



WHAT PARAMEDICS WANT^{IN} 2024

Paramedics weigh in on staffing; operations trends; and developing rewarding, sustainable careers in EMS

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INSIDE

The bottom line:
Insights into EMS
staffing

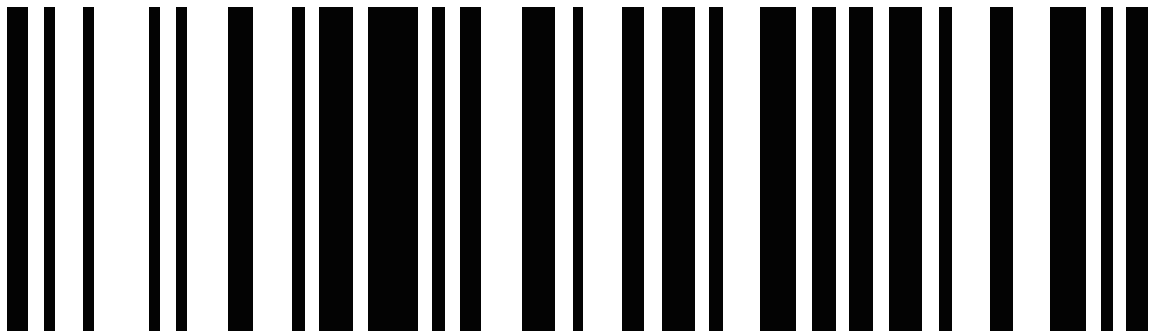
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FROM THE EDITOR

In the fast-paced world of emergency medical services, understanding the evolving landscape is paramount for leaders and caregivers alike. This year's annual EMS Trend Survey – the ninth iteration of the EMS Trend Report – conducted jointly by EMS1 and Fitch & Associates, offers a comprehensive look into the challenges, trends, and pressing issues facing EMS providers and agencies. With nearly a decade of consistent data collection, this survey has become a cornerstone for identifying critical areas of concern and shaping the future of EMS.

In 2023, survey respondents identified career development opportunities as a top concern. With staffing shortages continuing to factor as a top issue impacting the field, this year's What Paramedics Want report turns the lens on career pathways and issues impacting job satisfaction.

With nearly 60% of respondents reporting inadequate personnel to meet the demands of 911 calls in their primary service areas, this shortage not only impacts response times, but also contributes to increased dissatisfaction among both EMS workers and external stakeholders. As headlines across the nation highlight delays in emergency response times, it's clear that addressing staffing shortages must be a top priority for EMS agencies and policymakers.

As the EMS landscape continues to evolve, so too do the operational challenges and opportunities for innovation. From the slow adoption of digital transformation and artificial intelligence tools to the ongoing debate surrounding the use of lights and sirens, EMS agencies face complex decisions that require careful consideration. By leveraging the insights gleaned from this year's survey, EMS leaders can better understand the needs and expectations of their stakeholders, and work towards building a more resilient and responsive EMS system for the future.

Please share the results with your colleagues and follow us for our ongoing coverage of the trends shaping EMS by [becoming an EMS1 subscriber](#).

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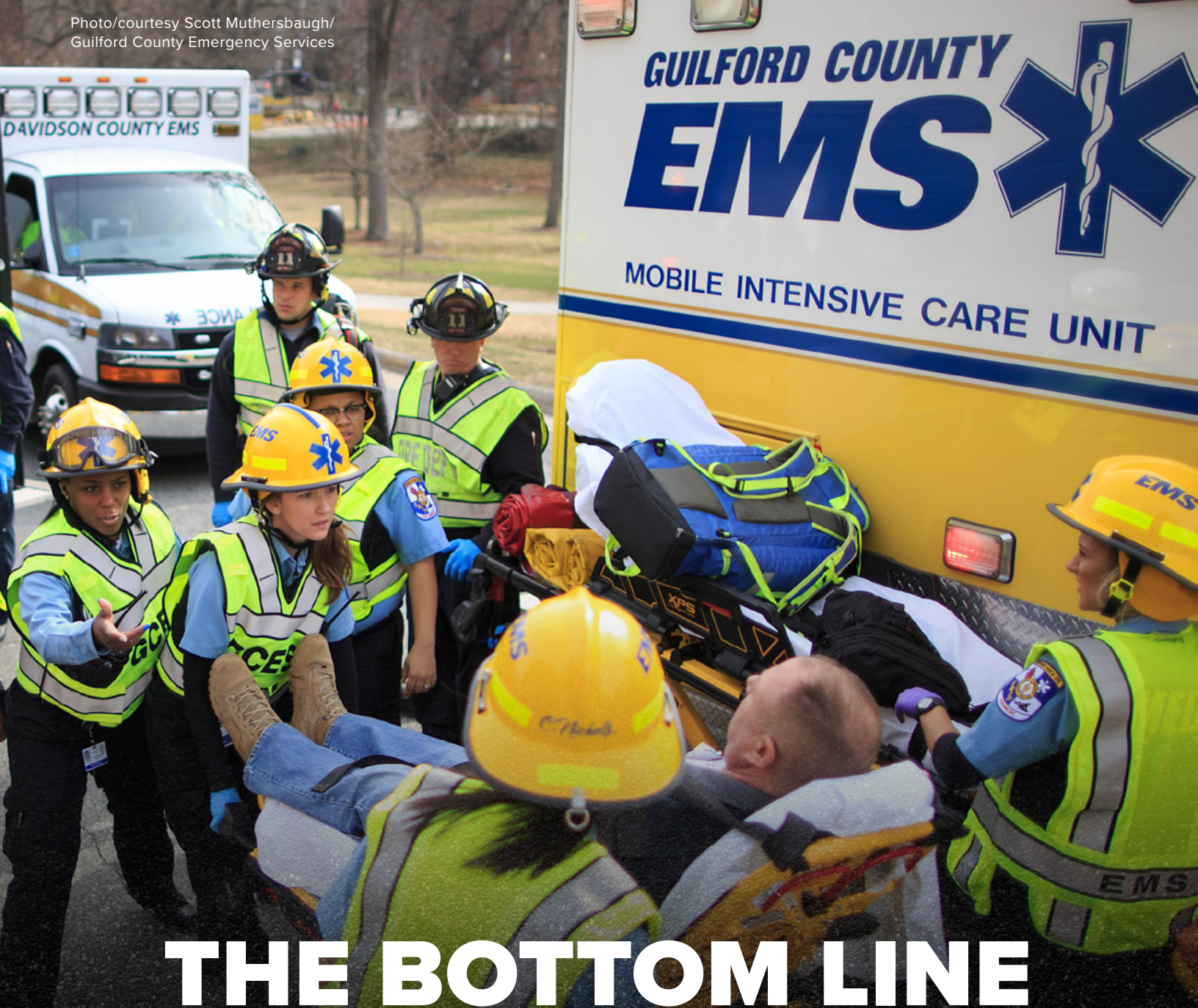
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Photo/courtesy Scott Muthersbaugh/
Guilford County Emergency Services



THE BOTTOM LINE

INSIGHTS INTO EMS STAFFING

Key findings from the annual EMS Trend Survey shed light on critical issues impacting paramedics

WRITTEN BY
Jay Fitch, PhD

After nearly a decade, consistent trends and patterns across various demographics and questions have been observed in the annual survey conducted by EMS1 and Fitch & Associates. The survey gathers insights about “What Paramedics Want.”

As compensation and benefits remain an overarching issue that impact many aspects of the EMS profession, it is not surprising that staffing/retention is consistently ranked as a critical problem. Other significant issues include funding, recruitment, career advancement, stress/provider mental wellness and agency leadership. Let’s dive into the results of the 2024 EMS Trend Survey.

Staffing

Lack of staffing is creating increased dissatisfaction among EMS workers and other system stakeholders. Almost 60% of survey respondents (57.3%) indicate that they do not have enough personnel to respond to 911 calls in their primary service areas.

