

Improving Responses to People with Mental Illnesses: *The Essential Elements of a Specialized Law Enforcement–Based Program*

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Ten Essential Elements

1. Collaborative Planning and Implementation - *Organizations and individuals representing a wide range of disciplines and perspectives and with a strong interest in improving law enforcement encounters with people with mental illnesses work together in one or more groups to determine the response program's characteristics and guide implementation efforts.*

2. Program Design - *The planning committee designs a specialized law enforcement–based program to address the root causes of the problems that are impeding improved responses to people with mental illnesses and makes the most of available resources.*

- a. Inordinate amount of time officers spend waiting for medical clearance in ER or frequency in which officers repeatedly come in contact with same individuals w/o effective resolution.
- b. Enhance understanding of root cause and available resources. What alternatives are available to increase reach of existing services?
- c. Assess available & potential resources to address them should drive short- and long-term goals of the program.
- d. Officers lack the training to safely de-escalate situation involving people with MI.
- e. If officers cannot effectively link people to MH treatment, another goal may be to streamline the process for connecting to these services.
- f. The committee must help interpret the criteria for emergency MH evaluation and decide how officers will access service.
- g. The committee should develop personnel selection criteria and a process for identifying officers best suited for the challenge of this new role. In particular, planners should consider officers' ability to reorient from the more traditional method of gaining control by using an authoritative approach during a field contact to a nonadversarial, crisis-intervention style. To the extent possible, the selection process should be voluntary, yet selective.

3. Specialized Training - *All law enforcement personnel who respond to incidents in which an individual's mental illness appears to be a factor receive training to prepare for these encounters; those in specialized assignments receive more comprehensive training. Dispatchers, call takers, and other individuals in a support role receive training tailored to their needs.*

- a. The chief law enforcement executive should ensure that training is also provided to supervisory and support personnel, such as midlevel managers, field training officers, call takers, and dispatchers, who advance the specialized program's operations.
- b. Planning and implementing a training initiative that supports the specialized program should be a collaborative effort between the law enforcement agency and stakeholders represented on the program coordination group. The coordination group should help guide training decisions, which include selecting content and techniques, ensuring the instruction is culturally competent, identifying and preparing trainers, and evaluating effectiveness.
- c. Make certain that the training initiative reflects an appropriate range of perspectives; members can identify mental health practitioners, consumers, and family members to provide some of the training instruction. Likewise, the group helps ensure quality by establishing a process for consistently reviewing and evaluating training and then modifying the curriculum based on the findings.
- d. Training should include stabilization, de-escalation techniques, community resources, etc.
- e. Specialized training should improve cross-system understanding of agencies' roles and responsibilities.

4. Call-Taker and Dispatcher Protocols – *Call takers and dispatchers identify critical information to direct calls to the appropriate responders, inform the law enforcement response, and record this information for analysis and as a reference for future calls for service.*

5. Stabilization, Observation, and Disposition - *Specialized law enforcement responders de-escalate and observe the nature of incidents in which mental illness may be a factor using tactics focused on safety. Drawing on their understanding and knowledge of relevant laws and available resources, officers then determine the appropriate disposition.*

6. Transportation and Custodial Transfer - *Law enforcement responders transport and transfer custody of the person with a mental illness in a safe and sensitive manner that supports the individual's efficient access to mental health services and the officers' timely return to duty.*

7. Information Exchange and Confidentiality - *Law enforcement and mental health personnel have a well-designed procedure governing the release and exchange of*

information to facilitate necessary and appropriate communication while protecting the confidentiality of community members.

8. Treatment, Supports, and Services - *Specialized law enforcement–based response programs connect individuals with mental illnesses to comprehensive and effective community-based treatment, supports, and services.*

9. Organizational Support - *The law enforcement agency’s policies, practices, and culture support the specialized response program and the personnel who further its goals.*

10. Program Evaluation and Sustainability - *Data are collected and analyzed to help demonstrate the impact of and inform modifications to the program. Support for the program is continuously cultivated in the community and the law enforcement agency.*