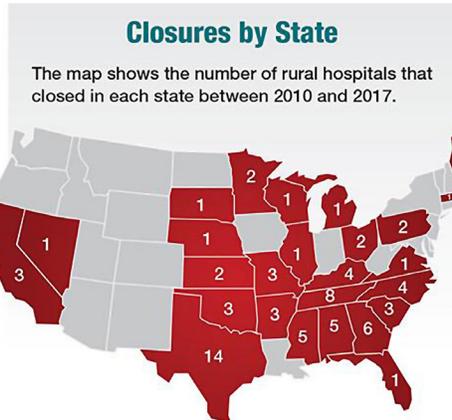


THE RURAL EMS AGENCY: A COMMUNITY'S LIFELINE



Texas EMS agencies play a critical role in our state's health care delivery system. The fast response and high level of care delivered by our state's EMS agencies have saved countless Texas lives. In many rural Texas communities, EMS agencies are taking on a new role as the community's health care safety net due to rural hospital closures. And for those rural communities that lack a rural hospital but have a primary care clinic, the EMS agency serves as the only health care option outside of business hours.



According to the North Carolina Rural Research Program, Texas leads the nation with 14 rural hospital closures since 2010. Rural hospital closures add the following pressures to rural EMS agencies:

- The increased transport stresses the system as it takes ambulances out of the community for hours due to the fact that the ambulance has to travel further to transport to the closest hospital.
- The increased transport stresses equipment by adding additional miles to units, which results in a faster replacement for ambulances.
- The increased transport creates a need for higher levels of training and care. If you can transport a patient to an emergency department with a physician and a team of health care professionals in a few minutes, the care needed for transport is viewed as "routine" in the EMS arena. However, if a patient requires a 50-mile transport, for example, the level of care that you would need to provide during that time period is generally expected to be higher, which requires a higher level of training for EMS professionals.

LOCAL PROJECT GRANTS

LPGs have been a lifeline for many urban and rural EMS agencies. Many EMS agencies relied on LPGs for capital equipment, injury-prevention projects, and continuing education for EMS professionals.

From 2009 to 2014, Scurry County EMS relied on LPGs to help create their STEMI (ST-Elevation Myocardial Infarction) program through education for EMS professionals and the purchase of capital equipment and other supplies associated with cardiac care, stroke care programs, and critical care transport. PK Westlake EMS in Graham used a \$30,000 LPG to acquire a 2012 ambulance remount. Without the grant, the volunteer agency would not have been able to replace its 2000 model chassis.

These are just two examples of how EMS agencies utilized LPGs in the past. Unfortunately, LPGs are no longer an option for EMS agencies due to the depletion of the EMS and Trauma dedicated Tobacco Fund. TEMSA worked with lawmakers in the 85th Legislature to pass HB 1407, which directed the Legislature to fund LPGs. However, an appropriation was not made.

TEMSA will work with lawmakers and stakeholders to fund LPGs in the 86th Legislature.

EMS PROFESSIONALS

Recruiting EMS professionals to work in rural areas is one of the greatest challenges that rural agencies face. In addition to recruiting challenges, rural areas lack EMS training programs that could help fill the void with local individuals. Many individuals in rural areas must on their "day jobs" to survive. They do not have the ability to move to another city to train or travel extensive distances to community colleges.

As a result, the 85th Legislature passed HB 1407, which created the framework for a distance-learning EMS professional education program in rural areas. If implemented, the program would consist of online distance learning and in-person skills training that would be conducted in rural areas. Ultimately, funds would be appropriated to acquire the training equipment necessary to conduct the mandatory hands-on and clinical portions of the course in rural areas. TEMSA is currently identifying accredited universities and educational entities that would execute the program.

