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January 17, 2022

For Immediate Release – January 17, 2022

BC ambulance paramedics record one million ambulance responses in 2021 – an all-time high

Data shows calls have increased drastically year over year

Vancouver, British Columbia - Ambulance Paramedics of BC responded to more than one million events responses last year, according to CUPE 873 President Troy Clifford. "In 2021, there were more than 840,000 dispatched ambulance events issued through BCEHS' Ambulance dispatch system. We know, however, that many events involved multiple ambulances and resources that don't get separate event numbers, so we are confident that our members responded to over a million calls for service in 2021 serving the citizens of BC. The numbers are staggering, to say the least."

BCEHS's call volume data reflects a steep upward trajectory year over year. In 2018, ambulance paramedics responded to 714,00 calls; in 2019, they had 723,000, and in 2020 they saw over 751,000. These numbers don't count the multiple ambulances and resources that did not get their own response identifier. "In just one year, we have seen almost 90,000 more responses," said Clifford. "With our worst staffing crisis in history, and BCEHS' inability to recruit and retain sufficient paramedics, we are heading for serious trouble. These numbers are just not sustainable."

The BC Coroners Service said that 2021's opioid deaths surpassed 2020's numbers by October, setting a new ten-month record of 1,782, with October alone seeing more than 200 deaths. "Our paramedics are pivotal in the prehospital fight against addiction and overdose deaths," said Clifford. "We are reviving dozens and dozens of patients every single day in this province. If it weren't for the work of our members, those numbers would be exponentially higher – without question. By the time 2021 final numbers come in, we could be looking at over 2,000 opioid-related deaths."

With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and severe weather events, like the heat dome and flooding, Clifford said the unprecedented call volume is putting paramedics' ability to respond to calls in peril. "We need some fundamental changes to how we acknowledge our members' mental health and wellness, let alone changes to wages and benefits to improve staffing and recruitment. If we don't see changes soon, we will continue to see our ability to respond to patients suffer and wait times increase."

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