



WASHINGTON CHAPTER American College of  
ADVANCING EMERGENCY CARE Emergency Physicians

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## WASHINGTON'S LACK OF SUPPORT FOR EMERGENCY PATIENTS RECEIVES A NEAR-FAILING D+

WASHINGTON — Washington dropped to 35th place in the nation with a D+ in the American College of Emergency Physicians' (ACEP) state-by-state Report Card on America's emergency care environment ("Report Card"). In 2009, the state ranked 19th in the nation with a C. While our State ranks in the top 10 states in the categories of Public Health and Injury Prevention and Quality and Patient Safety, Washington received failing grades in three out of five categories.

Our State did improve its overall ranking in the category of Access to Emergency Care (since 2009). Washington still received a failing grade in this category, in part because of a severe lack of resources and inpatient capacity for mental health patients. The state also has some of the lowest levels in the nation of staffed inpatient and intensive care unit beds. According to the Report Card, to improve our grade, Washington must make greater investments in hospital infrastructure and mental health care.

Washington's failing grade in the category of Disaster Preparedness reflects a drop in per capita spending on disaster preparedness from \$7.09 to \$5.31. According to the Report Card, Washington will improve its grade and ranking by creating a statewide medical communication system, by recruiting more physicians, nurses and behavioral health professionals to register in the Emergency System for Advance Registration of Volunteer Health Professionals before disaster strikes and by funding a statewide EMS medical director position.

"Washington's dismal grade in the arena of Disaster Preparedness is disappointing," said Dr. Christopher Kang, president of the Washington Chapter of ACEP. "This Report Card result and recent events such as the Boston Marathon Bombing should be a wakeup call to all of us. The emergency physicians of Washington want to work together with our policymakers and community leaders to reprioritize our commitment to Disaster Preparedness to better serve and care for the people of our State."

Washington received an F in the category of Medical Liability Environment related to having few protections for the state's medical practitioners. The state could improve its grade by passing a medical liability change evidentiary rules from "a preponderance of the evidence" to "clear and convincing

evidence” and by offering special liability protections for federally mandated medical care provided in emergency departments.

In the remaining two categories, Washington ranked in the top 10 states in the country.

Washington is a leader in quality initiatives, such as triage guidelines for heart attack, trauma and stroke patients. We have a strong prescription drug monitoring program and continue to fund quality improvement efforts within our emergency medical services system. As a result, the State’s B for Quality and Patient Safety ranked it eighth in the country.

“Washington is exemplary in numerous areas such as injury prevention and patient safety environment, but the dismal grades in these three categories are disconcerting and are an urgent wake-up call to reinvigorate our efforts to keep pace with new initiatives already being implemented across the country,” states Dr. Kang.

The low rates of fatal injuries and generally low levels of chronic disease risk contributed to Washington’s A- and 5th place ranking for Public Health and Injury Prevention. The State is first in the nation for seatbelt use and the infant mortality rate is among the lowest in the country.

“America’s Emergency Care Environment: A State-by-State Report Card – 2014” evaluates conditions under which emergency care is being delivered. The Report Card does not measure the quality of care provided by hospitals and emergency providers. The Report Card uses 136 measures in five categories: access to emergency care (30 percent of the grade), quality and patient safety (20 percent), medical liability environment (20 percent), public health and injury prevention (15 percent) and disaster preparedness (15 percent). While America earned an overall mediocre grade of C- on the Report Card issued in 2009, this year the country received a near-failing grade of D+.

**For more information about Washington State’s grades, go to [www.emreportcard.org](http://www.emreportcard.org).**

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*WA-ACEP is a specialty society representing 700 emergency physicians in Washington State.*

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