



## GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT EMS TRANSPORT BILLING PROGRAM

1. The system of providing Emergency Medical Services (EMS) in Anne Arundel County is focused on delivering world-class patient care: regardless of anyone's ability to pay for such service.
2. No citizen will ever suffer financial hardship as a result of an EMS transport.
3. Implementation of an EMS transport billing (fee for service) program will have no effect on the quality of care provided. The program will be transparent and a system of checks and balances will be established to ensure that all citizens are treated professionally, courteously, and with compassion.
4. We will – respond quickly, act competently, be nice.

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1. What is EMS transport billing (fee for service) and why is Anne Arundel County implementing this program?

*EMS transport billing (fee for service) is the process of obtaining financial reimbursement for the cost of providing medically necessary ambulance transportation. Medicaid, Medicare, and most other private insurance policies (health, auto, homeowner) already allow for reimbursement for this service. Anne Arundel County is implementing this program to seek reimbursement of these funds that will help supplement some of the operational expenses for providing Fire, Rescue, and EMS system while giving some relief to the general fund and ultimately the taxpayer.*

2. When will Anne Arundel County begin billing for EMS transport?

*The program is tentatively planned to begin on April 1, 2009.*

3. How is charging for EMS transport authorized?

*On June 1, 2008, Anne Arundel County Council amended Anne Arundel County Code Article 12, Title 1, §12-1-105 to permit such action.*

4. What are the charges for EMS transport?

*The County will charge a fee of \$500.00 per transport.*

5. Doesn't an EMS billing system amount to "double taxation?" As a property owner, I am already paying taxes that fund emergency medical services through the fire department.

*No. Charges for medical transport services result in revenues that should actually decrease the tax burden for Anne Arundel County citizens. The fees are paid as part of insurance coverage for County citizens and non-citizens alike. In addition, those persons who do not pay County taxes will also be bearing their share of the costs of the services that are funded by the County. For County citizens, the taxes paid will be considered as payment for that portion of the fee that is not covered by insurance. Those residing outside of the County will be billed for any balance due.*

6. Why am I being billed for ambulance transport service? Isn't the service free?

*Each year emergency call volume increases – last year reaching 40,000 transports and the cost of delivering critical emergency services approaches \$100 million annually including personnel, training, equipment and apparatus. In order to partially recoup costs and help ease the burden on taxpayers and property owners, we bill insurance carriers. The demand for, and cost associated with, providing this essential service will continue to rise as our population grows.*



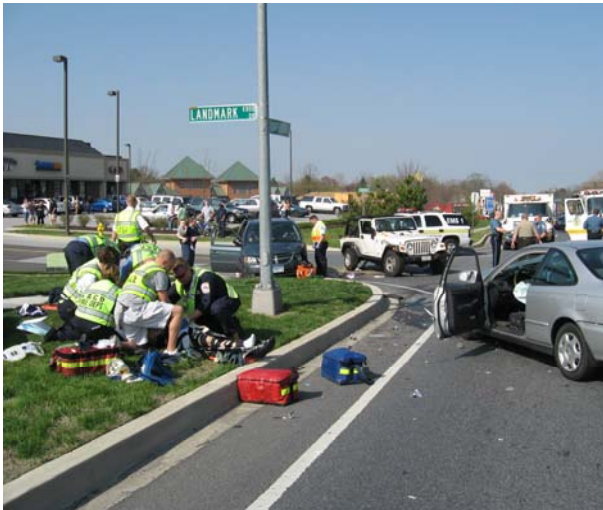
7. How does billing work?

