredited therefore making it easier for EMS personnel to move to other provinces.

One employer states in 2001, Paramedic service was dropped by 50% on certain days.

**TURNOVER RATES:** *(Employers were asked to provide local analysis of reasons for leaving and trends that may be emerging. They were also asked to provide annual turnover (loss of employees to other competitor employers) ratio to the existing staff complement (budgeted positions) in the given occupation.).*

The turnover rate for the large urban employer was 15% for 2001. Exit interviews have revealed that the most common reason for leaving is the wage disparity with other provinces as well as with other professions. A staff survey shows that wage disparity is the number one retention issue with existing staff.

The majority of Paramedics have left this employer for full-time positions in Police and Fire Departments as well as EMS services in Alberta or Ontario. Although the positions are distinctly different, Paramedics are often hired as Fire fighters and Police Officers because of their critical thinking skills. The difference in wages can be up to \$6/hour higher in these provinces.

**WORKPLACE INITIATIVES:** *(Employers were asked to identify workplace initiatives undertaken to address staff shortages, i.e., workload, job redesign, local joint union/management processes, health & safety, etc.).*

Employer initiatives have included:

- Relief staffing at the premium rate of pay (when relief staff can be found)
- Improved orientation and in-servicing policies i.e. the new orientation program costs \$8,000 per employee
- More flexibility in scheduling
- Employee recognition projects, team-building, increase in staff communications

**RECRUITMENT ISSUE ANALYSIS:** *(Employers were asked to provide information such as length of recruitment times, training investments, licensing issues, supply and demand issues, etc., as well as information that would identify trends that may affect recruitment and/or retention efforts).*

Employer recruitment initiatives have included:

- Advertising via internet, newspapers and mailouts
- School visits
- Bursaries to new grads i.e. 6 bursaries of \$3,500 each for 2001-2002 (1 employer)
- Encouragement to EMT employees to upgrade their training to Paramedic level. In exchange for a 1 year commitment, bursaries, education leave of absence, interest free loan (\$6,500) are offered.

Most new hires are new grads. Paramedic programs are offered in:

- British Columbia (1 program is offered through the Justice Institute)
- Alberta (As of 2002, there will be 4 paramedic programs, graduating approximately 15 students per year per program).
- Manitoba (1 program is offered through Winnipeg EMS. Candidates must be employee of Winnipeg EMS to enter program).
- Saskatchewan has a program (SIAST) that graduates 14 – 16 students per year.

The program in Saskatchewan (SIAST) allows students from other provinces. However, upon graduation they tend to either return to their home province or relocate to Alberta.

Other EMS organizations have been successful in creating career opportunities for EMS staff by developing tactical medical response teams i.e. paramedics trained to intervene at the front lines of police SWAT and riot squad operations. The RCMP and City Police have approached one District on this however, they have been unable to provide staff for these activities due to staff shortages. Other proven recruitment and retention initiatives include Emergency Room placements and Emergency planning. Again, because of the staffing shortages, these new initiatives are not feasible for this employer at this time.

**SALARY MARKET CONDITIONS:** *(Employers were asked to identify situations where their salary levels are lower than other employers that they would expect to recruit employees from or other employers that recruit their employees. This may be local, provincial, regional, national or international depending on the occupation group and traditional recruitment relationships. Cost of living considerations may or may not be appropriate to factor into market salary comparisons).*

One employer noted:

- For the Paramedic classification, there are 2 main competitors including Fire and Police Departments.
- Locally, the Fire and Police positions are not perceived as having comparable duties and responsibilities. However, these professions historically have recruited Paramedics.
- Salary comparisons with Alberta Paramedics show a 28% difference at the entry level and, a 24% difference at the top level.



**AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES:** *(The magnitude and timing of any market adjustment will be subject to the availability of existing resources. Please make any comments as to the impact of addressing this staff shortage if resources are not available in the short term).*

One employer reported that overtime has increased and some duties have been off-loaded to RN's and physicians or, patients will not receive certain interventions or levels of care at either the pick up scene or in transport. Delays in transport for clients needing time sensitive treatment have continued to increase.

## **CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Following the analysis of the data, the Committee is aware of the information surrounding the recruitment and retention of Paramedics.

Considering all the labour market criteria under the provincial framework, the Market Supplement Review Committee makes the following conclusions:

1. Service delivery issues were not identified by 2 of the 3 reporting employers. However, the District experiencing the service problems is a major urban centre which hires 94% of the reported Paramedics, and the issues are significant. Service problems reported include: minimum staffing levels i.e. no guarantee that a Paramedic will respond to a call requiring Advanced Life Support (ALS); increased risk from sending multiple ambulances to same call if no ALS staff ambulance is immediately available relying on other ambulance services outside of District; and, off loading duties to Physicians and RN's who clearly are already fully occupied with their own responsibilities.
2. The Committee recognized the recruiting issues that currently face employers. The vacancy rate for Paramedics in Saskatchewan is 17.6% for permanent full-time positions. One employer reports a 15 month average vacancy rate for Paramedics. Competition for Paramedics amongst employers across Canada is extremely significant and will increase when licensure reciprocity is recognized across Canada later this year.
3. Employers have made effort in attempting to enhance the attractiveness of the EMS workplace. Examples include: improving the new employee orientation and in-servicing policies, flexible shifts (when able), improving the physical facilities to better meet the program needs, and, offering employee recognition programs, team building and communication plans.

Having reviewed the employer information and considering all the labour market criteria defined by the market supplement framework, the Market Supplement Review Committee recommends:

1. A temporary market supplement for the Paramedic classification be implemented.
2. SAHO Labour Relations assess the current practices with respect to this classification, and work to standardize those practices.

**Market Supplement Consideration Request – Paramedics**

**Employer Respondents**

1. South Central Health District
2. Northwest Health District
3. Regina Health District

