

County has an 'older' and 'sicker' population



Chief paramedic for the county Doug Socha visited Hastings Highlands council to bring it up to date on paramedic services in the area and how the county's populations stand up to Canadian averages. / SARAH SOBANSKI Staff

By Sarah Sobanski

Residents of Hastings County aren't as healthy as the rest of Canada.

Doug Socha, chief and director of emergency services for Hastings County, visited Hastings Highlands May 17 to bring its council up to date on paramedic services in the area. According to his figures, people in the county have a higher rate of obesity and high blood pressure and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

'We tend to have an overweight population [and more] asthma, diabetes, smoking. All these numbers are higher than what Canada is. We tend to have an older population here, a sicker population, so we're starting to see more and more of our call volume going up,' said Socha.

Almost 60 per cent of those living in the county are obese or overweight, compared to 52 per cent on average for Canadians. They're

also five per cent more likely to have high blood pressure and around four per cent more likely to have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. They're also one per cent higher when it comes to being more likely to have diabetes or asthma. This could be contributed to by having more bad habits. Around a quarter of the county smokes.

'We're trying to find ways to be more efficient in the paramedic world. So typically, we're reactive. Someone calls 9-1-1, we respond. We're trying to become a little more proactive and actually getting out into the community before people are calling for paramedic services and help patients stay in their home longer and give them some advice before they're actually calling 9-1-1,' said Socha.

There were around 4,100 total calls in Bancroft in 2016. That's up six per cent since 2014 behind Quinte West and Belleville and before Picton, Madoc and Tweed.

'We're a very busy service,' said Socha. 'Our call volume is going up year by year for every base.'

The service attended 32,292 calls across the county in 2016. Around 22,000 calls were to treat or transport patients. The remaining 10,000 were moving the fleet to ensure there was coverage across the county ' for example when an ambulance went to a patient, another ambulance was sent to its base to be ready if another call came in. Call volume has increased by more than 20 per cent from 2007.

'We had an 8.4 per cent increase in our call volume last year. This has been the trend over the last three years. Between six and 10 per cent is what we're seeing? We're trying to find ways to mitigate that.'

On average, the service responds in less than eight minutes to high risk calls, including calls for shortness of breath, strokes and chest pains. It responds in 25 minutes or less on average for a CTAS 5 call, which are lower risk. Socha noted 'a cut finger,' 'abdominal pain,' or 'something of a less urgent nature' would be included in CTAS 5 calls.

People ages 81 to 90 make up the largest portion calls in the county ' around 3,500. They're followed by those aged 71 to 80 years old at around 3,250. Then it's 61- to 70-years-olds in third with just under 3,000 calls and 51- to 60-year-olds with under 2,500.

'As the population tends to get older they tend to call on us for medical assistance and entering into the healthcare system,' said Socha. 'We have a lot of 92-year-olds, but we also have a lot of 60 year olds who are taking care of their 92-year-old mothers and fathers.'

Socha also noted the services implementation of a difficult and remote access team. The team uses an all terrain type vehicle to access places like hunt camps.

Looking into 2017, Socha stressed that the service will focus on lessening call volume, being proactive as opposed to reactive and continuing to meet call response times.