

Specialty Care Center Designation in California (STEMI & Stroke)

Overview

In California, hospitals may seek designation as Specialty Care Centers for specific time-sensitive emergencies, including ST-Elevation Myocardial Infarction (STEMI) and stroke. These designations ensure that patients receive timely, specialized care at hospitals equipped with the appropriate staff, equipment, and systems.

What 'Specialty Care Center' Means

Specialty Care Centers refer to hospitals formally designated to provide advanced care for specific emergency conditions. For stroke, California recognizes Primary Stroke Centers, Thrombectomy-Capable Stroke Centers, and Comprehensive Stroke Care Centers, as regulated in Title 22 of the California Code of Regulations (§ 100159.01). Local EMS agencies (LEMSAs) play a major role in the designation process and ongoing oversight.

For STEMI, California regulations are defined under Title 22, California Code of Regulations (§ 100270 et seq.), which establish requirements for STEMI Critical Care System Plans, designation criteria, and local EMS agency oversight of STEMI Receiving Centers.

Key Regulations & Standards

Key frameworks for designation include:

- California Code of Regulations, Title 22, § 100270 et seq. – STEMI Critical Care System requirements.
- California Code of Regulations, Title 22, § 100159.01 – Comprehensive Stroke Care Center requirements.

Minimum standards for imaging, neurointerventional services, staffing, continuous quality improvement, transfer agreements, and rehabilitation services.

Local EMS agencies (LEMSAs) may establish additional requirements based on regional needs.

General Steps for Designation

Submit a Specialty Designation interest email to: hsaems@santacruzcountyca.gov and specify which type of designation your facility is applying for. Someone from our office will contact you with next steps. The following should be considered by the requesting facility as the process for Specialty Designation begins:

Evaluate Eligibility & Capabilities – Hospital assesses resources, staffing, imaging, and interventional capacity.

Review & Inspection / Audit – The local EMS agency will conduct a site visit, as well as audit data, and evaluate compliance.

Conditional Approval / Provisional Period – Hospitals may receive provisional designation while gaps are closed.

Monitoring, Data Reporting & Quality Assurance – Ongoing participation in registries, CQI programs, and data submission.

Re-designation / Recertification – A contract will be established between the County of Santa Cruz and the requesting facility establishing the Specialty Care Designation as well as the need for periodic review and renewal to maintain designation.

For additional information related to STEMI Designation, please review Policy 402 STEMI Receiving Centers in the [Santa Cruz County EMS Agency Protocols](#).

Santa Cruz County Specialty Care Designation Hospitals

Santa Cruz County's two local hospitals currently hold the following Specialty Care Designations:

Stroke:

Watsonville Community Hospital
75 Nielson St
Watsonville, CA 95076

Stroke and STEMI:

Dignity Health – Dominican Hospital
1555 Soquel Dr
Santa Cruz, CA 95065

Role of EMSA vs Local EMS Agencies

The California Emergency Medical Services Authority (EMSA) sets statewide policy and regulatory frameworks but does not directly designate individual hospitals. Local EMS agencies (LEMSAs) are responsible for approving, monitoring, and re-designating hospitals as Specialty Care Centers. EMSA develops guidance and statewide planning resources, while LEMSA manages the operational designation process.

Learn More

California EMS Authority:

- STEMI Critical Care Systems: <https://emsa.ca.gov/stemi/>
- Stroke System of Care: <https://emsa.ca.gov/about-stroke/>
- California Code of Regulations, Title 22, § 100159.01 (Stroke Centers): <https://www.law.cornell.edu/regulations/california/22-CCR-100159.01>
- California Code of Regulations, Title 22, § 100270 et seq. – (STEMI Critical Care Systems): <https://www.law.cornell.edu/regulations/california/22-CCR-100147.01>