

Therapeutic Transportation Program

Expanding Our Real-Time Response to Mental Health Crises

Los Angeles (LA) County has been transforming its approach to serving seriously mentally ill individuals by focusing on service and care instead of criminalization. One example of this shift is the Department’s therapeutic mobile vans. Launched in 2019 and with robust plans for expansion in 2021, this project offers a supportive and expedited alternative to the transportation needs of acute mentally ill clients requiring involuntary holds.



Focusing on Care, Not Criminalization

The Therapeutic Transportation Program vans are deployed from City Fire via their Tiered Dispatch system and operated by the Psychiatric Mobile Response Team (PMRT) in order to transport a client who is on a hold or to intervene on the streets to avoid the need for an involuntary hold. Utilizing specially-designed vans from the outset of responding to a call for someone in crisis allows the client’s healing and recovery to begin from the first moment of contact. All vans are staffed with an expert team from the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and are comprised of a clinical driver, psychiatric technician, and a peer support specialist enabled rapidly to initiate supportive case management.

The new pilot program expands the current reach and impact by integrating LA County mental health experts into the emergency response for calls that come into 911 or go directly to the LA City Police Department or LA City Fire Department. The pilot program will embed a team of LA County mental health experts 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in five LA City Fire stations across the County to co-respond or take lead on incoming emergency calls related to, or presumed to involve, an individual experiencing a mental health crisis. The program will launch in 2021 and be studied for one year with a focus on sustaining and expanding the program into other cities within LA County.

Providing Better Experiences and Outcomes While Decreasing Trauma

The Therapeutic Transportation Program meets clients with engagement, support and recovery-focused interventions in a way that increases trust, safety, and care. Specific benefits include:

- Therapeutic Transportation Program can minimize the client’s trauma, stigma, indignation and loss of privacy, which is too often a part of the transport process when ambulances and law enforcement are involved.
- Vehicles are designed with a therapeutic interior to ease the stress of the client’s situation, and the teams that staff the vans are dressed in civilian clothes, not uniforms, to further de-escalate the situation.
- The Therapeutic Transportation Program’s approach shortens the wait time for medically stable, non-combative and cooperative individuals – a crucial objective for the safety of both clients and the responding DMH team.
- For many underserved groups, the first encounter with mental health services is often through a mental health crisis. Changing the standard transportation practices to a more private, less traumatizing and less stigmatizing experience will lower a perception barrier to accessing mental health services and increase the likelihood families would volunteer to intervene on behalf of the potential client to obtain mental health services.
- The program frees up vital first-responder resources such as law enforcement patrols and ambulances to focus on other community safety and health priorities.

Learn More

- [Press Telegram: L.A. County unveils new response vehicles designed to aid folks experiencing mental health crises](#)
- [LA County & City Officials reveal joint crisis response system for mental health alternatives to law enforcement](#)