

SafeTechSolutions

Final Report

**ASSESSMENT
OF
EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES
IN
ALBIN, WYOMING**

October 2020



Contact: Aarron Reinert, MA, NRP, Partner

29251 Potassium Street NW • Isanti, MN 55040 | Tel 651.248.4239 • Fax 858.777.5455

aarron@safetechsolutions.us • www.safetechsolutions.us

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Executive Summary

As operating today, Albin Rescue Service (ARS) is not long-term sustainable. The organization, like many rural and remote Emergency Medical Services (EMS) agencies across Wyoming, and the nation, ARS finds itself at a crossroads, one in which the path forward will require difficult decisions, community education, a powerful story, and prepared, rested, and empowered leadership. Like many rural volunteer EMS organizations, ARS is experiencing a slowly evolving crisis, a crisis made up of many components, including a national change in people's willingness and availability to volunteer, the increasing demands of clinical care, regionalization of healthcare, ever-decreasing reimbursement paired with ever-increasing costs of readiness and operations, the decline of rural communities, the population shift to urban and suburban communities, and the transport distances between Albin and Cheyenne.

Recognizing these challenges, the leader of ARS elected to apply for an agency assessment offered by the Wyoming Office of EMS. The focused assessment resulted in seven major recommendations built from 13 key observations. These recommendations were:

1. **Formalize the current EMS System.** (Remove any adverse consequences for AMR's dual response, memorialize the practice in the contract, incentivize the practice.)
2. **More deeply understand and accept the needs of the current EMS system.** (What is desired by the community, what is financially sustainable, how to govern the system and maintain strong partnerships.)
3. **Create a community-wide shared vision for EMS.** (All stakeholders, shared operational and clinical expectations, assess willingness to pay.)
4. **Participate in creating a Laramie County EMS System for 2021 and beyond.**
5. **Transition Albin EMS to the new model.** (Honor local pride, ownership, and investments while leveraging knowledge and expertise.)
6. **Formalize legal structure and financial practices.** (Ensure Medicare and Medicaid compliance, IRS tax code, donations, and modern transparency expectations.)
7. **Ensure data is gathered and used to its full potential.** (Document all responses, and clearly document responses versus transports.)

The 13 key observations were:

1. The right leaders are in place, and the right conversations are happening.
2. An EMS system already exists within Laramie County, though it is informal.
3. As operating today, Albin EMS is not sustainable.
4. EMS is a vital and desirable element of healthcare and quality of life.

5. Workforce recruitment and retention is and will likely continue to be a major challenge.
6. There is a lack of consensus around the specifics of EMS in Eastern Laramie County: who funds it, who ensures the provision of service(s), who governs it, and who operates it.
7. The current collaboration between Albin and AMR, through the EMS Joint Powers Board, is ensuring there is the provision of EMS in the area served by Albin.
8. AMR's current contract may be creating a disincentive for AMR to dual respond.
9. There is perceived lack of fairness in how the financial burden of providing EMS is shared.
10. Some of the structures and practices of an integrated countywide EMS system are already in place.
11. Legal structure and financial practices likely need updating.
12. Current operations may not be in compliance with state law.
13. Gathering and leveraging data may be helpful and will likely be essential.

The recommended path forward that will likely result in EMS in Albin, Wyoming, being long-term sustainable, reliable, and viable is for ARS to transition the provision of EMS in Albin to a larger EMS system in Laramie County, Wyoming. The current EMS organization could continue to provide a critical service to their community by providing medical first response as part of the larger EMS system.

Of the many tools needed to aid a community through a transition such as the one recommended, leadership and leaders will be critical. In this area, Albin, Wyoming, is truly blessed. Throughout the assessment process, it was clear that the community and its leaders were critically aware of the need for EMS in their community and the reality that as operating today, EMS was not sustainable. Leaders were willing participants in embarking on the hard but essential path forward.

I. Introduction & Methodology

SafeTech Solutions, LLP was contracted by the Wyoming Office of Emergency Medical Services (EMS) to conduct an assessment of the EMS service in Albin, Wyoming. The service works in conjunction with three other ambulance services: Pine Bluffs, Burns, and the ambulance contractor in Cheyenne — American Medical Response (AMR). These services make up an informal EMS system in Laramie County Wyoming. SafeTech Solutions is an EMS consulting firm with extensive expertise evaluating EMS organizations and assisting in the development of rural ambulance services and systems. SafeTech Solutions has worked with rural Wyoming EMS agencies for many years through its EMS Leadership Academy and previous assessments throughout the State of Wyoming.

The goals of the Albin assessment were to:

- Evaluate the sustainability, reliability, and long-term survivability of EMS in Albin, Wyoming;
- Look for organizational components that are working well; and
- Make recommendations for change and improvement that would aid in the long-term sustainability, reliability, and survivability of EMS in Albin, Wyoming.

The scope of the assessment was limited and was not an audit of operations, finances, or clinical performance. Air medical service was not part of the assessment. All data was provided by the services themselves; SafeTech Solutions attempted to validate the information and, when needed, asked for supporting data to validate or invalidate the data provided.

