



## State Emergency Medical Services Council

### Where Are The Emergency Medical Responders: 2024 Update on the EMS Workforce Shortage

*Results of recent surveys and data  
on New York's emergency medical  
service workforce compiled by the  
NYS Emergency Medical Services  
Council – January 2024*

#### Executive Summary

Career and volunteer emergency medical service agencies in New York State are struggling to cope with a growing shortage of EMS responders. The number of active certified EMS responders in New York has declined by 17.5% from 2019 to 2022, according to the NYS Department of Health Bureau of EMS.

This executive summary combines information from the following sources:

- The recently completed 2023 NYS EMS Council (SEMSCO) Workforce Salary Survey
- The 2019 SEMSCO report EMS Workforce Shortages in NYS: Where are the Emergency Responders? <https://ubmdems.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Download-2019-NYS-EMS-Workforce-Report.pdf>
- 2023 Department of Health data presented to the New York State Department of Health Public Health and Health Planning Council
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2022 public data set
- National Association of EMTs (NAEMT) 2022 National Survey of EMS Workforce

The combined data and findings underscore critical challenges in the EMS sector, especially the severe and growing career and volunteer workforce shortage, the need for adequate and stable EMS funding and payment rates, and the importance of

improving compensation and benefits and creating attractive career pathways to retain EMS professionals so that communities receive quality emergency medical care.

New Yorkers who need emergency medical assistance expect that EMS will arrive when needed, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. However, the workforce shortage places this expectation at risk.

The surveys cited in this report were designed with the input of many members of the New York State Emergency Medical Services Council (SEMSCO) and compiled by SEMSCO Finance Subcommittee Chair Steven Kroll, MHA, EMT.

There were 3,831 responses to the 2023 SEMSCO Workforce Salary Survey, which achieved diverse input with a return rate of more than 10% of the active EMS responders in NYS.

### **EMS AGENCIES ARE CLOSING**

- The total number of ambulance services in NYS has decreased by 9% over the past 10 years from 1,078 to 982 (*source: DOH 2023*)
  - see endnotes on types of EMS agency ownership

### **THE NYS EMS COMMUNITY IS FAILING TO RETAIN TALENT AND RECRUIT ENOUGH NEW PROVIDERS -- ATTRITION, LONGEVITY, AND SATISFACTION**

- 58.4% of NYS EMS agencies indicated that the decline in number of certified responders diminished their ability to cover calls or scheduled shifts (*source: 2019 SEMSCO report*)
- The number of **active** NYS certified EMS practitioners has decreased by 17.5% from 2019 to 2022 (*source: DOH 2023*)
  - 2019: 40,046 certified and active
  - 2022: 33,022 certified and active (*there are 78,173 certified providers*)
- 62% of EMS leadership respondents had an unfavorable outlook on their agency's ability to recruit enough certified EMS responders to adequately serve the community in the future (*source: 2019 SEMSCO report*)

- 37% of respondents plan to leave the EMS field in the next five years. *(source: 2023 SEMSCO survey)*
  - Relief will not come from other parts of the country, as 45% of EMS respondents plan on leaving the profession within six years, according to the NAEMT 2022 National Survey of EMS Workforce. *(source: NAEMT 2022 National Survey of EMS Workforce)*
- Only 48% of respondents believe they have a long-term career in EMS. 27.5% said “no” and 24.5% were “unsure” *(source: 2023 SEMSCO survey)*
  - In seven regions of the state 30% or more of EMS providers do not believe they have a long-term career in EMS – Westchester, Hudson Valley, Suffolk, Hudson-Mohawk, NYC, Nassau, and Susquehanna
- 40% of EMS leadership respondents consider their EMS responder workforce to be distressed. *(source: 2019 SEMSCO report)*
- 32% of EMS providers report being somewhat or very dissatisfied with their current job as an EMS provider. *(source: 2023 SEMSCO survey)*
- When asked about their reasons for planning to leave EMS, respondents cited inadequate pay/benefits (65.7%) and the availability of better job opportunities outside of EMS (51.3%) as two primary factors contributing to their decisions. *(source: 2023 SEMSCO survey)*
  - Nationally, 60% of respondents cited better work life balance, 47% cited better pay and benefits, and 49% cited lack of opportunities for growth and professional development. *(source: NAEMT 2022 National Survey of EMS Workforce)*

## **VOLUNTEER EMS RESPONDERS**

- 52% of agencies utilizing volunteer responders reported their ability for timely EMS responses in their community was moderately or severely impaired by certified volunteer staff shortages; 29% of agencies reported frequent delayed responses or missing calls due to the shortage. *(source: 2019 SEMSCO report)*
- Two-thirds of volunteer/hybrid agencies reported their number of certified volunteers decreased over the last three years. 16% saw a decrease of more than 25%. *(source: 2019 SEMSCO report)*

## **CAREER EMS WAGES**

EMTs and Paramedics receive extensive training, work in high-risk and high-stress situations and have great responsibility for the well-being of the people they serve. Yet, EMT wages are comparable or less than for less complex jobs and Paramedic wages are less than other public safety and health care professions. EMS salaries must increase to support EMS as a career choice.

