

**MYTHS** **VS** **FACTS**

# Ambulance Patient Offload Times

Ambulance patient offload is the time it takes for an ambulance to stop at a hospital and transfer a patient from the care of skilled emergency management services personnel (EMS) to the care of skilled hospital emergency department staff. Maryland hospitals appreciate the care EMS personnel deliver until patients are moved to an emergency department bed and are working with state and EMS partners to eliminate delays when possible.

**MYTH** *Hospitals have unlimited capacity and infinite resources to care for patients.*

**FACT** Hospitals are limited by physical space and staffing. Maryland hospitals are often near capacity and are experiencing historic workforce shortages, with one in every four nurse positions vacant.

In addition, some patients may require specialized beds and staffing, which raises the complexity and resources needed to deliver high-quality care.

Hospitals' efforts to increase ED capacity have been limited by the state.

**MYTH** *Hospitals are the reason ambulances must wait to offload patients.*

**FACT** There are offload delays at hospitals due to a variety of factors that are outside of hospitals' control. The emergency department is both a safety net and often the bottleneck of health care—with unpredictable patient volume and care needs.

Hospitals are open 24/7/365 and care for every person who enters their doors, regardless of ability to pay. Maryland hospitals care for about 1.15 million patients who visit their emergency departments each year. However, often a hospital emergency department is not the most appropriate care setting for patients. Yet, it is difficult to transfer patients to more appropriate care settings. This stems from failures in the behavioral health system of care, limited space in skilled nursing facilities, and other roadblocks.

These factors, while unavoidable, can affect the amount of time before hospital caregivers can transfer care from EMS personnel.



## What's contributing to patient offload delays?

- **Lack of available primary care**
- **Lack of behavioral and mental health services**
- **Challenges discharging patients from the hospital to nursing homes, rehabilitation, and other post-acute settings**
- **Hospital workforce shortages**
- **Social determinants of health, particularly patients have no home or lack social support**

## MYTHS **vs** FACTS

**MYTH** *Arriving at a hospital emergency department in an ambulance means a patient will receive hospital care faster.*

**FACT** Patients who arrive at the emergency department, no matter how they get there, are assessed to determine the extent of their injuries or illness. Hospitals care for patients with the most severe, life-threatening conditions first, using a triage process that assesses patients' needs. This is true if you come to the hospital in an ambulance and if you enter the ED through the front door—meaning even patients who arrive by ambulance, if they do not have a serious or life-threatening condition, may still need to wait in the emergency department lobby to receive care.

**MYTH** *Hospitals should just hire more staff to speed up ambulance offload times.*

**FACT** Maryland's hospitals are one of the few essential facilities in our communities. Yet, they are facing historic workforce shortages. About one in every four hospital nursing positions is vacant, and hospitals—like industries across all sectors—are experiencing shortages in every department.

This is despite extensive hospital efforts to recruit and retain additional staff. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Maryland hospitals have increased wages by 25% overall.