Methodology

SafeTech Solutions' assessment team used a process of inquiry and investigation that capitalizes on the firm's extensive understanding of rural EMS systems. Its principals gathered quantitative and qualitative data through research, site visits, and interviews. One consultant, Partner Aaron Reinert, visited Albin, Wyoming, to review documents and data, conduct interviews, and assess operations, in addition to broadly evaluating the ambulance organizations (organizational structure, leadership, and operations).

Over two days of in-person and phone interviews we conducted; these interviews included:

- Three county commissioners;
- Albin town mayor;
- Four members of the town council;
- Fire chief;
- Two members of the Albin Rescue Board;
- Two medical directors;

- Representative from the Laramie County Sheriff's Department;
- Five members of the Laramie County EMS Joint Powers Board;
- AMR site leader;
- Cheyenne Regional Medical Center clinical leaders;
- Laramie County EMS Joint Powers Board Contract Administrator; and
- Laramie County Combined Communications Center (LQuadC) leadership.

SafeTech Solutions paid special attention to the social, economic, demographic, cultural, and political issues in the wider area, carefully analyzing data and making its recommendations based on industry best practices, as well as what is meaningful, measurable, and actionable. This report summarizes the key findings, observations, and recommendations for the EMS service in Albin, Wyoming.

To the best of SafeTech Solutions' abilities, the data has been verified and validated and believed to be materially correct, unless stated otherwise, as presented by the leaders of Albin Rescue Service.

II. Overview of Albin, Wyoming

First settled by Swedish immigrants in the 1880s, Albin, Wyoming, didn't come into existence until the Union Pacific Railroad came through the area, leaving a railroad siding — a short section of track allowing trains to pull off of the main line, where Albin would eventually be founded.¹

Albin was named after John Albin Anderson, who served as the area's post master, owning a post office just to the east of the railroad right-of-way. Once the railroad siding was in place, Anderson moved his post office right next to it. The post office also included a general store and his residence.²

Albin was known for its eggs and cream, produced by local farmers. The Union Pacific train would stop at Albin on its way through to Cheyenne at least twice a day to pick these items up for delivery in Cheyenne to the southwest.³

Albin is located in Northeast Laramie County, Wyoming, sitting directly north of the town of Pine Bluffs, Wyoming, and along the Wyoming-Nebraska border. Albin is one of three towns in Laramie County that are a part of the Cheyenne, Wyoming Metropolitan Statistical Area, which serve as centers of population along with the city of Cheyenne. The other towns in the Cheyenne, Wyoming Metropolitan Statistical Area include Pine Bluffs and Burns.

Laramie County, in which Albin sits, was at one time occupied by various Native American tribes, specifically the Cheyenne, as well as a few others. The tribes frequented the area for its ample supply of game, which they hunted.⁴

By 1882, telephone service had made its way to Laramie County, however, telephone service was not available in Albin till 1929.⁵ This was followed by electrical service in 1940 after a substation was built in Carpenter to the west.⁶ Schools in Albin are a part of the Laramie County School District #2, with Albin Elementary School located within the town, serving students from grades Kindergarten through sixth.

The closest medical facility to Albin is in Pine Bluffs, Wyoming, to the south. Residents also have the option of traveling to Cheyenne to the southwest, which has

¹ Sangres.com: <http://www.sangres.com/wyoming/places/laramie/albin.htm#X1D-5HIKiUk>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Travelwyoming.com: <https://travelwyoming.com/cities/pine-bluffs#:~:text=The%20Cheyenne%20and%20Arapahoe%20tribes,for%20tools%20and%20hunting%20supplies.>

⁵ "Hello? Can You Hear Me? Laramie Gets Telephones — 1882": <https://www.wyoachs.com/larmies-living-history-businesses/2018/4/17/hello-can-you-hear-me-laramie-gets-telephones1882#:~:text=On%20midnight%20December%2017%2C%201921,the%20most%20adverse%20weather%20conditions.>

⁶ WyoHistory.org: <https://www.wyohistory.org/encyclopedia/rural-electrification-changed-farm-life-forever-wyoming#:~:text=On%20May%2011%2C%201940%2C%20when,people%20showed%20up%20to%20celebrate.>

ample access to medical care, as well as the town of Kimball in the adjacent state of Nebraska.

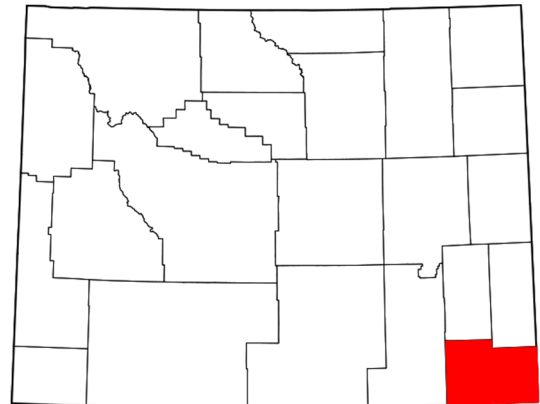
Summary of Albin, Wyoming

Like the other two towns in Laramie County, Albin boasts a small-town feel while giving residents access to the bigger cities in the area, specifically Cheyenne in the southwest part of the county; Casper in nearby Natrona County, Wyoming, to the northwest; and Scottsbluff to the northeast in Nebraska. When it comes to nearby medical facilities, Albin's somewhat isolated nature make providing out-of-hospital EMS services particularly challenging.

