

Audit at a glance

Emergency Medical Response Time

DECEMBER 2024

ABOUT | The Department of Public Safety's Denver 911 Communications Center, also known as Denver 911, receives and processes 911 calls for police, fire, and medical services. When a call is triaged and deemed a medical emergency, Denver Fire and Denver Health dispatch and respond to those calls. The Denver Health and Hospital Authority leads the emergency medical response system efforts.



In the report

FINDING: The city has not met its response time goals for emergency medical response services

- From May 2023 through March 2024, Denver 911, Denver Fire, and Denver Health did not meet response time goals: call answering time of 15 seconds 90% of the time, alarm-processing time of one minute and 30 seconds 90% of the time, and assign-to-arrive time of five minutes for Denver Fire and nine minutes for Denver Health. We found 6% of people, 29,066 out of 500,279 total calls, are waiting more than two minutes before their 911 call is answered. The Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials International says, and we confirmed, that there is a direct relationship between staffing levels and call answering times with higher staffing levels generally resulting in faster call answering times.
- The city's total response time goals are based on standards from the National Fire Protection Association. However, these goals may be unachievable if factors that could impact the ability to meet them are not considered. Factors may include poor weather, traffic, and construction. Setting goals that are unrealistic can result in continued noncompliance, which can lead to the appearance to the public that emergency response is not adequate.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The Department of Public Safety and Denver Health provide emergency medical services to the City and County of Denver. The agencies have a duty to ensure medical emergencies are responded to fast and efficiently. This requires collaboration among Denver 911, Denver Fire, and Denver Health to identify problems within the system, support each other's efforts, and build a sound foundation to deliver quality emergency medical services. Not doing so could cause people to not receive the medical care they need in a timely manner and reduce the public's trust in the emergency medical response system.

FINDING: The city does not have a comprehensive understanding of the total time it takes to respond to a medical emergency

- The total response time does not match the caller or patient experience with emergency medical services. The city's response time goals are not comprehensive and do not meet national standards.

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- National standards calculate total response time from the time a 911 call is placed through to the time a first responder begins administering care. Denver’s measure only includes the alarm-processing time and assign-to-arrive time. The city does not track the time between arriving on scene and reaching a patient. Agency officials said, “It is difficult to measure the time in a consistent and objective manner.”
- Without insight into all sides of an emergency medical response, the city cannot provide the emergency medical services the public expects, and leaders may miss opportunities to improve processes or identify gaps and efficiencies that may help improve response times.

FINDING: The Emergency Medical Response System Advisory Committee could be more effective

- The Emergency Medical Response System Advisory Committee is responsible for overseeing Denver’s emergency medical response system performance. Even though the committee has started to implement good meeting practices, such as using an agenda

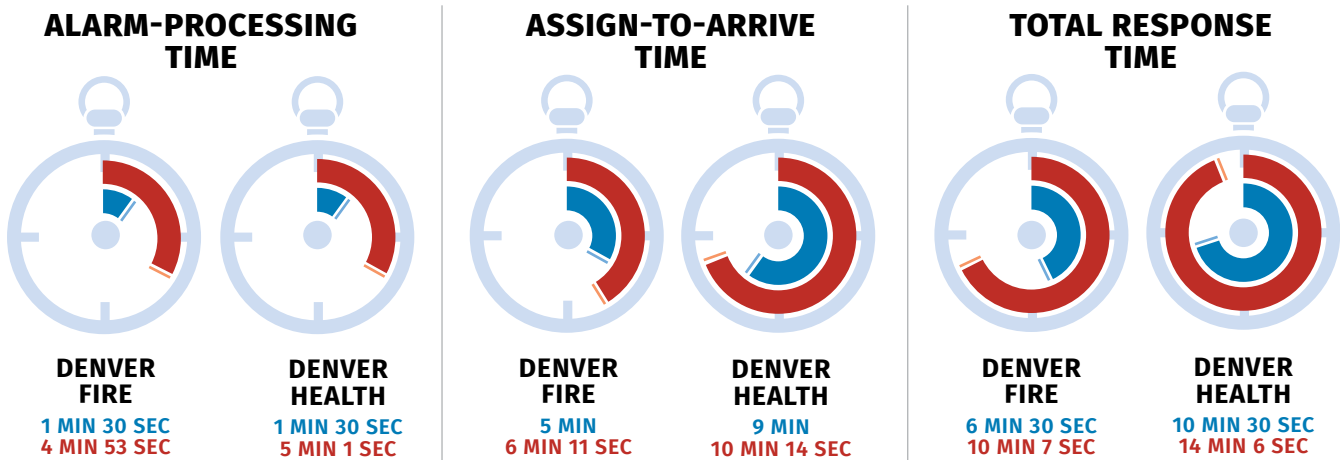
and meeting regularly, it does not have structured meeting practices in place to ensure its responsibilities are carried out. The lack of formalized policies and procedures prevents the necessary collaboration and communication needed to identify issues within Denver’s emergency medical response system.

FINDING: Documented policies and procedures for emergency medical response time reporting are incomplete

- Our audit found there is only one data analyst employee responsible for maintaining and reporting accurate response time data with little oversight or guidance. The policies and procedures they use to analyze and validate the accuracy of response time data lack sufficient detail and appear incomplete. In addition, changes made to the data analysis process are not formally reviewed.
- Having complete and robust policies and procedures can help reduce the likelihood of errors and mistakes and ensure data analysis and reporting can continue uninterrupted during a future change in staff.

Response time compliance

■ Goal to meet 90% of the time ■ Actual time met 90% of the time



Source: Created by Auditor's Office staff.

Timothy M. O'Brien, CPA | Denver Auditor



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