



SPRING 2026

HORIZONS

CRITICAL CARE, ANYWHERE.

\\ TOOLS AND TECH

3D-PRINTED WORK AIDS BOOST
HELICOPTER MAINTENANCE

\\ COMMUNITY SUPPORT

VIP'S MOM AMAZED BY ANGEL
DONORS' GENEROSITY

\\ WOMEN OF THE SKY

A NEW SERIES ON TRAILBLAZING
WOMEN FUELLING CHANGE

« A HEROIC RANCH RESCUE

CINDI LONG SHARES HER LIFE-SAVING
STARS EXPERIENCE

PRESENTED BY



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On the cover: Cindi Long

Photo by Lyle Aspinall

WELCOME



As we move into the spring and summer, which are typically STARS' busiest seasons for operations, I reflect on the incredible support from our allies like you to ensure we can continue to provide world-class critical care to patients in need across Western Canada.

In this issue of *Horizons*, we're pleased to launch a series recognizing the incredible women on the front line of operations at STARS – women who have broken through numerous barriers to become trailblazers in the male-dominated helicopter EMS field. Through their leadership, representation, and mentorship, they continue to break new ground and pave the way for future generations. The series begins in this issue by recognizing the work of Dr. Jennifer Nicol, a STARS transport physician. Stay tuned to read about more trailblazing women in our upcoming issues.

You'll also read a feature on a new pilot partnership with Keewatinohk Inniniw Minoayawin (KIM) Inc. in northern Manitoba, launched in November 2025. Through the initiative, frontline health-care teams in Tataskewiyak Cree Nation (Split Lake) and Manto Sipi Cree Nation (God's River) have around-the-clock virtual access to a STARS physician. This is just one more way we are able to provide critical care to those who need it, no matter where they are.

To wrap up our 40th anniversary celebrations in 2025, we recently celebrated the move of our last retired Airbus BK117 helicopter to the Hangar Flight Museum in Calgary – a fitting way to reflect on the impactful history of STARS. Thanks to the generosity of people like you, we raised over \$900,000 and honoured the legacy of an aircraft that played a vital role in decades of lifesaving missions. You can view the helicopter at the museum and learn more about what we do at STARS.

Since our first mission in 1985, you've saved lives with us. You enable us to provide care when it is needed most. Your active involvement and unwavering support continue to fuel our way forward.

Thank you for your continued dedication as we look toward building an even stronger future. And enjoy this spring 2026 issue of *Horizons*.

Dr. John Froh
President & CEO, STARS



Scan for
a video
of Cindi's
story.



Calving Season Brings STARS to Cindi Long's Pasture

An off-road vehicle accident caused critical injuries for Cindi Long — and a swift response from her community and STARS saved her life.

By Lyle Aspinall

Cindi Long doesn't know what caused her off-road vehicle to flip in April 2021, but she remembers demanding two things after it happened: "Get my glasses and get STARS."

It was calving season on the Long ranch near Oyen, Alta., and Cindi was driving a side-by-side, taking a new calf to its mother in a pasture, when something suddenly caused the unit to flip. The calf was okay, but Cindi was ejected and then trapped under the roll cage.

Just ahead in a pickup was her now-husband, Tim Long. He'd seen the mishap in his rearview mirror and spun back, straining to heft the vehicle just enough for Cindi to drag herself free. Then he called 911.

"I said, 'You tell them I need STARS,'" said Cindi. She "knew it was bad" and couldn't imagine three hours by road to a trauma centre.

STARS launched, but the first to arrive by air was local volunteer firefighter Caleb Klassen, who was in

the area with his personal airplane and now-wife Katie Klassen. She'd recently finished a practicum in a major trauma-centre emergency department as a requirement to complete her nursing degree.

Katie kept Cindi calm and alert, performed a basic assessment, and advocated strongly with local responders that she shouldn't be moved until STARS arrived.

"That's the last thing you want in your life — a red helicopter landing," said Tim. "But it's also the thing you want most, because if you're in that wreck, they're coming to save you."

STARS flight paramedic Scott McTaggart and flight nurse Maggie Mallett had prepared for a wide range of possibilities.

"When you hear 'side-by-side rollover,' we're presuming the worst," said McTaggart.

