

Increased funding to ADPS to allow paramedics to make house calls

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Photo by KEVIN McSHEFFREY/THE STANDARD On Friday, Nathalie Des Rosiers - MPP for Ottawa-Vanier, Elliot Lake Mayor Dan Marchisella, Henry Alamenciak, chief of Algoma District Paramedic Services, joined Premier Kathleen Wynne at the ADPS office in Elliot Lake for a funding announcement.

On Friday morning, Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne made a funding announcement at the Algoma District Paramedic Services (ADPS) office in Elliot Lake.

Wynne told the small group gathered at the ADPS that “health care is at the very centre of our caring for each other. If we have a value system that is based on fairness and equality and compassion, health care is probably the best way we express our caring for one another.”

She added that to help, the government is raising hospital operating funding by three per cent, cutting wait times and adding more nurses.

“Everyone should enjoy the care and comfort of a health care system that really is world class.”

She added that everyone should be able to expect the care that they need, at whatever age.

Ontario’s population is aging, and the people in Elliot Lake know that the care needs of the public is changing.

“I think Elliot Lake is at the forefront of that; you’re leading the charge. And supporting communities also means listening to their specific needs.

“I’m happy to announce today that we are renewing our support for the Community Paramedicine Program here in Elliot Lake.

“It’s exactly the kind of innovative thinking that we need to apply to our health care system right now.”

Through the Community Paramedicine Program, seniors and those with chronic health conditions can receive non-emergency care from a paramedic, often in their own home.

“Paramedics go beyond their traditional emergency response roles and provide a proactive level of care.”

That would include those who call 911 often; it would include home visits with seniors, as well as routine health checks, such as blood pressure and blood glucose testing.

While this program is relatively new for Elliot Lake and Algoma, it has been a pilot project in the Cochrane and Sudbury-Manitoulin districts for more than a year.

“We know this program works.”

Wynne said in the places where the program has been operating it showed a 73% reduction in 911 calls, 64% showed fewer call that resulted in emergency transports, and 80% showed reduced hospital admissions.

“Thumbs up on that.”

She added that last year, the program helped 8,252 people in the Cochrane and Manitoulin-Sudbury and Algoma districts.

“More people want to stay in their home, and this allows people to do just that.”

As a result of the success across the North East Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) the province has invested in five community paramedicine projects.

This year, the regions of Cochrane, Manitoulin-Sudbury and Algoma; Nipissing/Sudbury Health Promotion; Sudbury - Care Transitions Project; and Parry Sound will share \$771,200 in funding.

The North East LHIN funding is part of a new annual province-wide investment of \$6 million for the LHINs.

The announcement in Elliot Lake saw representatives attend from the city, St. Joseph’s General Hospital, the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Paramedic Services, Espanola, Township of Sables-Spanish Rivers and Sudbury.

Wynne was pleased to see nursing staff from the local hospital at the event.

“... anything that can keep people out of the emergency room, when they don’t really need to be there, really lightens the burden in the emergency rooms and in the hospitals. I just think this is a brilliant program.”

Elliot Lake mayor

Elliot Lake Mayor Dan Marchisella said the announcement was important for Elliot Lake.

“We have a higher level of the vulnerable, seniors with disabilities. What this means for us is less people having to check into emerge, shorter wait times and an all-round healthier Elliot Lake, Algoma District and Ontario.”

ADPS chief supports program

Henry Alamenciak, chief of Algoma District Paramedic Services, agreed with Wynne saying doing home visits would reduce emergency calls and transporting people to the emergency room.

He says the ASPA has not yet begun doing home visits with seniors for routine health checks such as blood pressure and blood glucose testing.

However, our crews “go in, they assess the patient and we do a referral to the CCAC (Community Care Access Centres),” explains Alamenciak.

The additional funding they receive will help the ASPA paramedics to do home visits.

“But we’d like far more funding than what’s being announced.”

While the Premier said \$771,200 was being allocated, that was for the five districts mentioned above. The three regions, Cochrane, Manitoulin-Sudbury and Algoma will share about \$88,000, with each getting nearly \$29,000.

However, paramedics will not be available for home visits all the time, only when they have downtime, explains Alamenciak, and that paramedics could also hold wellness clinics.

Beginning of the program

For a few years, Cochrane, Manitoulin-Sudbury and Algoma had been doing referrals to the CCAC. However, Cochrane and Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Administration Boards (DSAB) reallocated some of their funding to expand that program to do home visits and hold clinics.

Alamenciak says the Algoma DSAB didn't have any funds to reallocate to such a program. But now that they have gotten the extra funding, that is where it will go.

"It's a good initiative; it helps people stay at home. It's sort of the way of the future; people want to stay at home instead of being stuck in hospitals and nursing homes," says Alamenciak.

Rob Smith, chief of Manitoulin-Sudbury District Paramedic Services, says to expand the program they started with a couple of small test communities (Gogama, located off Highway 144, south of Timmins, and later Gore Bay, on Manitoulin Island). The paramedics in those two communities had more downtime and were able to start the pilot projects of doing home visits and wellness clinics.

"The community (Gogama) grabbed onto it and engaged with it really very quickly. And because it was a small number of paramedics working there, it was easier to focus. It became almost a strategic effort for them. And then it was the same thing with Gore Bay," explains Smith.

He says they then expanded the project across the district.

"And once it worked, and we had the recipe right, we could roll it out to everybody."

Township of Sables-Spanish Rivers Mayor Les Gamble is pleased with the program. He says the paramedics have been holding clinics in the community for about a year, helping citizens.

Smith adds they now share their information with the other DSABs so they do not have to make the same early mistakes.

Smith says the three regions began working together on the referrals to the CCAC because their districts have many similarities