
LEARN AND STAY ELIGIBILITY

Purpose

Paramedic education in Ontario is at a pivotal moment. Since 2000, the entry-to-practice credential has been a two-year diploma, replacing the previous three-semester Ambulance and Emergency Care certificate. This change was driven by the expanding clinical scope and professional recognition of the “paramedic” role.

However, today’s paramedics are being called upon to do much more, taking on roles in community paramedicine, virtual triage, emergency department staffing, and integrated care pathways. The current two-year diploma does not provide sufficient time or depth to equip paramedics with the advanced knowledge, skills, and clinical judgment required for these roles.

To truly optimize the role, scope, and impact of paramedic care for Ontarians, education must evolve. A more robust, integrated, and future-ready model is required.

Proposal

- **Implement a three-year Paramedicine degree program across all provincially funded colleges, beginning in fall 2025.** Ensure planning mitigates the risk of a two-year gap in graduate output. The implementation must ensure continuity of a sufficient cohort to avoid any “gap year” in graduate supply, maintaining a consistent pipeline of new practitioners.
- **Structure the degree program to incorporate laddering,** enabling students to progress from Primary Care Paramedic (PCP) to Advanced Care Paramedic (ACP) competencies within a single, regulated educational framework. This model ensures both educational and professional continuity. Certification in Autonomous IV should be included as part of the standard entry-to-practice credential, ensuring graduates are practice-ready across all settings.
- **Increase base funding to support more extensive lab, simulation, and virtual learning environments.** These resources are essential for developing the complex clinical and decision-making skills now expected of modern paramedics.
- **Enhance Ministry funding formulas** to reflect the program’s extended duration and complexity, and to incentivize larger program intakes. Academic certification processes must be built into the curriculum to verify proficiency in all clinical skills performed during preceptorship.
- **Include paramedic students in the Learn and Stay Grant,** supporting not only entry-to-practice education but also advanced certification. This approach will address both immediate and long-term Health Human Resources (HHR) shortages, particularly in underserved regions.

- **Strengthen collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Paramedic Services,** recognizing their critical role in delivering high-quality clinical education experiences. The formal inclusion of paramedic mental health and wellness programs within the curriculum is also essential to support student resilience, retention, and long-term workforce sustainability.

Challenges

Two primary challenges remain:

1. Aligning education with the expanding scope of paramedic practice.
2. Addressing the health human resource crisis affecting paramedic services across Ontario.

The current two-year diploma cannot meet the demands of a modern Paramedic Service. Paramedics are increasingly relied upon to provide front-line care, conduct comprehensive assessments, deliver community-based interventions, and manage complex patients outside of hospital settings.

These responsibilities require not only technical skills but a deep understanding of clinical reasoning, health-system navigation, population health, and evidence-based practice. A structured, ladder degree pathway will better equip paramedics to take on these evolving roles—and in doing so, optimize their impact on patient outcomes and system efficiency.

Time for Educational Changes

A degree-based, ladder program would support the inclusion of Paramedics under the Regulated Health Professions Act (RHPA). This step is essential to ensuring Paramedics have the regulatory support to practice to full scope, adapt to changing care models, and contribute meaningfully to interprofessional teams.

Professional regulation under the RHPA would also give the paramedic profession ownership of its scope and standards, allowing faster adaptation to changing health needs across Ontario.

Since 2017, Ontario's Paramedic Programs have been collaborating with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to modernize provincial program standards. While early efforts envisioned a shift to a three-year advanced diploma, this is no longer sufficient to prepare graduates for the full scope of paramedic responsibilities.

Many colleges have already exceeded the instructional hours typical for diploma programs in an effort to keep pace with real-world demands. A three-year, ladder degree is now the only model capable of delivering the depth and breadth of education required to optimize the paramedic's evolving role and impact.

As all health programs expand to meet growing demand, clinical placement capacity has become increasingly constrained. Without coordinated investment and planning, the launch of a four-year program could further strain the system.

To mitigate this, the province should explore creative laddering models, flexible program delivery options, and year-round placement scheduling. The involvement of Paramedic Services as committed educational partners must be formally recognized and supported through dedicated resources.

The Learn and Stay Grant, which supports advanced nursing education, must be extended to paramedicine. The need for advanced paramedic roles is equally urgent, particularly in rural and northern regions. Extending this funding would support both initial training and advanced laddering opportunities (e.g., ACP certification), allowing regions like Renfrew County to build and sustain programs that meet their population's needs.

Ontario's Paramedic Services are uniquely positioned to provide community-focused, patient-centered, and system-integrated care. With a reimagined education system – one that is ladderized, degree-based, and regulation-ready – Paramedics can fully realize their potential as key contributors to Ontario's health system. This shift is not just about adding years to education – it's about optimizing the role, scope, and impact of paramedic care to meet the health needs of Ontarians today and into the future.