

Fire and EMS Dispatch Equity and Optimization



The Need

Fire and emergency medical services (EMS) providers nationwide navigate the complexities of today's healthcare environment. Agencies play a critical role in providing much-needed emergency medical and fire safety services to their communities. With cities across the U.S. growing rapidly and population diversity increasing, these service access needs are increasing as well.

In addition to delivering essential services, EMS organizations and fire departments are also driven to improve operational and financial performance, achieve and maintain compliance, and equitably deliver high quality services to everyone in their growing, diverse communities.

Health equity and optimization analysis is a proven way that cities, counties, and departments can identify dispatch needs, create a plan, and implement a coordinated strategy to support high quality service delivery for all.



The Opportunity

The City of Austin, TX, is the 11th largest city in the United States and the fourth largest city in Texas. It has a population of just under one million residents. When combined with Travis County, this number increases to 2.2 million residents.

Two full-time emergency response departments protect and serve both residents and visitors of Austin and Travis County: the Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services Department (ATCEMS) and the Austin Fire Department (AFD). Although both ATCEMS and AFD are separate departments with unique missions, both share a common responsibility to protect and serve the residents and visitors of this thriving community.

In addition to being one of the largest cities in the U.S., Austin is also one of the fastest growing cities in the country. According to the city's Chamber of Commerce, Austin's population grew nearly 30 percent between 2010 and 2019, and the area is projected to grow the same amount every decade for the next three decades.¹ Adding to this is the fact that many new residents represent a broad range of ethnicities, cultures, and languages. As a result, the city needed an adaptability plan focused on equity to improve service access and service delivery to all residents and visitors.

¹"Population Overview." Austin Chamber, accessed May 9, 2022, www.austinchamber.com/economic-development/austin-profile/population/overview.



The Strategy

The City of Austin reached out to Public Consulting Group (PCG) for a solution. PCG partnered with the city to conduct a dispatch equity and optimization efficiency study. The process included strategic consulting, comprehensive interviews, and data-driven technology resources and support.

During the seven-month analysis, based on their findings, PCG's team identified the need for increases in the following elements across all entities:

- Strategic Cooperation
- Coordination
- Collaboration
- Consolidation

PCG applied numerous nationally recognized best practices and industry standards to their proven approach, including:

- National standards developed by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)
- Accreditation criteria from the Center for Public Safety Excellence's (CPSE) Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) Program
- The Insurance Service Office's (ISO) Fire Suppression Rating Schedule (FSRS)
- Accreditation criteria from the Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services (CAAS)

Forty-one recommendations for the City of Austin were identified in the final report. Within these recommendations, the study targeted three primary areas:

- Dispatch and emergency response evaluation
- Resource allocation assessment
- Prevention initiative evaluation

A fourth core component focused on outcomes: achieving equitable health outcomes; optimizing operations; increasing cost efficiencies; and identifying additional sources of revenue or funding.

Our experts are ready to partner with your department to offer proven, practical solutions to address the diverse emergency service needs in your growing community.

PCG. Let's solve it together.



Outcomes

Since PCG's dispatch equity and optimization efficiency study report was published for the City of Austin, the city has already completed the following recommendations:

- Hiring the Deputy Medical Director of Health Equity and Performance Improvement.
- Hiring four physician assistants who provide in-person and telehealth services to low-acuity patients. (These services help them to avoid unnecessary ambulance transport and emergency room bills.)
- Improving the city's charity care policies.

Through this transparent study, all city partners had an opportunity to analyze their current practices and data to begin discussions toward strengthening their relationships and organizational best practices moving forward. The City of Austin is continuing their work to provide the highest-quality, national-standards-level service access and delivery to all residents and visitors.