

NEMTAC® CERTIFIED STRETCHER OPERATOR™ (CSO)

Ensuring Safety | Promoting Accountability | Enhancing Reliability

Program Purpose

The safe handling and movement of passengers using a stretcher is a high-risk activity requiring coordinated team execution, proper equipment use, and adherence to defined safety protocols. Improper techniques, environmental hazards, or equipment misuse can result in serious injury to both passengers and crew.

The NEMTAC® Certified Stretcher Operator™ (CSO) program establishes minimum competency requirements for non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) professionals responsible for stretcher operations. The program is designed to reduce risk, improve consistency, and support safe patient handling across diverse operating environments.

Program Structure

The CSO program is delivered as a **hybrid certification program** consisting of two required components:

A hybrid certification program combines structured online education with in-person skills validation. Both components are required for certification.

Part One – Online Education (Self-Paced)

A structured online course introducing foundational knowledge, safety principles, equipment awareness, and operational expectations required for stretcher operations. Completion of the online component is required prior to participation in the in-person session.

Part Two – In-Person Skills Validation (Instructor-Led)

A hands-on training and evaluation session where participants must demonstrate required competencies in a controlled environment under instructor supervision. This component is focused on performance, not exposure.

Certification is contingent upon successful completion of both components.

Core Competencies

Participants are trained and evaluated on their ability to:

- Apply proper body mechanics to reduce injury risk
- Operate stretcher equipment in accordance with manufacturer guidelines
- Perform safe lifting, lowering, and transport procedures

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- Execute coordinated, team-based stretcher operations
- Communicate effectively with team members and passengers
- Identify and mitigate environmental hazards (e.g., uneven surfaces, wet conditions, slopes, gravel, mud, snow)
- Evaluate equipment readiness, including risks associated with non-approved or improperly secured accessories
- Maintain situational awareness throughout all phases of transport

Required Skills Demonstration

Participants must successfully demonstrate competency in the following areas:

- **Team-Based Operations**
Proper crew positioning (head end pushes, foot end steers), coordinated movement, and controlled navigation
- **Passenger Transfers**
Safe execution of standing pivot transfers and lateral transfer concepts using appropriate technique and communication
- **Securement Procedures**
Correct application and removal of safety restraints (foot-to-chest application, chest-to-foot removal)
- **Navigation and Movement**
Controlled movement through the environment, including doorway navigation, obstacle management, and 180-degree turns with a live passenger
- **Stretcher Control and Stability**
Wheel alignment when stationary, tip prevention, and safe operation across varied surfaces
- **Communication and Passenger Interaction**
Clear, professional communication using person-first language and safety prompts (e.g., protecting elbows)

Failure to demonstrate required competencies will result in non-completion of certification.

Operational Safety Principles

The CSO program reinforces critical safety practices, including:

- Positioning the destination surface slightly lower than the origin surface during transfers to allow controlled movement

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- Maintaining proper wheel alignment when the stretcher is stopped to reduce tipping risk
- Recognizing and adapting to environmental hazards such as uneven terrain, wet surfaces, and debris
- Ensuring all equipment and accessories are properly secured and manufacturer-approved
- Maintaining continuous control of the stretcher during all phases of movement
- Positioning crew members appropriately to prevent tipping or loss of control

Certification Requirements

Participants will be awarded the **NEMTAC® Certified Stretcher Operator™ (CSO)** certification upon:

- Completion of the online education component
- Successful demonstration of all required skills during in-person evaluation

Certification is valid for **two (2) years**.

Program Outcomes

The CSO program supports:

- Reduced risk of injury to passengers and crew
- Standardized stretcher operation practices across providers
- Improved operational consistency and accountability
- Enhanced quality and safety within NEMT services