



# 2022

## NATIONAL SURVEY

EMS WORKFORCE SATISFACTION  
AND ENGAGEMENT

BY THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIANS



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# Introduction

EMS agencies across the United States are facing crisis-level challenges in recruiting and retaining personnel. The resulting workforce shortages have led to longer wait times for an ambulance response in some areas. In others, labor shortages have contributed to ambulance agency closures.

Equally worrisome: the labor shortages are taking a toll on the EMS personnel who remain on the job. EMS practitioners are reporting feeling under strain due to heavier workloads, and pressure to work longer and longer hours, including excessive overtime. Some agencies have implemented mandatory overtime to ensure that ambulances are available to respond.

In one dramatic incident in September 2022, an exhausted Baltimore City Fire Department EMT was heard on his radio threatening to drive the ambulance into the harbor after a dispatcher repeatedly asked if he would put the unit back into service. The president of the local firefighter's union said the incident illustrated that some crew members are at their breaking point. "Members are completely fatigued, completely at their breaking point and there's no end in sight," the union representative said. "They're working multiple overtime shifts every week just to keep the department afloat."

## EMS AGENCIES STRUGGLE WITH TURNOVER, RECRUITING

The turnover rate among EMS personnel was high before the COVID-19 pandemic, and the pandemic further exacerbated the EMS exodus. Turnover rates are as high as 20 to 30% annually, according to [research](#) from the American Ambulance Association.

Compounding the staffing crisis, EMS agencies also report that they have fewer candidates responding to job postings and fewer recruits coming onboard.

This has left EMS agencies grappling with how to staff ambulances and continue to provide service to their communities. Some examples:

- In Minnesota, [60% of certified EMTs and 15% of paramedics](#) did not provide patient care in 2021. The absence of these licensed practitioners in the workforce led the state's Emergency Medical Services Regulatory Board to ask the Minnesota legislature to temporarily waive some regulations – such as no longer requiring those who drive ambulances to be certified professionals.
- In West Virginia, EMS lost 11,000 certified paramedics and EMTs from 2011 to 2016. A survey of EMS personnel in 2022 found that about [33% of respondents](#) said they planned to retire in the next five years.
- In California, the private ambulance service for the city of San Diego [told the paramedics' union](#) that medics would have to work mandatory overtime to meet the response times required under its contract. Falck, the ambulance service, said staff shortages had led to unacceptably long wait times.

Unless something is done to reverse the trends, the EMS labor crisis is projected to grow more dire. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), there will be an estimated 20,700 job openings annually for EMTs and paramedics in the coming years. Employment is expected to grow 11% over the next decade, faster than average for all occupations.

## Acknowledgements



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# The Impact of Employee SATISFACTION AND ENGAGEMENT

Improving retention, and reducing the numbers of paramedics and EMTs who are leaving the EMS workforce, is essential to addressing workforce shortages. To achieve that, two measures – employee satisfaction and engagement – have been shown to have a significant impact on whether someone stays or goes.

- Employee satisfaction is defined as the extent to which employees are happy or content with their jobs or work environment.
- Employee engagement is related to satisfaction, but has a slightly different meaning. An engaged employee feels invested in success of an organization. According to [hireology.com](https://www.hireology.com), engaged employees feel “connected and committed to their organization.”

**Research** has shown that engaged employees perform better on multiple performance outcomes. They have lower turnover, lower absenteeism, and fewer patient safety incidents or safety incidents of any kind.

## ➔ About This Survey

To determine the extent to which EMS practitioners feel satisfied or engaged in their jobs – and their reasons for staying or leaving the profession – NAEMT conducted a survey of EMS practitioners across the United States.

The survey, developed by subject matter experts serving on NAEMT’s EMS Workforce Committee, was distributed electronically in May 2022. We received 1,284 completed surveys from paramedics, advanced EMTs (AEMTs), EMTs, and emergency medical responders (EMRs) in all 50 states, and representing all EMS delivery models.

