

Emergency Medical Services in Washington State

In 2024, the Washington State Legislature directed WSIPP to describe the landscape of emergency medical services (EMS) in Washington, including a description of trends and response times, a projection of future service demand, and a comparison to EMS funding models in other states.

Background

EMS provides urgent prehospital care and transportation for individuals experiencing medical emergencies. In both the United States and Washington State, EMS systems are largely organized and funded at the local level, resulting in substantial variation in service delivery, funding structures, and resource availability across communities.

Findings

- EMS in Washington are delivered through a statewide EMS and trauma framework composed of 462 fire-based, public, and private agencies, with service delivery and operational decisions primarily implemented at the local level.
- EMS demand in WA has increased over time, reaching over 850,000 responses and 540,000 transports in 2024. Forecasts suggest continued growth over the next two years.
- While the state average response time is 8.2 minutes, responses remain longer in rural areas, averaging 12 minutes compared to 8 minutes in urban areas.
- About 6% of rural responses exceed 25 minutes versus 3% in urban areas.
- Current EMS funding structures create structural gaps as systems rely heavily on local funding and transport-based reimbursement, with no consistent state or federal model.

Limitations

- Data limitations include incomplete agency coverage, inconsistent reporting over time, a short historical period, and a lack of detailed local data on resources and costs, all of which constrain analysis and forecasting.
- There is limited evidence comparing the relative efficacy of alternative funding models.

EMS Responses and Transports (2019-2024)



Assignment Details

Assigned in the 2024 Legislative Session
[SSB 5986](#), Sponsor: [Sen. Cleveland](#)

[Full report available on WSIPP's website](#)

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