



HHSC's PROPOSED MEDICAID AMBULANCE CUTS WOULD DEVASTATE ACCESS TO EMERGENCY SERVICES

HHSC's biennial rate review has resulted in a recommendation that would lead to drastic reductions to Medicaid ground ambulance services to take effect on October 1, 2017. ***These cuts were not directed by the Legislature***, and Medicaid ground ambulance rates in the state of Texas are already only 67 percent of Medicare.

The proposed reduction to Advanced Life Support (ALS) emergency services is 13.42 percent. These services are for individuals who are experiencing strokes, heart attacks, trauma and other acute injuries. The proposal would cut ALS Level 2 by 36.8 percent.

The proposed reductions to Basic Life Support (BLS) services are 26.88 percent for non-emergency and 34.39 percent for emergency. BLS serves as the only appropriate mode of transportation for many Medicaid patients with non-emergent conditions. For example, a 55-year-old Medicaid recipient who is a completely bedridden quadriplegic and in need of an MRI must rely on BLS ambulance service due to the medical supervision required for the patient's tracheotomy.

Individuals living in rural areas rely on BLS emergency services emergency situations, which generally require a transport from a rural to an urban hospital for a higher level of care. In many areas of rural Texas, BLS is the only level of emergency medical care that is available. ***Due to the recent closure of many rural hospitals, Texas EMS agencies are the only source of immediate medical care in many rural communities.***

These reductions are being proposed with no consideration on how they will affect access and the ability of local communities to provide 911 services. Medicaid comprises approximately 20 percent of the payer mix in most urban communities, and 30 percent or more in rural communities. EMS agencies will have no choice but to make reductions in the number of ambulances that they equip and staff, which will impact response times for all Texas residents. Some communities will be forced to abandon the provision of 911 services altogether, or, in order to continue to provide services, local jurisdictions will be forced to raise taxes to subsidize ambulance services.