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## Low pay and work-life balance are top concerns

Among survey respondents, many indicated that pay was a top concern – 63% of respondents said they felt their pay and benefits were not adequate for the work performed. Likewise, when asked about their degree of satisfaction with their current job, pay and benefits was the source of the most discontent.



Asked for advice on how agencies could improve retention, the vast majority of respondents said boosting pay and benefits could improve retention.

However, a second major source of concern was work-life balance. Among those who stated they had plans to leave EMS, work-life balance edged out pay as the top reason. Work-life balance is the ability to manage the demands of careers with family responsibilities and personal lives. Many respondents wanted relief from long hours and a lack of flexibility in their schedules. They felt overworked, which was leading to mental fatigue and burnout. Some mentioned workforce shortages as the underlying cause of their stress – “Have enough staffing to avoid working ourselves to death,” wrote one respondent.

Among EMS practitioners, low wages and difficulties achieving a work-life balance go hand in hand. In the survey, 60% of respondents said they worked two or

more jobs. As one put it: “Significantly increase pay so employees don’t have to work several jobs to make enough to live and can avoid burnout.”

Boosting the pay of EMS practitioners must be a top priority for EMS leaders and local, state and federal government officials. NAEMT has long advocated for structural changes in reimbursement to enable EMS agencies to pay more. Current constraints include the under-valuing of EMS from Medicare and Medicaid relative to the cost of providing services, and the chronic underfunding of EMS by some city, county and state governments. We will continue our efforts to advocate for regulatory and legislative changes that will ensure EMS is properly resourced throughout our country.

Although pay looms large among respondents, the survey also revealed

other issues that EMS employers can address, starting today. These include showing appreciation, recognizing employees for quality performance, ensuring that EMS personnel feel respected, providing regular feedback, and improving communications from management. EMS practitioners also expressed a desire for additional training and education opportunities, both to make recertification less burdensome and to allow them to grow as practitioners.

Communities depend on EMS to be there for them in their time of need – whether it’s a medical emergency, a natural disaster or a mass casualty incident. We urge EMS leaders to use the results of this survey for insights into their workforce that they can act on immediately, as well as to continue to fight for the resources that EMS professionals need to serve their communities over the long-term.

### How NAEMT is Helping EMS Agencies Address Labor Shortages

NAEMT has been working on numerous initiatives to assist EMS agencies in addressing labor shortages.

At the national level, NAEMT continues to advocate for more resources, including grants for equipment and training, and higher reimbursements from Medicare and Medicaid. More resources for EMS will enable EMS agencies to pay higher wages that are more competitive with other healthcare and public safety professions.

To assist EMS agencies with their recruitment and hiring efforts, earlier in 2022, NAEMT published a guide, [“Innovative Recruitment Strategies for EMS Agencies.”](#) The guide provides tips and ideas for EMS agencies wanting to step up their retention and recruitment efforts, along with case studies on successful recruitment efforts that EMS agencies can use as models. The guide is available free for download on our website.

NAEMT has also joined other national fire and EMS organizations on an initiative to develop a national guidance document on minimum staffing of EMS personnel for 911 medical calls and interfacility transports. When completed, this guidance document may be used by state EMS offices when considering revisions in their state’s regulation of EMS and by agencies to determine the optimal staffing configurations to support quality patient care, efficient operations, and practitioner safety.

The National Survey on EMS Workforce Satisfaction and Engagement is our latest project. We urge EMS agency managers and leaders to use these insights provided by respondents to ensure that their employees feel satisfied and engaged in their work. This can help to improve retention of EMS practitioners, who are so vital to the health and safety of the community.

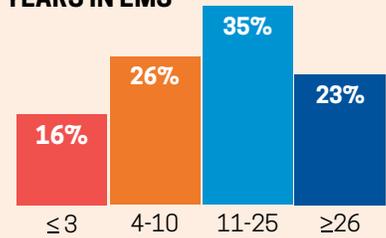
# Survey Demographics

All respondents' primary job for their EMS agency was a field practitioner. 88% worked for agencies that either exclusively or mostly provide 911 response; 12% worked for agencies that either exclusively or mostly provide inter-facility transports.

