Background

When an emergency or trauma occurs, having access to medical treatment in a timely fashion can literally be the difference between life and death. In Iowa and across the nation, recent tornados, flooding and other unexpected emergencies highlight the importance of having emergency responders at the ready. But there are daily individual emergencies – like accidents or heart attacks – that also require an immediate emergency response. Unfortunately, Iowa residents may not always be able to rely on receiving this emergency assistance. While the state of Iowa requires the statewide provision of fire protection and law enforcement, reliable access to emergency medical services (EMS) in every Iowa community is not mandated.

This means that when someone calls 911 for help from police or fire departments, those responses are guaranteed when appropriate, but ambulance services are not. In some areas, paid ambulance services provide reliable care with most crews staffed with certified paramedics. In other areas, EMS has traditionally been provided by volunteers. However, this model no longer works for many Iowa communities because of the cost and time required for certification and lack of flexibility in volunteers’ work schedules. There are simply not enough volunteers to answer calls at all hours of the day, seven days a week.

Without enough trained local volunteers, back up services from other EMS providers must come from father away, which means ambulances take longer to arrive.

In some cases, the local community hospital has taken on the role of providing backup or serving as the sole provider of ambulance and EMS services. But limited payment for these services under federal and state law means hospitals supporting this community benefit often do at a significant financial loss. Rural hospitals already face many financial challenges and continuing to operate EMS services without reimbursement is simply not sustainable.

Position:

1. IHA supports legislation to designate EMS an essential service under state law, which would qualify this necessary service to be supported by state and local funding.
2. IHA supports efforts to eliminate unnecessary regulatory burdens that prevent the appropriate and efficient utilization of resources and personnel across EMS providers.
3. IHA supports any efforts to provide consulting and assistance in developing regional or inter-governmental restructuring of existing EMS services to best utilize existing resources.
Action Needed

Designate EMS an Essential Service

IHA supports legislation to designate EMS an essential service under state law, which would qualify this necessary service to be supported by state and local funding. Having a reliable source of funding will help hospitals and other providers who deliver EMS services to recover a greater portion of the built-in cost of supporting 24/7 emergency medical and ambulance services that are ready at a moment’s notice. Funding will enable EMS providers to pay professional staff members and help support and finance the necessary training and certification required of these professionals.

Cities, counties, hospitals and other entities need flexibility to structure EMS services so that limited resources can be used efficiently and effectively. Providers should be able to collaborate and structure regional agreements that meet multi-county demands for these services and the well qualified individuals who provide them.

There is a great and growing need for qualified emergency medical technicians and paramedics, in part because current volunteers and employees are no longer able to serve. In addition to ensuring appropriate funding for the system, collaborative and creative solutions are required to meet EMS needs across Iowa. Iowa regulations require proof of credentialed staff working for each EMS group. And each group must manage its own credentialing, which can be burdensome and duplicative. In addition, medical protocols for a service are overseen by a single medical director and those protocols can easily vary between groups. These are all challenges to regionalization and standardization that add to the cost and burden of this already stressed system.

Regulatory requirements and personnel reporting should be simplified and processes made flexible so that a certified individual can serve where and when needed and staff and equipment can be shared among entities and within hospital facilities.

IHA supports efforts to eliminate unnecessary regulatory burdens that prevent the appropriate and efficient utilization of resources and personnel across EMS providers. IHA also supports any efforts to provide consulting and assistance in developing regional or inter-governmental restructuring of existing EMS services to best utilize existing resources.