**Fiscal Facts: Collaborative Strategies to Enhance EMS in Lafayette County**

As emergency medical services (EMS) providers in Lafayette County face challenges maintaining appropriate staffing levels and response times, greater inter-agency collaboration could help stabilize provision of these services.

Greater coordination at a countywide level also could help to ensure more uniform response times and improved quality of care, particularly for more critical situations requiring advanced life support. However, it likely would come at a higher cost to residents, a recent Wisconsin Policy Forum report found.

The Forum has produced research for EMS agencies across the state, and we found many of the same challenges facing other agencies are affecting those in Lafayette County. Call volumes are increasing, and recruiting and retaining staff has become more difficult, particularly among volunteer responders.

In Lafayette County and elsewhere, this can have life-and-death consequences. In recent years, the communities examined in this report faced multiple instances in which an EMS agency was unable to assemble a crew to respond to a 911 call due to a lack of available volunteers and needed to rely on a neighboring jurisdiction instead.

As a largely rural county in southwestern Wisconsin, Lafayette County is served by a patchwork of small EMS agencies based within, and just outside of, the county. These providers use a variety of staffing models, including some full-time, part-time, and volunteer staff.

Current response times vary significantly across the county. In many cases the total response time can be 25 minutes or more, meaning many Lafayette County residents may live in an ambulance desert under the current model.

These agencies experience numerous common challenges that would benefit from greater cooperation and collaboration. They include staff recruitment and retention, lengthy advanced life support (ALS) response times in some areas, and anticipated population growth -- much of which will be senior citizens – that will create higher call volumes.

Our report outlines a spectrum of collaboration opportunities for these agencies to consider, from small- and intermediate-scale measures up to full-scale consolidation of EMS agencies at the countywide level. The latter option would help to address staffing shortages while improving EMS response times and standards of care. At the same time, it also would increase countywide EMS operating expenditures substantially and also would eventually require the possible construction of a new EMS station.

The report also found that the need for some stakeholders to rebuild trust —and for others, the willingness to consider change -- will be key for any movement toward countywide EMS sustainability. Long-range planning and forward thinking now could be the difference between implementing a measured, planned approach to service provision – or a more costly, crisis-oriented response.

*This information is a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at* [*wispolicyforum.org*](https://wispolicyforum.org/research/state-tax-burden-up-but-overall-burden-still-falling/)*.*