



NAEMT Position Statement

Recognition of EMS as an Essential Public Function

Statement:

NAEMT believes that the essential life-saving public function fulfilled by emergency medical services (EMS) necessitates support by all levels of government to ensure its viability. The ability of EMS to fulfill this essential public function in meeting the day-to-day needs of local communities and responding to disasters, public health crises and mass casualty incidents depends upon sufficient resources. Local, state and federal government authorities must share the responsibility for funding EMS and integrating EMS in our nation's preparedness, response and recovery infrastructure.

Background:

Every day, thousands of people call 911 for a medical emergency with the expectation that an ambulance will respond so that emergency medical practitioners will treat and transport them to definitive care. However, despite this public expectation, EMS's essential public function is not fully recognized at any level of government.

EMS saves lives and is a unique and critical part of the healthcare delivery system. EMS systems conduct nearly 25 million transports to more than 8% of the US population per year, predominantly by ground but also by air.

In every community in our nation, EMS is expected to deliver quality emergency medical care on a day-to-day basis to their residents as part of a continuum of health care services provided to all patients with emergency medical conditions. Regardless of the model of EMS care delivery -- whether governmental, nonprofit, private or volunteer -- all EMS providers fulfill this essential public function to the best of their ability for all patients in need within their limited resources.

In addition to these local responsibilities, EMS systems are an integral component of each state's emergency response system and are a critical element of our nation's disaster and mass casualty response infrastructure. The vital role played by EMS in the Boston Marathon bombings, the Texas fertilizer plant explosion, Hurricane Sandy, and the Aurora and Tucson shootings just in recent history illustrates its significance in saving lives in the worst of circumstances.

EMS, Fire, and Law Enforcement work together to form a triad of critical services in disaster response and recovery. EMS' function is to perform medical triage, provide life-saving treatment and transport. Both the Fire Service and Law Enforcement are funded through governmental sources; EMS relies on a fragmented and inadequate patchwork of financing despite its essential public function.

EMS is also a component of our nation's public health system that protects our communities through disease prevention, surveillance, and response. Cooperation and integration of EMS and public health not only provides an essential infrastructure for daily response, but also improves a community's preparedness and response to natural and man-made disasters, including acts of terrorism. An effective national EMS system is essential in any plan to mitigate and respond to the medical consequences of disasters or other public health events, whether natural or man-made.

However, many communities in our nation struggle to provide even basic emergency medical services to their residents. Further, most local governments do not possess the financial resources needed to prepare their EMS systems for disaster response. Strong federal support in the 1970's fueled the initial development of EMS systems at the state and local levels. Yet, in the 1980's the withdrawal of comprehensive federal support led to haphazard growth and implementation of EMS systems across the country. Today, EMS remains significantly underfunded and challenged to serve patients.

NAEMT supports the continued provision of EMS through all delivery models best determined at the local level. Yet, given the essential life-saving public function provided by EMS, strong public leadership and appropriate and consistent public funding is vital to ensure the viability, effectiveness and sustainability of EMS in our nation. In particular, funding for EMS must be sufficient to ensure an effective response not only in daily operations, but also in disasters, mass casualty incidents and other public health crises.

The millions of Americans each year with emergency medical conditions count on EMS; EMS must be able to count on all aspects of government to support the essential public function it provides.

References:

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