

**Continuing to Incentivize and Expedite Hiring for Los Angeles County’s
Alternative Crisis Response Programs**

Over the last few years, Los Angeles County (County) has greatly expanded their Alternative Crisis Response (ACR) system so that individuals experiencing a mental health crisis in LA County can receive an in-person field-based response from mental health professionals. This expansion has coincided with the implementation of 9-8-8 as the national number for suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotlines. In LA County, anyone can call 9-8-8 or the LA County Help Line at 1-800-854-7771 and request a Field Intervention Team (FIT) if they or someone they know is experiencing a crisis and does not need a law enforcement or paramedic response.

Since 2021, the County has committed to expanding the number of FIT teams available along with their hours and geography to ensure that no matter where or when a person is in crisis, they can receive an in-person response in a timely manner. In 2021, there were fewer than 30 FIT teams across the County that only operated during business hours. Now, there are a total of 72 FIT teams spread across the County with 24/7 coverage. As a result of this expansion, response times have decreased by nearly 70%. This rapid expansion took place during the tail-end of a global pandemic and amidst a

MOTION

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national mental health worker shortage. When the County first set out to expand the number of FIT teams, the Department of Mental Health (DMH) had a difficult time filling the positions. In the changing healthcare landscape, recruiting for field-based services with the same pay as teleworking or clinic-based services was a major challenge. It has been especially challenging to recruit for field-based services outside of regular business hours, which are required to operate FIT teams 24/7.

In response to these challenges, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) passed multiple motions to incentivize field-based positions as part of the Alternative Crisis Response network.¹ As a result of the motions, the County implemented various incentives and programs to enhance recruitment and retention of field-based positions and to speed up the hiring process:

- Increased the bonus for field-based positions from \$180/month to \$280/month;²
- Implemented a \$2,500 signing bonus for all Alternative Crisis Response positions;²
- Implemented three \$2,500 retention bonuses for Alternative Crisis Response positions to be given at intervals of 6 months, 12 months, and 24 months;²
- Doubled the weekend and night shift differentials;²
- Reinstated the Psychiatrist Loan Forgiveness program that was suspended in 2020;
- Utilized same day hiring fairs to expedite the hiring process;

¹ [“Enhancing Recruitment and Retention for Mental Health Field Positions”](#) Hahn/Barger. October 19, 2021.

[“Student Mental Health Trainees”](#) Hahn/Barger. October 18, 2022.

[“Incentivizing Hiring for Los Angeles County’s Alternative Crisis Response”](#) Hahn/Barger. April 4, 2023.

² <https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/183100.pdf> CEO. August 8, 2023.

- Expanded the stipend financial incentive program to include Psychiatric Technicians; and
- Partnered with colleges and universities to recruit qualified individuals.

These efforts have helped DMH fill critical field-based Alternative Crisis Response positions, resulting in them more than doubling the total number of FIT teams available and expanding the hours of availability to operate 24/7. However, there is more work to be done. Field response times are still too long,³ so DMH has allocated more positions to their FIT network. They now need to fill those vacancies, which remains a challenge given the highly competitive mental health market. Additionally, some of the one-time funding that was utilized for the signing bonuses, retention bonuses, and increased field-based bonuses and shift differentials is set to expire. A comprehensive plan and strategy needs to be developed to both maintain the existing incentives and implement new ones to help DMH fill critical Alternative Crisis Response positions and increase their network in order to bring people in crisis the help they need when they need it.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to report back in writing in 60 days with the following:

1. Funding options to maintain and continue the increased field-based bonuses and shift differentials and the additional interval bonuses, as implemented in August 2023, after the American Rescue Plan Act funding expires; and
2. A plan to incentivize and expedite hiring of crucial vacant positions in Alternative Crisis Response field teams. The plan should consider, but not be limited to, the following:

³ [“Reducing Field Intervention Team Dispatch Times to Enhance LA County’s Alternative Crisis Response System”](#)
Hahn/Horvath. September 24, 2024.

- a. Further increasing shift differentials for night shifts that have been harder to staff;
- b. Implementing bonuses for geographical locations that have been harder to hire in;
- c. Further increasing field-based bonuses for clinician positions, which have been the hardest to fill;
- d. Reworking the way that DMH employees volunteering for overtime night shifts receive payment for standby time, in order to incentivize more DMH staff to volunteer for overnight overtime shifts;
- e. Strategies to increase the number of applicants to the DMH hiring fairs that are being held to expedite the hiring process;
- f. Increasing the partnerships with colleges and universities by creating more internship or student worker positions with DMH as a pathway to a career in the Department; and
- g. Advertising and promoting the Department's Psych Tech stipend program.

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JH:kc