The Land

Sitting on 0.15 square miles,⁷ Albin, Wyoming, is relatively small. Located in Laramie County in the southeast corner of the state of Wyoming, Albin has a semi-arid climate. This is due to its location on a high plain, at 5,338 feet, located between the Laramie and Snowy Ranges.

The land in and around Albin is relatively flat, with higher elevation found north of town, specifically between Albin and LaGrange, Wyoming.⁸ The Pawnee National Grassland lies to the south of Albin in the neighboring state of Colorado.



Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Just like other areas in and around Laramie County, Wyoming, Albin plays host to various livestock farms. There are no public lands in and around the town of Albin, due mainly to its small size, the closest being Hawk Springs Stater Recreation Area in nearby LaGrange, Wyoming.

Transportation

A mostly rural area, the main roadway into Albin, Wyoming, is the Pine Bluffs Albin Road, which runs from neighboring Pine Bluffs, Wyoming, to the south before turning into Laramie County Route 162 north of Albin. The roadway continues to the north, ending at Wyoming State Road 151, more commonly called LaGrange Road.

Wyoming State Highway 216, known as Albin Road for its entire length, begins at U.S. Route 85 in the west before heading east into Albin, Wyoming. Once past the town of Albin, the roadway continues east ending at State Line Road situated on the Wyoming-Nebraska border.

⁷ "2019 U.S. Gazetteer Files": https://www2.census.gov/geo/docs/maps-data/data/gazetteer/2019_Gazetteer/2019_gaz_place_56.txt

⁸ "Albin, WY Nearby Mountains": <http://www.nearbymountains.com/WY/Albin>

Due to its small size, Albin, Wyoming, has no airports of its own, with residents and visitors having to rely instead on air service at nearby airports. These airports include Cheyenne Regional Airport 50 miles away in Cheyenne, Wyoming, to the southwest; Western Nebraska Regional Airport in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, 60 miles to the east; and Laramie Regional Airport in Laramie, Wyoming, 110 miles to the west.⁹

Out of those three, Cheyenne Regional Airport hosts on average around 124 operations per day. Many of these operations involve military aircraft, with some multi-engine and jet airplanes added in.¹⁰ Western Nebraska Regional Airport, also known as William B. Heilig Airport, only sees about 83 aircraft operations per day, most of those transient or general aviation aircraft.¹¹ Laramie Regional Airport is a much smaller airport and only sees about 29 aircraft operations per day, with many of those general aviation and transient flights.¹²



Source: everycounty.org

Land Use, Tourism & Industry

As in other areas of Laramie County, Wyoming, the region around Albin is used primarily in the livestock industry, with cows and pigs being the most predominant types of livestock. Another industry that employs a high number of Albin residents is in management occupations. This is followed by jobs in maintenance and ground cleaning occupation and those employed in transportation-related occupations.¹³

While there are no activities in Albin as far as tourism is concerned, the area does provide easy access to surrounding areas, including the Pawnee National Grassland in Colorado to the south, Cheyenne and other areas to the west, Thunder Basin National Grassland to the north, and Nebraska to the east.

The People

Albin, Wyoming, had a population of 181, according to the 2010 U.S. Census, up from a population total of 120 in 2000, an increase of about 34%.¹⁴ About half, 75%, of homes in Albin are traditional family homes. The rest, 25%, are either one-parent, non-family homes, or people living alone.¹⁵

The number of people reporting as a part of the White ethnic group makes up 95.8% of the population living in Albin, Wyoming. About 0.8% identify as Native American,

⁹ Travelmath: <https://www.travelmath.com/nearest-airport/Albin,+WY>

¹⁰ Airnav.com: <https://www.airnav.com/airport/KCYS>

¹¹ Airnav.com: <https://www.airnav.com/airport/KBFF>

¹² Airnav: <https://www.airnav.com/airport/KLAR>

¹³ Data USA: <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/albin-wy>

¹⁴ Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albin,_Wyoming

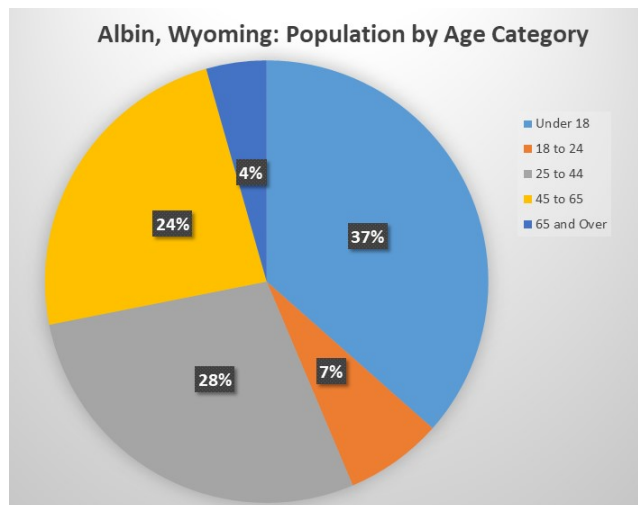
¹⁵ Ibid.

