



EPAD IN ACTION PUBLIC HEALTH

“We need better control in terms of notification of outbreaks, the earlier the better so that we can communicate to the staff the importance of protecting themselves. We need to work more closely with public health and hospitals in terms of communication of these issues. Paramedics have a significant role in reporting outbreaks from the front lines.”

Bruce Farr
Chief General Manager
Toronto Emergency Medical
Services²

COMCARE
EMERGENCY RESPONSE ALLIANCE

1701 K STREET NW
FOURTH FLOOR
WASHINGTON DC 20006
202.429.0574
WWW.COMCARE.ORG

Emergency Response **Problem:**

The outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in the Toronto area in 2003 demonstrated a severe lack of communication between public health authorities and the medical community. This deficiency was most evident at the outset of the crises when Ontario officials realized they had no way to communicate immediately with all physicians, family practitioners, radiologists, healthcare workers and emergency response agencies across the province. Public health officials had to fax and email a letter to alert physicians in the public health community.

However, the letter did not reach all physicians and was not distributed to first responders, nurses, ambulance and emergency medical personnel, or their professional associations, which slowed the response rate of medical professionals. Most of these officials learned of the outbreak through the media; others placed telephone calls to local public health units or hospitals to get the information they needed. Unfortunately, there was no system in place to ensure that information needs could be met without disrupting the efforts to combat SARS. As a result, Canada's Auditor General recommended that Health Canada work with provinces and territories to obtain agreement on the sharing of disease information, including agreement on data collection, data dissemination, and data standards.¹

¹ “The SARS Commission Interim Report SARS Public Health in Ontario”, The Honorable Mr. Justice Archie Campbell, Commissioner, April 15, 2004

² SARS Commission Public Hearings, September 29, 2003, p.163

E-Safety and EPAD **Solution:**

An E-Safety Network would have solved many of the communications problems experienced during the outbreak of SARS. As a data-sharing framework, it embraces the use of national data standards and encourages information exchange across jurisdictions and disciplines. By using the Emergency Provider Access Directory (EPAD), public health officials could have easily routed messages to the right agency destinations, without needing to know their electronic addresses. Medical professionals would have had the information they needed when patients arrived and would have been able to respond at a quicker rate.

Registration in EPAD is an important first step for achieving efficient information exchange. Emergency agencies and authorized private entities register how and where they want data sent to them. They indicate their incident information preferences with corresponding geographic areas. This simple act of EPAD registration enables the geographic targeting and cooperative exchange of vital information about a mass emergency or a single event to all appropriate authorities quickly and securely.

COMCARE is a national non-profit alliance dedicated to **advancing emergency response**. We promote the adoption of modern, interoperable emergency systems and the development of new procedures, training, and tools to maximize their value for emergency responders. We encourage cooperation across professional, jurisdictional and geographic lines, seeking to improve effectiveness through solutions that integrate emergency response professions, government, the public and private industry. COMCARE's 100+ organizational members represent the wide diversity of the emergency response community.