The number of negative press reports are also increasing. It is not uncommon to see headlines such as: “Waited more than an hour for an ambulance for a heart attack” and “A woman died after waiting 3 hours for an ambulance.”

Response expectations remain high. The caustic impact on caregivers and external stakeholders of staffing shortages and coverage limitations will likely expand until the staffing crisis is fully resolved.

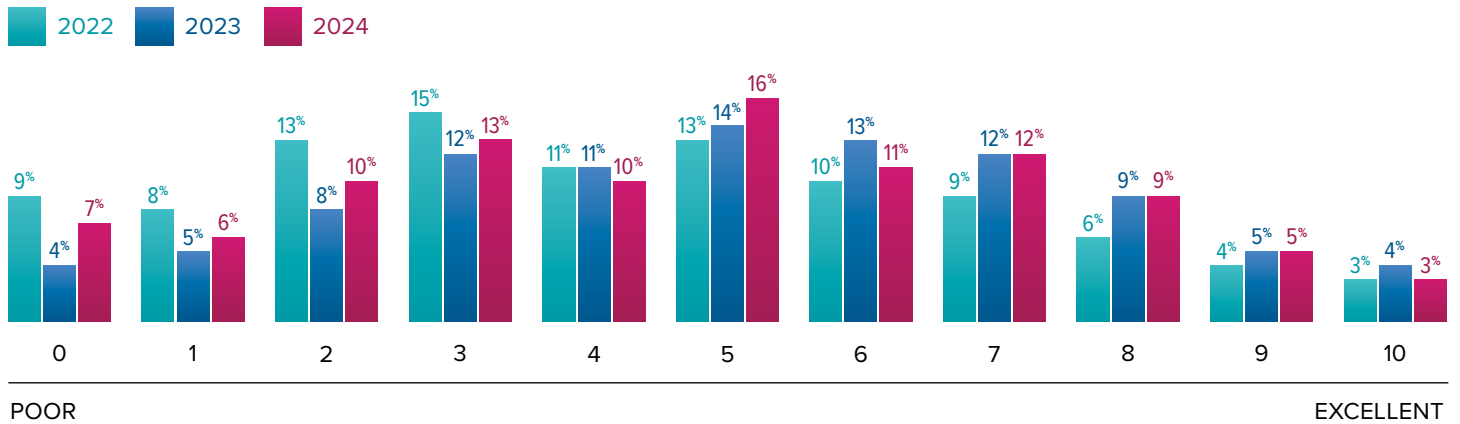


Photo/courtesy Scott Muthersbaugh/Guilford County Emergency Services

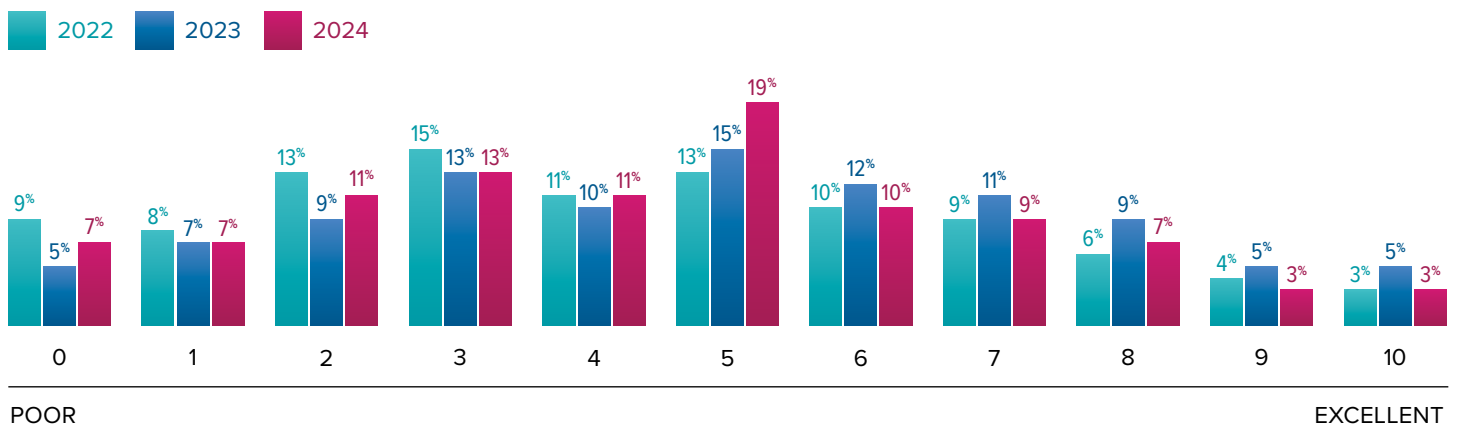
Rank the critical issues facing EMS today (1 being the most critical)

	 2024	 2023	 2022
	Retention of quality personnel	Retention of quality personnel	Retention of quality personnel
	Funding and reimbursement	Career development/ advancement	Funding and reimbursement
	Career development/ advancement	Recruitment of qualified applicants	Recruitment of qualified applicants
	Leadership	Provider mental health	Leadership
	Recruitment of qualified applicants	Leadership	Career development/ advancement

Please rate the state of EMS provider retention in your organization



Please rate the state of EMS provider recruitment in your organization



How much of an impact are the following issues having on your community?

	HIGH/VERY-HIGH IMPACT	LOW/NO IMPACT
Opioid overdose epidemic	36%	24%
Health-related impacts of climate change	7%	76%
Homeless patient populations	34%	39%
Patients in mental health crisis	62%	9%
AI taking over EMS jobs	2%	93%
COVID-19	20%	50%

