

# A COMPLETE GUIDE TO NEMT SERVICES: COMPASSION, COSTS AND QUALIFICATIONS

Express Medical Transporters





# AN OVERVIEW OF TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

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Throughout the U.S., healthcare providers and communities are facing a quickly growing challenge. According to the Center for Disease Control, **78 percent of the U.S. population 55 and older** has at least one major, chronic condition, while estimates place another **half million adults with serious behavioral health issues**. Chronic-care patients require regular hands-on care, and adding to the challenge, many lack access to transportation to and from appointments and hospitals, resulting in a significant strain and cost for patients, families and care providers.

## A LACK OF TRANSPORTATION MEANS MAJOR COSTS FOR CARE PROVIDERS, PATIENTS AND GOVERNMENT

In some cases, a lack of transportation keeps hospital patients from being discharged, resulting in significant costs for care providers who are unable to free up a beds and resources for incoming patients. The issue has become particularly important because of new care compensation models associated with the Affordable Care Act. Another strain has been the expensive use of ER transportation for patients riding to non-emergency care because they have no other means of transportation. To reduce ER visits and hospitalization, regular care is required for patients with chronic conditions. One response from care providers has been to expand outpatient services with new outpatient centers, but these facilities are decentralized and can be even more difficult to access for patients lacking access to transportation.



## NEMT SERVICES AND ROI

To meet these challenges and others, non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) is a necessary and cost-saving solution for patients, families and care providers. NEMT can help hospitals discharge patients on time to free up beds and save costs. In these cases, NEMT not only helps patients get home, it also allows care providers to deliver compassionate care to more patients and capture a tangible ROI. Ultimately, if patients can't get to appointments, providers can't help them and lose the opportunity to serve a significant population.

NEMT can also significantly reduce the improper use of ER transportation and the associated costs. One study found that for the state of Florida, **every dollar spent on NEMT saves the state \$11** if even 1 percent of total medical trips avoid the ER — a 1,100 percent ROI.

## PROCURING NEMT SERVICES FOR YOUR HEALTHCARE ORGANIZATION

The best way to serve patients who lack transportation is to partner with a trusted NEMT provider, and selecting the right non-emergency medical transporter is a crucial decision. In this guide, we cover the basics of NEMT services and costs, and we arm you with the knowledge to evaluate NEMT providers.

## PART I: BASICS OF NEMT SERVICES

At the core, NEMTs are responsible for getting patients to and from appointments. But professional operations are much more than taxi services; they're set up specifically to transport the elderly, those with physical disabilities and chronic conditions and patients with mental and behavioral health issues. NEMTs coordinate rides with you and the patients, operating as an extension of your organization — drivers are the first and last face a patient sees. NEMTs aren't ambulances, but they are equipped to transport wheelchair and stretcher passengers, and drivers should have extensive training in safety, First Aid and a range of other areas.

### TOTAL SAFETY

The first promise a non-emergency medical transporter must keep is the ability to keep passengers safe. That means safety throughout the entire process, including:

- Safely driving patients to and from your facility and ensuring they reach the right person
- Getting patients onto and off of the vehicle safely
- Securing wheelchair passengers and stretcher passengers

To meet these basic needs, quality NEMTs employ qualified, safe drivers and supply safe, up-to-date vehicles supported by the latest technology. But there's much more to supplying both of those key elements than is on the surface. In a later section, we cover the qualifications that drivers should possess and specific requirements for dedicated NEMT vehicles.



## TIMELINESS, PROFESSIONALISM AND GOOD COMMUNICATION

Quality NEMTs have systems in place to coordinate every ride, minimize wait times and get passengers to appointments on time. A timely ride starts with purposeful route planning, which involves your NEMT partnering directly with you as well as using the latest software and GPS to efficiently coordinate pick-ups and drop-offs. NEMTs should offer accessible communication, both with the office overseeing routes and with individual drivers. Drivers should arrive punctually in marked vehicles wearing uniforms.

## COMPASSIONATE SERVICE

Perhaps the most important element of quality NEMT service is compassionate help for passengers. Here are some examples of what that looks like in practice:

- Helping wheelchair passengers navigate steps, pushing them in the wheelchair, securing them on the van
- Providing an arm to lean on for the elderly
- Walking passengers all the way to and from the door — going beyond just helping them on and off the vehicle
- Helping bed-bound passengers safely in and out of stretchers and onto and off of the van
- Making sure passengers are comfortable at all times

Exceptional drivers go above and beyond. Specifically, they're trained in serving those who require specialty accommodations and can relate well to passengers. In many cases, drivers will regularly transport specific patients to and from appointments over an extended period of time, even years. It's important for drivers to be able to form relationships with passengers based on trust. That happens when drivers treat every passenger with respect and dignity and take real pride in the work. This intangible element has to be built into the culture of an NEMT and be fostered through both hiring the right drivers and training them well.

## CUSTOMIZABLE, FLEXIBLE PROGRAMS

The best NEMT providers are experienced in solving problems for care providers and setting up custom transportation programs. Quality NEMTs should be able to tailor programs to each customer, a key consideration as you evaluate NEMTs — since you'll need a program that works specifically for you.



For starters, that means working with you on custom billing arrangements that fit your existing systems. Quality providers also offer the availability to schedule and plan rides on weekends, in the evenings and at odd discharge times, such as just before midnight or in the early morning.

A true partner will sometimes even allow family members to ride with patients at no extra cost — important because family members will typically ride along with patients on about 20-30 percent of rides.

## LONG-DISTANCE TRANSPORTATION

Some NEMT providers will take passengers on long-distance rides in the right circumstances. The cost is higher than other modes of transport, but in some cases, it's the best option.