- 45% of EMTs report having an hourly base wage of \$19 or less; 76% report having an hourly base wage of \$24 or less (*source: 2023 SEMSCO survey*)
  - Average salary of a convenience store shift manager in upstate NY is \$18 per hour (*source: Indeed.com October 2023*)
  - Average salary of a retail salesperson in NYS is \$19.23 per hour (*source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2022*)
  - Average salary of a data entry keyer in NYS is \$20.12 per hour (*source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2022*)
- 24.5% of EMTs report earning less than \$39,000 a year as an EMT; 51.6% report earning less than \$49,000 (*source: 2023 SEMSCO survey*)
  - For reference, \$39,000 is 130% of the federal poverty level for a family of four
- 35% of Paramedics report having an hourly base wage of \$29 or less; 61% report having an hourly base wage of \$34 or less (*source: 2023 SEMSCO survey*)
  - Average salary of a Paramedic in NYS is \$29.58 per hour (*source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2022*)
  - Average salary of a Firefighter in NYS is \$35.35 per hour (*source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2022*)
  - Average salary of a Registered Nurse in NYS is \$48.14 per hour (*source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2022*)
- 18% of Paramedics report earning less than \$59,000 per year as a Paramedic; 36.4% report earning less than \$69,000 (*source: 2023 SEMSCO survey*)
- A substantial 68% of participants admitted to considering a transition to a different healthcare profession. (*source: 2019 SEMSCO report*)

## **WORKLOAD**

- 49% of agencies using only paid responders reported an increase of more 11% or more in the number of paid overtime hours in the last two years to compensate for responder shortages *(source: 2019 SEMSCO report)*
- 73% of respondents reported working more than 40 hours per week; 37% work more than 50 hours per week; 17.7% work 61 or more hours per week *(source: 2023 SEMSCO survey)*
  - In nine regions more than 23% of respondents work more than 61 hours per week – Adirondack, Finger Lakes, Hudson-Mohawk, Mid-State, Mountain Lakes, Nassau, Suffolk, Susquehanna, Westchester
  - Providers need to work more than one job to make ends meet. 42% of agencies indicated “nearly all” of their paid Paramedics work more than one job in EMS. 34% indicated “nearly all” of their paid EMTs work more than one job in EMS. *(source: 2019 SEMSCO report)*
  - Nationally, 60% of respondents work two or more jobs. *(source: NAEMT 2022 National Survey of EMS Workforce)*
- 85% of respondents have experienced burnout or compassion fatigue in their role as an EMS provider *(source: 2023 SEMSCO survey)*
- 89% of respondents have experienced a traumatic event or incident when working as an EMS provider. *(source: 2023 SEMSCO survey)*
- More than half of agencies had inter-facility transports delayed by responder shortages, potentially disrupting patient navigation of hospitals and continuing care providers. *(source: 2019 SEMSCO report)*

### **AMBULANCE OFFLOAD TIMES**

- Increasing ambulance offload times lengthens EMS calls and place an additional burden on a shrinking and stressed workforce.
  - 9% of patient offloads took 30 minutes or more during 2021-22 *(source: DOH 2023)*

- 339,090 patients waited on an ambulance stretcher at the hospital for more than 30 minutes
- 35,450 patients (1% of patients) waited one hour or more

Endnote: Types of EMS Agency Ownership in New York State (*source: DOH 2023*)

- New York State has 982 ambulance services
- Commercial For-Profit or Sole Proprietor **(9%)**
  - Commercial ambulance services answer 47% of all emergency calls and 78% of all non-emergency calls in NYS (*source: United NY Ambulance Network testimony - NYS Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on the Executive Budget Proposal, February 8, 2022*)
- Not-For-Profit **(54%)**
- Municipal **(35%)**
  - Fire District **(17%)**
  - County, City, Town, Village **(18%)**
- State and Federal Government **(1%)**

REASONS FOR THE EMS WORKFORCE SHORTAGE INCLUDE:

- A need for more EMS responders to meet increasing demand for ambulance service due to aging communities, substance abuse, behavioral health challenges, and chronic care needs
- Low wages for career EMTs and Paramedics, despite the tremendous responsibilities that come with the job
- A very limited capacity to raise wages, due to the declining financial health and negative fiscal outlook facing most EMS ambulance services. Many insurers – including Medicare and Medicaid -- pay EMS agencies less than their actual cost of providing care and transportation
- A decline in the number of new volunteers to replace long-time volunteers aging into retirement
- Significant delays in turning patients over to hospitals due to emergency room overcrowding