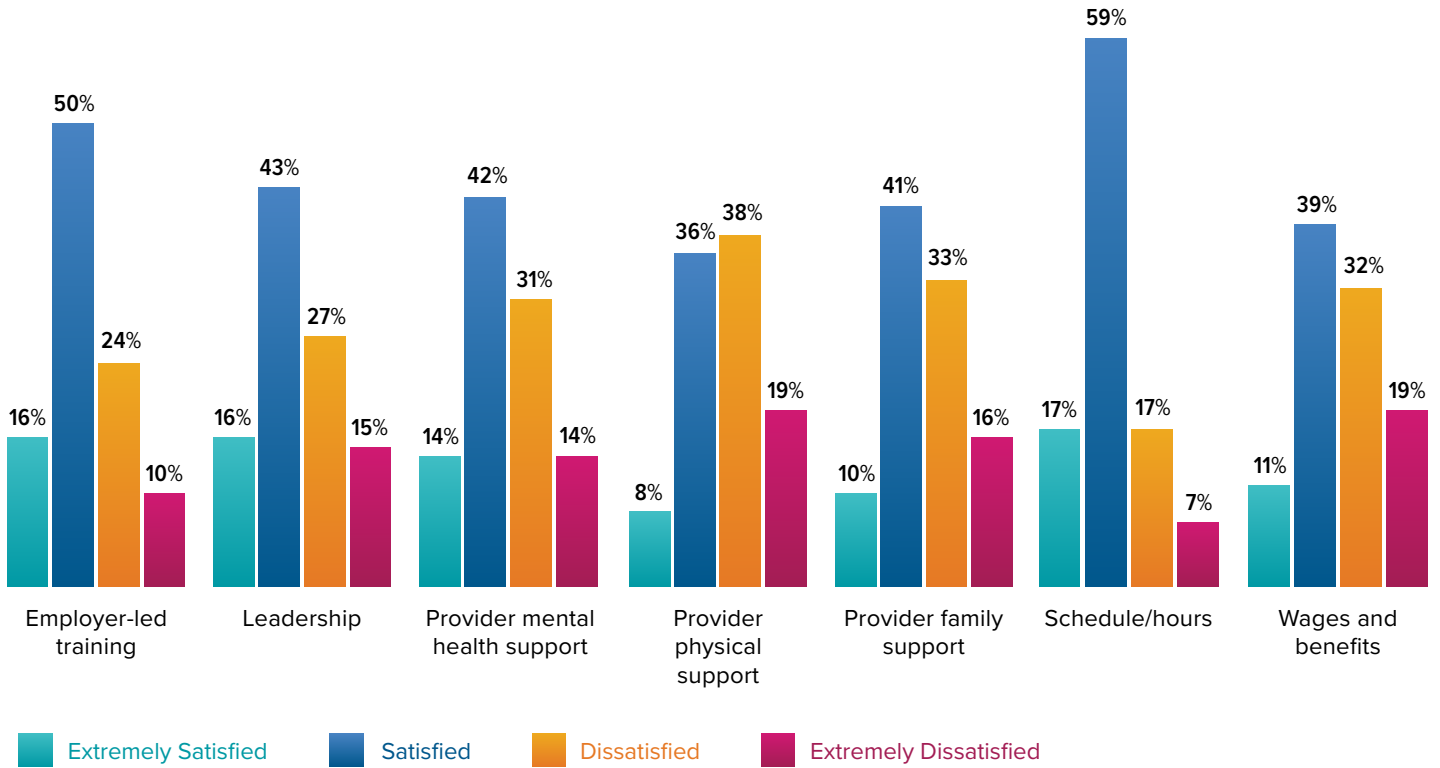
Career pathways and development

Respondents identified lack of available personal time as their biggest barrier to career development. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (62%) report they are on 12- or 24-hour schedules. About three-quarters (76%) of the survey respondents report being satisfied with their schedule and hours.

Financial constraints were the second-most-frequently identified barrier to career development.

A majority (52.8%) said that they did not plan to change employers and, in the free text responses, a common theme was, “the grass isn’t always greener on the other side.”

Rank how satisfied you are with each of the following at your current employer



Why are you planning to leave your current employer?

Retiring from EMS	24%
To pursue other employment (not in public safety/healthcare)	17%
To pursue other healthcare employment	21%
To pursue other public safety employment	10%
To continue EMS employment with another agency	17%
Other	12%

2024 SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

The 2024 EMS Trend Survey was conducted in early 2024. The EMS1 and Fitch & Associates teams developed the questions and widely promoted the survey open to all members of the EMS community.

A total of 1,608 responses were received from EMS professionals representing a wide range of service models across the U.S., U.S. Territories and Canada. Respondents represented suburban (35%), rural (32%) and urban (29%) service areas across fire-based (19%), public third service (20%), public utility (10%), private for-profit (16%), private non-profit (18%), hospital-based (15%) and federal/military (1%) service models.

The majority of respondents' primary role is ALS 911 response (48%); and 51% are ground field providers, 11% field supervisors, 10% manager/directors and 11% chief/administrators.

Paid roles account for 87% of the respondents, with 3% volunteers and 10% serving in both paid and volunteer roles.

Seventy-one percent of respondents obtained a degree (up from 65% in 2023) – 30% associates, 27% bachelor's, 12% master's and 2% doctorate.

Eleven percent of respondents have 0-5 years of experience, 15% 6-10 years of experience, 24% 11-20 years of experience, 24% 21-30 years of experience and 26% more than 30 years of experience.

Leadership

Agency leadership has been consistently named as problematic for caregivers. It has been among the top five issues in each of the last 3 years. Examining this year's results a bit closer, of those who rated poor agency leadership among their top three issues, nearly half (48%) indicated it was the most stressful issue, while the caregiver's direct supervisor was rated as the most significant stressor by almost a fourth (24%) of the respondents.

Operations

Operations-related questions also revealed some interesting responses. Several other scientific studies have questioned the value of "running hot" ([lights and sirens](#)) to all calls. An increasing number of caregivers recognize that "running hot" represents an increased risk.

Over a third of survey respondents report that the opioid epidemic is having a very high impact on their communities. To address that need, 57% report using leave-behind naloxone, with an additional 13% reporting they are planning to adopt this policy soon.

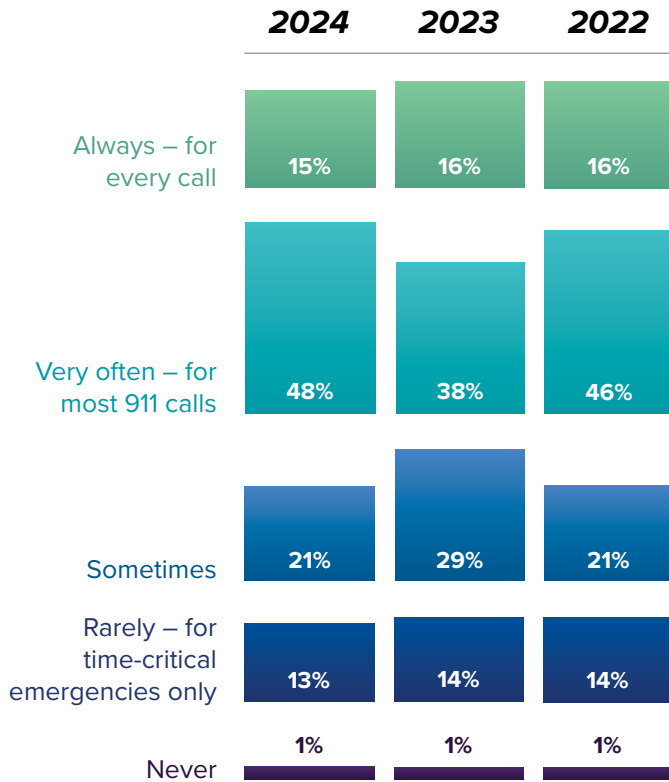
More than six in 10 respondents (61%) indicate that they frequently or occasionally utilize a special response team for patients experiencing a mental health crisis.

What are the top three most stressful aspects of your job?

	 2024	 2023
1	Salary and benefits	Poor agency leadership
2	Staffing	My direct supervisor
3	Poor agency leadership	Staffing

Digital transformation and artificial intelligence (AI) tools have been slow to be adopted in EMS.

My organization responds to 911 calls using lights and sirens



Overall, 8 in 10 respondents (82%) indicate they have not adopted AI tools. Of those using AI tools, 60% indicated they are using or planning to use AI for operational analysis, while 50% are using or are planning to use AI tools for both human resource support and clinical care or documentation.

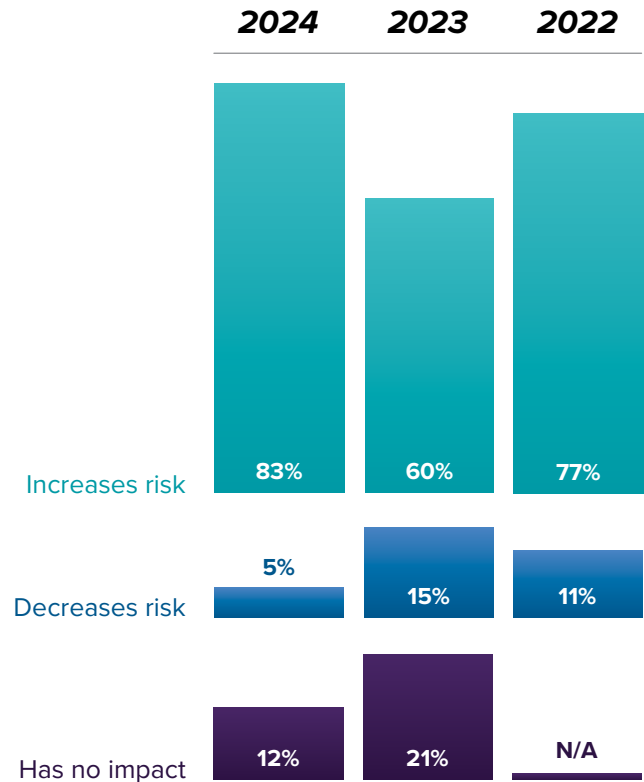
Another area of operations that has not seen large scale acceptance yet is the use of hybrid/electric ambulances. Only 5% report frequently using [electric ambulances](#), while 23% of respondents indicate their agency is planning to adopt EVs at some point.

