

Saskatchewan Air Ambulance (Lifeguard) 70th Anniversary

History

By early 1946, the Saskatchewan government established Saskatchewan Air Ambulance, which is the oldest formally-organized non-military air medical transport service in North America. Using a war surplus Norseman bush plane, the first flight picked up a female patient in the town of Liberty on **February 3, 1946** and took her to the Regina base, then to hospital. With the addition of a second Norseman, the service averaged about 20 flights a month in its first year.



In the early days, pilots and nurses used bush planes to transport sick and injured people from communities across Saskatchewan.

At first, few communities had airfields, so planes often landed on fields or on open water with pontoons attached. For winter landings, skis were attached. In addition to transporting patients, the planes also delivered medical supplies and brought physicians or nurses to isolated communities for public health services.



This single-engine Norseman was the second plane in the fleet. Featured on a Canadian stamp in 1982, it's on display at the Western Development Museum (Moose Jaw).

Today

Operations have been based at John G. Diefenbaker International Airport in Saskatoon since 1993, to best serve more isolated communities in northern Saskatchewan. Crews provide emergency medical transportation in the province and inter-facility patient transfers in Saskatchewan or out of province. Annual budget in 2015-16 was \$15 million. Saskatchewan Air Ambulance is the oldest formally-organized non-military air ambulance service in North America.

Aircraft

- Three twin-engine turboprop Beechcraft King Air B-200s (Ministry of Central Services)
- Cruising speed 270 knots (500 kilometres per hour or 310 miles per hour)
- Can fly **2,000 kilometres** (1,300 miles) before refuelling

Flights

- Available 24 hours per day under most weather conditions
- **An average of 125 flights every month**, 1,500 each year
- Can carry two patients
- Medical supplies, monitoring equipment and medications, including a ventilator, defibrillator/pacemaker, type O blood and (for neonatal patients) a transport incubator

Crew

- Specially-trained air medical, maintenance and flight crew with extensive experience in critical care, aircraft maintenance and northern flight
- 29 pilots and first officers – two on each flight (Central Services)
- 37 registered nurses (Saskatoon Health Region) and flight paramedics (MD Ambulance)
- Nine aero-medical engineers and support staff (Central Services)
- When needed, a doctor or special medical team (such as a pediatric or neonatal transport team) will provide care in flight

Patient cost

- **\$385 per trip** for residents (More than 90 per cent subsidy by provincial government).
- \$6.29 per mile flown for non-residents or insurers (Health Canada, Saskatchewan Government Insurance, Workers Compensation Board of Saskatchewan).

Today's crews transport critically ill and injured patients to advanced medical care centres in fast, well-equipped twin-engine planes.