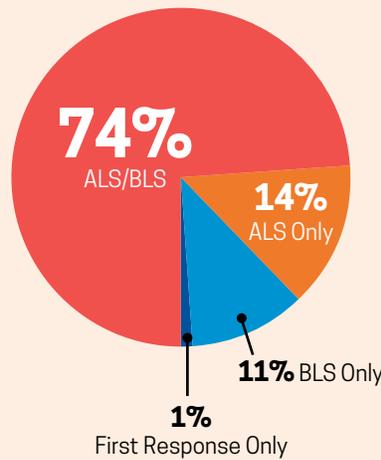
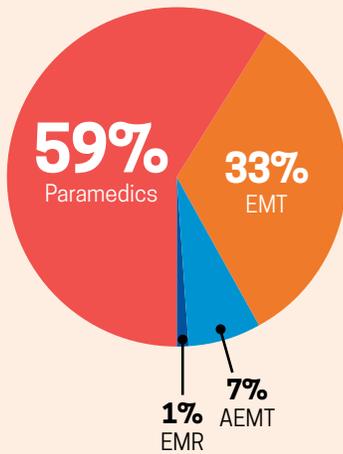
## TYPE OF CARE

74% of respondents worked for an agency that provides Advanced Life Support (ALS) and Basic Life Support (BLS).

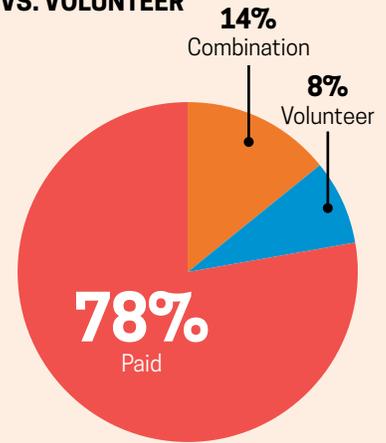
## YEARS IN EMS



## TRAINING LEVEL OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

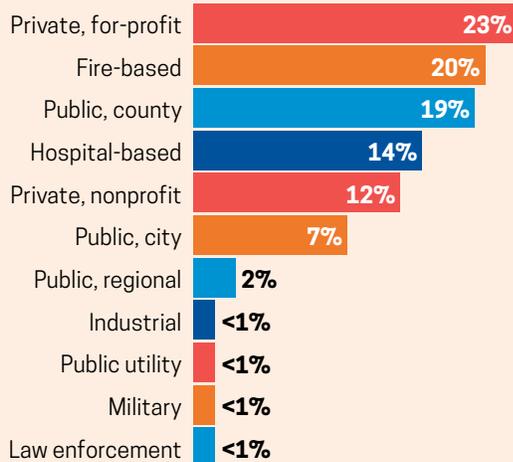


## PAID SERVICE VS. VOLUNTEER



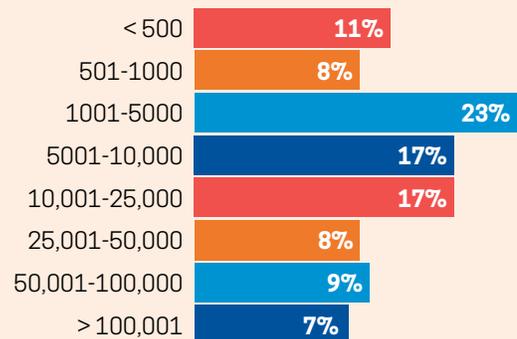
## DELIVERY MODELS

Respondents hailed from all 50 states, and represented all delivery models. About half worked for private EMS agencies, and half worked for public agencies.



## NUMBER OF RESPONSES ANNUALLY

Respondents worked for agencies with a range of call volumes.



# Pay in EMS

Across industries, compensation – including wages and benefits – is one of workers’ greatest concerns. The NAEMT survey asked respondents about their hourly wages and annual income.