0.8% as Asian, and 2.5% identify as other races. In addition to identifying as White, roughly 9.17% of the population also identify as Hispanic or Latino.¹⁶

The median age in Albin was 28.1 years, according to the 2010 U.S. Census: 36.5% of residents were younger than 18; 7.1% were between the ages of 18 and 24; 28.2% were 25 to 44; 23.7% were 45 to 64; and 4.4% 65 or older. The gender makeup of the town was split fairly evenly: 50.8% male and 49.2% female.¹⁷

While there are not a lot of tourists that visit Albin, Wyoming, some travelers do pass through on their way to other parts of the state or into Colorado to the south and Nebraska to the east. And while the actual number of people who travel through the area is relatively unknown, they must be taken into account when planning for the use of future emergency medical funds.

Albin, Wyoming, expects to see its population grow by as much as 78, for a total of 222 by 2030, an increase of roughly 35%.¹⁸ This increased population, in addition to the number of travelers that come through the area each year, makes it important to plan appropriately when it comes to emergency medical services. This is especially important in a place like Albin, where medical care is not readily available but the emergency medical services responsible for the area are still expected to respond with the same level of service regardless of the number of calls.



Source [Wikipedia](#)

The Economy

The median household income in Albin, Wyoming, is \$43,125,¹⁹ about \$18,000²⁰ less than the median household income of the state as a whole. Unfortunately, at least 54% of the population lives below the poverty line, which is higher than the national average of 13.1%²¹ and the Wyoming state average of 11%.²²

¹⁶ Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albin,_Wyoming

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ "Population for Wyoming, Counties, Cities, and Towns: 2010 to 2040": <http://eadiv.state.wy.us/pop/wyc&sc40.htm>

¹⁹ Data USA: <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/albin-wy#:~:text=Median%20household%20income%20in%20Albin%2C%20WY%20is%20%2443%2C125.>

²⁰ Data USA: <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/wyoming>

²¹ Ibid.

²² Data USA: <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/wyoming#economy>

Unemployment in Laramie County, Wyoming, where Albin is located, sits at about 6.6%²³ and is slightly lower than the 7.1% for the state of Wyoming.²⁴ A high amount of residents, at 90%, in Laramie County, Wyoming, have health insurance.²⁵ Sixty-two percent have private insurance, and the other 38% have public health insurance.²⁶

²³ "Unemployment Rate in Laramie County, WY": <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/WYLARA0URN>

²⁴ Pine Bluffss Post: <https://www.pinebluffspost.com/story/2020/08/27/news/wyoming-unemployment-falls-to-71-in-july-2020/8204.html>

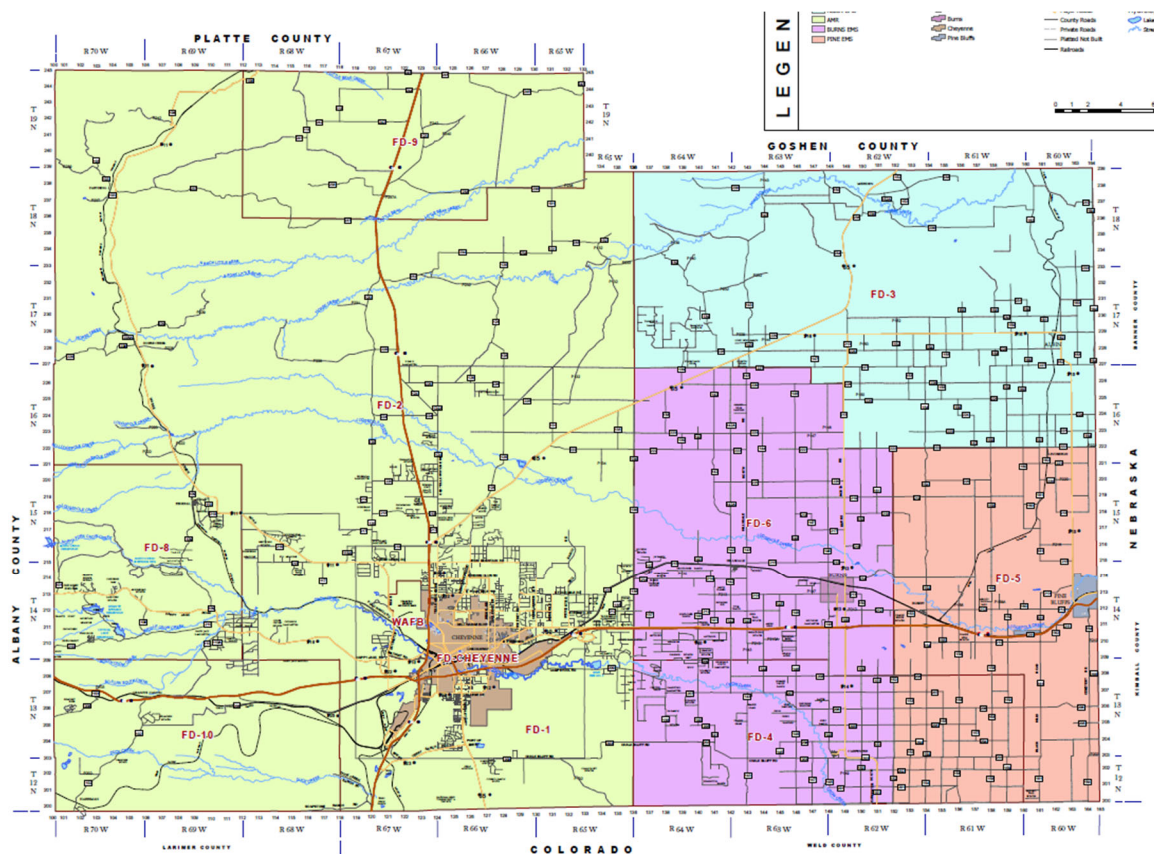
²⁵ "Laramie County Health Matters": <http://www.laramiecountyhealthmatters.org/indicators/index/view?indicatorId=2254&localeId=3182>