During the hour-long flight to Foothills Medical Centre in Calgary, he and Mallett used on-board ultrasound to look for internal bleeding, managed Cindi's pain and blood pressure, and relayed critical information to the trauma hospital.

It was later confirmed she had major damage to her kidneys, ribs, pelvis, lungs, and more. Most concerning was a femoral bleed — a life-threatening injury that can deteriorate rapidly.

"If [deterioration] had happened en route," said Mallett, "or if she had been taken on a bumpy road for a two- or three-hour drive and this had happened on the way, things may have had a different outcome."

Cindi's recovery is ongoing, but she's grateful for her second chance and the ability to continue her ranching life.

"If it wasn't for STARS, I would not have made it out of this field," she said. "I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't have my grandchildren. I'm so blessed and grateful for every day I get to wake up."

VERY IMPORTANT PATIENT



The last Airbus BK117 helicopter in the STARS aircraft fleet was welcomed into the Hangar Flight Museum in Calgary in November 2025. More than 100 generous allies contributed to the campaign that allowed STARS to donate the retired aircraft, and each one has their name printed on the side. The museum addition honours the legacy of a helicopter platform that anchored STARS' critical-care access to patients for more than 30 years. At its peak, before being replaced by the Airbus H145, eight BK117 helicopters were flying for STARS across Western Canada – not to mention three others that were previously flown under contracts in the charity's earliest days.

A Legacy Helicopter Lives On

The retired Airbus BK117 that played a vital role in decades of life-saving STARS missions now lives in Calgary's Hangar Flight Museum.

2025/26

YEAR IN REVIEW



STARS EMERGENCY LINK CENTRE

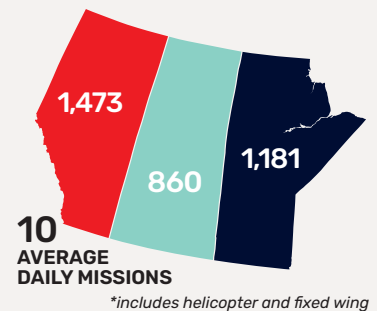
66K+
MISSIONS TO DATE
SINCE 1985

39,324
EMERGENCY
REQUESTS HANDLED

108
AVERAGE EMERGENCY
REQUESTS A DAY

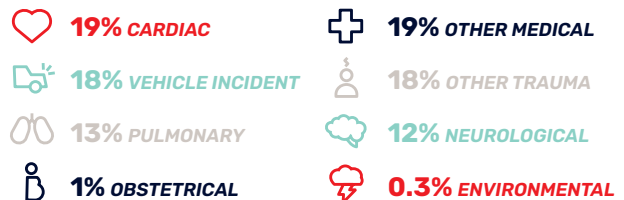
MISSIONS

=3,514
YEARLY MISSIONS*



INCIDENT TYPES

STARS RESPONDS TO A VARIETY OF CRITICAL CARE CALLS



How many times did STARS fly to your community? Scan here to find out.



At the STARS Winnipeg base in Dec. 2025 are (L-R) Hon. Uzoma Asagwara, STARS president and CEO Dr. John Froh, and Benjamin Graham and Tom Bryk from Manitoba Blue Cross.

Long-Lasting Care Across the Prairies

Two partners made powerful pledges, generously supporting STARS' mission to bring pre-hospital critical care to Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

MANITOBA BLUE CROSS

Manitoba Blue Cross pledged a historic \$3 million to support STARS critical mission operations throughout Manitoba over the next decade. It's the largest donation ever provided to STARS in the province and was announced at the Winnipeg STARS base in December 2025. In recognition of this transformative gift, STARS will rename its base in that province to the STARS Manitoba Blue Cross Winnipeg Base, symbolizing both organizations' shared commitment to ensuring the health and safety of Manitobans for years to come.

NUTRIEN

Nutrien has renewed its longstanding partnership with STARS through \$4 million in new funding. This brings its total contribution over the past 10 years to more than \$30 million. The pledge was officially announced in January 2026 at the STARS base in Saskatoon. The renewed commitment directly enables STARS' critical mission operations throughout Saskatchewan, ensuring rural and agricultural communities have access to critical care when they need it most.