The majority of EMTs reported making under \$40,000 a year.

- 41% of EMTs make less than \$15/hour.
- 36% make \$15-\$20/hour.

**77% of EMTs make under \$40,000 a year.**

Many paramedics make substantially more, with most earning between \$42,000 and \$80,000 a year.

- Nearly half (49%) make \$21-\$30/hour.
- 19% make \$31-\$40/hour.

**68% of paramedics make between \$42,000 and \$80,000 a year.**



## EMS PRACTITIONER PAY, BY TRAINING LEVEL

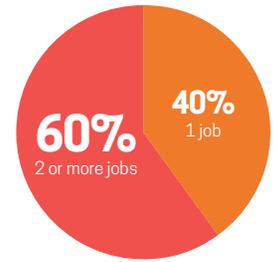
Per Hour/Year	EMTS	Advanced EMT	Paramedic
< \$15/hr < \$30k/yr	41%	36%	4%
\$15-20/hr \$30-40k/yr	36%	41%	17%
\$21-25/hr \$42-50k/yr	13%	12%	29%
\$26-30/hr \$52-60k/yr	6%	3%	20%
\$31-35/hr \$62-70k/yr	2%	1%	11%
\$36-40/hr \$72-80k/yr	1%	0%	8%
\$41-50/hr \$82-100k/yr	1%	5%	7%
> \$50/hr > \$100k/yr	<1%	2%	4%

## OTHER FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE EMS PAY

There are other factors associated with pay levels in EMS, including call volume, geographic location, and the level of public financial support for EMS. EMS practitioners who worked at agencies with a higher call volume tended to make more than those at agencies with a low call volume. Lower call volume agencies are often in rural areas, while agencies with high call volumes tend to be in large urban areas. Pay also varies by delivery model.

## WORKING TWO OR MORE JOBS

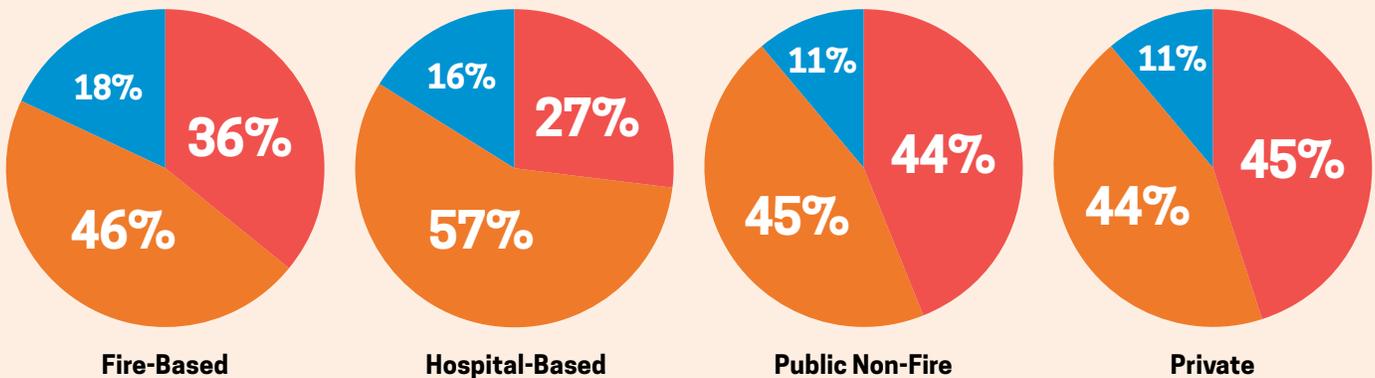
It's also common for EMS practitioners to work at more than one job, either in EMS or in another industry. Among survey respondents, 60% said they worked two or more jobs: 34% held a second job in EMS and 26% at a second job in another industry.



EMTs and paramedics worked at multiple jobs at similar rates. 62% of EMTs work more than one job, while 58% of paramedics do.