²⁶ "Laramie County Health Matters": <http://www.laramiecountyhealthmatters.org/indicators/index/view?indicatorId=362&localeId=3182>

III. Overview of Albin, Wyoming, EMS System

Overview

ARS is a Basic Life Support (BLS) licensed volunteer EMS organization that serves the Northeast corner of Laramie County (see section below in light blue). The service is owned by the city of Albin and governed by a volunteer board. It has an engaged, prepared, and proactive leader. The service has two ambulances, one located in the Town of Albin co-located with the fire district, and the other located near the intersections of State Highway 85 and Laramie County Road 216.



The service received approximately 21 requests for services in 2020, as reported by LQuadC, and was able to respond to roughly half of the requests for service. Proactively, the service entered into a dual response system with the EMS contractor in Cheyenne, AMR. Every request for service has a dual response from AMR and ARS. In the event ARS is unable to respond, AMR is already enroute and able to provide Advanced Life Support (ALS) care. When ARS is able to respond, approximately 25% of the time, they will transport the patient to Cheyenne Regional Medical Center (CRMC). In the event ARS does not transport and the patient is in need of transport, AMR will transport the patient. Both organizations, community leaders, medical directors, medical center clinical leaders, and providers report positive experiences with the system.

Finances and Financial Resources

ARS is solely funded by revenues from transport, donations, and in-kind services for the town of Albin (fuel, insurances, co-location with the fire district). Volunteers on the service do not receive compensation for their time. The service has historically offered the Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) course for free to individuals interested in joining the service.

The service operates on a calendar year for its fiscal year. The 2019 fiscal year began with a balance of \$29,798. There were \$ 11,797.44 in operational expenses, resulting in a positive balance of \$18,001 at the end of the fiscal year.

System Finances

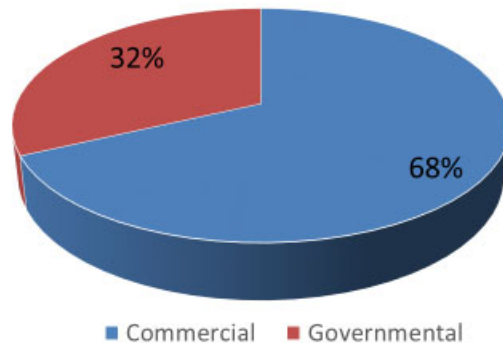
Fiscal 2019

- Total Cash Resources	\$29,798
- Total Expenses	\$11,797.44
- Fiscal Year ending	\$18,001

	2019	2020 6.23
Gross Revenue	\$29,798.00	\$30,688.00
Total Expenses	\$11,797.44	\$1,571.68
Net Revenue	\$18,001	\$29,116

The service uses an external billing agency that reports a payer mix of 68% commercial payers, largely commercial insurances, and 32% governmental payers, largely Medicare and Medicaid. This mix results in a percent collected per call, on average, being 57%. This payer mix and percent collected is quite unusual for a rural and remote community. It is more common to see a payer mix of 70% or more governmental and 30% or less private insurance, resulting in a percent collected of 30% or less. The billing agency and service leaders report a high percentage of ranches and ranch hands in their service area, as well as a large presence of military personnel due to the ICBM fields.

Payer Mix



57% Averaged reimbursed

What is not accounted for in the current finances is the cost of labor. Today, ARS is able to provide some responses due to the dedication, commitment, and sacrifice of a few individuals; as discussed previously, the availability of volunteers is dwindling. To fully understand the finances and financial resources of ARS, one must account for the volunteer labor or, said differently, the subsidy provided to the community by the individuals willing to provide EMS labor for free.

An ambulance service in Wyoming is required by law to have at least two personnel on every ambulance transport. One of the two must be at least an EMT-Basic. To account for volunteer labor, a calculation is used that references the value of a volunteer hour in Wyoming as determined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Volunteer Sector. This number represents the cost; in this case, ARS would need to pay to employ an individual with benefits.

