



Volunteer Providers of Emergency Medical Services

May 2021

Background

Idaho's system for emergency medical services (EMS) provides out-of-hospital acute care and transport for injuries and illness. In our 2010 evaluation, *Governance of EMS Agencies in Idaho*, we found that Idaho's system was fragmented and built on a statutory framework that had not kept pace with the evolution of EMS. Since the evaluation's release, the Legislature has made several statutory changes and local EMS providers have independently developed new partnerships.

OPE has not conducted a follow up evaluation since 2013 and legislators have limited information on the impact of recent policy changes. In March 2021, the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee (JLOC) directed OPE to evaluate improvements to EMS administration and examine policies to improve the recruitment and retention of volunteer EMS responders.

Like many states, Idaho partially relies on volunteers to staff EMS. Volunteers make up a higher share of EMS staff in rural communities than in urban communities. In 2012 and 2018, the Legislature passed concurrent resolutions requesting that the Department of Health and Welfare conduct town hall meetings across the state to learn more about barriers to volunteering.

The town hall meetings produced information that led the department to make several improvements. The meetings had several policy suggestions that would require legislative action. Legislators have little information about the feasibility and effectiveness of policy recommendations resulting from the town hall meetings or whether the recommendations align with best practices for rural states like Idaho. Legislators also have limited

information about the current level of need for volunteers across the state and the effect of insufficient volunteers on EMS performance.

EMS is provided by several types of local government, including ambulance districts, fire protection districts, and counties. Most of these governments provide services other than EMS. Services outside of EMS, such as fire protection, involve separate governance structures and stakeholders. Effective volunteer incentives may also differ. Should legislators wish to learn more about governance of fire protection services and efforts to improve recruitment of firefighters, OPE could pursue this information through a separate evaluation.

Scope

This evaluation will focus on EMS administrative improvements and volunteer recruitment and retention. Specifically, the evaluation will:

- discuss the governance of EMS in Idaho and recent attempts to improve coordination;

- provide information regarding Idaho's reliance on volunteer EMS responders;

- assess the perceived shortage of volunteers and need to improve their recruitment and retention; and

- identify best practices for legislators in rural states to improve recruitment and retention of volunteer EMS responders.

Projected completion date: 2022 legislative session