## PAY ACCORDING TO DELIVERY MODEL

● >\$20 ● \$21-35 ● \$36+



# Job Satisfaction in EMS

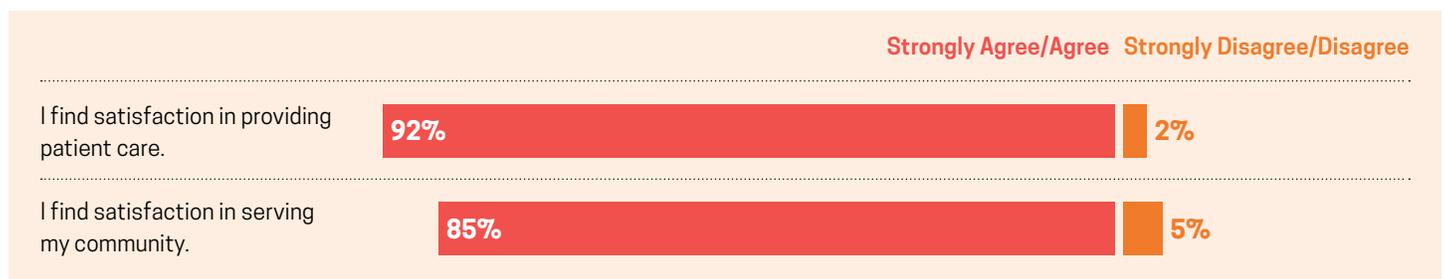
EMS practitioners were asked to rate their beliefs on a series of statements about aspects of their job that impact satisfaction. Categories included the extent to which EMS practitioners find satisfaction in providing patient care and serving the community; whether their job provided them with a sense of purpose; their satisfaction with pay and benefits; and whether their job enabled a good work-life balance.

Respondents could choose Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree or Strongly Disagree. Neutral answers are omitted.



## PATIENT CARE

The vast majority of respondents feel a great degree of satisfaction with providing patient care and serving their community.



## SENSE OF PURPOSE

The majority also believe that working in EMS provides a strong sense of purpose. Having a sense of purpose is an important measure of well-being. Whereas a “goal” is something to be accomplished, a sense of purpose is a long-term state of mind that helps to give life meaning. [Research](#) has shown that having a sense of purpose can even reduce the risk of chronic disease.



## PAY

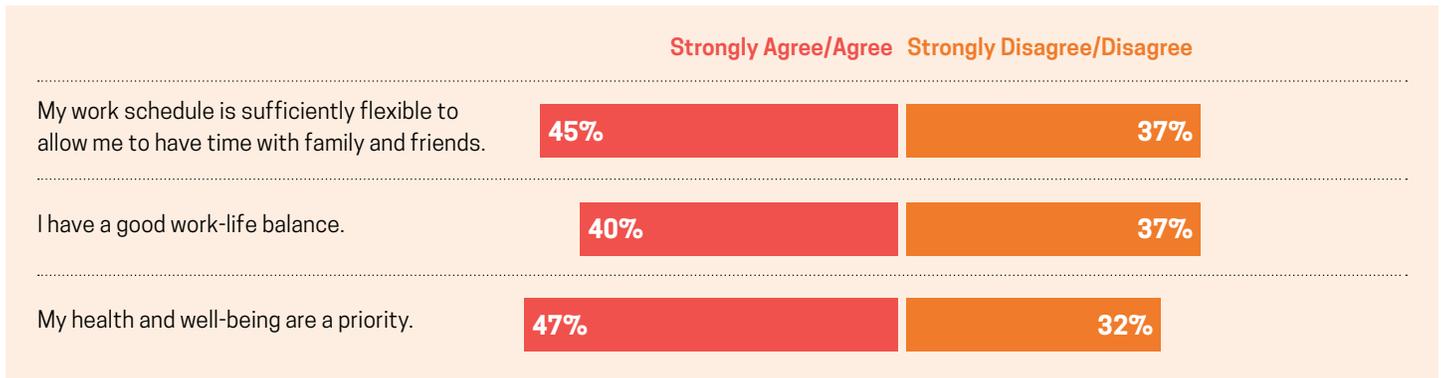
Yet on other indicators of job satisfaction, EMS fares worse. The majority of respondents believe they are not being paid appropriately for the work performed.