Caregiver wellness

When asked about how caregivers prioritize their health, 43% of the survey respondents indicate that they give it some attention but not enough. Adequate rest remains a significant concern in 2024 with only 4% of respondents getting the recommended amount of sleep daily.

When asked if department leaders recognize stressors for caregivers, nearly 60% agreed,

In general, the use of lights and sirens



while 23.5% strongly disagreed. Nearly 60% (57.21%) indicated that their department provided behavioral health support services, but with less than a third (31%) indicating that peer support teams are well trained, additional support resources should be considered.

In summary, the consistent trends observed in survey from year to year underscore the reliability of the findings. The EMS Trend Survey provides valuable insights for individual service leaders and national policymakers alike. By understanding the responses and adapting to the trends, organizations can better meet the needs and expectations of their stakeholders in the years to come. The articles that follow will describe in more detail certain aspects of this year's survey results. [1](#))

About the author

Jay Fitch, PhD, is a founding partner at Fitch & Associates. Now semi-retired, he serves as a core faculty member for Fitch EMS Foundation and as the senior advisor for mentoring and leadership development for the Fitch Education Foundation.

EMPOWERING EMS CAREER DREAMS: A LEADERSHIP IMPERATIVE

Channel the energy and ambition of EMS professionals to foster a thriving and motivated workforce

Photo/courtesy Scott Muthersbaugh/Guilford County Emergency Services

WRITTEN BY

Anthony W. Minge, EdD

Many people enter the EMS profession seeking a fulfilling career in which they can meaningfully impact the health and safety of their community. They sign on with a department or agency full of energy and vision, to treat the sick and injured, set on making a difference in the world.

The more seasoned staff in our ranks who've long since passed the registry and proudly carry the badges of validation that come with years of service carry the torch, leading committees, attending conferences and seminars, bringing back new ideas and methodologies. Like that Farmer's Insurance commercial, "they know a thing or two because they've seen a thing or two!" Powerful resources one and all!

As leaders, we have the opportunity and duty to harness these providers' vivacity and use it to make positive changes, allowing our profession to keep pace with progressive technologies, advancements in medicine, and even appropriate recognition and treatment of a changing social populus.

Channeling providers' passion

Are we as leaders taking full advantage of this great and powerfully dynamic prospect, channeling our people's sometimes almost unbridled energy to serve our communities to the fullest?

Are we welcoming and promoting charismatic and enthusiastic behavior, recognizing, showing appreciation and promoting the vigorous pursuit of employee goals?

Are we asking our EMS professionals what they want from their careers and how we can help them to achieve these goals?

Or are we too focused on the day-to-day routine and stuck in the rut of a "we've already tried that ... it won't work" mindset to really take the opportunity to entertain the idea that our employees may have goals and career dreams and ideas that might just solve at least some of the dilemmas that regularly plague our services?

We have a responsibility as leaders to ensure we are listening to, understanding, recognizing, promoting the pursuit of and even growing our employees' dreams to grow beyond their current

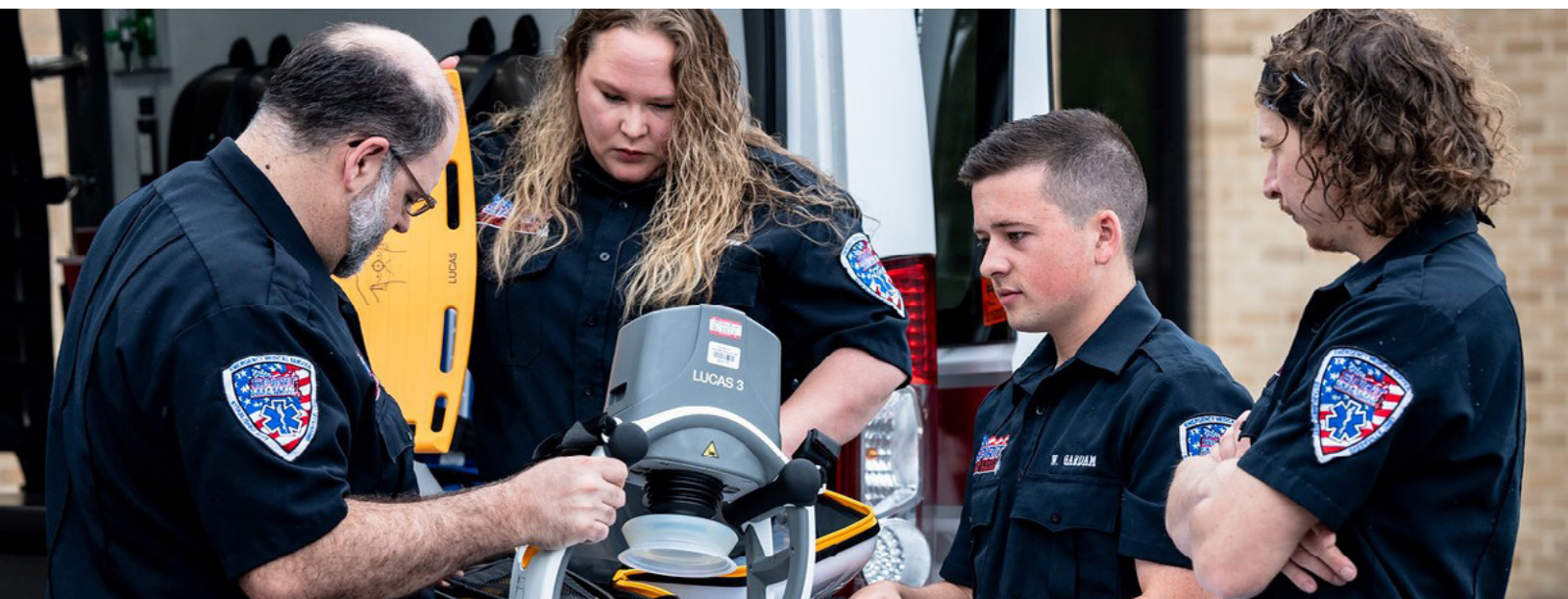
roles. Those in positions of power often fail to recognize that dreams and goals will come along at different points in each member's career path.

As a leader, you must be willing to regularly lend your experience and seek to assist your employees in achieving their career dreams. Failure to do so can lead to lackluster performance and can be costly in terms of retention, recruitment and even lost revenue.

Here are some tips for assisting your employees as they aspire to accomplish more.

- 1. Engage employees in career conversations.** Establish an honest and open dialogue about employees' skills, interests and career goals. Encourage them to reflect on their strengths and areas for development. This requires active listening skills that may need to be developed. If you are talking more than your employees, you're not doing this well.
- 2. Set goals and encourage ownership.** Work with employees to set SMART goals – these are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound goals. Employees who take part in creating the path of their destiny are more inspired to accomplish their goals.
- 3. Provide regular feedback.** Continually communicate with constructive feedback at regular intervals. Focus on both strengths and areas of improvement, offering tips and tools to keep employees on track and make continual progress towards the attainment of the goal.
- 4. Foster purpose.** Help employees to find meaning and purpose in their current work by connecting it to their goals and the overall goals of the agency. This will improve job satisfaction and you will likely see greater engagement and often improved performance.
- 5. Support professional development.** Encourage continual learning. Provide training opportunities. Send employees to classes, seminars and conferences. Consider adopting creative scheduling processes that will allow providers to attend school to further their degree.
- 6. Align individual and organizational goals.** When employees understand how their goals and dreams contribute to the success of the organization, they have a sense of achievement and accomplishment that will keep them motivated, benefiting both parties.

