

Crisis Recommendations Survey

Intro

Thank you in advance for taking the time to complete this survey about the set of 16 recommendations put forth by the Crisis Response Stakeholder Group. Your thoughtful feedback, suggestions and concerns are a critical part of this process, as a subset of these will be finalized and put into an action plan for the County and partners to implement.

Your responses will be completely anonymous and the survey should take around 15 minutes to complete.

Description

The Crisis Response Stakeholder Group (CRSG) was convened by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services and the Allegheny County Emergency Services to address the overreliance on emergency services for people with behavioral health needs as well as the racial inequities that persist throughout our crisis system. The CRSG developed the following vision for an improved crisis system:

- A crisis response system that builds trust with communities of color and meaningfully integrates community work, voices, skills, and expertise
- There are fewer people in active crisis
- Whenever possible, law enforcement is not the first or only response on behavioral health crisis calls
- Jail incarceration is no longer viewed as the primary method for connecting people to behavioral health services/supports
- People are aware of - and have more and easier access to - structurally competent, culturally humble, trauma-informed human services in the community.

Our group has come up with 16 recommendations. The purpose of this survey is to hear your feedback on these recommendations. For each recommendation, we invite you to share your thoughts. Please feel free to respond to as many or as few as you'd like. As you read, please consider whether the proposed recommendation will help us achieve the vision for an improved crisis response system (as stated on the previous survey page).

At the end of the survey, we ask you to consider all 16 recommendations and select the top 5 you believe should be prioritized by the County and its partners.

If you'd like to read more about the CRSG's background or more detailed descriptions of the recommendations, you can download the CRSG Recommendations Document.

Please advance to the next page when you are ready to begin the survey.

Recommendation 1: Improve the quality and increase the availability of crisis walk-in centers and other services that are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to receive a person experiencing a crisis.

A crisis walk-in center is a physical location an individual can go to when they need support and stabilization during a crisis. Staffed with psychiatrists, clinicians, nurses, and peer specialists, they can be an alternative to an emergency room or even jail for someone who is in need of immediate mental health or substance use services. These, along with other pre-arrest diversion services, should be available 24/7 to individuals in crisis.

What do you think of this recommendation?

Recommendation 2: Improve mobile crisis options and functioning.

Resolve Crisis Services' mobile crisis team currently serves Allegheny County residents by sending a team of mental health professionals to a person in crisis when they are called by the police or county residents. As the only licensed mobile crisis team in Allegheny County, and a high demand for mobile crisis response, there are limitations to their services, particularly during high call volume times.

What do you think of this recommendation?

Recommendation 3: Support first responders across the county to receive needed, ongoing training.

When someone is experiencing a crisis, it's important that the people who respond to them (whether peers, mental health professionals, law enforcement, Emergency Medical Services, or a combination) have the appropriate training to meet the person where they are, de-escalate the situation and connect them to the right services, should they want help. This requires developing ongoing and robust training opportunities which would be made available and encouraged throughout the course of an individual's career, and provided across the County's diverse municipalities, regardless of their size and resources.

What do you think of this recommendation?

Recommendation 4: Improve discharge planning from jails, hospitals, and emergency departments.

Individuals leaving jail, the emergency department or hospitals may need continued services to address their behavioral health needs. A coordinated discharge plan can ensure these individuals receive the continued care they may need, and that no one falls through the cracks upon leaving a facility.

What do you think of this recommendation?

Recommendation 5: Enhance designated phone line(s) for connecting individuals to human services, so that healthcare systems, providers and discharge planners have one place to call when patients need immediate human services and supports (from food to mental health and substance use services).

Improving the function and general awareness of one, widely known phone number to call when people need to get connected to immediate human services and supports can ensure people receive the help they need, when they need it.

What do you think of this recommendation?

Recommendation 6: Establish a structure and set of protocols that is responsible for overseeing and holding accountable the full crisis system (including prevention services, early intervention supports, response to people in crisis, and post-crisis recovery).

The crisis system is comprised of many distinct agencies (e.g., mental health providers, law enforcement, government, etc.) that operate independently and in collaboration with each other. To ensure the system as a whole is functioning for the people it is designed to help, and that cross-agency coordination and communication is occurring as its intended, it's important to establish a structure and set of protocols to assess the system on an ongoing basis, and ensure the effective implementation of improvements and innovations.

What do you think of this recommendation?

Recommendation 7: Develop a system or resource with real time information on service availability (e.g., eligibility criteria; area or population served; appointment availability).

When an individual with behavioral health needs wants to access services in the County, there is not one, go-to resource or system with real-time information about what services exist and their availability status. This makes it hard for individuals to easily find the help they want, and for behavioral health staff and law enforcement officers to make a quick referral to the right agency or service.

What do you think of this recommendation?

Recommendation 8: Increase availability of easy access, low-barrier respite centers and similar models.

Respite centers are physical spaces where individuals who feel like they might be close to experiencing a crisis can go to take a break, decompress, and talk with peers. Increasing access to respite centers could prevent crises from happening, and offer an alternative option for individuals who would prefer to speak with a peer, rather than a clinician.

What do you think of this recommendation?