## WORK-LIFE BALANCE, WELLNESS

Work-life balance is a state in which a worker feels able to juggle the demands of their career, while also having time for a personal life. Working lots of overtime hours can make achieving a work-life balance difficult. Especially during times of staff shortages, EMS practitioners may feel pressure from employers to work excessive amounts of overtime. EMS practitioners also care about their colleagues, and they may feel that they need to cover the shift even if they're exhausted, because if they don't, someone else is going to have to.

EMS practitioners also face financial pressures to work long hours. With 2/3 of respondents feeling underpaid, EMS practitioners may feel they need to work as many hours as possible to maximize their earnings.



# How Well Do Employers Support and Engage

## EMS PRACTITIONERS?

Respondents were asked to rate their beliefs on a series of statements on EMS agency policies and practices that impact how well supported employees feel in doing their jobs, and employee engagement. The statements covered many aspects of their work, from whether they felt they had the appropriate equipment to do their jobs, to the quality of management, to recognition for excellent performance.

Respondents could choose Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree or Strongly Disagree. Neutral answers are omitted.



### COMMUNICATIONS

Strongly Agree/Agree Strongly Disagree/Disagree

My agency adheres to its published mission, vision and goals.

49%

28%

My agency has a comprehensive system of policies and procedures that provide a sound framework for operations.

55%

25%

Management provides clear and consistent information to personnel.

32%

48%

### EQUIPMENT

Strongly Agree/Agree Strongly Disagree/Disagree

I am provided with the appropriate equipment and supplies to perform my job.

69%

18%

### MANAGEMENT

Strongly Agree/Agree Strongly Disagree/Disagree

I feel valued by my employer.

35%

42%

I feel my supervisor is invested in my success.

45%

31%

There is mutual respect between EMS practitioners and managers.

40%

37%

Practitioners can share concerns and problems with management without fear of retaliation.

40%

39%

My agency acts on employee feedback.

29%

48%

## CULTURE OF ENGAGEMENT

Strongly Agree/Agree Strongly Disagree/Disagree

My agency fosters teamwork, inclusiveness and camaraderie.

39%

37%

My agency supports my health, wellness and resilience.

38%

37%

## RECOGNITION, FEEDBACK

Strongly Agree/Agree Strongly Disagree/Disagree

My agency has a constructive quality improvement program through which practitioners receive feedback on performance and outcomes.

36%

39%

Management provides regular constructive feedback on my overall performance as an employee.

28%

48%

My agency provides easily accessible patient outcome information to its EMS practitioners.

28%

48%

My agency shows support and demonstrates recognition of its EMS practitioners during National EMS Week.

43%

33%

Management provides recognition and praise for excellent performance.

35%

40%

## TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Strongly Agree/Agree Strongly Disagree/Disagree

My agency offers training and mentoring opportunities for practitioners.

51%

27%



# REASONS FOR LEAVING EMS

The NAEMT survey found that 9% of respondents had plans to leave the profession within the year, and 18% planned to leave within 3 years. Another 18% planned to be gone within 6 years.

That means 45% of EMS respondents plan on leaving the profession within 6 years.



## 41%

of EMTs plan on leaving EMS within 6 years

## 47%

paramedics plan on leaving EMS within 6 years

### TOP REASONS FOR LEAVING: WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND PAY

When asked why they planned to leave, 47% of respondents said for better pay and benefits. But that wasn't even the top reason.

50% said they were leaving for a better work-life balance, a response that highlights the strain that so many EMS practitioners have been under due to workforce shortages, long hours and the demands of their jobs.

Another driver of EMS practitioners leaving the field: concern for their physical and mental health. 44% cited this as a reason.