## RISK REDUCTION

NEMTs reduce the risk of harm coming to your patients as they go to and from appointments and care. They also reduce your risk. A quality NEMT carries full insurance on all vehicles and has all personnel professionally licensed and insured, eliminating headaches for you.

## PART II: KEY CONSIDERATIONS WHEN SELECTING AN NEMT

In this section, we cover the key characteristics of a quality NEMT provider and what it takes to deliver the kind of service illustrated in part I.

### HIGHLY TRAINED DRIVERS

Your NEMT must have a team of trained drivers that can ensure your patients' safety at all times. That starts with hiring the right people to serve as drivers, people who have a desire to serve with compassion and make a difference for your patients. At an absolute minimum, drivers should pass a thorough background check and provide:

- A valid driver's license(s)
- Successful completion of a DOT physical exam
- An up-to-date Motor Vehicle Check
- Documented experience assisting the elderly and those with disabilities
- Passed testing for alcohol and substance abuse

A quality NEMT provider goes far above and beyond the bare minimum in training drivers. To serve the elderly, passengers with severe health conditions or those with mental and physical disabilities, drivers should receive population-specific training. Just as important, they should have a strong base of knowledge about emergency preparation, First Aid, defensive driving and vehicle care. For example, at Express Medical Transporters, **we provide 14 courses for our drivers**, or as we call them, Field Service Representatives, because they do much more than drive.

When it comes to your patients' safety and experience, you want a trusted partner and qualified, professional drivers. No amount of training is too much.





## VEHICLES

Don't overspend on ambulance rides when an NEMT ride is available. Professional-quality NEMTs using the right vehicles can more cost-effectively handle the vast majority of non-emergency rides.

The best NEMT providers have a full fleet of vans in a variety of sizes to cost-effectively handle any type of non-emergency need and serve any volume of rides. That includes wheelchair and ambulatory vehicles outfitted with cameras to monitor rides as well as GPS and security technologies to track exactly who's driving, where they're going and even their speed.

Wheelchair vehicles should be equipped with wheelchair lifts and a four-point locking system to secure passengers. They should also have enough door width, headroom and space to safely accommodate all passengers

NEMT vehicles should come fully outfitted with safety equipment, navigational technology, First Aid kits and backup equipment as well as complete insurance documentation. They should meet ADA standards and be inspected, insured, registered and up to date.

## TECHNOLOGY

Today, more than ever before, technology has transformed NEMT services and the way they're delivered. Modern NEMT providers should use a range of available technologies to guarantee security and ensure timeliness.

One technology is the use of GPS tracking combined with a central software dashboard that shows the locations of company vehicles at all times. Software systems are available that provide a log of all trips and any events during a trip. For security, vehicles can now be designed to start only when professional company drivers use individualized key fobs that identify who's driving. Each NEMT van should come equipped with cameras to monitor the ride, and every driver should be outfitted with technology that allows for instant communication with both the home office and care providers. At Express Medical Transporters, we take this a step further, using a custom system that records all calls and interactions so nothing ever gets lost in translation.

To ensure all of these technologies are always available, your NEMT should invest in Internet redundancy and cloud storage for continuous uptime. All of these technologies are not only available but are a requirement to deliver safe, efficient, cost-effective NEMT service for your patients.

## **PART III: NEMT COSTS AND GETTING A GOOD VALUE**

If your facility needs to provide rides for patients to increase the population you can serve, free up your resources to earn ROI or simply to assist patients, you can keep NEMT costs down with smart planning

### **FACTORS AFFECTING THE COST OF NEMT**

A range of factors impact the cost of transportation, including:

- Total volume of rides
- Consistency of that volume
- How well rides align with pre-scheduled routes and whether or not a ride is pre-scheduled
- Timing of a ride (e.g. business hours vs. after hours or on the weekend)
- Mileage of a ride
- Exclusivity of transportation arrangement with an NEMT provider
- Whether or not your NEMT can transport multiple passengers on the same ride (known as multi-loading)

### **HOW TO REDUCE THE COST OF NEMT FOR PATIENTS AND GET A GOOD VALUE FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION**

Your NEMT has to schedule rides and provide the necessary manpower and vehicles to provide those rides. By pre-planning your rides in partnership with your NEMT, you can uncover cost efficiencies and get a great value.

If you procure a consistently high volume of rides, your NEMT can plan ahead of time and set up efficient, consistent routes that minimize the miles driven and provide convenient timing for all passengers. Over time, you and your patients will see other benefits as well. Your NEMT will be able to plan for and accommodate any special needs your patients may require, patients will become familiar with specific drivers and your NEMT will help build trust with those you serve.

Another way to get quality NEMT services at a good price is to select one company to serve as your exclusive transporter, which allows for even more consistency, pre-planned routes and cost savings.

Lastly, select an NEMT willing to partner with you on billing. Whether you need a custom arrangement where you bill per passenger or per route, you'll want to work with a company that has the flexibility, staff and technology to operate within your billing system. The right setup for you should provide a completely transparent picture of where your dollars are going and allow you to easily provide reports when necessary.





## MORE ABOUT EXPRESS MEDICAL TRANSPORTERS

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Since 1996, we've provided compassionate, safe and timely transport. Today, we are the most trusted non-emergency medical transporter nationwide. With a large fleet of vehicles and a rigorously trained staff, we ensure reliable rides and can assist any passenger — no matter what challenges they face. We take great pride in every element of our work to assist both care providers and our passengers.

EMT serves more than 1,000 organizations nationwide, including hospitals, clinics, adult day centers, nursing homes, dialysis centers, doctor's offices and more. For assistance transporting your patients, call us at 1-844-RIDE-EMT (1-844-743-3368) or [contact us here](#).