

Piloting a State Police Diversion Program-Delaware

The Nexus Between Jail Diversion and Crisis Services

Delaware Program Highlight

- “Adding peer support was the secret sauce to make the program successful.” —Glenn Owens, Director of Crisis Intervention Services, Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (DSAMH)

Pre-Arrest Diversion Partnership

- State Police often encountered individuals experiencing mental health or substance use issues
- These encounters led to a cycle of arrest and incarceration
- State Attorney, State Police, Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (DSAMH) collaborated with funding from Opioid Response Grant and TTI (NASMHPD-Transformation Transfer Initiative)
- 3 of 9 State Police Districts Participated in the Pilot
- Offered another Avenue to access Behavioral Health Care without arrest

How it Works

- A 2-member team of a clinician and a peer would be referred a case from the Police and have a warm handoff the same day or next
- Officers could refer individuals that were committing misdemeanor crimes from a pre-approved list of crimes from the State Attorney
- Police began to refer more cases so they could focus on more pressing issues
- The program expanded to not just include people that were committing crimes but to anyone in need of behavioral health treatment

Data 1 year after launch

- 784 referrals (.3% pre-arrest diversion, 25% overdose response, 75% social contact)
- Of the 784, 51% contact was made and 57% of those accepted services (23% of total referrals)
- 89% of those engaged (20% of total) enrolled in treatment

Integration with Crisis System

- This project is operated by DSAMH in collaboration with its Crisis Intervention Services and fills a void for police to refer individuals who may have a behavioral health disorder but do not need immediate crisis treatment.
- Participation in the program may prevent crises by engaging individuals in treatment as early as possible.
- Police contact mobile crisis teams or escort individuals to crisis stabilization units when they encounter individuals in need of crisis care.

Populations Served

- 68% of referrals were male, 32% were female, 64% were white (69% in 2020 Census), 21% (22% in 2020 Census) were black and 15% were other.
- The majority of the referrals were for adults between the ages of 26-45 (60%), with smaller percentages for those aged 18-25 (10%), 46-55 (17%) and over 55 (13%).
- Due to data collection efforts, the program can track referral rates by gender, race, and age, by troop location, and observe them over time for trends.

Project Legacy

- The project will continue using blended funding from the Delaware Criminal Justice Council and State Opioid Response grants.
- As officer and commander confidence has grown, the project has expanded from three troop districts to six in 2022.

What Can Delaware's Police Pre-Arrest Diversion Program Teach Us?

- While there are administrative hurdles to hiring peer support staff with criminal justice involvement histories, their lived experience in the justice system carries credibility to individuals who are involved or at risk of involvement.
- Officers have expressed their surprise and admiration for peers that they once knew as troubled that have become case managers and able to persuade individuals to engage in treatment.

What Can Delaware's Police Pre-Arrest Diversion Program Teach Us?

- The success of the project can be attributed to the early partnership among DSAMH, Delaware State Police and the Department of Justice. The trust developed between partners allowed the program the flexibility to expand referrals and reach more people in need of treatment.