Spirit EMS Education Director Scott Wolf (left) goes over new equipment and skills with (from left to right) Advanced EMT Julie Oliver, Paramedic Will Gardam, and Paramedic Phoenix Waters as part of an EMT class at Spirit EMS. (Photo/courtesy Spirit EMS)



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

EMS providers share what they need to foster a long-term fulfilling EMS career



By Rachel Engel

Based on the responses to the question, “What is the No. 1 thing your organization could do to help you develop a rewarding, long-term career in EMS,” several key trends and common requests have emerged.

Here are the top requests from the EMS Trend Survey and quotes from respondents:

1

Increased pay and benefits

- Higher wages to ensure financial stability and reduce the need for multiple jobs
- Better benefits, including healthcare, retirement plans and pensions

“ Better pay and benefits with good retirement.

“ Better pay for my time spent away from home.

“ Pay paramedics the same as nurses for the same job.

“ Increase the pay so that providers could earn a stable income with one job.

“ Increase pay. My job is wonderful and the people are great, it’s just the money.

2

Career advancement and development

- Defined career ladders and advancement opportunities
- Paid time off for training and education
- Support for continuing education, certifications and advanced degrees
- Leadership and mentorship programs

“ We need a true career ladder that leads to jobs not as physically demanding.

“ Develop a career ladder to mimic fire service.

“ Financially incentivize progress in education and career.

3

Work-life balance

- Reduced mandatory overtime and more predictable schedules
- Adequate staffing to prevent burnout and ensure time off
- Moving away from 24-hour shifts

“ Improve staffing. Be it by improving pay, offering educational incentives for new hires or other methods, doing the job of two people consistently should not be a thing.

“ We need less hours worked without sacrifice of a livable wage and benefits.

“ Reduce/eliminate egregious mandatory overtime shifts.

4

Leadership and management improvements

- Stronger, more transparent leadership
- Leadership training for current and future leaders
- Reduction in favoritism and politics within the organization

“ Train leadership on how to lead and guide rather than have favorites and ridicule.

“ Leadership transparency, end buddy club.

“ Teach me to be a better leader.

“ Provide genuine support and leadership and a level of confidence that they have your back. Eliminate self-serving leaders and poor leadership in general by correcting poor promotional selection processes.

5

Professional recognition and respect

- Recognition of EMS professionals as a critical part of the healthcare system
- Treating EMS professionals with respect and valuing their contributions
- Encouraging a positive and supportive work culture

“ Show more support and recognize and reward personnel for the work they do.

“ Create a better working environment that focuses on the employees.

“ Recognizing and rewarding the contributions of EMS professionals through incentives, awards, and public acknowledgment. This could help boost morale and motivation, fostering a sense of pride and satisfaction in the work they do.

6

Health and wellness support

- Mental health resources and support
- Programs to reduce physical and emotional stress

“ Initial mental health support needs to be a major focus early on so providers can develop healthy coping strategies and stay mentally and physically fit for their career.

“ Be aware of the needs of the personnel. We are all burnt out and keep getting pushed. We are expected to work when injured, and ill, and beat down. It never stops and it never will because no one in the world above street level medics care enough to make a change.

“ Ask employees if they are OK instead of punishing them when problems boil. Be proactive in helping them manage stress.

7

Improved training and resources

- More hands-on, realistic training
- Access to updated and adequate equipment and resources

“ Incentivize degrees and offer more outside training opportunities.

“ Have an actual career development path that includes coursework and travel where one can meet peer professionals from other agencies across the nation, like the National Fire Academy.

“ Realistic training with motivating and encouraging educators/ leaders.

8

Organizational stability and support

- Consistent policies and stability within the administration
- Better communication between leadership and staff
- Support for work-life balance and family needs

“ Do not punish us for our honest mistakes.

“ Have a more open communication line between ranks.

“ Engagement. Just care about your people. Prioritize your presence as you would for your children. Invest in your employees. Get to know them as more than a number.



Even if the goal may lead employees to a career outside your organization, if you do not support their dreams, it may lead to unsatisfied and disgruntled employees. Supporting employee dreams and goals leads to improved satisfaction and often develops loyalty.

There are many stories of exceptionally successful people who started at the lowest levels of an organization, who were encouraged to pursue a dream by a supervisor, manager or some other leader, and went on to greater heights. Some of those were internal to the original company, and some, even though they had left the agency, went on to be prominent in other areas but were still impactful in being able to promote and support the organization (and leaders) that originally encouraged and assisted them in pursuing their dream.

A key element that most all successful organizations share is that they create an environment in which employees feel valued and motivated to pursue their career aspirations.

Some benefits your organization may realize when encouraging employees to pursue their career dreams include:

1. Increased employee engagement and satisfaction

2. Improved retention rates
3. Enhanced productivity and performance
4. Positive cultural change
5. Improved recruitment and talent attraction

Reflecting on our own career journeys, we most likely owe a debt of gratitude to at least one leader in our own career development who supported our dreams and encouraged us to pursue them, even offering advice and support along the way. These people were crucial to our success. You can thank them by paying it forward, embracing the opportunity to inspire your employees to pursue their career dreams and – along the way – provide guidance, motivation and emotional support to help navigate the path. You won't be sorry you did. [1](#)

About the author

Anthony Minge, EdD, is a senior partner at Fitch & Associates. He has more than two decades of leadership, revenue cycle management, compliance and healthcare business operations experience. Prior to joining the firm, he was the business manager for Northwest MedStar in Spokane, Washington.

EMS WELLNESS: **PROGRAM UPTAKE AND ROADBLOCKS**

Balancing organizational support and personal responsibility, Joe Coons examines how providers can engage in improving their health and wellness



WRITTEN BY
Joe Coons, NREMT-P (ret.)

Over the last 10 or so years, there has been a proliferation of wellness programs designed to help EMS providers maintain their mental and physical well-being. Agencies have stood up peer support teams, tailored employee assistance programs to meet the unique needs of our industry, purchased gym equipment and provided memberships. The question becomes: are we using them?

Physical well-being

Let's start with physical health. According to a study published in 2021, 56% of EMS workers surveyed were considered obese using body mass index standards. Of those same workers, 48% did not meet the physical activity guidelines recommended by the CDC.

In the 2021 study, participants identified lack of energy, willpower and time as primary reasons for a lack of physical activity, ranking lack of resources last. Similarly, in the 2024 EMS Trend Survey, respondents ranked time and motivation as their biggest barriers to maintaining their physical health – indicating while the resources may be available, providers are still finding it difficult to adopt wellness strategies.

How do you prioritize your physical health?

6%

I prioritize it above all other responsibilities

38%

I balance it with my other responsibilities

43%

I give it some attention, but not enough

12%

I rarely prioritize my physical health

2%

I do not prioritize my physical health



EMS PROVIDER HEALTH: By the numbers

CDC recommendations:

- Perform 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity in a week
- Perform moderate or greater intensity muscle-strengthening activities twice a week
- Get 7 or more hours per day of sleep

Respondents report:

- **32%** often/always meet CDC recommendations for moderate-intensity physical activity
- **41%** rarely/never meet CDC recommendations for moderate-intensity physical activity
- **25%** often/always meet CDC recommendations for muscle-strengthening activities
- **50%** rarely/never meet CDC recommendations for muscle-strengthening activities
- **27%** often/always meet CDC recommendations for sleep
- **39%** rarely/never meet CDC recommendations for sleep



What are the barriers to taking steps to maintain or improve your physical health? Select all that apply.

