



**Oregon State Ambulance Association**

## **Position Statement: EMS Workforce Crisis**

### **Purpose**

Workforce shortages in the EMS system is threatening public health and jeopardizing the ability to respond to healthcare emergencies on a timely basis. This statement articulates the OSAA position regarding the critical need for collaboration between EMS providers, healthcare delivery systems and state and local government officials in understanding and addressing the urgency of the unprecedented EMS workforce crisis in our state.

### **Statement**

EMS providers, healthcare delivery systems and state and local government officials have a shared responsibility to ensure community access to a well-trained and adequate ground ambulance services workforce that includes underserved, rural and Tribal areas, and addresses health disparities related to accessing pre-hospital ground ambulance healthcare services, including critical care transport.

Pre-hospital EMS service providers are at a breaking point because there are not enough paramedics (ALS providers) to meet the increasing demands for EMS services and inter-facility medical transports. As a result, EMS providers are experiencing decreasing availability to respond to 911 calls and increasing response time. The strain on these EMS services is also compounded by workforce shortages among hospital and skilled nursing facility partners with increasing handoff times between EMS and Emergency Department and hospital and nursing home staff.

As stewards of community health, safety and well-being, EMS providers, healthcare delivery systems and state and local government officials must work collaboratively to develop real-time strategies that proactively address the critical challenges facing communities in light of the EMS workforce shortage. These challenges include:

- Pandemic-driven loss of 1-2 years of paramedic school cohorts
- Decreasing enrollment in paramedic education programs
- Increasing labor costs due to premium pay, incentives, higher wages to address staffing shortages and pay equity laws that require retention bonuses for existing staff when recruitment incentives are offered
- Increasing fuel, supply, and equipment costs
- Supply chain issues that are impacting EMS providers' ability to meet community needs and regulatory compliance due to unreasonably long waits for new equipment and supplies including ambulance chassis (18-24 months) and other critical medical equipment such as gurneys and monitors (6 months to 2 years). The current 200,000 milage cap on ambulance vehicles is exacerbating this challenge as EMS providers experience much longer wait times for new chassis.
- Changes in fire department employment parameters (more relaxed testing requirements and criteria, increased compensation, early retirement programs, migration of paramedics from small fire departments and private ambulance companies to larger metropolitan areas)
- Increasing demand for hospital paramedic positions which is drawing from the available workforce pool
- FEMA and AARP incentives that make it difficult for small, rural, and special district agencies to compete with recruitment
- Public payer reimbursement that is below the cost to provide care
- Workforce burnout

The above challenges have an impact on an agency's ability to provide timely responses to healthcare emergencies.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program, the 2020-2030 workforce forecast shows that EMTs, paramedics and health technologists/technicians are projected to leave their professional employment between 2020 and 2030 at a higher rate than all occupations in the US economy:

- 11% for EMTs and paramedics
- 9% for health technologists and technicians
- 8% total for all occupations

As these professionals exit the EMT/Paramedic workforce (to largely pursue different occupations and/or retire), there will be an anticipated 20,700 job openings for these positions each year over the decade (2020-2030).

In Oregon, based on a survey by OSAA and the Oregon Fire Chiefs, Oregon's private and public EMS agencies are experiencing a 50 – 75% decrease in paramedic applicants since the beginning of the pandemic. In addition, both initial and renewal EMS licensure trends were relatively flat between 2019 and 2022, yet the demand for paramedics – and other EMS providers -- is increasing with volume escalations. This is a cause for great concern given the projected demand for these professionals over the next 10 years.

### **Impact**

The critical nature of the current EMS workforce crisis is impacting service to patients, as well as health outcomes. As response times for 911 emergency medical care increase, regulatory compliance for EMS providers declines, creating barriers for EMS providers working to deliver care and services. The increases in staffing costs (without reimbursement rates increasing) and resources dedicated to recruitment are simply not financially sustainable for private or public sector providers.

Among OSAA's greatest concerns is the fact that communities are losing their ALS emergency pre-hospital services due to the EMS workforce shortage. This loss is particularly devastating to small, rural communities that already have fragile healthcare systems.

### **EMS Provider Actions to Date**

To address the critical need for more paramedics, EMS providers have been working diligently to implement creative solutions, including:

- Developing scholarships to support education for EMTs who pursue paramedicine degrees
- Incentivizing paramedic staff with premium pay to recruit, retain and provide additional coverage (including hiring bonuses)
- Working collaboratively with healthcare organizations within the delivery system to address operational challenges and infrastructure designs
- Working collaboratively with community colleges to streamline paramedic degree program application processes and completion pathways.

### **Policymaker Actions**

To ensure access to a well-trained and adequate ground ambulance services workforce, OSAA is calling on legislators to:

- Support legislation to join the EMS Compact, which allows licensed EMTs and paramedics from compact States to practice in Oregon quickly and effectively

- Assist with workforce development initiatives
- Support flexibility for hiring and retention bonuses
- Review regulatory relief of financial penalties and punitive adverse actions in relation to Ambulance Service Area compliance metrics (specifically response times and 200,000 milage cap on ambulance vehicles)
- Support expanded access for temporary international EMS providers (Australia)
- Offer tax relief for paramedic student tuition
- Advocate for easier, more accessible EMS education pathways:
  - online training
  - more community college access points
  - modification of AA requirements (provisional license for paramedics with 2 years to get AA)
- Establish an Emergency Services task force, bringing together experts from across Oregon to evaluate the current state of the EMS system and make recommendations for improvements
- Make strategic state investments to:
  - Paramedic Students + all provider types
    - Earn to Learn programs
    - Fifth year senior programs
    - Future Ready Oregon grants directed at EMS Industry
  - Medicare/Medicaid reimbursement increases
  - Innovation projects to redesign delivery of pre-hospital EMS services
  - Interfacility Non-Emergent Transport Reimbursement

### **Healthcare Delivery Systems Action**

As partners in community health, OSAA is asking healthcare delivery systems to recognize how hospital and skilled nursing facility capacity constraints and workforce shortages are affecting the EMS sector performance and viability.

### **ABOUT Oregon State Ambulance Association**

For nearly fifty years, the Oregon State Ambulance Association has promoted high standards of ambulance and emergency medical services (EMS). OSAA members provide air and ground emergency ambulance service throughout Oregon. The OSAA mission is to help members do the best possible job of protecting the public and saving lives. [Members](#) of the Oregon State Ambulance Association (OSAA) are private and public organizations that provide 9-1-1 emergency ambulance service and transportation throughout Oregon.

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