



Alaska Emergency Medical Services

Vision for 2050 Description and Explanation

Over the past 50 years, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) in Alaska have evolved into a vital and indispensable component of the state's healthcare system. When emergency medical response or transportation is needed, EMS has increasingly become expected and assumed to be readily available - even amidst Alaska's vast size, diverse communities, challenging geography, and extreme weather conditions.

However, as public expectations for EMS have grown, the ability to provide these services has faced mounting challenges. These challenges stem from how EMS was originally developed, its structure, and a persistent shortage of resources. The most pressing shortages are in workforce and funding, which jeopardize the availability, reliability, and financial viability of local EMS, as well as its long-term sustainability. These issues are further compounded by the fact that EMS in Alaska, much like in the lower 48 states, largely developed at the local level, often without sufficient regional or statewide planning and with limited resources.

To address these challenges, the Alaska State Office of EMS has embarked on a multi-year process of assessment, visioning, and ongoing strategic planning. The assessment is complete, a vision for the next 25 years of EMS has been defined, and planning to implement this vision has begun and is ongoing.

The Vision

A 2021 statewide assessment identified EMS in Alaska as being at a threshold, ready for its next stage of evolution. The vision statement below crosses that threshold and represents our aspiration for the future. It serves as a guiding star for continuous planning and the ongoing monitoring of progress over the next 25 years.

*In 2050, the Alaska EMS system is an essential service that provides for the life, health, and safety of **all** Alaskan communities.*

Alaska EMS is a critical component of an integrated healthcare system that is evidence-informed, driven by its communities, and provides culturally relevant, person-centered services that are reliable, viable, and sustainable.

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Vision Explained

An essential service refers to a public service considered crucial for the functioning of society and the well-being of the public. Such services are so vital that their interruption would significantly endanger public health, safety, or welfare. As an essential service, EMS will receive the same attention, support, and resources as other essential services, such as public safety, public works, utilities, and public health. In this vision, EMS is no longer a service whose existence depends solely on local initiative and limited resources.

Stating that EMS serves all Alaskan communities means ensuring EMS resources are appropriately distributed to provide sufficient capacity to meet needs and provides equitable access to response and care.

Viewing EMS as a critical component of an integrated healthcare system means recognizing that EMS plays a vital role in ensuring population health. EMS is not just about responding to medical emergencies, providing care, and transporting patients; it is a key link in the continuum of care, bridging the gap between an emergency event and access to definitive medical treatment. Additionally, EMS serves as a crucial connector within a healthcare environment defined by vast distances, regionalized medical specialties, tertiary care, and varying levels of care across the state.

To be evidence-informed means that EMS integrates the best available research evidence with clinical expertise and local context to optimize patient outcomes and resource utilization. By relying on data-driven protocols, performance metrics, and continuous quality improvement processes, such a system ensures that interventions are both effective and aligned with the needs of the community.

An EMS system that is driven by its communities, and provides culturally relevant, person-centered services honors the local development and character of EMS in Alaska. In this vision, EMS remains a local function with the flexibility and autonomy to meet community needs while respecting local culture and traditions. Person-centered care prioritizes the unique needs, preferences, and values of each individual. It emphasizes treating patients as active partners in their health decisions, and fostering communication, trust, and collaboration between patients and EMS providers.

The Vision's emphasis on describing EMS as a system is deliberate. While preserving the local character of EMS in Alaska, EMS will become a true system. This means local agencies will increasingly become more interconnected and work together to achieve greater capacity, effectiveness, efficiencies, and best possible outcomes. As a true system, it will be characterized by shared inputs, processes, outputs, and feedback loops, that enable it to adapt and maintain stability.



Ensuring that the Alaska EMS system is reliable, viable, and sustainable highlights the needs of local agencies and provides a framework to assess and appropriately resourcing them.

- ♦ **Reliable** – Reliable EMS agencies are staffed with enough qualified workers to respond to every call for help within a reasonable amount of time.
- ♦ **Viable** – Viability pertains to the financial health of local agencies, requiring a clear understanding of the full costs of providing services (including the value of donated labor) and ensuring that all expenses are matched with adequate financial resources.
- ♦ **Sustainable** – Sustainability focuses on the long-term likelihood of the local agency remaining operational. It includes maintaining a workforce, ensuring sufficient financial resources, fostering community interest and support, and providing the leadership necessary to coordinate these elements effectively.

Focus Areas

The realization of this vision will focus on seven areas:

- Patient Care
- Community & Stakeholder Engagement
- System Governance
- Data Informed Decision-Making
- Funding
- Workforce
- Technology

Ongoing Planning Work

The next phase of work focuses on bridging the gap between the Vision and the current state of Alaska EMS. This will involve an in-depth strategic planning process designed to develop actionable plans around the identified focus areas, addressing the most pressing EMS challenges while maintaining a clear alignment with the Vision.





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Patient Care

Enhance the prehospital care system so that it is characterized by evidence-informed clinical guidelines, engaged medical direction, appropriate oversight, and statewide access to Emergency Medical Dispatching with prearrival instructions.



