

Community Safety

SR2 911 Emergency Communications Service Delivery

UBCM Executive

Whereas there is a growing need for a more resilient and reliable emergency communications system, especially in light of the increasing severity and frequency of disasters and emergencies, 911 service disruptions and a growing annual emergency call volume;

And whereas 911 is a universally recognized number for British Columbians to call when there is an emergency (e.g. medical issue), but 911 calls related to mental health are oftentimes directed to police agencies as the first point of contact;

And whereas the improvement of the 911 emergency communications system has been a long-standing priority for local governments, as well as the UBCM Executive, which has made calls for improvements related to funding, governance and standards:

Therefore be it resolved that the Province of BC work with local governments to modernize the 911 emergency communications system in a manner that is consistent with recent UBCM advocacy, and which includes the following:

- Implementation of a 911 call answer levy on cellular devices, to address current and future financial challenges associated with the delivery of 911 services;
- Development of consistent 911 service standards, without increasing service costs for local governments;
- Creation of a provincial 911 governance model, with local government representation, to address policy and service standard issues, and manage revenue; and
- Integration of mental health call options within the 911 framework.

UBCM Resolutions Committee recommendation: **Endorse**

UBCM Resolutions Committee comments:

The UBCM membership has consistently endorsed resolutions seeking the creation of a call answer levy on cellular devices to fund 911 emergency services (2021-EB7, 2012-LR1, 2011-B13, 2009-B10, 2004-SR1). Last year, UBCM members endorsed a more wide-ranging resolution (2022-EB42), seeking for the Province to work with UBCM to develop a new provincial mandate and structure for 911 service delivery, with a focus on improving the governance, funding and operations.

Additionally, the UBCM Executive, in October 2022, delivered correspondence calling for a governance model, consistent service standards, and a provincial strategy to modernize 911 services, in addition to emphasizing the need for a call answer levy on cellular devices.

The integration of mental health call options within the 911 framework is an emerging advocacy issue for the UBCM Executive. In August 2022, the UBCM Executive and Local Government Policing Modernization Roundtable requested that the Province create and fund a coordinated continuum of response to mental health, addictions and other complex social issues, including through the addition of a mental health option within 911 call options. This request is consistent with recommendations delivered by the Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act in April 2022.

In March 2023, the Province announced funding towards the implementation of Next Generation 911 (NG911), a federally mandated initiative to modernization 911 networks and infrastructure across Canada. Funding includes:

- *\$90 million towards E-Comm 911 technological upgrades and other work associated with the transition that would otherwise be funded by local governments; and*
- *\$60 million to UBCM to support local government transition costs.*

See resolution RR17

UBCM Executive comments:

Background

The Executive is bringing forward this Special Resolution as a means to consolidate recent UBCM resolutions and advocacy pertaining to 911 emergency communications service delivery. Requests related to funding, governance, standards and the integration of mental health call options have all been featured as part of recent UBCM resolutions and/or other advocacy directed towards the provincial government.

Many of these requests have coincided with the introduction of Next Generation 911 (NG911), which is a federally mandated initiative to modernization 911 networks and infrastructure across Canada. NG911 digital-based infrastructure and technology will enable enhanced emergency communications capabilities, including real time texting, audio and video streaming, picture messaging and precise location determination. This new platform also offers the ability to add new emergency response functions, including the integration of mental health call options into the current police, fire and ambulance dispatch framework.

These requests are also a reflection of the current state of 911 emergency communications service delivery in British Columbia. The implementation of NG911 will likely increase the annual cost of 911 service delivery, which will be borne by local governments. The financial pressures to fund the 911 system are even more noteworthy given the lack of a province-wide call answer levy on cellular devices. While most Canadian provinces have already implemented such a levy, BC local governments are only able to pay for this service through property taxes or a levy on those that still use landline phones.

Data provided by E-Comm 911 shows that annual call volume has increased over the past several years, putting substantial pressure on the dispatch system. Many 911 calls are also mental health related, and without a dedicated call option, affected individuals are often passed to agencies who are not and should not be expected to take the place of trained mental health professionals.

While the 911 emergency communications system has become province-wide, with E-Comm handling 99 percent of calls, BC still lacks a provincial 911 governance structure. This means that many local governments are not able to provide direct input towards the 911 services that they fund and receive. This has made it difficult to develop, among other things, province-wide standards, which would ensure all areas of the province are receiving the same level of service.

UBCM Policy Position

The UBCM membership has consistently endorsed resolutions seeking the creation of a call answer levy on cellular devices to fund 911 emergency services (2021-EB7, 2012-LR1, 2011-B13, 2009-B10, 2004-SR1). Furthermore, in October 2019, the UBCM Executive called on the Province to establish a call answer levy on cellular devices, in addition to creating a new governance entity to manage associated revenue.

Last year, UBCM members endorsed a more wide-ranging resolution (2022-EB42), seeking for the Province to work with UBCM to develop a new provincial mandate and structure for 911 service delivery, with a focus on improving the governance, funding and operations.

Noting the increasing frequency and severity of disasters, recent 911 service disruptions and growing annual call volume, the UBCM Executive, in October 2022, delivered a more comprehensive request to the Province. Correspondence called for a governance model, consistent service standards, and a provincial strategy to modernize 911 services, in addition to emphasizing the need for a call answer levy on cellular devices.

The integration of mental health call options within the 911 framework is an emerging issue prioritized by the Local Government Policing Modernization Roundtable (LGPMR) and UBCM Executive. In August 2022, the UBCM Executive and LGPMR requested that the Province create and fund a coordinated continuum of response to mental health, addictions and other complex social issues, including through the addition of a

mental health option within 911 call options. This request is consistent with recommendations delivered by the Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act in April 2022.

Current Status

In 2019, six years after a UBCM working group had examined the introduction of a province-wide call answer levy on cellular devices, the Province initiated a comprehensive review of 911 emergency communication service delivery. This review was abruptly concluded in February 2020, prior to any meaningful changes being implemented.

The Province and UBCM, in spring 2023, examined local government transition costs associated with Next Generation 911. Following these discussions, the Province finalized a \$150 million investment towards the implementation of NG911, including:

- \$90 million towards E-Comm 911 technological upgrades and other work associated with the transition that would otherwise be funded by local governments; and
- \$60 million to UBCM to support local government transition costs.

UBCM has also continued to engage the Province regarding long-term changes to 911 emergency communications service delivery. Most recently, UBCM Executive members raised this issue as part of an April 2023 meeting with the Honourable Mike Farnworth, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General. UBCM and provincial staff continue to meet on a regular basis to discuss challenges, concerns and long-term solutions to improve 911 emergency communications service delivery.

Conference decision: _____