Compared to other professions, EMS has a high rate of on-the-job injuries,

including back and other musculoskeletal problems, along with the risks of being in a motor vehicle accident or being struck while responding on roadways. Violence or threats of violence against practitioners is also a problem. A 2019 NAEMT [survey](#) found that two in three EMS practitioners had been physically assaulted on the job.

### WHEN THEY LEAVE, WHERE ARE EMS PRACTITIONERS GOING?

- About 27% plan to stay in the healthcare field, only in a different job.
- About 37% are leaving the healthcare field.
- 36% haven't yet decided.
- Nearly half (49%) of respondents say they will need additional training and education, while 18% say they won't. The remainder don't know.

## REASONS FOR LEAVING EMS

Many respondents cited more than one reason for leaving the EMS profession.



## WHAT RESPONDENTS HAD TO SAY ABOUT WHY THEY ARE LEAVING

Many expressed frustration with a job that doesn't pay well yet requires so much from them.

*Too many hours for not enough pay.*

*Not paid enough or respected enough for the work.*

*Physical demands of the job have taken a toll on my physical health.*

*Pay not keeping up with inflation and cost of living, and not a clear path to move up and make enough in the EMS field.*

*The standard of compensation is just absurd for someone who not only has a special skill set, but who has to sacrifice so much personally just to do this profession.*

*Making \$16 an hour to destroy my body for what?*

*Lack of professional development opportunities. If I become an RN, the sky's the limit. If I stay where I am, there's nowhere for me to go.*

*I don't believe I will be able to work longer due to mental fatigue.*

*Low pay, aging equipment, management failures to employees, scheduling and failure to take care of employees.*



## SOLUTIONS

# What EMS Practitioners Want From Their Employers

The survey asked respondents what their EMS agency could do to improve job satisfaction and increase retention. 1,181 respondents gave their advice.

The majority of respondents offered more than one suggestion for how agencies can do better (For example: “More competitive pay. More appreciation of employee work. Increased opportunity for provider responsibility within the agency.”) In analyzing the responses, several themes emerged.



## EMS practitioners want improved pay and benefits.

Respondents want an increase in wages so they would not be compelled to get second or third jobs to pay their bills. In addition, they want pay that's more on par with other public safety workers.

Some asked for specific benefits, such as a meal stipend while on shift, agency-provided uniforms, or for required continuing education courses to be provided to them. Others suggested incentive programs to reward employees for longevity.

*EMS needs to become an essential service like police and firefighters. Our jobs are just as important and we should have the same pay and benefits.*

*Pay that is equivalent to other public safety in the area, properly resourced with enough trucks to meet the call demand, and improved safety for providers.*

*Higher wages. More than \$11 an hour for EMTs and more than \$20 an hour top out for medics.*

*Pay people enough so they can work where they live without having to pick up a second job just to live. If people make enough to survive they would not be out looking for something with better pay.*

*So many are burned out after 1 to 3 years. I could at least deal with more if I was paid appropriately.*

## They want employers to support a healthy work-life balance.

Respondents often linked low pay and the need to work multiple jobs with interfering with their ability to have a healthy, sustainable work-life balance.

*Making \$42,000 a year without OT is not a survivable wage. I have to choose whether I can see my kids or feed them.*

*Pay enough money to not have to work multiple jobs is all we can ask for.*

*Tired of having to work 2 full-time jobs in order to support myself and my family due to terrible pay/benefits.*

## EMS practitioners especially dislike mandatory overtime and holdovers.

Workforce shortages have prompted some EMS agencies to require paramedics and EMTs to work overtime. Working long hours without sufficient time off can lead to negative mental, physical and social effects, including stress, exhaustion and low morale. Studies have even linked working 55 hours a week or more with higher rates of stroke and heart disease.

*We get treated like we're replaceable when I know we're not. I have 200-plus hours of PTO. I request time off and I get told no even though I've worked two years without a vacation.*

*Less forced mandatory shifts due to low staffing levels. People are overworked and tired. It's unsafe.*

*Stop overworking your employees. The job is hard enough without 20 to 40 hours of OT a week.*

## And they don't feel like they are treated with enough respect.

Numerous respondents commented that they felt they weren't treated with respect from their employers or other healthcare providers they interact with, and that EMS agency leaders should do more to listen and act on their input.

