

NEWS

Last updated at 9:32 PM on 30/08/05

Wait times 'excessive, unacceptable' Jones wants investigation into air ambulance service

Northern Pen

Cartwright-L'Anse au Clair MHA Yvonne Jones wants to know what's causing delays in response time by the provincial air ambulance service when there are emergencies affecting residents of Labrador.

Calling the wait times "excessive," she's calling on Health and Community Services Minister Paul Oram and Labrador-Grenfell Health to investigate the reason or reasons why this is happening.

"People in Labrador have difficulty understanding why such delays can occur when the urgency of life and death situations are outlined by medical professionals," said the Liberal Opposition leader in a news release on Thursday.

"Every time there is an accident or tragic event in this region of our province, we continuously hear the stories from families who feel a more effective air ambulance service is needed," she said. "We cannot continue with the status quo and a full review of the system is needed to determine how these delays are happening."

Contacted by the Pen, a communications spokesperson in the health department said the minister is the only person who can address the allegations, but that he wasn't available on Thursday. Labrador-Grenfell Health said Thursday any response would come from Eastern Health, which co-ordinates the provincial air ambulance program.

Ms. Jones raised concerns following recent medical emergencies in Labrador which she suggested again demonstrated the need for improvements to the air ambulance service to serve and protect the medical needs of residents of the region.

"The family of an accident victim says their son was forced to wait 11 hours from the time the call was made for emergency transportation from Labrador West to the Health Sciences Centre," she said. "It was also reported that a young boy from Labrador City had to wait nine hours to be transported in another emergency situation."

Ms. Jones noted that when minutes can be critical in the treatment of emergency medical conditions, it's "unacceptable" for patients to wait up to 11 hours for an air ambulance flight.

"In this particular instance, the young man was involved in an accident on Aug. 4 and received serious injuries that required immediate and critical treatment," she pointed out. "While this individual is making progress and is expected to recover from his injuries, his family is angry that they were forced to wait such a long period of time to receive air ambulance service in a potential life and death situation."

The Liberal MHA said the apparent gap in service raises questions about why the system isn't working effectively for patients.

"I am certain there are occasions when service is provided in a more efficient manner, however, these recent incidents in Labrador over the past couple of weeks demonstrate that there are problems that must be addressed somewhere in the system."

At the present time, an air ambulance is stationed at St. Anthony Airport to service Labrador. According to Ms. Jones, if the plane is not available, an air ambulance is dispatched from St. John's. In cases where neither plane is available, commercial airlines are used. If this option is not available, Search and Rescue helicopters are called in for support.



YVONNE JONES