61%

Lack of time due to work or personal commitments

40%

Lack of motivation or interest in physical activities

26%

Financial constraints, including costs of gym or equipment

17%

Limited access to exercise facilities or outdoor spaces

16%

Physical limitations or health conditions

15%

Uncertainty about effective methods or routines for physical health improvement

12%

Lack of support or encouragement from family, friends or employers

Physical health is important for cardiovascular health, keeping up with the demands of the job and avoiding injury. Strains and sprains make up the majority of injuries in EMS and are most commonly located in the back and neck area. Many EMS workers think that the job is cerebral, and it is. What they don't account for is that moving humans for a living is physically demanding. Having some physical strength and cardiovascular fitness is very helpful towards accomplishing those moves without injury. We must take personal initiative to account for that and be ready, using the tools provided. Not only will this help avoid injury, but it can also lengthen a very rewarding career. If you're an EMS professional who is struggling with getting started, or maintaining a physical fitness or activity routine, here are a few things that you can do to improve your health.

- **Start small.** Routines typically fail because we try to do it all at once – implementing a time-consuming, high-effort plan that changes everything. The problem is that life does happen and we will encounter challenges. That's when we can falter, when it gets difficult, because changing everything is so overwhelming. By starting small, we're giving ourselves some grace and taking it one step at a time. For physical activity, try taking the stairs versus an escalator. Set a small amount of time usually

used for watching TV aside and going for a 30-minute walk instead. If you're changing your eating habits, change by including something healthy instead of subtracting – something along the lines of adding more protein or greens first. Once you have that first small habit down, move on to another small step.

- **Use the social dynamic in a positive way.** One way to stay on top of change is accountability. By including yourself with a group of like-minded people with similar goals, it can be very helpful when it comes to overcoming feeling too tired or just not feeling it today. The cliché is that if you hang around five fit people, you will become the sixth.
- **Track success.** Most of the time, people look at the failure aspect of a new routine. "I didn't make it to the gym today" or "I blew my diet for the day by eating cookies in the EMS room at the hospital." These are things that can make a change feel negative. Instead, focus on the positives and document them. "I felt good walking the stairs today," or "I was able to get all of my protein in" can set a positive mindset about change. Eventually, what we view as shortcomings will become insignificant and therefore less bothersome.



Mental well-being

In regard to our mental wellbeing, we've made leaps and bounds since I started in EMS in 1992. Back then, the thought process was to take whatever is bothering you and bury it deep down inside, never to be spoken of again. Thankfully, our industry's culture has shifted greatly and for the most part, we've started to take a deep look at how the things we see and do affect us mentally.



How do you prioritize your mental health?

I prioritize it above all other responsibilities



I balance it with my other responsibilities



I give it some attention, but not enough



I rarely prioritize my mental health



I do not prioritize my mental health



As mentioned, many agencies have started peer support teams and adopted EAP programs equipped to deal with the unique concerns of the first responder community. If you're lucky, the clinicians involved might even talk like us.

But, as with the physical aspect of our wellbeing, are we really taking advantage of the opportunities before us?

Only 4% of respondents to the 2024 EMS Trend Survey reported they don't have any behavioral health programs or offerings available to them, but adoption rates are low – just 15% report accessing peer support and 12% accessing an EAP.

Even though the culture in our industry has shifted, there is still a lot of work to be done in terms of how we view seeking mental health. The reasons we don't pursue the help available to us can be a pretty complex subject. There are some areas where asking for help with our mental health still carries a stigma of weakness.

EMS providers are also very self-reliant people, and we expect to be the rescuers, not the ones needing rescue. Many times, EMS workers can't even recognize the fact that they're in need of those services. Historically we haven't been educated on the telling signs that our career path is affecting our mental health. We may get some of that education now, but maybe there's

not enough of an ongoing focus to ensure that it stays at the forefront.

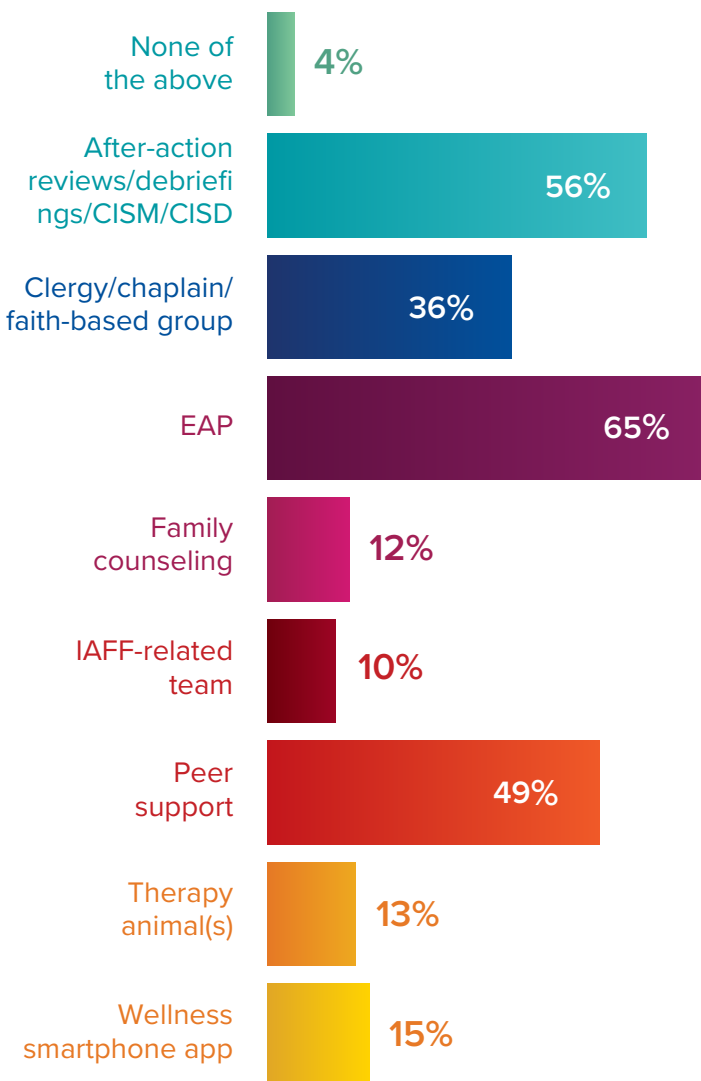
Then of course, there are areas where mental health support is just not available. Small volunteer agencies can struggle with providing resources and services. That population in particular may suffer even more as they are typically in smaller communities, serving their friends and neighbors when responding to calls.

So how can we get more EMS providers to access mental health services more often? Here are a few things that we can do to help our brothers and sisters stay healthy.



Mental health support

Respondents report the following behavioral health programs/offerings are available to them:



Education is key

As with most challenges, the first step is recognizing that we have a problem. Educating ourselves and those around us as to what a degradation of mental health looks like, and why it may be job-related is important. For ourselves, recognizing signs we are struggling can be a big hurdle.

Teaching others to look for things like an increase in alcohol use, withdrawing from social situations or a loss of enjoyment of hobbies can help someone check on a coworker, especially when the coworker may not even recognize what is bothering them. Periodically providing refreshers for this training will help keep it at the forefront.

One organization near our program has a great training program for family members of new employees. On the last day of their onboarding, they invite family members to come to the station. There, they are educated about what to look for in terms of signs of unhealthy levels of stress. They learn what is normal and abnormal behavior, so that not only can they keep an eye on their loved one and encourage them to seek help when needed, but they can also recognize when they may have had a rough shift and just need some grace to process it. After all, many of us try to protect our family from the negative events we see by saying nothing about them at all to the ones we're closest to.

