



Phillip R. Crandall, Director
Social Services | Public Health | Mental Health

news release

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EPD, DHHS work together to support the mentally ill

Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Mental Health staff will soon be partnering with Eureka police officers as part of a new community outreach team to better serve severely mentally ill people who come to the attention of law enforcement.

The Community Mobile Response Team, which will be phased in over the coming year, will work specifically with people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless and need help to stabilize their illness and secure the services and assistance they need to avoid further problems from occurring.

"Nothing about addressing homelessness is easy. There are no silver-bullet solutions," said DHHS Director Phillip R. Crandall. "Despite the complexity of the issues surrounding homelessness and the impact of severe mental illness, Eureka City Council members Mike Newman and Melinda Ciarabellini and 4th District Supervisor Virginia Bass have worked hard to bring the county and city together to tackle this issue."

The impacts of untreated mental illness result in approximately 1,800 people in crisis being transported each year by law enforcement from the streets, hospitals, shelters, family resource centers, group homes, fire departments, DHHS' Mobile Outreach program and other county offices to the department's Psychiatric Emergency Services (PES) outpatient program.

In the initial phase of the Community Mobile Response Team approach, DHHS Mental Health staff will join officers on calls for people with a possible severe mental illness. DHHS staff will assist the person in the field as well as in the transition, if necessary, to PES or DHHS' Sempervirens Psychiatric Health Facility (SV).

"With an earlier and integrated team response, the intent is that people will receive the care and treatment they need," Bass said. "The goal is to help them avoid further law enforcement intervention, trips to the emergency

room and psychiatric hospitalization. This partnership will benefit the people it serves and the community as a whole.”

Upon release from SV or PES, a mental health clinician and a case manager will establish a discharge plan addressing the person’s needs, including linkage to necessary services. This might include outpatient mental health counseling, medication support, alcohol and other drug services, housing or shelter, linkage to a primary care physician and enrolling the person in programs like Medi-Cal and CalFresh, when eligible.

“This partnership is a step in the right direction for supporting people who are in a mental health crisis,” Ciarabellini said. “Together, we can implement cost-effective, promising and evidence-based strategies to work toward better continuity of care while improving public safety in the City of Eureka.”

A mental health clinician will also do ride-alongs with the EPD two days a week to become familiar with calls received, responses and people who may require repeated intervention. The other three days, the clinician will be stationed at PES and will go to the scene when called by law enforcement.

“The Eureka Police Department realizes that in order to effectively reduce the impact on our neighborhoods, the homeless mental health piece must be front and center of any effective solution,” said Chief Andrew Mills. “EPD, working in collaboration with the Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services, is elated to explore new and important solutions to this very difficult and resource-intensive problem. DHHS, working with EPD in the field, brings the expertise and experience necessary to improve our problem-solving efforts.”

During the inception of the initial phase of this evolving program, the EPD/DHHS Mental Health team will meet weekly to review responses and case files and to identify gaps and needs for further planning. Priority will be given to those with the highest needs. Treatment plans will be developed to include behavioral health services, housing, eligibility, food and more.

“The addition of Community Mobile Response will fill a much-needed gap in services by expanding the ability to provide triage services and to dispatch DHHS Mental Health personnel into the community,” Newman said.

Data will also be collected on the number of responses, assessments, referrals to treatment, types of services and outcomes, further EPD calls and PES and SV hospitalizations as well as housing gaps and opportunities. After three months of collecting information, Community Mobile Response Team members and DHHS and EPD administration will discuss further enhancement of the program. This could include additional staff or resources, including increased ride-alongs, after-care services, monitoring or other options.

“EPD and DHHS can assure you data will be used to measure the effectiveness of this solution and to determine how to expand should we find

success,” Mills said. “EPD applauds DHHS in its willingness to join into this field-level solution.”

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Pictured at a recent Community Mobile Response Team meeting are, from left, 4th District Supervisor Virginia Bass, Eureka Councilman Mike Newman, DHHS Director Phillip R. Crandall, Eureka Councilwoman Melinda Ciarabellini and Eureka Police Chief Andrew Mills.



DHHS Director Phillip R. Crandall, right, shakes hands with Eureka Police Chief Andrew Mills at a recent Community Mobile Response Team meeting.