*Respect employees more and value their opinions.*

*More respect from managers and others EMS interacts with, such as nurses and hospital staff.*

*Listen to your senior practitioners. We have been in the field for a very long time and offer some of the best advice.*

## EMS practitioners want to be recognized for a job well done.

Respondents commented that their employers are too quick to point out mistakes, yet often fail to offer praise for good performance.

*Acknowledge your employees. Make them feel appreciated and not like they are just a number. Let them know their hard work and dedication does not go unnoticed. The pandemic along with the EMS shortage is taking a toll on us mentally and physically...I have watched EMS practitioners who had so much dedication and always kept a positive attitude slowly dwindle down to not caring with a negative attitude. A little appreciation would go a long way.*

*Learn to recognize your employees. You only hear from management when it's bad news.*

*Positive feedback goes a long way to making your employees feel valued. If you're always going to call us out when we do something wrong, let us know when we do something right too.*

## But recognition is not a substitute for better wages.

Some paramedics and EMTs acknowledged that their employers were attempting to improve retention through employee recognition programs. But they seem jaded about EMS agency efforts to show appreciation that don't involve increasing wages.

*You know the answer. But they won't. They would rather throw us pizza parties and give us T-shirts rather than give us better pay.*

*My employer has tried so, so many things to increase retention but poor retention and satisfaction are still pretty prevalent. Paying more is the only thing that they're still trying to ignore as a solution.*

*I don't think that \$13.50 an hour is enough to feed my family, and with the cost of living rising through the roof and gas prices sitting at \$4.30 per gallon as of writing this... Everybody knows the solution but no one wants to do anything about it. If pay doesn't go up, we're going to lose a lot more people.*

*Basically I'm leaving because I know we don't matter. For EMS Week, they got us cheap lunch boxes with Dollar Store snacks and gave us the water bottles that have been sitting at HQ for about a year.*

## To improve satisfaction, EMS practitioners say management – particularly communications – needs to be better.

Numerous respondents expressed a lack of leadership within their agency as contributing to poor job satisfaction and engagement.

*Communication between management and street level needs to be consistent and more open. Management doesn't necessarily need to have all the answers/ solutions to questions/problems. Sometimes it's enough to acknowledge there is an issue and what the potential next steps might be.*



*Back your people. Stop being bosses and become leaders.*

*Better communication and respect for providers. Better pay. Listen to crews and apply feedback to improve crew and management relations.*

*Listen to your employees, they're the ones out in the field. Help them out in the field instead of sitting behind a desk.*

## EMS practitioners also want more training and education opportunities.

Numerous respondents expressed a desire for enhanced training and education opportunities, to help fulfill requirements to maintain certification and to enrich their knowledge to make them become better responders. Some also mentioned a need for more mentors.

*Incentivize training and professional development more. Initiate more hands-on EMS and fire training. Establish an accredited training program.*

*Provide more training, with college credit, better pay for those with more training, and the equipment to utilize the training (ventilator, point-of-service ultrasound, point-of-care labs).*

*Implement a career ladder and provide more opportunities for training in the EMS side of the profession, just as much as the fire training.*

*More education and professional development opportunities.*

*Make training and education opportunities and CE courses available at no cost.*



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## **ABOUT NAEMT**

Formed in 1975 and over 75,000 members strong, the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians (NAEMT) is the only national association representing the professional interests of all emergency and mobile healthcare practitioners, including emergency medical technicians, advanced emergency medical technicians, emergency medical responders, paramedics, advanced practice paramedics, critical care paramedics, flight paramedics, community paramedics, and mobile integrated healthcare practitioners. NAEMT members work in all sectors of EMS, including government agencies, fire departments, hospital-based ambulance services, private companies, industrial and special operations settings, and in the military.