At the Saskatoon STARS base in Jan. 2026 are (L-R) STARS employees Tara Oliver, Shane Ulsifer, Don McManus and president and CEO Dr. John Froh; STARS Very Important Patient Adair O'Grady; Nutrien CEO Ken Seitz; MLA Ken Cheveldayoff; and STARS employees Barry Tolmie, Rene Chapman and Ian Hayne.



THE UNIQUE SKILLS WOMEN BRING TO STARS

Meet Dr. Jennifer Nicol

Role: Transport physician

Where: Calgary base

STARS history:
8 years and counting

Dr. Jennifer Nicol
explains how
female transport
physicians add
strength to STARS.

By Karin Olafson



Women of the Sky: A Series

In a field that is still male dominated, the trailblazing women working at STARS are fuelling change. They're breaking barriers, filling critical roles, and inspiring young women to pursue meaningful careers. This article is the first in the series.

When Dr. Jennifer Nicol began working at STARS in 2018, female transport physicians were few and far between. Now, 33 of 124 transport physicians across the organization are women.

"EMS tends to be a male-dominated field," said Nicol. "When I started with STARS, I was one of three women in the [Calgary] group; now we have 11. One third of our group is made up of women."

Nicol's weekly schedule is jam-packed. In addition to her role as a STARS transport physician, she works as an emergency physician at Calgary's Foothills Medical Centre, holds medical leadership roles, and has three young kids who are all in extracurricular activities. She's careful to put her family first, planning time to hike in summer and ski in winter.

Her STARS role alone is a juggling act, as transport physicians are embedded in every mission either physically, virtually, or by phone. Her duties might involve being on board a flight, using virtual care to support rural physicians with hospital

transfers, or taking calls to ensure the right in-hospital specialist can take on a STARS patient.

While the early days were intimidating at times, Nicol and her female colleagues quickly recognized the value they could bring to STARS' patient-centred work.

"Women have a very high level of emotional intelligence," said Nicol. "We can be vulnerable and show emotional bravery and bring a real growth mindset to our work. Of course, our male colleagues do as well, but I think these skills are a real superpower that women have."

She added that the complexity of being a STARS physician means skills like organization, communication, and collaboration are integral. And for women, these skills are constantly honed in all aspects of life. In Nicol's case, she had to take these skills to the next level after her third maternity leave when she returned to STARS and her ER

job with two toddlers and a baby at home, while also grappling with the pandemic.

"My role at STARS is where I've felt the bravest and most empowered and bold," she said. "We've been very conscious at STARS trying to recruit the best people to work with us, and we've been successful in recruiting a number of women. That's helped a lot in terms of how our group is perceived, how open we are, and how inclusive we are."

