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# LEVERAGING THE LEARN AND STAY GRANT TO STRENGTHEN THE PARAMEDIC WORKFORCE IN RURAL ONTARIO

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## Purpose

To seek Ministry of Health support for expanding the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant to include Paramedicine students and to establish funding for career-long educational pathways – from entry-to-practice training through upskilling to Advanced Care Paramedic (ACP) and Community Paramedic (CP) roles.

This approach will ensure a sustainable pipeline of qualified paramedics, support career progression and employee retention, and address ongoing Health Human Resources (HHR) challenges in rural and northern Ontario.

## Background

Ontario's rural and northern communities continue to experience persistent shortages of paramedics and other health-care professionals. These shortages impact emergency response times, continuity of care, and access to preventative and community-based health services.

At the same time, the scope and complexity of Paramedicine are expanding, requiring advanced clinical competencies and leadership capabilities. To sustain this evolving role, Ontario needs a comprehensive educational and funding strategy that attracts new entrants, supports career advancement, and retains experienced practitioners within the system.

The Learn and Stay Grant, which currently supports students in other critical health professions, covers tuition and education-related costs in exchange for a post-graduation service commitment in underserved areas. Expanding this grant to Paramedicine – and aligning it with upskilling supports – will help stabilize the workforce and enhance care access across all regions of the province.

## Why This is Important

### Strengthening Entry-to-Practice Recruitment

- Extending the Learn and Stay Grant to Paramedicine will attract students from rural and northern regions, increasing the likelihood they train and remain in their home communities.
- Removing financial barriers improves access and diversity in the paramedic workforce.

### Supporting Career Progression and Retention

- Structured upskilling pathways from PCP to ACP and Community Paramedic roles provide clear, achievable career goals that encourage retention and professional satisfaction.

- Experienced paramedics can advance their clinical scope and continue serving their communities without needing to relocate or leave the workforce to pursue further education.

### **Enhancing Local Capacity and System Resilience**

- Upskilled ACPs and Community Paramedics enhance the capacity for advanced and preventative care within rural and northern regions.
- Expanding local training and service delivery reduces reliance on urban recruitment and strengthens community-based health-care delivery.

### **Promoting Equity and Long-Term Sustainability**

- A combined approach to entry, advancement, and retention ensures equitable access to education and employment, stabilizing regional health systems.
- Embedding mental health and wellness supports within education and training programs will help address burnout and strengthen workforce resilience.

## **Key Recommendations**

### **Inclusion of Paramedicine Students in the Learn and Stay Grant**

- Expand the Learn and Stay Grant to include Primary Care and Advanced Care Paramedicine programs at Ontario's publicly funded colleges.
- Prioritize applicants who reside in or commit to practise in rural and northern communities after graduation.
- Align the program with Ontario's Health Human Resources Strategy to support targeted regional workforce planning.

### **Support for Paramedic Upskilling and Professional Development**

- Develop dedicated funding for upskilling programs that allow current PCPs to progress to ACP or Community Paramedic certification.
- Offer flexible learning options (e.g., modular, hybrid, or virtual formats) that enable working paramedics to participate without leaving their communities.
- Recognize upskilling as an essential retention strategy, ensuring long-term service continuity in high-need areas.

### **Strengthen Collaboration and Educational Infrastructure**

- Enhance coordination between the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Colleges and Universities, and Paramedic Services to expand training capacity and clinical placement opportunities.
- Invest in simulation labs, regional training hubs, and virtual learning platforms to maintain consistent, high-quality instruction across Ontario.
- Incorporate paramedic mental health and wellness programming as a standard component of both initial and advanced training.

## **Expected Outcomes**

- Increased recruitment and retention of Paramedicine students and practitioners in rural and northern Ontario.

- Enhanced workforce stability through continuous learning and career progression opportunities.
- Expanded clinical capacity via locally trained Advanced and Community Paramedics.
- Improved patient access to emergency and community-based care.
- Strong alignment with the province's Health Human Resources Strategy and rural health-care sustainability goals.

## Recommendation

That the Ministry of Health:

1. Expand the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant to include Paramedicine students, supporting both entry-to-practice and advanced training.
2. Invest in structured upskilling programs to facilitate advancement from Primary Care to Advanced Care and Community Paramedic roles.
3. Collaborate with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to align education funding, program delivery, and workforce distribution goals.

