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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health Services  
BC Ambulance Service  
Interior Health

### **SOUTHERN INTERIOR TO GET HELICOPTER AMBULANCE PILOT**

KAMLOOPS – Health Services Minister Kevin Falcon today launched an eight-week pilot project for a dedicated helicopter air ambulance that will transport critically ill or injured patients in the southern Interior.

“Whether by ground or air, we want to get patients to the care they need as quickly as possible,” said Falcon. “We are excited about the potential and will watch the helicopter air ambulance pilot project over the coming weeks to evaluate its impact on patient outcomes in the southern Interior.”

“Adding dedicated air service on a trial basis is a positive step forward and a welcomed support to rural health professionals,” said Kamloops-North Thompson MLA Terry Lake.

Emergency air transport in Interior Health is provided by BC Ambulance Service (BCAS) paramedics transporting patients via airplanes and chartered helicopters. There are no dedicated air ambulance helicopters on contract in the Interior but if required, helicopters are chartered as needed from pre-qualified local air operators.

“BC Ambulance Service and Interior Health have been involved in discussions to determine the best option for Critical Care Transport by air to serve rural communities spread out over vast distances,” said BCAS chief operating officer Les Fisher.

The new dedicated pilot project that will operate during daylight hours will see a local helicopter and pilots contracted to fly Critical Care Transport paramedics from Kamloops directly to an incident scene or rural facility. These paramedics will help stabilize the patients and then transport them to the appropriate level of care.

“The helicopter ambulance pilot project is certainly excellent news,” said Interior Health CEO Dr. Robert Halpenny. “We want to continue to work with BCAS to ensure we create the right critical-care transportation model to meet the needs of residents and visitors of the southern Interior.”

It is estimated that the helicopter will undertake approximately 40 flight hours a month during the trial at a cost of about \$140,000 per month. The Critical Care Transport paramedic team operates in Kamloops. The helicopter being used for the pilot project is a Bell 412 multi-engine aircraft with a crew of four – two pilots and two Critical Care Transport paramedics.

Currently, the BCAS Airevac program contracts three dedicated helicopter air ambulances – two in Vancouver and one in Prince Rupert, plus six fixed-wing air ambulances based in Vancouver, Kelowna and Prince George.

In addition to the contracted aircraft, BCAS also utilizes approximately 40 charter carriers (both airplanes and helicopters) for patient transfers as needed.

BCAS transported 8,209 patients by air in 2009-10. BCAS's expenditure for air ambulance service in 2009-10 was \$41.3 million.

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