

GAO Study on Air Ambulance Services

Current Study

A mandate from the U.S. Senate and House Appropriations Committees requires GAO to review air ambulance services. Our study has three research objectives:

1. How have the geographic distribution of air ambulance providers and the types of transports they provide changed over time?
2. How has the extent of out-of-network transports varied over time and across geographic areas?
3. What is known about the types of approaches that states have taken to address out-of-network transports and potential balance billing for air ambulance services?

To answer these questions, we plan to interview air ambulance providers, insurers, hospitals, and government officials in six selected states (FL, MD, MT, NM, ND, and TX) about how the market works in these states and analyze federal and other data on these issues.

For the purposes of our meeting, we are interested in hearing from the Economic Affairs Interim Committee about the reasons for and experience with the approaches that Montana has taken to address out-of-network transports and balance billing.

Findings from GAO's Recent Work on Air Ambulance Services

In July 2017, GAO issued *Air Ambulance: Data Collection and Transparency Needed to Enhance DOT Oversight* (GAO-17-637). This report can be found at: <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-637>. Our findings include:

- The median price charged for helicopter air ambulance service doubled from 2010 to 2014, from approximately \$15,000 to approximately \$30,000 per transport.
- Factors such as a provider's proportion of transports provided by payer and competition may play a role in air ambulance prices charged, but data to assess these factors are not available.
- GAO recommended that the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) collect and publish air ambulance complaint information. DOT has added a page on its website that provides aggregated information about complaints by air ambulance carriers.

If you have any questions, please contact Heather MacLeod, Assistant Director (MacLeodH@gao.gov, 206-654-5574) or Matt Green, Senior Analyst (GreenM@gao.gov, 202-512-6811).