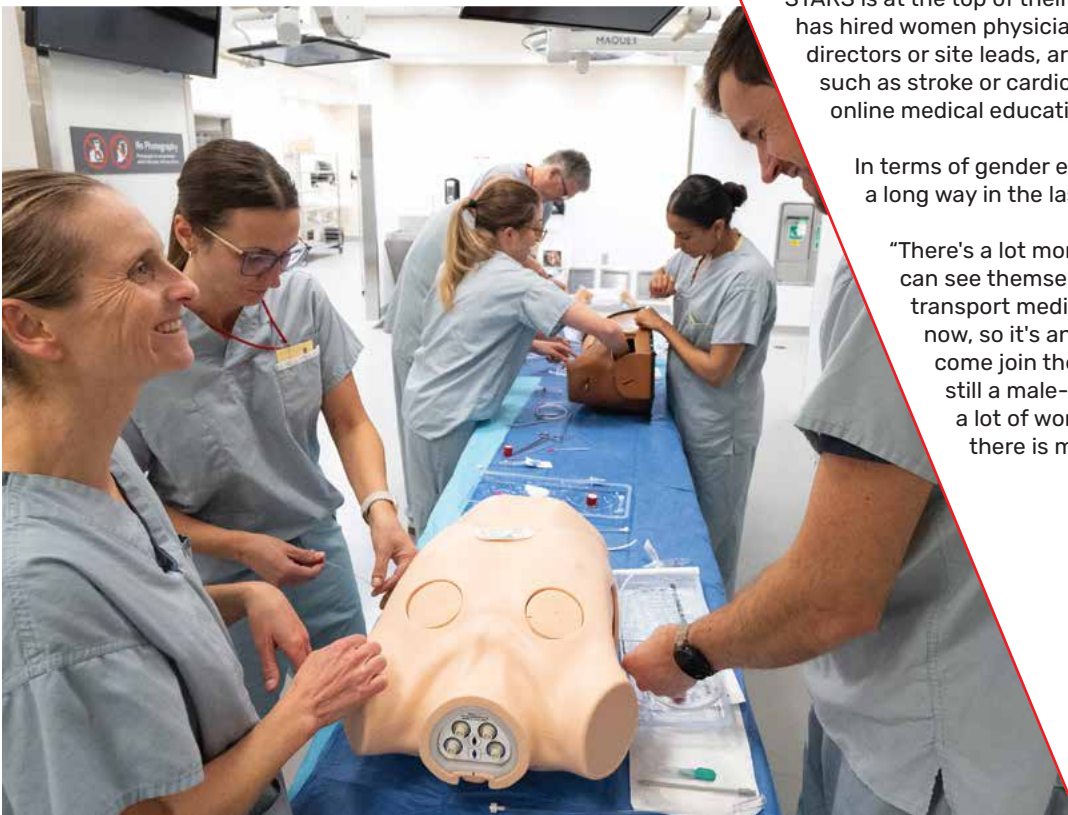
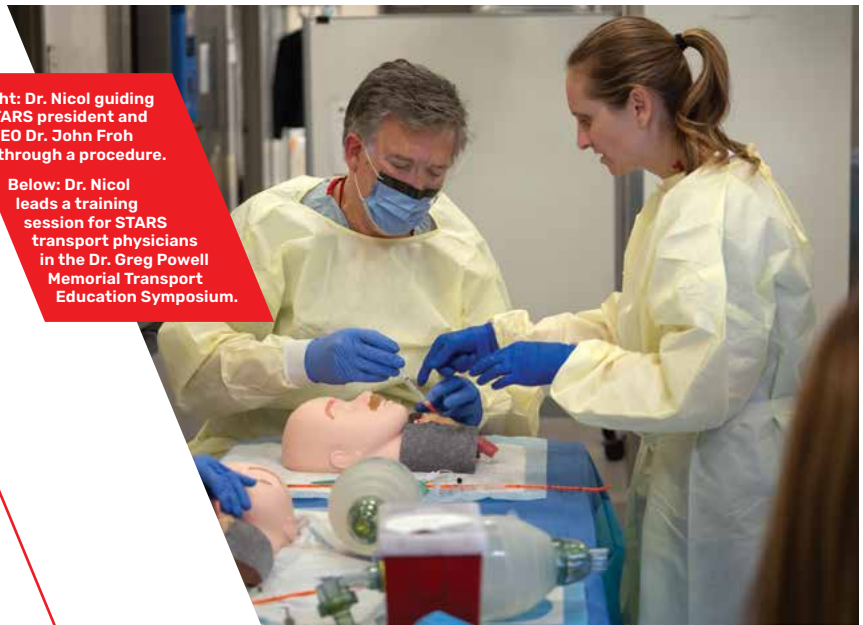
Nicol added that every female physician employed by STARS is at the top of their professional game. STARS has hired women physicians who also work as program directors or site leads, are trained experts in fields such as stroke or cardiology, and contribute to free online medical education.

In terms of gender equity, the industry has come a long way in the last few years.

"There's a lot more inclusion now, and women can see themselves [working in emergency transport medicine]. Women are represented now, so it's an invitation for other women to come join the field," said Nicol. "Yet, it's still a male-dominated world. We've done a lot of work to get where we are, but there is more work to be done." ▀

Right: Dr. Nicol guiding STARS president and CEO Dr. John Froh through a procedure.

Below: Dr. Nicol leads a training session for STARS transport physicians in the Dr. Greg Powell Memorial Transport Education Symposium.





Aircraft maintenance engineer Ryan Gillis displays work aids that he and some engineering colleagues made using a 3D printer.

Innovative Work Aids

STARS engineers create custom work aids, combining passion with cost-efficiency.

By Alicia L'Archevêque

Helicopter maintenance demands specialized skills and equipment. At STARS, aircraft maintenance engineers use their ingenuity to design and build custom work aids that streamline tasks, enhance safety, and significantly reduce costs for the organization.