Recommendation 9: Launch co-response teams to respond to 911 calls.

In Allegheny County, a law enforcement officer that is dispatched to a 911 call involving an individual with mental health needs has the option to call the Resolve mobile crisis team to come to the scene and provide support services. Depending on Resolve's capacity to respond and where the officer is located, there can be a time lag for this secondary response to arrive. In a co-responder model, a police officer and a mental health professional respond to behavioral health-related 911 calls together. Co-response teams allow for the police officer to make sure the scene is safe, and for the mental health clinician to support the individual experiencing a crisis.

What do you think of this recommendation?

Recommendation 10: Develop awareness around an alternative number to 911 that people can call when someone is experiencing a behavioral health crisis and explore strategies to provide a behavioral health response to 911 calls involving individuals in crisis.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is working to implement a simple, direct three-digit code (988) for people experiencing a mental health crisis to call and speak with trained counselors. They believe this could potentially divert many calls involving individuals in crisis away from 911. The 988 line could be implemented as soon as summer 2022, and will require an extensive marketing campaign to increase awareness throughout Allegheny County; this recommendation would support that effort. Additionally, there are several models across the country where teams of medics and mental health professionals, instead of police officers, are dispatched by 911 call centers to respond to calls for service that involve individuals in crisis (who are not a threat to themselves or others). Allegheny county will explore how these models, or similar models, can be implemented here.

What do you think of this recommendation?

Recommendation 11: Increase the availability of preventative and proactive outreach supports to prevent a crisis before it occurs.

In Allegheny County, data shows racial inequities in accessing preventative care; Black adults are less likely to access preventative care, and more likely to utilize crisis services, while their White counterparts are more likely to access preventative care and have lower utilization rates of crisis services. Improving and expanding prevention and outreach (in particular for communities of color) can make sure everyone gets the services and supports they need before a crisis occurs.

What do you think of this recommendation?

Recommendation 12: Address basic housing needs.

Many people with behavioral health needs also need access to stable housing. There are a variety of barriers that currently exist, including policies that limit housing options for people with criminal records, or quality concerns about housing options for people with behavioral health needs. Solutions may include supporting existing and new efforts to work with landlords, clear criminal records, prevent evictions and provide permanent supportive housing.

What do you think of this recommendation?

Recommendation 13: Establish and fund more community-led and operated crisis response models.

Recognizing that community members are experts in understanding their own community needs and, in particular, that Black communities have been historically and are presently harmed by the crisis response system, community-led and operated crisis response models would be designed for and by community members. This can ensure more responsive and accessible services for community members, and improve engagement and use of supports for those who may not immediately trust service providers.

What do you think of this recommendation?

Recommendation 14: Make sure qualified, trained front line staff are available 24/7 for individuals experiencing crisis; and that these staff have the appropriate compensation, support and caseloads to provide the best services possible, no matter the time of day.

High-quality staff (including social workers, mental health professionals, and other frontline staff) are critical to a healthy functioning crisis system. Ensuring that individuals in crisis always have access to top notch care and support, no matter the time of day, requires that staff have manageable caseloads and are adequately supported and compensated in their roles. Burn out is far too common in the social services sector, and ultimately impacts the individuals being served. Focusing efforts on cultivating a strong workforce that is available 24/7 will enable frontline staff to meet clients where they are, provide the best services possible, and ultimately reduce avoidable calls to 911 or to law enforcement.

What do you think of this recommendation?

Recommendation 15: Develop a process to address mistrust and hurt between communities and government, including law enforcement.

The City of Pittsburgh started this work in 2015 through a collaboration with the National Initiative for Building Community Trust & Justice. Pittsburgh was selected as one of six pilot sites to employ strategies, examine policies, and develop evidence through research to reduce implicit bias, enhance procedural justice, and promote racial reconciliation. This recommendation could include building on the work that's already been started, and identifying new strategies to address mistrust.

What do you think of this recommendation?

Recommendation 16: Increase the number of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) behavioral health providers.

More representation in the field of behavioral health is crucial. Anyone seeking behavioral health supports and services should be able to find mental health professionals, social workers, psychiatrists and other professionals that can relate to and empathize with their cultural background.

What do you think of this recommendation?

Now we'd like to you to consider all 16 recommendations. Please select the top 5 recommendations that you believe the County and its partners should prioritize in order to achieve the stated vision for an improved crisis response system. Understanding that you may view all 16 recommendations as critical, we want to get a sense of what you think is most important to implement now.

[Recommendation 1](#)

[Recommendation 9](#)

[Recommendation 2](#)

[Recommendation 10](#)

[Recommendation 3](#)

[Recommendation 11](#)

[Recommendation 4](#)

[Recommendation 12](#)

[Recommendation 5](#)

[Recommendation 13](#)

[Recommendation 6](#)

[Recommendation 14](#)

[Recommendation 7](#)

[Recommendation 15](#)

[Recommendation 8](#)

[Recommendation 16](#)

Your feedback is incredibly important to the development of our programs, and we really appreciate your time in taking this survey. If you have any last thoughts or suggestions about the recommendations, or if there is anything that we missed, please share them here.