

Emergency Helicopter Services in Montana

What have we learned?

Montana Air Ambulance Coalition
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Where did we begin?

- Unfounded allegations that out-of-network emergency air ambulance charges were “egregious” or even “gouging”
- Unfounded allegations that out-of-network emergency air ambulance providers were “unwilling” to go into network

What Did We Find?

- Air ambulance charges in MT are similar to everywhere else across the country
 - Source: Medicare (CMS)
- Reviewed cost data demonstrating the various factors that drive pricing, including low MT Medicaid payments
- Current prices charged are not excessive, but necessary to stay in business in rural areas. Most have charity programs

What Did We Find?

- Most Insurance Companies in MT don't stick beneficiaries with Balance Bills for emergency air transports. Only the largest ones do.
- Large Insurance Tactics
 - Offer network rates as low as 25% of what is paid in other States
 - Tell providers to take it or leave it
 - Send small check to patient rather than provider
 - Blame providers for the balance bill

What Did We Find?

- “Allowable Scheme” used by some insurance providers in MT to avoid transparency of what they are really selling
- The “Allowable Scheme” not allowed in other States. Insurance Companies forced to pay a Usual and Customary Rate.

What Did We Find?

- Most Air Ambulances based in the State are not in-network with most insurers
- St. Patrick Missoula CEO testified that they were forced to stop providing Air Ambulance after being unable to negotiate higher rates from the largest insurer.
- Kalispell Hospital testified they lost more than \$2 Million per year on their air ambulance program

What Did We Find?

- Evidence that BCBSMT formerly paid billed charges to out-of-network emergency air providers, but changed policies and now pay only a fraction, leaving their policyholder with a large balance.
- Payment of full charges by BCBSMT would cost an additional \$1.70/month

What Did We Find?

- Rural Areas of Montana remain underserved compared to other large rural states
- Insurance companies have suggested that areas such as Bozeman, Butte, and Helena may not be able to support an emergency helicopter as it would not be “financially viable”
- Ironically, it is insurance payment policies that could prohibit financial viability

What Did We Find?

- Emergency physicians testified that prior to Summit/REACH moving into the Bozeman and Helena areas a few years ago, they had historically had to wait up to several hours for the limited number of aircraft to respond from Great Falls or Billings.

What is the Solution?

- Follow the lead from other States
- Increase Medicaid payment rates
- Prohibit use of the “Allowable Scheme”
- Require Insurance companies to cover emergency services. Define in Legislation
- Pass legislation to Hold the Patient Harmless
 - Force insurers to stand in the shoes of the patient