

Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Billing Program

Daily, the citizens of Prince William County depend on our Fire and Rescue providers to reduce the number of deaths and disabilities that occur from serious injury or illness. In fiscal year 2009, Fire & Rescue responded to 31,413 calls for service. Of these calls, 24,707 were EMS incidents with 15,481 patients being transported to medical facilities for additional care and treatment.

Prince William County operates a two-tiered EMS response system where both basic and advanced life support services are rendered. Basic life support (BLS) is a level of medical care that consists of life saving procedures that are non-invasive and include activities such as control of bleeding, care of sprains, strains, and fractures, artificial ventilation, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and the delivery of oxygen. BLS care is delivered by trained emergency medical technician – basic (EMT-B) providers.

Advanced life support (ALS) is a higher level of medical care as compared to BLS. ALS care includes the performance of non-invasive and invasive procedures such as cardiac monitoring and defibrillation, establishment of intravenous (IV) lines, delivery of medications, and placement of advanced airways. ALS care is delivered by specialty trained emergency medical technician – intermediate (EMT-I) and emergency medical technician – paramedic (EMT-P) providers.

Prince William County has grown tremendously over the decades and that growth has placed additional service delivery demands on our system. The new economic reality that Prince William County, our region, state, and the entire nation now find themselves operating in requires us to evaluate every possible option for stabilizing revenue, while considering the amount of tax burden we place on our citizens. As a way of augmenting the funding needed to deliver EMS to its citizens, the Prince William Board of County Supervisors has directed the Department of Fire & Rescue to study how they can diversify the revenue generation and examine instituting an EMS billing program.

The EMS Billing program is a revenue recovery initiative for emergency medical service (EMS) incidents, which result in the transport of a patient to a hospital. In the structure of this program, the patient's health insurance company will be billed for the services rendered, similar to the process that hospitals and doctors use now. Health insurance costs, including EMS transport services, are already included in insurance premium actuarial calculations. Not billing for services for which premiums have already been paid only benefits the insurance companies. This situation results in the County irretrievably losing legitimate revenue, which could be used to assist in addressing the many system-wide needs in our Fire and Rescue services. Most of our surrounding jurisdictions already have an EMS billing program in place.

The billing approach Prince William County will use is described as a “compassionate” approach, meaning the direct financial impact to County citizens will be minimized, as much as possible. Any remaining co-payment or deductible, after the insurance company has been billed, will not be charged to the County citizen. This includes those County citizens who do not have insurance coverage; no charges will be billed.

Providing the valuable service of EMS care and transport for our citizens remains the top priority of Fire and Rescue. EMS billing will not change the quality of care provided and EMS will always be provided, without regard to anyone’s ability to pay. Calls to the 911 center will be answered in the same way and the medical care on the scene and during transport to a hospital will remain unchanged. Emergency responders will continue to provide the highest quality of emergency medical care for our community.

As we enter the public education phase of our initiative, information regarding the EMS billing program will be offered to the citizens of Prince William County. We encourage anyone with questions or concerns, to contact us for further information.

If you would like more information or have additional questions, please visit our website at www.pwcgov.org/EMSBilling; email emsbilling@pwcgov.org; or call 703-792-6800.