

# Staff Report



---

To	<b>Joint Social Services and Land Ambulance Committee</b>
Service Area	Public Services
Date	Wednesday, May 14, 2025
Subject	<b>Update on Hospital Offload Delays - Guelph Wellington Paramedic Service</b>

---

## Recommendation

1. That the update on hospital offload delays impacting Guelph Wellington Paramedic Service be received by the Joint Social Services and Land Ambulance Committee for information.
- 

## Executive Summary

### Purpose of Report

This report provides a summary and update on hospital offload delays, an issue that impacts the efficiency and effectiveness of Guelph Wellington Paramedic Service (GWPS).

### Key Findings

Hospital offload delays created a significant draw on the resources of GWPS in 2022 and the first quarter of 2023. Considerable work by the Guelph General Hospital and GWPS, with assistance from the Provincial Ministry of Health, has reduced the impact of these delays and facilitated an improvement in the efficiency of the paramedic service.

### Strategic Plan Alignment

Improvements in the efficiency of Guelph Wellington Paramedic Service improve the response times to emergency calls, supporting the need for community well-being.

### Future Guelph Theme

People and Economy

### Future Guelph Objectives

People and Economy: Support community well-being

### Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications from this report. The application for Dedicated Offload Nurse Funding from the Province would, if approved, flow through the City of Guelph to the Guelph General Hospital on verification of staffing. The improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of the paramedic service will indirectly impact future budgetary needs for the service.

---

## Report

Hospital offload times are a significant issue in managing the performance of our paramedic service and have a major influence on our ability to provide efficient services to the community. Hospital offloads occur when paramedics arrive at a hospital with a patient, but the hospital is unable to assume care for that patient. The paramedics are required to remain in the hospital to care for the patient and are unavailable to respond to other emergencies occurring in the community. When paramedics are caring for patients in offload delay and unavailable, paramedic resources are stretched thinner in the community, and subsequently response times to subsequent emergencies lengthen. The Provincial Ministry of Health has directed that the transfer of patient care should occur within 30 minutes, 90 percent of the time.

Guelph Wellington Paramedic Service was significantly impacted by hospital offload delays beginning in 2022 and the first quarter of 2023, primarily at the Guelph General Hospital. Delays there reached over four hours at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile, with some delays stretching to 12 hours and more. As more ambulances were delayed in offload it was common to have 12 teams of paramedics caring for patients in the hospital, leaving three or fewer ambulances available for emergency response during peak hours in Guelph and Wellington County. These circumstances led to multiple occasions where there were no Guelph Wellington paramedics available to respond to emergencies in our community, leaving our residents to rely on and wait for responses from our neighboring paramedic services including from Waterloo, Dufferin, or Halton regions.

The causes of these delays and the inability of the hospital staff to assume care of the patients included an overall increase in the number of patients entering the emergency department including an increase in the number of patients brought in by our paramedics. There was also an increase in the medical acuity of the patients involved, requiring more time and attention from the hospital staff. This was compounded by the number of patients admitted to the hospital overall, leaving no room for patients in the emergency department to be admitted to other areas.

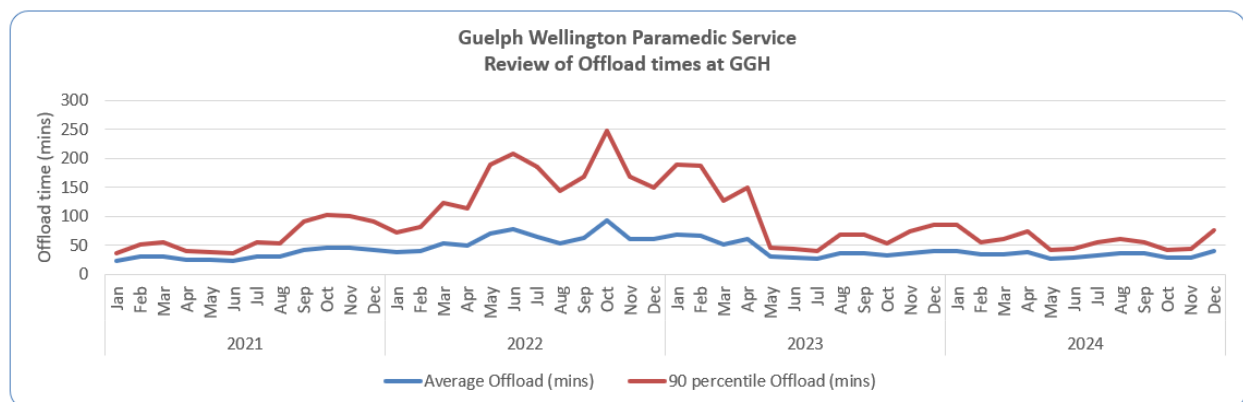
In the second quarter of 2023, our efforts in working with Guelph General hospital began to have an impact. In addition to working on improving our communications and coordinating our efforts, our service focused on reducing the number of patients being transported to GGH through our Community Paramedicine program and by transporting appropriate patients to alternative destinations under programs approved by the Ontario Ministry of Health. We also began a program called Fit2Sit, where appropriate lower acuity patients were offloaded to the waiting room rather than remaining under paramedic care.