Determining True Labor Costs

2 People
 24 Hours a day
 365 Days a years
 25.53 Value of volunteer hour in WY
 1 Truck

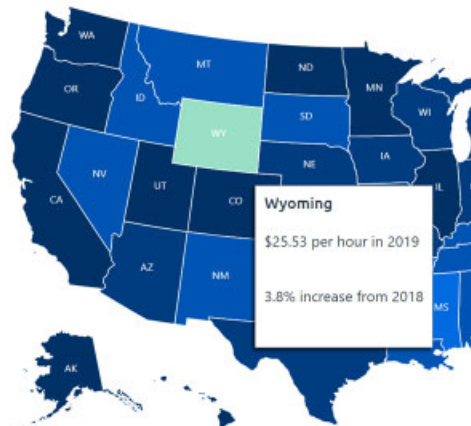
= \$447,285.60 cost / truck / year

* \$25.53 breaks down to:

- \$17.11 hourly wage
- \$8.42 hourly benefit

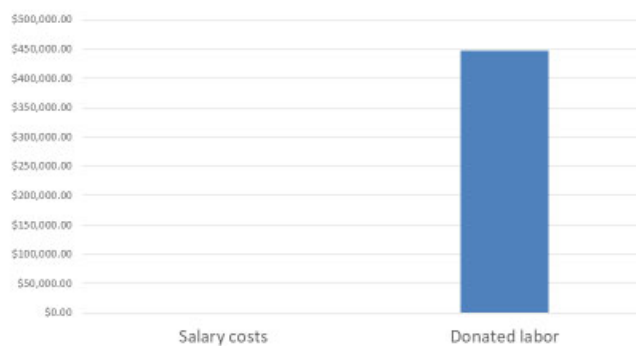
National fulltime comparisons per year

- 1 ALS Ambulance: \$1 to 1.2 Million
- 1 Intermediate Ambulance: \$750,000
- 1 BLS Ambulance: \$500,000



The value is multiplied by two individuals, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and results in a total labor cost of \$447,285.60. If ARS wished to staff two ambulances 24 hours a day, the labor number would be doubled. Today, ARS and the town of Albin do not account for this cost.

Labor Costs Accounting for Donated Labor



	2019
Salary costs	\$0.00
Donated labor	\$447,285.60
True Labor costs	\$447,285.60

Also of note when considering ARS finances and financial resources is their current rate structure. With the primary revenue source for the organization being fee for

service, specifically billing for treatment and transportation, it is critical ARS ensure its rates match its expenses. Today, ARS rates do not match its true expenses. Effort should be made to calculate the true costs of operating ARS, including fully realizing its total expenses. Once true expenses are known, this number can be divided by total transport volume to understand a cost per call. This information, along with considering national averages, should assist the service in setting rates based on expenses.

Personnel

There are 11 employees/volunteers on the ARS. Of those 11, generally 3 are able to respond when calls for service are received. ARS relies on an “all call” system for scheduling personnel to be available to respond to requests for service.

Call Taking, Dispatch & Communications

ARS is dispatched by LQuadC. 911 is used throughout ARS’s service area, as well as all of Laramie County. LQuadC is a combined communication center for all of public safety in Laramie County. Emergency Medical Dispatching (EMD) is used, as well as Medical Priority Dispatching Services (MPDS) where applicable. Both VHF and Wyolink is used for communication between ARS and LQuadC and other public safety agencies. Cellular service is limited due to signal strength and density of cellular towers. The ICBM force in the area adds additional complications with communications, as the military and missile silos can be on different frequencies and communication modalities. LQuadC is often able to breach the gap and cross connect communications for non-military providers. Users provide excellent reviews of LQuadC, its technology, reliability, and expert staff. ARS does not pay a fee for the communication services.

First Response

Generally, there is no medical first response in the ARS service area. Laramie County Sheriff’s Department may respond to calls for service; however, the response time may be long. The area fire district may also respond for request for manpower, extrication, and rescue services. Generally, they do not provide medical first response.

Receiving Facilities & Other County Healthcare Resources

The primary receiving facility for patients from ARS is Cheyenne Regional Medical Center.

Mobile Integrated Health

To date there are no mobile integrated healthcare/community EMT/paramedic programs in place.

EMS Education

Initial and continuing education is provided by ARS staff and leaders. The services medical director is also highly engaged and often provides continuing clinical education.

