

Law Enforcement–Mental Health Learning Sites

Jurisdictions across the country are exploring strategies to improve the outcomes of encounters between law enforcement and people with mental illnesses. As a growing number of communities develop or enhance their comprehensive police-mental health collaboration (PMHC), many agencies are struggling with the planning process and how to tailor successful implementation strategies from other jurisdictions to address their own distinct problems and circumstances.

In an effort to expand the knowledge base for law enforcement agencies interested in starting or enhancing a PMHC, the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, with assistance from a team of national experts and the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), selected six police departments to serve as national law enforcement–mental health learning sites. These learning sites represent a diverse cross-section of perspectives and program examples and are dedicated to helping other jurisdictions improve their responses to people with mental illnesses. The original six learning sites, selected in 2010, are the Houston (TX) Police Department, the Los Angeles (CA) Police Department, the Madison (WI) Police Department, the Portland (ME) Police Department, the Salt Lake City (UT) Police Department, and the University of Florida Police Department. In 2017, due to the success of the program, four new sites were added, including the Arlington Police Department (MA), the Gallia, Jackson, Meigs Counties Sheriffs’ Offices (OH), the Madison County Sheriff’s Office (TN), and the Tucson Police Department (AZ).

Portland (ME) Police Department

Total number of agency personnel: 218

Sworn: 163 Civilian: 55

Total population served: 64,000 people

Jurisdiction and state: Portland, Maine

Program Highlights

- Features mental health professionals embedded in the law enforcement agency
- Operates within a small city, in collaboration with nearby rural community
- Facilitates internship program for Master’s level students
- Uses a co-response model with a community-based support network
- Provides Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training for all officers

The Portland Police Department (PPD) has developed innovative programs and collaborative partnerships to address increased calls for service involving people who have mental health and/or substance use issues (collectively, behavioral health issues). PPD began their efforts in 1996 with the creation of a police liaison position on mental health, and the department has since developed a Specialized Behavioral Health Response Program with trained officers who respond to often time-consuming, complex calls involving people with mental illnesses.

The PPD has also worked with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Maine since 2001 to provide Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training using the 40-hour comprehensive “Memphis Model” designed to train officers responding to people experiencing a mental health crisis. Although initially a volunteer program, PPD now mandates that all officers complete the CIT training program.



Law Enforcement—Mental Health Learning Sites Portland (ME) Police Department

Co-Response Unit and Behavioral Health Collaborations

PPD's [mental health liaison](#) responds to calls alongside officers. As of 2010, the PPD has a full-time behavioral health coordinator who collaborates with care providers to help people who have behavioral health needs, primarily by managing the co-responder program and facilitation officer training. In 2011, to offer more assistance, the PPD began collaborating with the University of Southern Maine and the University of New England to provide year-long internships for Master's program participants interested in responding to calls for service with officers, conducting follow-ups, and making referrals to mental health providers. In 2015, the unit was further expanded to include a substance use disorder liaison. The department also works closely with Opportunity Alliance, the state's designated crisis services provider for Cumberland County, to facilitate on-site placement of an additional full-time professional mental health liaison within the department.

Along with the Specialized Behavioral Health Response Program's coordinator and liaisons, PPD CIT officers have a network of community partners that they can call for assistance. For example,

- CIT officers can call Cumberland County Crisis Response to provide a mental health mobile crisis outreach team for people in need of mental health services, advocacy, and/or support;
- Opportunity Alliance can send a crisis response team clinician for children in crisis;
- A local nonprofit's Homeless Outreach and Mobile Engagement (HOME) team can co-respond to incidents involving people without housing;
- Family Crisis Services has advocates embedded at PPD who respond to incidents that involve domestic violence; and
- The Maine Behavioral Health Care coordinates the Trauma Intervention Program, an often-used team that sends volunteers (within a 20-minute response time) to a scene to assist officers in the support of those who have witnessed trauma.

When an individual generates numerous calls for service, the program's liaisons and coordinator, officers, and case workers will use a team approach to determine the person's needs, appropriate interventions, and future responses to calls. Often, PPD CIT officers will attend commitment hearings, treatment planning meetings, and discharge planning meetings to support continuity of care. The PPD coordinates with schools, the jail, district attorney, and behavioral health agencies to advance individual case work and systems-level changes.

To learn more about the PPD and its initiatives, please contact:

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To learn more about the Law Enforcement/Mental Health Learning Sites, please visit <http://csgjusticecenter.org/law-enforcement/projects/mental-health-learning-sites/> or email the Law Enforcement Program team at le-mh-learningsites@csgjusticecenter.org.