

Behavioral health

2024



Expand behavioral health and substance use disorder services and funding for law enforcement alternative response programs (**HB 2245, HB 2088**).

Background:

Cities are not traditionally direct behavioral health service providers, yet law enforcement officers are increasingly dispatched to behavioral, mental health, and substance use crises. Nationally, behavioral health and substance use concerns represent roughly 20% of 911 calls. A crisis of this type can be both tragic and dangerous for the individuals, families, and communities involved.

In communities across the state, extreme disparities exist in access to frontline first responders, behavioral health resources, and drug treatment.

The Legislature has made significant investments in this system in the past few years, but major gaps still remain. Many communities do not have local options to divert people into drug treatment—or the nearest service center is often located many miles away from the community. Additionally, complicated and overlapping systems often mean that the responder who shows up first to the scene of a crisis may not be equipped to handle it.

A number of cities are adopting alternative response programs that complement or replace a traditional law enforcement response with one that takes a holistic approach to an individual's needs. Community diversion options like mental health co-responders, Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD), and Community Advocates for Referral and Education Services (CARES) programs have proven successful.

55% of Washington cities report having no alternative community diversion programs in place.

Strong cities need:

- **Greater access** to the entire continuum of behavioral health services and substance use disorder (SUD) treatment for adults and juveniles, including:
 - Crisis treatment
 - Inpatient treatment
 - Intensive outpatient treatment
 - Ongoing behavioral and mental health treatment and SUD treatment.
- **Increased support** to improve workforce and staffing at community treatment centers and to expand treatment facilities.
- **Increased funding** for alternative response programs.

People in crisis need...



Someone to talk to



Someone to respond



Somewhere to go

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Cities are coming up with new solutions:

The communities of Bothell, Kenmore, Kirkland, Lake Forest Park, and Shoreline worked together to create the Regional Crisis Response (RCR, pronounced 'racer') Agency – a new regional partnership that provides crisis de-escalation, intervention, and navigation to the system of care. Early data from the new program shows:

- 67% reduction in jail bookings;
- 60% reduction in crisis services events; and
- 4% reduction in emergency department visits.

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