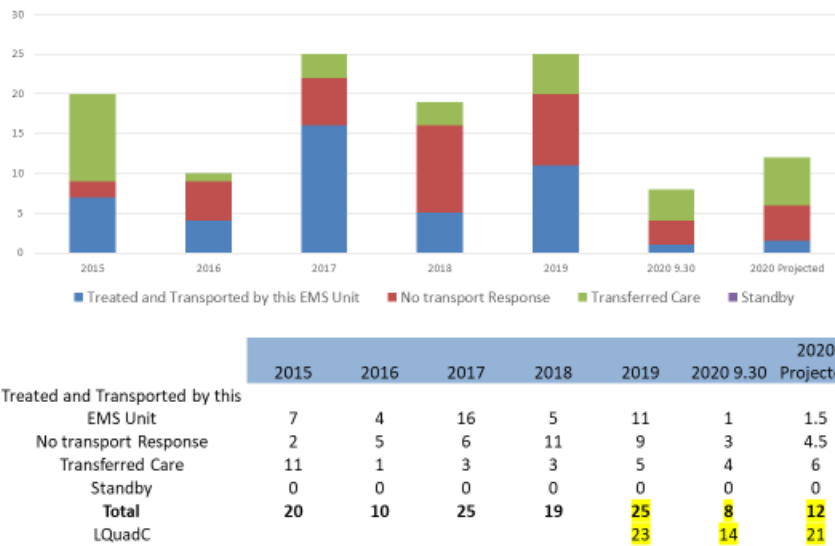
EMS System Oversight

EMS in Laramie County is governed through an EMS Joint Powers Board (EMSJPB). Today, the EMSJPB primarily focuses on management and leadership of the ambulance contract for Western Laramie County. The EMSJPB has created many components of an EMS system for all of Laramie County. For example, all services in Laramie County use medical guidelines developed through the EMSJPB. All services share the same medical directors, contracted through the EMSJPB. The EMSJPB also facilitates conversation on mutual aid, dual response, equipment purchases, and disaster coordination.

Call Volume

Historically, ARS has received roughly 20 calls for service each year. In recent years, due to volunteerism, their ability to respond to requests for services has been greatly limited.

Call Volume Trends



Note: Data highlighted in yellow indicate variances between the data reported in the Wyoming Ambulance Transport Reporting System (WATRS) and LQuadC.

V. Key Findings

Finding 1: The right leaders are in place, and the right conversations are happening.

ARS leaders, elected officials, and community leaders have already begun to have the difficult conversations. Leaders, elected officials, and community members had already reached the conclusion that EMS, as operating today in Albin, were not sustainable. With this in mind, the community has begun to prepare itself for the needed transition. Local leaders, specifically the ARS director, have likely spent countless hours helping the community understand the needed changes. Due to the thoughtfulness, honesty, and patience shown during these conversations, the community appears ready, willing, and able to lead this change.

Finding 2: An EMS System already exists within Laramie County, though it is informal.

Today, EMS medical direction is shared by all four EMS organizations in Laramie County. There is a dual response system in place ensuring an ambulance response to 100% of the calls for service. Countywide EMS issues are considered and discussed at an EMS joint powers board, and mutual aid happens frequently. However, today there are four separate EMS organizations often vying for the same resources of finances, personnel, time, and attention. Similarly, there is duplication in areas of management, leadership, and administration.

Finding 3: As operating today, Albin EMS is not sustainable.

ARS is made up of dedicated, committed, loyal individuals who have sacrificed much in the name of providing service to their community and citizens. As volunteerism has changed, EMS has changed, and small-town America has changed. This has affected the ability of the volunteers to ensure a 100% response to all requests for service. Today ARS is able to respond to roughly 50% of their requests for service. This response rate is likely to decrease as more volunteers leave the profession and operational demands increase. The gap between current revenues, donations, and the town of Albin's own financial resources is just too great to make having a full-time or part-time ambulance practical.

Finding 4: EMS is a vital and desirable element of healthcare and quality of life.

In all interviews conducted as part of this assessment, it was clear that EMS is a desired and expected component of life in all parts of Laramie County. Respondents especially cited the critical need for EMS in Eastern Laramie County due to the distances from healthcare facilities and the lack of clinic or urgent care facilities in local communities. The interviews reflected a true appreciation, not only for the service, but for the people providing this care — both volunteers and paid employees.

Finding 5: Workforce recruitment and retention is, and will likely continue to be, a major challenge.

Finding and keeping more of the right people is likely to be one of the greatest challenges to face EMS in Laramie County. This challenge is shared by EMS organizations across Wyoming and the nation. EMS recruitment and retention is facing a perfect storm of factors; these factors are shared by both full-time and volunteer organizations. Initial and ongoing training requirements are increasing for all levels of EMS practitioners. Interest in vocational careers such as EMS is decreasing, now especially in light of Covid-19. Rural communities are seeing their populations decrease as young people move away for higher-paying career opportunities, while at the same time rural community healthcare needs grow due to an aging population and the lack of basic services. Compounding all of these factors is the regionalization of healthcare.

Finding 6: There is a lack of consensus around the specifics of EMS in Eastern Laramie Co: who funds it, who ensures the provision of service(s), who governs it, and who operates it.

When asked, all interviewees could agree on the need for EMS in Eastern Laramie County. Most agreed that in order for EMS in Eastern Laramie County to be long-term sustainable, it would require full-time EMS personnel at considerable expense. Some agreed on the likely staging and deployment of possible future full-time resources. Where there was a marked lack of agreement was around who would fund the resources and how they would be managed and operated. Some saw it as the legal responsibility of county leaders. Others saw it as the responsibility of local communities and their citizens, and others saw it as the responsibility of already-in-place collaborative services, such as the fire districts.

Finding 7: The current collaboration between Albin and AMR, through the EMS Joint Powers Board, is ensuring there is the provision of EMS in the area served by Albin.

Regardless of the challenges of volunteerism and volunteer staffing, there is a 100% response and, if needed, transportation in the area served by ARS. The dual response system with AMR ensures that there is always an ambulance responding to every call for service and always a transporting ambulance available, regardless of which organization it is from.

