

Dane County Emergency Management

EMS Division

Towns Association September 2026



Summary of EMS within Dane County

Wisconsin Chapter 60.565 Ambulance Service

The town board shall contract for or operate and maintain ambulance services unless such services are provided by another person. If the town board contracts for ambulance services, it may contract with one or more providers. The town board may determine and charge a reasonable fee for ambulance service provided under this section. The town board may purchase equipment for medical and other emergency calls.

Models of EMS Around Dane County:

Commission Model - Multiple jurisdictions sign onto an agreement to make decisions together with a board of representatives from each municipality. All jurisdictions weigh in on decisions. (*FitchRona EMS, Waunakee Area EMS, District One EMS, Oregon Area Fire, Deforest/Windsor Rescue, Cross Plains Area EMS, Sugar River EMS, Cambridge Area EMS, DeerGrove EMS, Mount Horeb Fire, Brooklyn EMS*)

Contract Model - One municipality, typically a larger City, has ownership over the department and charges neighboring municipalities for service. Decisions are made by the one jurisdiction. (*McFarland Rescue, Sun Prairie Rescue, Middleton EMS, City of Madison Fire Department, Stoughton Area EMS, Maple Bluff Fire Rescue*)

Private Ambulance contract - Municipality contracts with a private EMS agency. (*Marshall/Medina/York—Lifestar EMS*)

Benefits of Dane County EMS System for Municipal 911 EMS Providers:

Mutual Aid; Auto ALS for non medic agencies; Mass Casualty Incident planning countywide; radio system support; 911 call taking and dispatch; education and research; data system management and analytics; cardiac arrest data entry and quality assurance, ambulance support with two available for use by agencies (1 bariatric and 1 standard); group purchasing and medication vending machine management; Critical Incident mental health support through Employee Assistance; Peer Support Coordination; Crossing of borders based on call acuity (Auto ALS) for all agencies; County Medical Advisors to support hospital consistency and collaboration.

FAQs

What are the pressures facing municipal EMS services?

Volunteer Staffing - Towns are largely bedroom communities. Many don't work in small towns. If there are businesses, the ability to allow their staff to leave work for EMS calls is challenging, and using existing municipal staff (i.e. public works) is taxing when there are already staffing and workload issues. The hours of education required to become an EMT is just one of many reasons it is not sustainable anymore. Entry level requires 180 hours and then 40 hours every three years to renew. Initial training for paramedic level is a minimum of 1200 hours.

Fiscal Impacts - Cost of all supplies has increased dramatically. This cost combined with limited reimbursement creates challenges.

Increased Call Volume - Towns in Dane County have seen a 44.5% increase in call volume from 2020-2025.

Reduced Availability of Equipment/Supplies - Turn around time on acquiring an ambulance for example has increased to more than two years in most cases. This applies to supplies and medications as well with supply demand.

What funding options are available to municipalities?

Billing is one option, BUT recovery of billing is on average less than 50% due to Medicare/Medicaid limitations.

Tax Levy can be considered, but strict statutory limitations exist that can only be exceeded with referendum, or for a Town of less than 3,000 population it can be a vote of electors.

Shared revenue 2023 Act 12, maintenance of effort.

Fire fee for combined departments. 60.55 states the Town Board may charge property owners a fee for the cost of fire protection to their property according to a written fee schedule established by the Town Board.

What options other than increased funding could municipal EMS services pursue?

Shared services with bordering municipalities.

Group purchasing and/or coordinated services.

Contact Information

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