*Anne Arundel County will contract with an independent EMS transport billing company. The selected vendor will be required to adhere to stringent rules concerning patient confidentiality, professionalism, and courtesy in the administration of the EMS transport billing program. For County citizens, taxes paid will be considered as payment for any portion of the fee that is not covered by insurance. Those residing outside the County will be billed for balances due. The County will consider waivers for financial hardship to those unable to pay balances due.*

8. How will insurance information be obtained?

*Patient care and attending to a patient's needs are always the most important priorities in EMS. Fire department professionals will not seek patient insurance information at the time care is provided. After transport, the independent billing company will work with the transported patient and the receiving hospital to obtain the necessary information. Upon receipt, the company will submit a claim to the insurance carrier. No further correspondence should be received until the insurance company has made a determination of payment.*

9. Will I have to pay for the service at the time it is provided / rendered?



*No. No payment will be expected at the time of transport and all persons will be transported regardless of insurance coverage or their ability to pay.*

10. What is a “Compassionate Billing Program”?

*A compassionate billing program accounts for the fact that there are individuals who are unable to pay for medical transport services due to financial hardship. Therefore, the County will be granting waivers for payments to those persons who meet certain financial requirements. This applies to non-residents of the County. County residents will not be billed for any unpaid fees (after insurance) because County residents' payment of taxes is considered their contribution toward those unpaid fees. The threshold for granting a waiver of a bill under this program will be 250% of the federal health care poverty guidelines for the lower 48 states and the District of Columbia. A family of four earning \$55,125 a year or less would be eligible for this program. A family of two earning \$36,425 a year or less would also be eligible. A single person would qualify at \$27,075.*

11. Will an EMS transport billing system result in higher health insurance premiums?

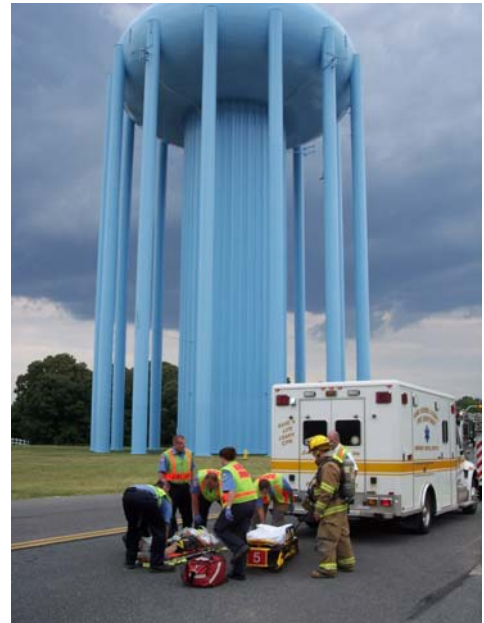
*Generally, health insurance plans and federal programs, such as Medicare, already provide coverage for medical transport. Therefore, the County implementing this charge should have no direct impact on health insurance premiums. It is a coverage that is being paid for but is not being used for transports in Anne Arundel County. Health insurance premiums are based on many factors. The State Insurance Commission controls insurance premiums and reviews and proposed changes quarterly to prevent abuse by insurance companies.*

12. How will my privacy be protected?

*Federal HIPAA laws are strictly followed. All Department members are trained in patient privacy matters as part of their EMS training.*

13. I am a County resident and I do not have insurance of any kind. Will I receive a bill?

*You will not receive a bill. No person will ever be denied EMS transport regardless of their ability to pay. If there is no insurance coverage, taxes paid will be considered as payment of the charges to the County resident. The County will not collect any further sums from County residents. Non-County residents will receive invoices, and the County will attempt to collect the sums due. Non-County residents may apply for waivers based on financial hardship. The Controller of Anne Arundel County and the Fire Chief will have the authority to waive a bill if it is deemed to represent a financial hardship.*



14. I am a County resident, but my insurance company will not pay for EMS transport. Will I be responsible for the bill?

*No. The payment of various taxes by County residents is considered their contribution toward the medical transport fee.*

15. If a resident of the County has reached an insurance limit for EMS transport for the year, and additional services are required, will the citizen get a bill for these additional services, or can the fee be waived?

*Historically, this has not been an issue based on various insurance carriers and most, if not all, policies do not place a limit on medically - necessary transports related to EMS service.*

16. Will the billing company send uncollected transport fees to a collection agency?



*No Anne Arundel County residents will ever have an unpaid transport bill sent to a collection agency.*

17. I am concerned that the EMS transport billing program will disproportionately affect those most in need of the service – specifically the elderly, working poor, and chronically ill who are already making tough decisions about how to spend their extremely limited dollars. Doesn't this hurt those groups the most?