Community & Stakeholder Engagement

Recognize how EMS supports community goals, understand the resources EMS needs to achieve these goals, and strengthen partnerships to enhance community engagement in making informed decisions about level of care and clinical practice.



System Governance

Define EMS in Alaska as an essential service where it is clear who is legally required to provide the service, what baseline service is required, and who is responsible to fund the service(s) and create the regulatory environment to support the vision within the context of local self-determination.



Data Informed Decision-Making

Enhance the information environment so that it supports research and end-user value, such as clinical decisions, care outcomes, workforce, and EMS industry trends.



Funding

Agreement and support from stakeholders and elected officials on the true cost of EMS and regional activities, that transitions to foundational level funding.



Workforce

Address disparities in compensation for EMS professionals, invest in leadership to foster supportive cultures for recruitment and retention, and integrate EMS workforce needs into broader workforce strategies.



Technology

Universal access to reliable emergency communication systems, broadband infrastructure, and information systems.

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Vision for 2050 Roadmap

Patient Care



- Create, maintain, and fund culturally appropriate structures and processes to support the clinician and clinical environment that achieves the Vision.
- Develop strategies to identify and close gaps in clinical care and clinical systems.
- Support providers of all pre-hospital care levels in the clinical environment.
- Collect and utilize data and experience to drive care practices and strategies.
- Require an engaged, prepared, and informed physician medical director for EMS systems.
- Create appropriate systems to evaluate care against best practices and evidence-informed guidelines.
- Involve communities in making value-based decisions about sustainable levels of care and clinical practices.
- Support EMS agencies and their local healthcare systems in integrating clinical care practices and information.

Community & Stakeholder Engagement



- Provide culturally relevant, person-centered services within the community.
- Develop and agree upon a shared story of critical EMS needs as they relate to the Vision.
- Identify, engage, inform, and educate stakeholder groups' needs and wants, and articulate the role EMS plays/could play in meeting those needs and wants.
- Develop, strengthen, and deepen both traditional and non-traditional relationships and partnerships.

System Governance



- Define EMS in Alaska as an essential service with clarity about who is required to provide the service, what baseline service is required to be provided, and how the services will be funded.
- Update, modernize, and/or create an agile regulatory environment, within the context of local self-determination, to support the Vision:
 - Align Alaska with national certification levels.
 - Become an EMS Compact State (REPLICA).
- Advocate for reform of the EMS financial and reimbursement systems.
- Establish baseline expectations for EMS agencies.
- Create tools and resources to meet baseline expectations.
- Align the work of advisory bodies and committees of influence to the Vision.
- Delineate the roles and responsibilities EMS system's regions, advisory bodies, and committees.
- Ensure Alaska EMS is represented at the national level and embed EMS within local, regional, state, and national organizations and activities.

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Data Informed Decision-Making



- Create a clear and compelling “why” for the collection and use of data.
- Develop toolkits, benchmarks, and model key performance indicators for the use of EMS data.
- Cultivate a data and information environment that supports research and end-user value, such as clinical decision support, clinical and patient- reported outcomes, etc.
- Position Alaska to be amongst the leaders in rural and frontier EMS research.

Funding



- Determine the gap in funding between the true cost of providing EMS in Alaska as it operates today, and as it would need to operate as envisioned in 2050.
- Develop agreement and buy-in on the foundational level cost of EMS. Maximize currently available financial resources and revenue streams. Create and leverage non-traditional financial resources and revenue streams.
- Provide the necessary funding for regional activities that support the Vision. Advocate for reform in EMS funding, payment, and reimbursement systems. Research, identify, and reduce duplication of costs.

Workforce



- Gather the information necessary to understand the data and trends associated with recruiting and retaining the EMS workforce.
- Encourage strategies to recruit and retain a workforce that reflects the demographics of the population served.
- Promote parity for recognition and compensation of the EMS workforce. Provide the financial resources necessary to maintain the EMS workforce required to achieve the Vision.
- Cultivate an EMS culture that supports high recruitment and retention by investing in EMS leaders and leadership development.
- Embed EMS workforce needs and programs and strategies associated with recruitment and retention, in the larger planning process.
- Recognize and promote the need for work/life balance and mental health resiliency.
- Support and assist a transition from the volunteer model where and when appropriate.

Technology



- Assure equitable and reliable access to information/communication systems, and infrastructure sufficient to accomplishing the Vision.
- Promote universal availability and access to redundant emergency communication systems and equipment.
- Promote statewide access Public Service Answering Points equipped with Emergency Medical Dispatching and pre-arrival instructions.
- Leverage telemedicine and the concepts of remote/virtual care.
- Create an environment where EMS stakeholders are present when infrastructure and technology decisions are made locally, regionally, and at the state level.
- Identify and leverage infrastructure that protects the EMS worker and provides for their safety.
- Ensure bidirectional exchange of information and patient outcome data through the use of integrated information systems.

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