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## HEALTH SERVICES COMMITTEE

Monday, March 18, 2024  
Roughrider Room, State Capitol  
Bismarck, North Dakota

Senator Kristin Roers, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

**Members present:** Senators Kristin Roers, Michelle Axtman, Jeff Barta, Judy Lee; Representatives Gretchen Dobervich, Kathy Frelich, Dwight Kiefert, Carrie McLeod, Emily O'Brien, Todd Porter, Robin Weisz

**Member absent:** Representative Alisa Mitskog

**Others present:** See [Appendix A](#)

**It was moved by Representative Weisz, seconded by Representative O'Brien, and carried on a voice vote that the minutes of the November 29, 2023, meeting be approved as distributed.**

### STUDY OF THE COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF NORTH DAKOTA

Chairman Roers reviewed information ([Appendix B](#)) submitted by the Insurance Department regarding the Comprehensive Health Association of North Dakota (CHAND). She noted:

- CHAND enrollment at the beginning of March included 23 enrollees in major medical plans and 124 in Medicare supplement plans.
- Options to move forward include implementing legislation to allow cancellation of the CHAND program or to continue the CHAND program which may have a financial impact.

### STUDY OF THE TREATMENT OF INDIVIDUALS WITH BRAIN INJURY

Dr. Joshua Wynne, Dean, University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences, presented comments regarding hyperbaric oxygen therapy. He noted:

- A study is being conducted regarding the effect of hyperbaric oxygen therapy on postconcussive syndrome.
- The hyperbaric oxygen therapy program is expanding to serve additional parts of the state.

### STUDY OF THE DELIVERY OF EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

Ms. Sarah Aker, Executive Director, Medical Services Division, Department of Health and Human Services, presented information ([Appendix C](#)) regarding Medicaid reimbursement for emergency medical services (EMS). She noted:

- There are 115 ground ambulance providers and 7 air ambulance providers enrolled in the Medicaid program.
- Ground ambulance utilization has increased from 7,449 Medicaid reimbursements in 2019 to 9,858 reimbursements in 2023.
- Medicaid reimbursement rates in the state for EMS generally is higher than surrounding states.

Ms. Lisa Johnson, Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, North Dakota University System, and Mr. Ron Lawler, Director of Learning and Development, Sanford Ambulance, presented information ([Appendix D](#)) regarding EMS education. They noted:

- North Dakota University System 2-year institutions offer various credit and noncredit emergency medical responder, emergency medical technician, and paramedic programs.
- Coordinating programs among institutions would provide a greater variety of expertise, coordinated curriculum, and reduced administrative burden.

Chairman Roers called for committee discussion regarding options to allow EMS providers to enroll in the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) public safety retirement plan.

Representative Porter presented comments regarding options for EMS providers to enroll in the PERS public safety plan. He noted:

- Law enforcement and fire department personnel may enroll in the plan while EMS providers may not.
- There would be no cost to the state to allow EMS providers to enroll in the plan because costs would be paid by participating EMS providers.

Ms. Rebecca Fricke, Executive Director, Public Employees Retirement System, responded to committee member questions regarding allowing EMS providers to enroll in the PERS public safety retirement plan. She noted:

- The contribution rate for the public safety retirement plan with prior service is 18.04 percent which consists of a 5.50 percent employee contribution, 11.40 employer contribution, and a 1.14 percent retiree health credit.
- The contribution rate for the public safety retirement plan without prior service is 15.80 percent which consists of a 5.50 percent employee contribution, 9.16 employer contribution, and a 1.14 percent employer contribution relating to the retiree health credit.
- The PERS Board has the authority to adjust the employer contribution rate based on actuarial estimates.

Mr. Adam Parker, North Dakota EMS Association, presented comments regarding allowing EMS providers to participate in state retirement plans. He noted support from EMS providers to allow participation in the PERS public safety retirement plan.

Chairman Roers called for committee discussion regarding options to require public safety answering points (PSAP) to report when an ambulance service fails to respond to a call for service.

Mr. Christopher Price, EMS Director, Department of Health and Human Services, responded to committee questions regarding PSAP reporting requirements. He noted there is no process to determine if an ambulance service fails to respond to a call for service.

Mr. Parker presented information ([Appendix E](#)) regarding options for potential legislation to address distressed ambulance services. He noted potential legislation would need to:

- Include a process to determine when an ambulance service is distressed;
- Provide clear guidelines regarding the process to notify an ambulance service that it is not meeting state or federal guidelines; and
- Allow ambulance services to respond to service deficiencies before declaring a service distressed.

Mr. Tim Wiedrich, Health Response and Licensure Division, Department of Health and Human Services, responded to committee member questions.

Chairman Roers asked the Legislative Council staff to prepare a bill draft related to distressed ambulance services.

Lt. Adrian Martinez, Training Director, Highway Patrol, presented information ([Appendix F](#)) regarding EMS training for law enforcement. He noted:

- The Law Enforcement Training Academy requires basic law enforcement academy students to be trained in basic first aid and CPR.
- Ongoing EMS training varies by law enforcement agencies.

Chairman Roers distributed a bill draft ([Appendix G](#)) to provide liability protection for 988 suicide and crisis lifeline operators.

Mr. Jeremy Brown and Ms. Ashley Hrichena, FirstLink, Fargo, presented information ([Appendix H](#)) regarding liability protection for hotline operators and mobile crisis responders. They noted:

- Liability protection is needed for 988 and 211 hotline operators, 911 dispatchers, and mobile crisis responders.
- Others states have enacted legislation to provide liability protection for operators, dispatchers, and responders.

Mr. Duane Ell, Emergency Preparedness and Response Division, Department of Health and Human Services, presented information ([Appendix I](#)) regarding the North Dakota Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) program. He noted:

- CISM team members provide stress management services to minimize the harmful effects of stress on emergency services personnel.
- CISM team membership is comprised of emergency services personnel and mental health professionals who receive special training and volunteer their services.

Ms. Tami Conrad, Behavioral Health Administrator, Department of Health and Human Services, presented information ([Appendix J](#)) regarding first responder mental health services. She noted:

- The Department of Health and Human Services began a law enforcement behavioral health trial program in March 2022.
- As of December 31, 2023, the program was serving six state agencies and 27 individuals have received services through the program.

### OTHER BUSINESS

Chairman Roers announced the next committee meeting is tentatively scheduled for September 2024.

No further business appearing, Chairman Roers adjourned the meeting at 1:40 p.m.

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Brady A. Larson  
Assistant Legislative Budget Analyst and Auditor

ATTACH:10