



Outlook

Five Cities Betting On Mobile Crisis Response To Ease Law Enforcement Strain

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Date Tue 9/23/2025 4:57 PM

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Sent: Thursday, April 3, 2025 10:32:25 AM

To: Hawkins, Chad

Subject: Five Cities Betting On Mobile Crisis Response To Ease Law Enforcement Strain

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Five Cities Betting On Mobile Crisis Response To Ease Law Enforcement Strain

1. Austin “Expands Mental Health Crisis Outreach Team [To] Operate On A 24/7 Basis.” Last

week, Austin’s City Council approved the expansion of the city’s lauded Expanded Mobile Crisis Outreach Team—which the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services deemed a “**national role model**”—nearly doubling the number of responders in the field while also expanding the ranks of the team’s mental health experts who work inside the city’s 911 emergency call center, Melia Masumoto **reports** for KVUE.

The expansion will help to meet the growing demand of the mobile crisis team, but as Marisa Malik, who helps to oversee the EMCOT units, explained to KVUE “EMCOT [still] needs three times the number of members it currently has to fully match the volume of mental health calls coming in.”

A key component of EMCOT’s success is the city’s unique approach to their 911 dispatch center—when you call 911 in Austin, Texas, a dispatcher will ask

you: “Do you need fire, EMS, police, or mental health.” That fourth option —“mental health”—is an innovation that started in Austin, [as Safer Cities has reported previously](#).

Austin Police Association President Michael Bullock, a supporter of the EMCOT unit, recently [testified](#) before Austin City Council and explained:

“[I]t’s time that we work towards getting law enforcement out of mental health. We have never claimed to be the experts, but yet we have been charged with the responsibility of responding to mental health crisis. And taking these positive steps towards identifying better ways to divert these calls, to have a more robust mental health response system, I believe is a positive step.”

The mental health experts with EMCOT typically stay on scene for about an hour, then follow up within 24 hours—and can continue helping for up to 90 days with transitional crisis services, Masumoto reported. That ability to stay on scene for an extended period is key to the team’s success and a feature that separates their work from law enforcement who often need to move on quickly to the next call for service, Malik [explained](#) to KUT news: “Oftentimes a crisis isn’t stabilized after an initial visit. So that team really focuses on working with individuals to do treatment planning, case management... that really helps reduce a crisis from happening again.”

2. Portland’s Mobile Crisis Team Approved To “Transport [People] From Response Scenes To Shelters Or Addiction Treatment Centers.”

When a call for mental health service came in, Portland Street Response team takes the call, but if that person needed additional services—perhaps transport to treatment facility or a shelter—the team used to have to call in other first responders like the Portland Police Bureau, taking up additional police resources and slowing down the medical services that a person in crisis needed.

But that changed this month, as Leslie Dominique [reported](#) for Fox12 news in Portland, when city officials transferred those duties to Portland Street Response—elevating the team with the capabilities that other first responders like police, fire and EMS deploy. Ria Nochera, a supervisor with PSR, explained to the news channel that this shift “legitimizes Portland Street Response as a

first-response agency... [and] it's also about looking out for our partner agencies because they're overwhelmed and getting slammed with calls... [Now,] we'll be able to get them right on our rig and onto the next place that they need to go."

The shift also expands the team's reach. "Crews can now respond to crises in public indoor spaces, [similar to law enforcement or medics]—such as government building lobbies, restaurants, and grocery stores — during regular business hours," Fox12 detailed.

Portland Mayor Keith Wilson, a vocal supporter of the Street Response team, **described** this change to KATU news as "a success story, and expanding its capabilities was a key campaign promise... These new policies empower our dedicated PSR teams to shuttle at-risk individuals to services including lifesaving shelter, recovery services, day centers, and more."

3. "Philly Mobile Crisis Response Teams Average 20 Mental Health Emergencies A Day."

Philadelphia's Community Mobile Crisis Response Team Network "has become critical in addressing behavioral health emergencies across the city," Nicole Leonard **reports** for WHYY in Philadelphia, having now been "dispatched to more than 14,000 calls between January 2023 and January 2025. Now, Leonard details, local leaders are calling for "the program to expand in order to meet rising demand" across the city.

Leonard reports that the Philly mobile crisis teams—"clinicians, nurses, social workers and other outreach specialists who respond 24/7" to mental health related calls for service—are now responding to about "20 mental health emergencies a day," freeing up law enforcement to focus on solving serious crimes.

The shift to mental health professionals handling more calls for service is welcome, Philadelphia police officer Kenneth Harper **explained** to the news station: "This should have been done a long time ago... police are very needed, it's very important, but dealing with people in a mental crisis, we get a little bit of training on it, but we barely scratch the surface."

An expansion of the team is also backed by data collected by the city's Department of Behavioral Health of people who have received treatment from the mobile crisis responders: "70% of respondents rate Philly's mobile mental health experience 'highly satisfactory,' Marco Cerino recently **reported** for the Philadelphia Tribune.

4. Indianapolis Launches "Mobile Crisis Accelerator Program ... [To Help] Reduce Reliance On Emergency Rooms And Law Enforcement."

The new program, launched this month, is "designed to enhance mental health crisis response across the state of Indiana" through designing and expanding mobile crisis teams around the state with the goal of "reducing reliance on emergency rooms and law enforcement intervention," Chloe McGowan **reported** in the Indianapolis Recorder.

Here's how the accelerator works: "The program uses state dollars to provide grant funding, training and technical assistance to eligible organizations... [to] provide on-site de-escalation and crisis intervention, connections to ongoing mental health and social services... Eligible organizations can receive up to \$1 million in grant funding that can be used to cover staff, training and operational costs."

Jasmine Black, who helps oversee the accelerator program, **explained** to WFYI News that "mobile crisis teams reduce the strain on law enforcement and emergency rooms, which also ultimately saves communities lots of dollars while improving the mental health and well being of communities across the state."

5. Durham Mobile Crisis Team Has Responded To "More Than 26,000 Emergency Calls... Alleviated Strain On The Police Department."

For WRAL, Lora Lavigne **reports** on city officials considering the expansion of Durham's Holistic Empathetic Assistance Response Team, or HEART, team which has handled "more than 26,000 calls ... work [that] helped avert thousands of crises and alleviated a strain on the police department." Expansion plans would include hiring "more skilled mental health professionals, peer support specialists, and

EMTs” who would be “available at all times of the day throughout the city, county and public schools.”

Many Durham City Councilmembers have already “vowed to support the changes in their ongoing budget discussions,” Cindy Bae and Sean Coffey **reported** for ABC11 News. Councilmember Carl Rist recently said that the City Council has “made this one of our top five priorities this year for the budget... you've got a council that supports this, and we're going to make this happen...”

Durham Police Chief Patrice Andrews recently said that Durham Police Department “continues to be fully supportive of the HEART Program... because it enables us to focus on more appropriate law enforcement needs throughout our community.”

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