



Associated Ambulance, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

When Erin Iker’s employer, Associated Ambulance, won contracts to provide EMS services to hundreds of small communities, her first directive was to find a digital scheduling solution for staff at 22 stations sprinkled across a service area larger than the State of Ohio.

“Every station did things a bit differently,” said Iker, noting that each station manager created his or her own schedules. “Timesheets were filled out on paper, then sent into payroll at the end of the pay period to be manually processed. Each station did things a bit different.

“It was like a whole bunch of little companies. So when we changed over to Aladtec to standardize the company scheduling, it was challenging to get everyone on-board with it. They didn’t have a choice, and there was a lot of push-back initially.”

Iker remembers talking with Chad Clay, one of Aladtec’s owners, as they collaborated to arrive at the proper formats to reflect Associated’s 96-hour core-flex schedule.

“(Chad) was looking at our schedule and said -- ‘How do you guys even function?’ ‘Each station did their own scheduling. Everything was on paper. They had their own little group of casuals who would help out and fill sick calls, vacations. It was just this disjointed (model),” said Iker. “Implementing EMS Manager and then tying it payroll afterwards changed how we run our company ten-fold. Major, major changes. Good changes.”

“The big thing that (station managers) noticed was, where previously, every station had 10 or 15 casuals, now they had like 160 casuals that they could use to help fill vacant shifts”

Alberta has three trauma centers, the University of Alberta and Royal Alexandra hospitals, both in Edmonton, and Foothill Medical Center in Calgary. While Associated Ambulance utilizes Provincial-operated flight services for critical cases whenever possible, “a lot of times aircraft aren’t available, so crews have to transport by ground into Edmonton or Calgary. It’s a four-hour drive from Jasper to Edmonton. That’s a long time to be with a critical patient. It’s



Department Info:

Roster: 341 employees.

Calls: About 28,000 in 2017.

Service area: 108,000 sq. Kilometer (42,000 sq. miles) region with approx. 100,000 people in municipalities, plus thousands more in rural and back-country.

Apparatus: ALS ambulances staged at 22 stations across the province.

Special Challenges: Diverse territory includes extensive agriculture, lake and river recreation, back-country responses to a portion of the Canadian Rockies (Jasper National Park) and heavy petroleum, chemical and forestry industries in the north.

Aladtec users since early 2013

www.associatedambulance.com

Neighboring agencies also using Aladtec:

Stettler District Ambulance Association, Stettler; Alberta Paramedical Services Ltd., St Albert; Spruce Grove Fire Services, Spruce Grove; Medavie Health Services West, Fort Saskatchewan; Leduc Fire Services, Leduc; Beaver EMS, Tofield; Aeromedical Emergency Services, Wetaskiwin; Muskawchees Ambulance Authority, Hobbema; Vegreville EMS, Vegreville; Sylvan Lake Fire Dept., Sylvan Lake; Red Deer Emergency Services, Red Deer; and Medavie Health Services West Central, Red Deer County, Alberta

a constant treatment process, constantly trying to make sure they get to the city as successfully as possible,” said Iker. “It’s nice for our crews (in that) when you put a treatment plan in place, you actually get to see your treatment plan in action. Many of our practitioners who work in the cities enjoy coming out to rural areas for this reason.

“We do a lot of calls, but not just our service areas. Alberta is a provincial EMS system so ambulances are dispatched based on ‘closest ambulance to the call...’ so when our ambulances come into the cities, they’re often dispatched to calls in the city as well. Our call types are very diverse. We do urban and rural EMS calls, transfers, emergency calls, you name it. They could be at a farm, doing a farm incident one hour, then three hours later they could be in the city, doing a call in downtown Edmonton or Calgary.”

Because Aladtec allows open shifts and trade requests to be seen by anyone qualified to fill them, staffing is less challenging. With the mobile app, employees are able to log on from anywhere, anytime, to sign up for shifts, offer a shift giveaway or trades. This flexibility and access is essential in today’s world, Iker said.

“This flexibility and access makes a big difference. You’d be surprised, now that everybody can see all the vacancies that are out there, we do have full-time paramedics that work on one side of the province may pick up an extra shift on the other side of the province.

“They might be in Jasper on vacation, and they see that there’s a hole there and they might as well pick up a shift while they’re there and make some extra money to pay for their trip. So, they’re able to see what’s out there in real time to help plan. It has made the company a lot smaller in that sense.”

“I think nowadays if you don’t have any online scheduling or online anything, you’re not in today’s world,” said Iker. “Almost every service that I know in Edmonton or within Alberta, use online scheduling. It’s all about convenience, and it’s all about people being able to manage their personal lives and their personal schedules. EMS Manager does that.

“Today’s generation (doesn’t) use phones the same way that my generation does. I’m still happy if I get a phone call. I’ve noticed that in my current position, if I call people, they don’t answer their phone and they won’t call me back, but if I text them, they will get back to me within minutes. I’ve had to change how I do my job. I have a few employees of the older generation that prefer a phone call. If I send them an e-mail or a text message, they don’t get back to me. They don’t monitor it the same way the younger generation does.”

Beyond the scheduling and communications, Aladtec is Associated’s go-to platform to eliminate paper forms. AA is the third-largest user of forms among Aladtec’s 2,100-plus customers.

“The forms piece was huge when Aladtec released that feature. We have a ton of forms, and we’re constantly coming up with more that we’re going to use,” said Iker. “Our most frequently used forms are the DURC’s (Daily Unit Readiness Checksheet) and our Overtime Hours reports. We’ve had multiple versions of the DURCs because you guys called us and said, ‘You’ve got 23,000 submissions of this form, and it’s bogging down your system...’”

Onboarding a new employee isn’t difficult, she said. “I do a 45-minute to an hour orientation. General overview, then more in-depth for full-timers. The younger generation picks it up really quickly. The older guys, they struggle a little bit, but it’s fairly easy to use, especially with some of the new changes like the giveaways and trades.”

Iker uses the Required Message tool sparingly. “I will start off with e-mail, then text message if I don’t hear anything. Then the Required Message is my last resort. We’ve used it before for other things, and it’s actually worked quite well.

“Our HR Department was having a real issue collecting benefits information from our staff. She gave me a list of people who were not in compliance. I checked them all off and sent a Required Message letting them know of their deficiency. (HR) was very appreciative because probably 85 percent of them took action after they received that message because everybody logs in to EMS Manager all the time.”

“Because we’ve invested so much into Aladtec, and because of how our company runs and how much we (rely on) Aladtec, right now, we couldn’t function without it. So much is through it, to change over to a different program would be a huge challenge.

“I know there are times that I’ve been super-frustrated and I’ve let you guys know that, and there have been times where I think, I will change companies because I’m so mad right now, but you guys have been very good about rectifying those problems in a very timely manner.

“I think for small services, it would be advantageous to see how a larger service uses it and how (Aladtec) can benefit them. Everyone is always negative to change, and for older generations -- -- it’s like, ‘Oh. We’re never going to do this...’ but when they realize how much of a benefit it is, especially if they have any plans to grow, or as they start to bring in new, younger employees, it’s almost a must-have to function today.”



Erin Iker

Erin Iker joined Associated Ambulance in 2013 when her employer took over EMS contracts from municipal services in more than a dozen Alberta communities. A licensed EMT, Iker has worked “on car” with another private service, and for Albert Health Services and InterHospital -- a provincial BLS service. She has served in a variety of managerial roles and is currently Operations Supervisor for Scheduling.