STARS engineers are innovators, and now, with the growth of 3D printing and digital design, their creativity is growing a cache of clever work aids like custom tailboom stands, cowling stands (also known as engine access stands), bottle stabilizers, and more.

"We used to carve [work aids] out of wood or by filing down a chunk of aluminum," said Ryan Gillis, an aircraft maintenance engineer at STARS who has designed and 3D-printed a variety of items now in daily use across the organization.

The process of adjusting and perfecting work aids is also accelerated throughout the entire STARS engineering team. Once a first model is rendered, improvements are just a couple of clicks away.

"We can shave hours off the job by being more accurate in how we approach things," said Gillis.

Supporting a helicopter tailboom separated from the fuselage previously required rigging it into straps hanging from rented cranes. Now the massive piece rests safely in custom-built mobile steel supports that were designed digitally and fabricated in a STARS engineer's garage. It has eliminated the need for costly rentals.

Another example of how work aids save STARS money is a unit designed

by Gillis that helps with the accurate disassembly and assembly of control rods inside the helicopter's mechanical build. Buying a similar aid from a manufacturer would cost USD \$49,000 and require a six-month lead time. Gillis built his version for pennies, and it has since been rolled out across the organization.

Approved work aids serve to assist accuracy, improve efficiency, and reduce risk. They're not industry requirements and are only implemented when an aircraft is grounded.

STARS doesn't own a 3D printer. Most custom work aids are built by engineers printing them at home. One STARS engineer even welds from his home shop, creating metal work aids for his team.

Gillis said creating work aids while off-duty is a STARS engineer's way of supporting the charity.

"This is our way of giving back," says Gillis. ■

A Mission Born From Loss

Last year, Cindy Letourneau reached a massive fundraising goal to commemorate her son, Chris, and show her gratitude for STARS.

By Olivia Piché

Cindy Letourneau drives a red vehicle. She's tried to switch colours, but she just can't – it represents her unwavering support for STARS and the Very Important Patient (VIP) program. But Cindy's story is a little bit different from other STARS VIP stories as she wasn't the patient – it was her son, Chris.

In September 2013, Cindy received a call that Chris was in a motorcycle accident on his way to work. STARS cared for Chris during an eight-minute flight from Sherwood Park to Edmonton's University of Alberta Hospital, but sadly, he passed away in the emergency room from cardiac arrest.

"Because STARS was there, my son did not pass away on the asphalt or on the way to the hospital, but in the care



Cindy Letourneau is flanked by (L-R) flight nurse Jodi Scott, pilot Josh Brewster, flight paramedic John Doyle, and pilot Jeff Cliff. She's holding the cheque for STARS indicating that her fundraising total surpassed her \$250K goal.

of staff," said Cindy. "For a mother, the only thing you want is to have your children taken care of, and they took care of him."

DECADES OF IMPACT

At Chris's funeral, Cindy asked family and friends to consider donating to STARS in lieu of flowers. This marked the beginning of more than a decade of remarkable fundraising. Cindy's original goal was \$22,000 since Chris was 22 years old at the time of the accident. She, along with Chris's friends and girlfriend, established an annual memorial golf tournament, CL88, to raise the funds. Cindy hit her goal quickly, but she was nowhere near done with her fundraising efforts.

So, in 2014, she set a new goal: raise \$250,000 to have a logo commemorating Chris put on the side of a STARS helicopter. Last summer marked the golf tournament's 12th year, getting the funds up to

\$181,000. In 2025, STARS nominated Cindy for the National Philanthropy Day Community Catalyst Award, and she won. Two angel donors saw her nomination video and anonymously donated \$35,000 each, pushing her past her goal.

"She was blown away. She expected it would take another six to eight years to reach the \$250K," said Vanessa Mickel, lead, external events, Alberta. "She raises this money because she's grateful to STARS, but we are incredibly grateful to her for being such a STARS advocate."

REMEMBERING HER SON

Cindy's unwavering support and Chris's memory will be recognized on STARS' aircraft. The CL88 logo will be unveiled in Edmonton on July 6 this year, which would have been Chris's 35th birthday. An additional celebration will be held in Calgary to bring more of Chris and Cindy's community together.

Looking forward, Cindy plans to continue fundraising to help others who need STARS and share her gratitude for the way they were there for Chris.