*No. First and foremost, anyone who calls 911 will be provided service regardless of their ability to pay. Second, County residents will not have to pay any fees not covered by insurance. Third, a compassionate billing program will be put into place to serve as a safety net for non-residents of the County struggling financially. Fourth, federally supported Medicare and Medicaid programs are specifically designed to assist such groups by providing health care coverage when commercial insurance cannot be afforded.*

18. Who will I call if I have a billing or insurance problem?

*The EMS billing company will have customer service representatives to address billing and insurance questions through a toll-free 800 number and the internet. If you are not satisfied, you may contact the fire department Patient Advocate at 410-222-8EMS (8367). You can also email the Fire Department with questions / concerns at [FDemsbilling@aacounty.org](mailto:FDemsbilling@aacounty.org)*

19. What happens if I call 911 and do not need to be transported? Will I be billed?

*No. A fee will only be imposed if you are transported to a hospital. You will, however, be required to sign a refusal of care form releasing the medical providers and the County from any liability arising from your refusal to accept transport to the hospital.*

20. If I call 911 for someone else, am I responsible for any bill resulting from an EMS transport, even if I am not the person transported?

*No. The fee relates to the person who is transported by ambulance.*

21. Some residents have expressed concern about other people who cannot afford to pay for this service and/or do not have any form of insurance. Specifically, they feel that some people will delay in calling for assistance for EMS services based on their ability to pay for such services. What effect will an EMS transport billing service have on this?



*Although this is a perceived fear, extensive evidence from jurisdictions who have implemented a billing program have found such assertions to be completely FALSE. The ability to pay will never be considered when providing service. When citizens need emergency assistance, they should call 911 immediately. The program is not intended to decrease call volume in any way.*

22. Have other localities implemented a successful EMS transport billing (fee for service) program?

*Yes. Similar programs have been proposed or implemented in the City of Annapolis, Baltimore City, Queen Anne County, Prince George County, Fort Meade, and Frederick County. Sources indicate that between 70-85% of all EMS services nationwide bill as a means of cost recovery / service enhancement.*

23. If an out-of-county ambulance responds into the County and provides EMS transport, what billing policy applies?

*The County enters into mutual aid agreements with surrounding jurisdictions. In those instances when an out-of-county ambulance responds into the County and transports a patient to the hospital, the billing policy of the out-of-county ambulance applies. Anne Arundel County cannot affect the policy of another jurisdiction.*



## EFFECT ON VOLUNTEERS

24. How does this program help volunteer fire fighters and fire companies in the County?

*New funding made available through EMS transport billing will be placed in the General Fund. Monies from the General Fund are used to support volunteers by maintaining existing facilities, providing personal protective equipment and uniforms, fuel for apparatus and training. The County also contributes to the Length of Service Awards Program (LOSAP) providing volunteers with a small monthly stipend after 25 years of service. The Anne Arundel County Volunteer Firefighters Association has expressed its support of an EMS transport billing program and the County is developing a revenue sharing program with volunteer companies who staff their ambulances.*



25. I have always contributed to my local volunteer fire company? Will they still need my donation?



*Yes! Anne Arundel County Volunteer Fire Companies use donations to make capital purchases (fire apparatus), make improvements to existing facilities, and plan for long term financial growth. Your donations make it possible for volunteer fire companies to remain a vibrant part of our emergency services delivery system.*

26. Will an EMS transport billing system result in a loss of volunteers in Anne Arundel County?

*The County is blessed to have a dedicated cadre of well-trained and active volunteers and does not expect any decrease in volunteerism associated with an EMS transport billing system, despite a downward trend in volunteerism nationwide. Anne Arundel County will always support a Fire/Rescue system that promotes volunteerism even as it continues to develop a delivery model that ensures continuity and consistency. One of the goals of the program is to promote volunteerism through revenue sharing.*