

Situation:

Mental illness is an endemic problem to our society greatly impacting many of our most vulnerable populations. Sonoma County has a high volume of people with substance use disorders, homelessness and behavioral health conditions.

Background:

EMS providers and Emergency Departments are the tip of the spear against these relentless issues. ERs with 24/7 access to acute care are the main entry point for patients in mental health crisis. Although ER's have the personnel and training to manage patients in psychiatric crisis, once admitted to the ER, mental health patients often languish in stressful conditions that often provide no improvement in their condition. Psych boarding in our ERs leads to other significant costs:

Lack of access to acute care beds for critical medical and trauma patients.

Lack of beds for ambulances to off load patients leading to EMS system delays.

Burn out and turn over of trained ER staff.

Poor environment of care for our psychiatric patients in their most pressing time of crisis.

Increase hospital day rates and admissions boarding hours.

Assessment:

Paramedics are trained and capable of applying their assessments to make critical decisions. AB1544 allows for community paramedic pilot programs to triage to select alternate destinations like behavioral health facilities. Pilot programs have shown great success in these processes. AB1544 sunsets in January 2024. Current legislative bill AB 767 seeks to extend AB1544 until January 2031. This will give local EMS agencies additional time to develop protocols that allow paramedics to triage directly to appropriately staffed and equipped psychiatric facilities.

AB1544 has a section for community paramedics to provide short-term, post-discharge followup for persons recently discharged from a hospital.

Paramedic triage to alternate destinations has been shown to improve access to timely mental health care, decrease psychiatric ER boarding and allows paramedics to further serve their communities.

Recommendation:

Draft a position statement for endorsement of AB 767 by members of the SoCo EMCC to send to Assembly Member Mike Gipson, the author of AB 767 in support of this Act. Make it clear that the EMCC does not have a position on post hospital discharge, but strongly advocates the extension of AB1544 to ensure paramedics can triage to alternate destinations. Upon successful passing of AB 767, EMCC and all stakeholder groups may work to develop a paramedic triage to alternate destination protocol for use in CVEMS jurisdictions.

Triage to Alternate destinations Pilots:

Counties related to OSHPD Community Paramedicine Alternate Destination pilots
- https://emsa.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/71/2017/07/CP_AltDestMH.pdf

AB 1544:

Community Paramedic Triage to Alternate destination Act

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200AB1544

AB 767:

An act to amend Sections 1815, 1834, 1836, and 1857 of the Health and Safety Code, relating to community paramedicine.

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202320240AB767

Groups Currently Supporting AB767:

California American College of Emergency Physicians Cal ACEP

California Hospital Association