

## Ambulance Services

### Scope

This policy applies to:

☒ Kaiser Permanente  
Health Plan of  
Washington

☒ Kaiser Permanente  
Health Plan of Washington  
Options, Inc.

☒ Commercial

☒ Medicare

☐ Medicaid

### Policy

Original Effective Date: 09/01/2014

When benefits allow, Kaiser Permanente will reimburse licensed ambulance companies for emergency transport services to the nearest facility that can accommodate the member's medical treatment needs. Kaiser Permanente will also reimburse medically necessary [inter-facility transports](#) by ambulance. [Cabulance](#) services may be reimbursed when pre-authorization is obtained from the health plan, [this applies to both international and regional transport within the United States](#).

Kaiser Permanente does not reimburse ambulance costs to transport additional passengers.

### Billing/Coding Guidelines

All claims must be billed according to Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) guidelines

### Policy Definitions

**Cabulance** - A vehicle operated by a driver who is trained in first aid only. It is limited to transporting patients who can either sit on the cabulance bench seat or in a secured wheelchair. A cabulance does not have equipment or personnel on board for attending to the patient during transport, nor does it have facilities for the patient to lie down.

**Ambulance Services** - Ambulance transport is NOT covered merely as a convenient transportation service when a patient can be transported SAFELY by any other vehicle. Medically appropriate ambulance transportation is a covered service regardless of the State or region in which it is rendered. Coverage is provided for emergency transport and interfacility transfers.

**Inter-Facility Transports** - Transport from an acute care hospital bed to another facility for diagnostic evaluation or treatment and return to inpatient status. This does not include transports to and from skilled nursing facilities.

**Air Ambulance Services** - KPWA will approve claims only if the beneficiary's medical condition is such that transportation by either basic or advanced life support ground ambulance is not appropriate.

**Nearest Facility** - The nearest facility is one that:

- can provide the appropriate level of care, and;
- has capacity at the time of the transfer, and;
- was a reasonable destination considering conditions at the destination site, weather along the route and other variables.

**Calculation of distance:**

- **Air** – Nearest facility will be calculated as the most direct path between two points “as the crow flies” unless the most common flight path along this route varies from this description.
- **Ground** – Nearest facility will be calculated as the most direct path between origination point and facility, using common routes.

### Prerequisite(s)

Not applicable

### References

[Medicare Claims Processing Manual](#), Chapter 15 – Ambulance

### Frequently Asked Questions

- Q1:** A member had an emergency transport from his/her home to the nearest hospital. Will the ambulance service be reimbursed?
- A1:** Yes. Kaiser Permanente will reimburse emergency transports to licensed ambulance companies.
- Q2:** A member is transported by air ambulance to a facility further away than the nearest facility capable of treating the patient. Will the ambulance service be reimbursed?
- A2:** Yes, as a modified payment based on the calculated distance to the nearest facility capable of treating the member. The mileage to the nearest facility will be calculated and used as the basis of reimbursement for the mileage billed on the claim.
- Q3:** A member had an inter-facility transport from a non-contracted hospital to a contracted hospital and is admitted to an inpatient status. Will the ambulance service be reimbursed?

- A3:** Yes. Kaiser Permanente will reimburse medically necessary inter-facility transfer ambulance services.
- Q4:** A member was transported by cabulance to a skilled nursing facility. A pre-authorization was not obtained. Will the cabulance service be reimbursed?
- A4:** No. Kaiser Permanente will not reimburse cabulance services unless pre-authorization is obtained from the health plan.
- Q5:** A member had an emergency transport to the hospital. The member's spouse wanted to ride in the ambulance to be with the member. There are additional costs to have the spouse ride in the ambulance. Will these additional costs be reimbursed?
- A5:** No. Kaiser Permanente does not reimburse costs of additional passengers transported by the ambulance.

## Revision History

05/24/2022 – Updated formatting

Note: This information is intended to serve only as a general reference resource regarding reimbursement policy for the services described and is not intended to address every aspect of a reimbursement situation. Accordingly, we may use reasonable discretion in interpreting and applying this policy to services being delivered in a particular case. Further, the policy does not cover all issues related to reimbursement for services rendered to our enrollees as legislative mandates, the provider contracts, the enrollee's benefit coverage documents, and the Provider Manual all may supplement or in some cases supersede this policy. This policy may be modified from time to time by publishing a new version of the policy on Kaiser Permanente provider website; however, the information presented in this policy is believed to be accurate and current as of the date of publication.