Finding 8: AMR's current contract may be creating a disincentive for AMR to dual respond.

Like many performance-based contracts, the contract between the EMSJPB and AMR has specific performance requirements, such as level of effort and response times based on severity of the call. Contractors, such as AMR, match their operational deployment to the contract expectations and financial resources. As an incentive for performance, the contract also has substantial penalties for performance failures.

This creates an interesting paradox for the contractor, AMR. While they are not penalized for sending an ambulance outside their contracted area for a dual response with ARS, it does create a scenario where AMR could then be penalized within Cheyenne, as they now have fewer ambulances in Cheyenne for the same volume of work. This scenario could create a disincentive for the current or future contractor to provide a dual response service for fear of operational, clinical, and financial penalties.

Finding 9: There is perceived lack of fairness in how the financial burden of providing EMS is shared.

Communities across Wyoming and the nation are struggling with the expectation to provide more services and infrastructure with fewer resources. As they consider what services to fund with these limited resources, they have begun to ask if it is appropriate for the citizens of their tax base to pay for a service that provides services outside their geographic boundaries. In the case of ARS, the city of Albin is made up of a few square miles. However, the ARS provides services to approximately 450 square miles in Eastern Laramie County. The question being asked is: Shouldn't everyone within the service area contribute to the cost of providing the service?

Finding 10: Some of the structures and practices of an integrated countywide EMS system are already in place.

Structures and practices such as dual response, mutual aid, shared medical direction, joint equipment purchased, shared medical guidelines, and a EMSJPB are already in place and functioning well.

Finding 11: Legal structure and financial practices likely need updating.

ARS is owned by the town of Albin. However, the service is governed by an independent board that has its own checking account and Medicare National Provider Identifier (NPI). The current structure is very common among rural volunteer EMS organizations, which grew up organically and over time found themselves falling under a governmental unit for things like insurances and fuel. Some simple changes would bring the governance into line with current accepted and expected practices.

Finding 12: Current operations may not be in compliance with state law.

The state of Wyoming rules and regulations governing licensed ambulance services require an ambulance service to respond to 100% of their requests for services and, if requested, provide transport of the patient. Today, ARS is only able to respond to requests for service roughly 50% of the time. There is no provision in law for a part-time ambulance service.

Finding 13: Gathering and leveraging data may be helpful and will likely be essential.

During the assessment, it was noted that there were variances between run volume data for ARS in the WATRS system and the requests for service provided by LQuadC. Data, especially run volume data, is critical to understand the need, costs, and deployment requirements for an ambulance service. The data would also be essential when imagining, creating, designing, and implementing a new countywide EMS system. Every effort should be given to ensuring 100% of the data is entered into the WATRS system, with special attention to when the service is requested but does not respond and when they respond but do not transport.

VI. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Formalize the current EMS system.

Begin by documenting the current system and ensure there are formal written agreements to memorialize the dual response system between agencies, as well as in the contractor agreement with AMR and any future EMS contractor. Continue by removing any adverse consequences for AMR's dual response, such as direct or indirect level of effort or response-time penalties. Consider adding an incentive for the contractor to provide the service as a method to ensure the costs of providing the service are weighed against the possible revenues.

Recommendation 2: More deeply understand and accept the needs of the current EMS system.

Convene a process to more deeply understand what is desired by the community, what is financially sustainable, how to fund the system, and how to govern the system while maintaining strong partnerships. Use this listening and learning to imagine what is possible and what is desired. This process must also hold a mirror up to what is desired and what those that might use the system are willing to pay for; without this balance and acceptance, the system will fail.

Recommendation 3: Create a community-wide shared vision for EMS.

With the knowledge and education gained in recommendation 2, gather community stakeholders to create a shared vision for the future. This new vision should have a clear statement of clinical, operational, governance, and financial structures. One must only look at success and failures of area-wide or countywide school consolidations to understand how strong or fragile a system can be without the proper transparency and upfront agreements.

Recommendation 4: Participate in creating a Laramie County EMS system for 2021 and beyond.

Using the work from recommendation 2 and 3, bring stakeholders together from both Eastern and Western Laramie County to create a roadmap for a sustainable EMS for 2021 and beyond. Engage all voices and balance needs and wants with what everyone is willing to pay for now and into the future. Account for all costs, including volunteer labor.

Recommendation 5: Transition Albin EMS to the new model.

Any change must begin by honoring local pride, ownership, investments, and sacrifices made by the EMS volunteers that have given much of their life to the provision of EMS in Albin. Capture and leverage the knowledge and expertise within the volunteer ranks to design an EMS first-response system that provides excellent treatment and stabilization for patients until the transporting entity arrives.

Recommendation 6: Formalize legal structure and financial practices.

Adapt current governance, operational, and financial practices to align with the current ownership structure.

Recommendation 7: Ensure data is gathered and used to its full potential.

Document all responses, clearly note those responses when ARS was unable to respond, when they were able to respond but did not transport, and when they did transport. Leverage the data to understand the current system and the needs of a current countywide EMS system.