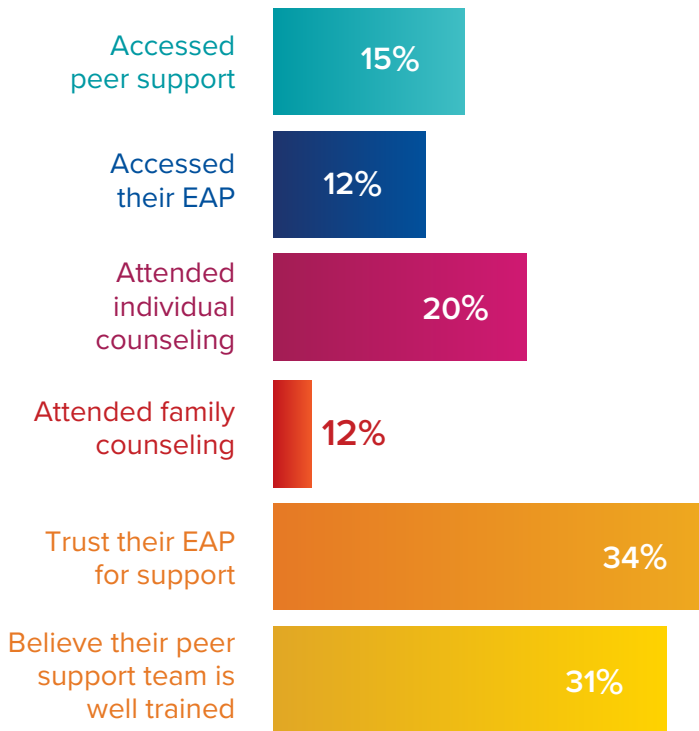
Peer support providers can trust

I am a big proponent of peer support teams, but they must be appropriately trained to be effective. Only 12% of respondents to the 2024 EMS Trend Survey strongly agree that their peer support team is well trained. A poorly trained team can be detrimental to someone's well-being and therefore it is imperative to be cautious when designing and managing these programs.

Peer support training should be led by a mental health clinician who is familiar with the first response community. Employees should also be educated about how peer support is anonymous to help provide confidence that what they say won't "get around."



Respondents report in the past 3 years



Seeking out regionalized support

Some regions or states may be able to offer services where there may be none available to an individual agency. Law enforcement has been addressing mental health for some time and there may be resources available through your

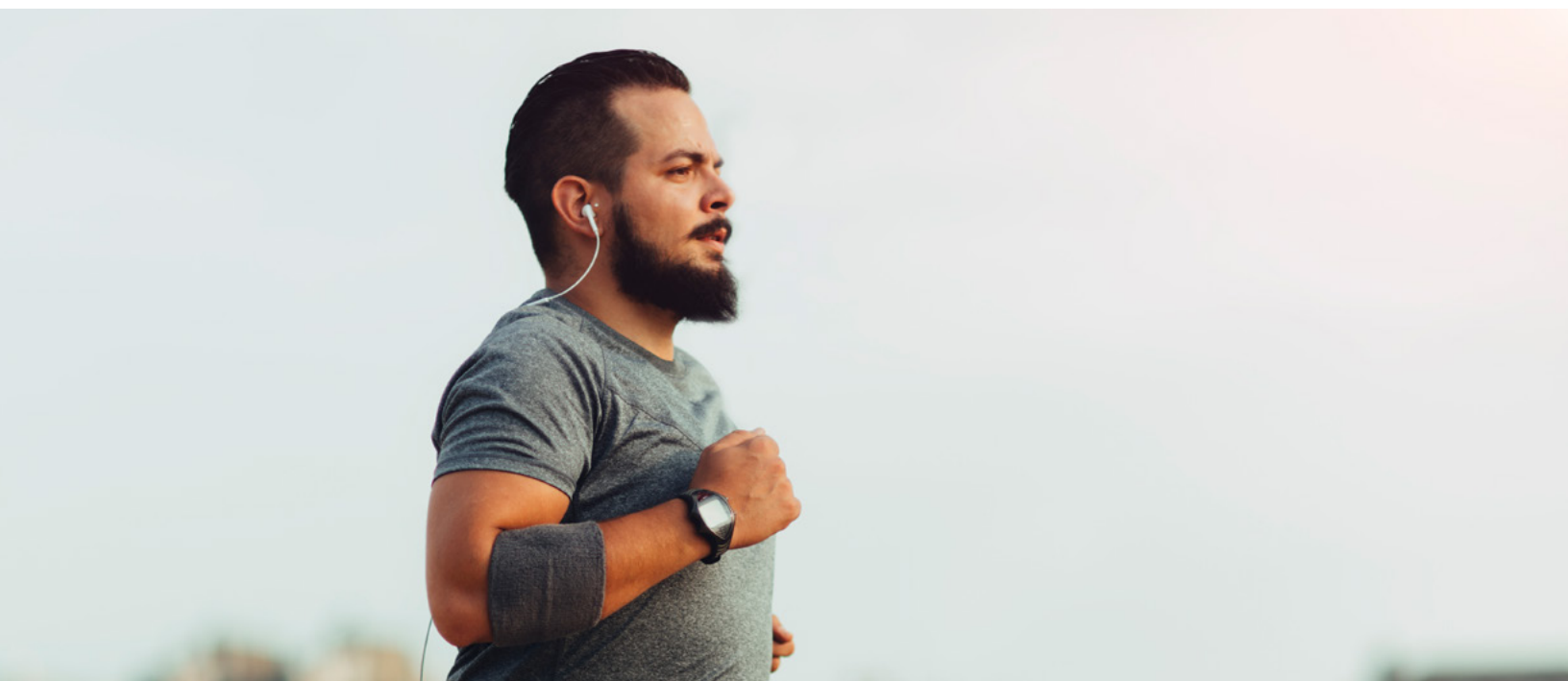
local police department. Some state agencies can also have resources in place that you may be able to access. Ask neighboring agencies what resources they use. This can also be useful for those smaller agencies whose employees might not want to talk to their peers.

While EMS agencies have made leaps and bounds in efforts to ensure the physical and mental well-being of their staff, it will take all of us to affect real change. EMS providers must put a focus on their own health throughout their careers. By putting some of these pieces together, we can continue to move forward with extending not only our careers, but our lives overall. [1](#)

About the author

Joe Coons is the director of safety and Communications Center manager at LifeFlight Eagle, a not-for-profit air medical service serving Northwest Missouri. His journey with LifeFlight Eagle started in 2005, when he embarked on his career as a dedicated flight paramedic.

With more than 32 years of experience in EMS, Joe brings invaluable support to the program, imparting training in critical areas such as human factors, root cause analysis and the implementation of a just culture. His commitment and leadership were recognized when he was honored with the prestigious David Connelly Memorial Leadership Award in the Communications Center Manager’s Course in Spring 2018.





WHAT DRIVES PARAMEDIC JOB SATISFACTION?

What EMS's biggest advocates tell us about creating meaningful opportunities to retain talent

We can agree that EMS is a critical component in the healthcare system. However, our profession continues to face significant challenges. Many of these, such as employee retention, job satisfaction and the impact of work-life balance, continue to appear year after year.

To better understand the results of the 2024 EMS Trend Survey, I was curious to see how various factors impacted how likely respondents were to recommend EMS as a career to others, e.g., respondents' experience levels (i.e. years of service), job title and service model. I was also curious to see how these factors correlated to comments in the next survey question, "Please let us know why you would or would not recommend EMS as a career."

As the EMS Trend Survey collected responses from EMS professionals with a variety of experiences, from those new to the profession to veterans with more than 30 years of service, identifying common themes within stratified groups could be useful in developing agency-focused efforts for specific employee groups. As most agencies operate with tight budgets, it seems beneficial to know which 20% of solutions will provide 80% results.

- **Service model.** The first factor I explored was service model, as this is often a debate point in EMS discussions. The median

scores for recommending EMS as a career (0 = not likely; 10 = very likely) were 6-7 across all service models, with Public Third Service, Public Utility and Fire-Based models all tied at 7, and the rest at 6. Therefore, service model does not appear to have a significant impact on this question.

