

911

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION NURSE SYSTEM

PROGRAM

Providing timely and reliable response is critical to the mission of the San Bernardino County Regional Fire Departments. In 2020, our Emergency Medical Services (EMS) responded to 279,262 calls for service in our jurisdiction of more than two million residents in a 20,000 square mile region. Our goal is to serve our communities with the best in fire protection and EMS when we receive calls for help.

Recently, we implemented a successful pilot program to serve our community called the Emergency Communication Nurse System (ECNS). The ECNS is an innovative program by which our trained Dispatch operators work alongside nurses stationed in the County's 911 Call Center network to quickly assess the level of response required for medical calls.

HOW IT WORKS

Upon receiving a call, Dispatch determines if a traditional response (fire, ambulance, police) is required, or Dispatch can route the caller to a nurse for immediate assessment. The nurse will offer medical recommendations for home care, advise if a visit to Urgent Care is needed, or if necessary, will issue an emergency response.

BENEFITS

Based on deployment in other states, ECNS has proven the value of diverting non-critical calls to the care of nurses. Not every 911 call needs a lights and sirens response. The benefits are multi-fold:

- Costs incurred by our agency and residents are lowered
- Resources, vehicles and staff remain at-the-ready for our most critical emergency calls
- Valuable space is freed-up in our hospital system

Traditional EMS does not include protocols for differentiating between the most critical need and low-acuity based on symptoms and the request for help. An ECNS system can quickly assess and provide the appropriate level of care. Additionally, at hospitals an ambulance-patient off-load delay occurs when patients cannot be transferred timely from ambulance paramedics to emergency room staff. These factors can become problematic due to our population growth, a shortage of physicians in the area and difficulties in increasing hospital capacity.

We are also mindful of the load upon our emergency responders. During a normal flu season, the health care delivery system nearly fills to capacity. This year COVID-19 creates a potential for a twin-demic that could completely overwhelm the system. Our pilot ECNS serves to decrease the risk for that drastic scenario.

FUTURE FUNDING NEEDED

Our goal is to serve residents more effectively while saving county resources. We believe a year-round ECNS can help us do that.

CONFIRE, together with San Bernardino County Fire and San Bernardino Council of Governments are seeking funding to extend the ECNS program beyond its current June 2021 expiration date. Currently, the program is funded by the CARES Act, which is not a long term sustainable resource. We are seeking \$1.8 million annually to continue with year-round implementation of the ECNS program.

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