Chris Letourneau

PHOTOGRAPHS \ (TOP) LYLE ASPINALL; (BOTTOM) COURTESY OF CINDY LETOURNEAU

COMMUNITY SUPPORT



Dr. Doug Martin, medical director and transport physician at STARS Manitoba, is one of the physicians providing virtual care under the KIM partnership.

Expanding Critical Care in Northern Manitoba's Remote First Nations

A partnership between STARS and Keewatinohk Inniniw Minoayawin (KIM) Inc. is helping close long-standing gaps to access health care.

By Kristy Archibald

Access to emergency care can look very different in northern Manitoba, where distance and geography often stand between critically ill or injured patients and the treatment they need. Beginning Nov. 1, 2025, a new partnership between STARS and Keewatinohk Inniniw Minoayawin (KIM) Inc. is helping close the gap to health-care access and improve patient outcomes.

Through a six-month pilot initiative, frontline health-care teams in Tataskweyak Cree Nation (Split Lake) and Manto Sipi Cree Nation (God's River) have around-the-clock virtual access to a STARS physician. This enhanced support is working to strengthen local clinical capacity by providing real-time consultation on patient treatment, stabilization, diagnosis, and management. When necessary, STARS physicians also assist with referrals and

work alongside Manitoba's Virtual Emergency Care and Transport Resource Service (VECTRS) to coordinate patient transport.

As of March 2026, almost 90 separate patients had been impacted by this new partnership.

"This partnership will support timely and equitable access to critical care services for patients when they are needed most," said Cindy Seidl, chief clinical officer at STARS.

Dr. John Froh, president and CEO of STARS, added: "We are proud to partner with KIM to provide the services of our physician team where they can be of assistance and ultimately help improve patient outcomes in northern Manitoba."

The initiative is equally significant for KIM, a First Nations-led health

organization dedicated to transforming health-care services for 23 northern Manitoba First Nations. By integrating STARS' critical care expertise into its primary care services, KIM aims to improve access, patient experience, and health outcomes in communities that

have long faced systemic barriers to emergency care.

"This partnership is helping address long-standing gaps in access to emergency care for First Nations in northern Manitoba," said Michelle Monkman, interim CEO of KIM. "Since launching in November, we are seeing the strengthened ability of local care teams to respond in critical situations. This is a clear example of First Nations-led health transformation in action."

First Nations leaders see this partnership as a meaningful step forward. Chief Michael Yellowback of Manto Sipi Cree Nation describes the partnership as having a "profound impact on the community and represents a transformative innovation in how health care is delivered."

This partnership brings specialized critical care expertise directly into remote communities, ensuring patients receive timely support when every minute matters. ▀

Municipal Hail Insurance

Life is unpredictable, but because of our 13-year partnership with Municipal Hail, rural communities across the Prairies have access to best-in-class critical care from STARS when the unthinkable happens. Municipal Hail is more than insurance. They are part of a lifeline for farmers, fields, and communities through their coverage and their support of STARS. STARS is deeply grateful for Municipal Hail's commitment to rural communities across Western Canada in livelihood and life – thank you!



MUNICIPAL HAIL INSURANCE

Storms are unpredictable... We aren't.



NEVER MISS A MISSION



**JOIN STARS FOR LIFE
AS A MONTHLY DONOR
AND MAKE EVERY
MONTH MATTER.**



Become a monthly donor today at stars.ca/monthly or scan the QR code.



When Cindi's life was hanging in the balance, allies like **you** helped STARS reach her in time (see story on page 3).

But Cindi is only one patient – and with over 100 emergency calls coming in each day, steady support is vital.

Join STARS FOR LIFE today, so your support is there for every STARS mission, all year long. As a monthly donor, your steady support allows STARS to always be there for the next patient who needs us.



\$10/month

provides an airway-management tool.



\$25/month

provides a Blood on Board cooler system.



\$50/month

provides mission-critical equipment like an electronic flight bag.

From left to right: Tim and Cindi Long walk with neighbours Katie and Caleb Klassen on the Long ranch near Oyen, Alta. Read their story on page 3.



Your donation makes a difference.
It allows us to be there for the next patient in need.
Please donate today.

PHOTOGRAPH \ LYLE ASPINALL

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