The Guelph General Hospital, led by then-new President and CEO Mark Walton, made significant efforts to improve the patient flow through the emergency department and relieve the pressures causing offload delays. They stretched the capacity to care for patients and made other changes that reduced these delays despite the ever-increasing number of patients and the increasing acuity of the injuries and illnesses involved.

Working together, the City of Guelph and GGH applied to the Ontario Ministry of Health for assistance and received funding to staff an additional resource in the emergency department to care for patients that would otherwise have remained in

the care of paramedics through the Dedicated Offload Nursing Program. That funding and resources remain in place today and we have applied for an increase to further assist in caring for our patients entering the health care system. GGH and GWPS meet regularly with the Assistant Deputy Minister of Health who is specifically monitoring the work that we are doing and the results that we have achieved in reducing offload delays.

The impact of these measures have been significant. Hospital offload delays still occur during surges in ambulance call volumes and in emergency department visits, but they have been greatly reduced in number and in length of time. The resulting increase in efficiency in the deployment of GWPS, in concert with the increases in staffing approved in 2024 have allowed the service to improve response times and compliance with the targets set in the service's Response Time Performance Plan despite the ongoing increases in emergency call volumes.

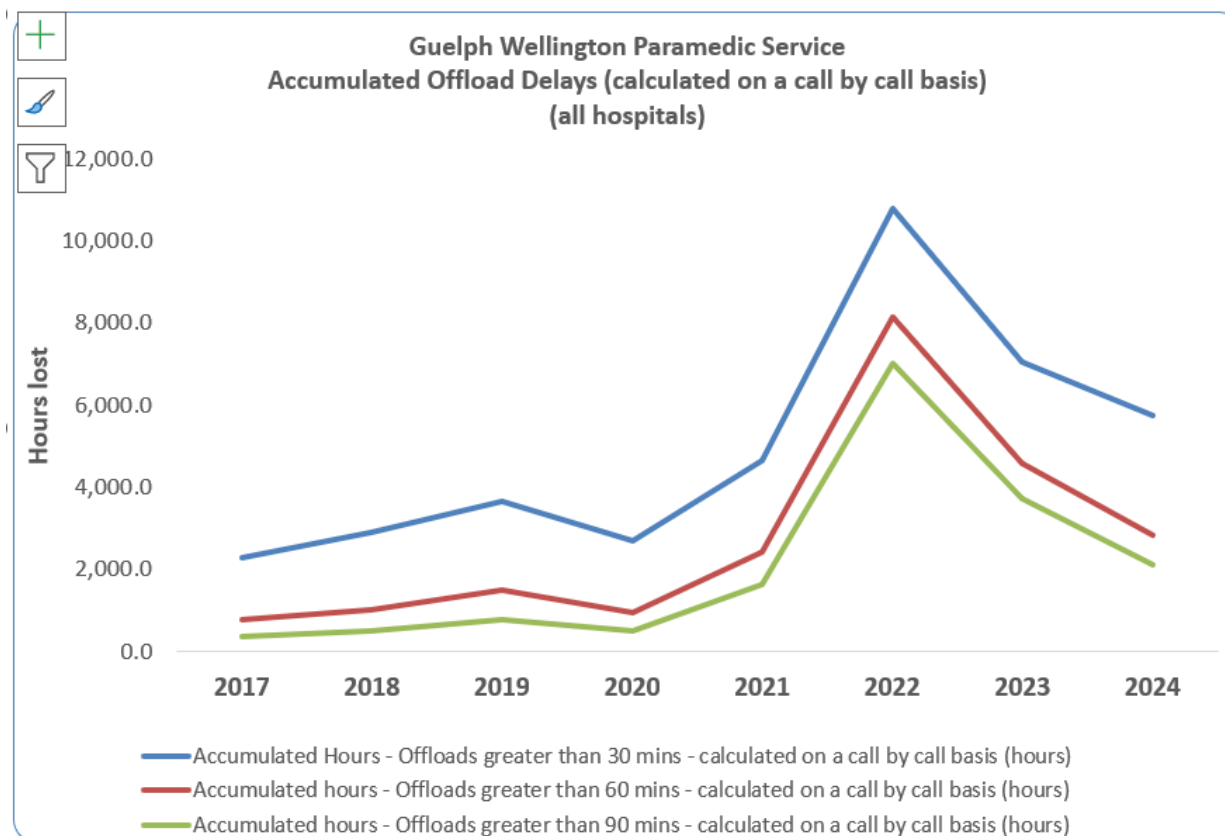


Our data shows that in 2022, our paramedics were required to remain in hospital emergency departments caring for patients for greater than 10,700 hours beyond the 30-minute expected offload time. In 2024 that time was reduced to approximately 5,700 hours. The 90<sup>th</sup> percentile time of delay has been reduced from a high of 248 minutes in 2022 to an average of 58 minutes in 2024.

In addition to an improvement in response times, GWPS has seen a reduction in incidents where no ambulances are available. Although these incidents still occur where call surges occur or where multiple ambulances are sent to a multiple patient event, the data shows that these incidents are much less frequent and shorter in duration as an indirect result of the reduction in hospital offload delays.

Although this work was primarily with Guelph General Hospital, we are also having ongoing and regular conversations with Wellington Health Care Alliance and specifically Groves Memorial Community Hospital in Centre Wellington. Although less frequent, Groves Hospital is also facing pressures with patient numbers and offload delays do occur there.

While the progress of the work of reducing offload delays has been positive, reducing the time to transfer care to the Provincial target has not yet been achieved and there are risk factors that could cause a reversal of this progress. These include the predicted increases in paramedic emergency call volumes and the overall increases in demands on the hospital. The City and Guelph General Hospital have jointly applied for increased funding in the Dedicated Offload Nurse Program to provide additional staffing to reduce these risks and to further reduce the offload delays that continue to occur.



## Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS)

Another process to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Guelph Wellington Paramedic Service is an initiative of the Provincial Ministry of Health, who manage the Central Ambulance Dispatch system separately from the paramedic service. The Province is rolling out changes to the computer system that triages the severity of emergencies and prioritizes the paramedic response accordingly. The change is to address the over-triaging of many emergency calls where a large number of calls are dispatched at the highest priority, but found to involve non-life-threatening injuries or illnesses.

The change is planned at the Central Ambulance Communications Centre (CACC) in Cambridge, which dispatches ambulances to calls in Guelph and Wellington County, to occur in December 2025.

The new computerized system, the Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS), is an internationally recognized medical response model that will modernize the delivery of paramedic services across Ontario. The system will include a structured call process that will result in accurate and timely assessment of the severity of emergencies that paramedics are responding to. Areas already using MPDS report notable improvements in key operational challenges, including reduced offload delays at hospitals.

With this change, residents in our area will see a change in that there will be more questions when they call for assistance, and where the injury or illness is determined to not be life-threatening, there may be a delay in response time as ambulances are triaged to higher priority emergencies. Conversely the change

should allow the service to focus on the most serious injuries and illnesses and improve response times to those calls.

Although offload delays have been a significant issue for Guelph Wellington Paramedic Service in the past several years, the number and length of delays has been greatly reduced through the efforts of Guelph General Hospital and with the assistance of the Ontario Ministry of Health. Upcoming changes to the ambulance dispatch system are expected to increase the efficiency of the service even further and can be expected to lead to more improvements.

### **Financial Implications**

There are no direct financial implications from this report. The application for Dedicated Offload Nurse Funding from the Province would, if approved, flow through the City of Guelph to the Guelph General hospital on verification of staffing. The improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of the paramedic service will indirectly impact future budgetary needs for the service.

### **Consultations and Engagement**

The content of this report was shared with Mark Walton, President and CEO of Guelph General Hospital for his comments.

### **Attachments**

None

### **Departmental Approval**

None

### **Report Author**

Stephen Dewar, Chief and General Manager, Guelph Wellington Paramedic Service

### **This report was approved by:**

Stephen Dewar  
Chief and General Manager, Guelph Wellington Paramedic Service  
Public Services, City of Guelph  
519-822-1260 extension 2805  
stephen.dewar@guelph.ca

### **This report was recommended by:**

Colleen Clack-Bush  
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer  
Public Services  
519-822-1260 extension 2588  
colleen.clack-bush@guelph.ca