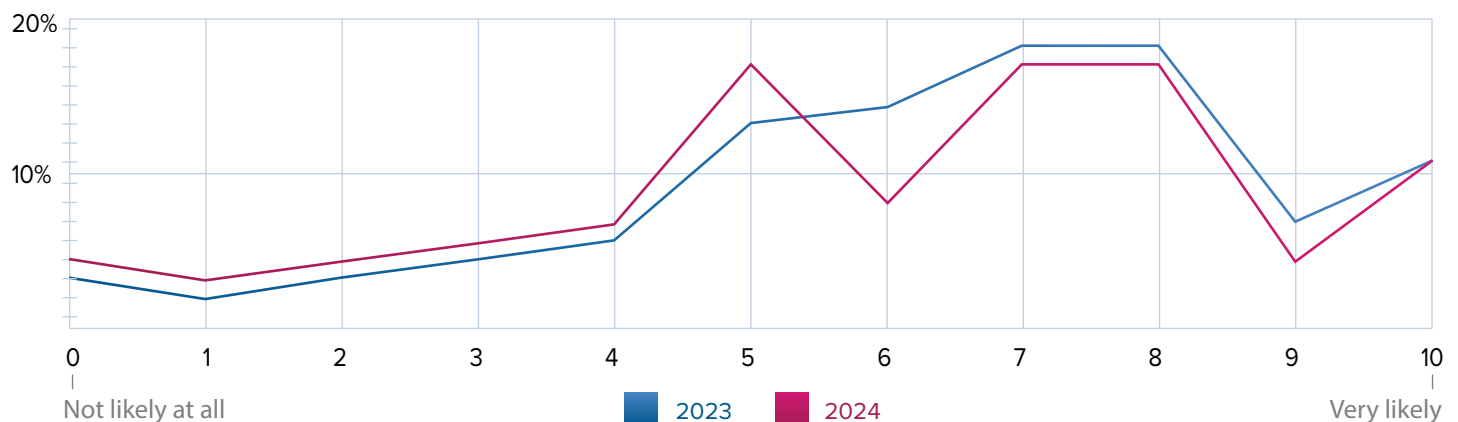
- **Job title.** Next, I wondered if maybe the respondent's job title made a difference. Score averages hovered between 4.5-6.5, with Dispatchers averaging 8.3, followed by Medical Directors (7.5) and Chief/Administrator (7.2). The two lowest scoring groups were Flight Paramedic/Nurse (4.5) and Field Provider Ground (5.5). Interestingly, of all the job titles included, these two have the most direct contact with patients and a purpose that most aligns with why EMS exists.

Key themes and findings

Exploring the free-text response to the question, "Please let us know why you would or would not recommend EMS as a career," the data became more interesting. Using Python script and QualCoder 3.5 software, I created two score groups: 0-4 (low scores) and 6-10 (high scores) for identifying common themes.

I identified the following overarching themes and phrases used by the group least likely to recommend EMS as a career (those who scored 0-4):

How likely are you to recommend EMS as a career to others?





Photo/courtesy Scott Mutthersbaugh/Guilford County Emergency Services

- **Pay and mental health:** “pay,” “respect,” “stress,” “burnout,” “mental”
- **Working conditions and support:** “poor,” “pay,” “retirement,” “advancement,” “shifts,” “support,” “schedule”
- **Career advancement and benefits:** “lack,” “advancement,” “opportunities,” “retirement,” “paid,” “benefits”
- **Hours and physical demands:** “hours,” “long,” “stress,” “hard,” “body,” “time,” “appreciation,” “demanding”
- **Work-life balance and family:** “money,” “family,” “toll,” “time,” “physical”

- **Helping and community impact:** “great,” “people,” “help,” “helping,” “need,” “community,” “love,” “time,” “opportunity”
- **Work hours and family impact:** “hours,” “long,” “stress,” “low,” “family,” “stressful,” “away,” “life,” “health,” “work”

We can readily see that there are some overlaps between these groups, particularly in pay, benefits and health (e.g. stress, demanding, toll, etc.).

Areas where the low-rating versus high-rating groups seem to deviate are centered around career fulfillment, challenges being perceived as a positive, and contribution to the community as a positive. Respondents who indicated a high likelihood of recommending EMS perceive EMS as a rewarding and challenging profession. This theme resonated strongly across experience levels, but it was mainly noticed in the 21-30 years and more than 30 years of experience groups, with the 11-20 years group not far behind. These professionals emphasized the rewards of the EMS profession, drawing attention to the personal satisfaction and professional challenges that come with the job.

Career fulfillment and helping/community impact were key themes predominantly influencing those with higher recommendation scores. These emphasize the importance of

In contrast, for those most likely to recommend EMS as a career (those who scored 6-10), the five overarching themes were:

- **Rewarding and challenging career:** “rewarding,” “challenging,” “community,” “profession,” “physically,” “extremely,” “stressful”
- **Pay and benefits:** “pay,” “low,” “poor,” “benefits,” “high,” “stress,” “respect,” “nursing,” “management,” “lack”
- **Career and fulfillment:** “career,” “recommend,” “good,” “person,” “field,” “right,” “work,” “fulfilling,” “experience”

career development, job satisfaction and sense of accomplishment.

Conversely, pay and benefits emerged as a critical concern, especially among those less likely to recommend EMS as a career (0-5 scores). This area was the highest-rated concern for professionals with 6-10 years and more than 30 years of experience. It indicates that while intrinsic rewards are significant, tangible benefits like salary and compensation packages are equally important. The dissatisfaction with pay and benefits suggests a need for industry-wide improvements to attract and retain talent.

Working hours and their impact on family life were significant concerns across all experience levels but were particularly pronounced for those with 0-5 years, 11-20 years and 21-30 years of experience. This issue was consistently examined as a key obstacle to the EMS recommendation which focuses on the need for better work-life balance management within our profession.

Recruitment-retention recommendations from the data

The survey results point to several areas where improvements can enhance job satisfaction and career recommendations within EMS:

- **Increase compensation.** There is a need to address dissatisfaction with compensation and benefits. Competitive salaries, comprehensive benefits packages and clear pathways to economic development can help attract and retain EMS personnel. Of course, this is nothing new. This struggle has been going on for a long time and seems to get worse as the economy changes and the cost of living rises.
- **Establish or enhance performance development programs.** Companies should implement strong performance development programs that can help maintain high levels of job satisfaction. Opportunities for advancement, career advancement and recognition can lead to long-term job satisfaction as they provide achievable future goals as employees grow within the profession.
- **Support work-life balance.** Introducing flexible schedules and mental health support, and ensuring adequate working hours can reduce the negative impact of EMS work on employee family life and individual well-being. Agencies that promote employee wellness through system modifications gain employee trust and loyalty.



- **Emphasize community impact.** Leaders should reinforce the value and impact of EMS work in the community to help maintain motivation and pride in the profession, especially for those starting their careers. It's a cliché to get into EMS “to help people” because it's true. Sometimes we need visual reminders of this, so agencies should find tangible ways to show providers' impact on those they serve.

The findings of this year's EMS Trend Survey shed light on the multifaceted nature of job satisfaction and career recommendations in EMS. By addressing key concerns about pay, career advancement and work-life balance, as well as reinforcing meaningful work elements, the EMS profession can provide employees with more satisfaction and increase commitment. These changes are necessary to ensure that EMS remains a viable and attractive profession for current and future employees.²⁾

About the author

Maria Beermann-Foat, PhD, MBA, NRP, has over 20 years of prehospital emergency care experience in privately-owned, hospital-based and county government-based emergency services. She is EMS training coordinator for Eugene Springfield Fire in Oregon. She retired as battalion chief of operations for MED-ACT Emergency Medical Services in 2021.

Dr. Beermann-Foat holds a Ph.D. in Organization Management from Capella University and a Masters of Business Administration from MidAmerica Nazarene University.



Photo/courtesy Scott Muthersbaugh/Guilford County Emergency Services

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1 Access additional analysis of the EMS Trend Survey ems1.com/ems-trend-report/



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