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CONTACT: Tati Simonian, Public Information Officer, city of Santa Monica
Tati.Simonian@santamonica.gov | (424) 280-0571 (cell)

Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health
pio@dmh.lacounty.gov | (213) 738-3700

Addressing Homelessness: Partnership between city, county brings added behavioral health resource to Santa Monica

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (Jan. 8, 2024) – Santa Monica first responders will now have access to a dedicated behavioral health team to better assist individuals in need of mental health care, thanks to a partnership between the city and the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health.

The pilot program, launched today, provides a specialized therapeutic transport team that will be available five days a week to assist Santa Monica Police and Fire personnel with 911 and non-emergency calls for service that involves someone experiencing a mental health crisis. The partnership with the Department of Mental Health, or DMH, is part of Santa Monica's push to collaborate with regional service providers for a coordinated, holistic approach to addressing homelessness.

Two Santa Monica-based teams will staff the van for eight hours per day to start. The three-member therapeutic transport teams include a driver, a peer support specialist and a clinical social worker. The first month of the program will involve team training and integration with first responders.

As the team continues to embed itself in the Santa Monica community, they will accompany first responders and will ultimately have the ability, if appropriate, to independently handle calls for service. This approach will allow for more targeted and tailored responses focused on behavioral health care, while also expanding first responders' capacity to address other emergency calls.

The team will have the ability to do a psychiatric transport to an urgent mental healthcare facility or hospital, as well as impose a 72-hour psychiatric hospitalization, known as a 5150 hold, for a person who is deemed to be a danger to themselves or others. The team can also assist with lower-level needs for someone in crisis.

The pilot program will initially focus on the downtown area, with the goal of quickly expanding citywide.

“This pilot allows us to provide a meaningful and appropriate level of response to support someone experiencing a mental health crisis,” Mayor Phil Brock said. “Mental health is a critical community need, particularly when it comes to our efforts to address homelessness, and I’m looking forward to continuing to work with our partners at DMH to strengthen and enhance supportive resources in Santa Monica.”

The Santa Monica City Council dedicated \$464,000 to fund the pilot program, and the county of Los Angeles provided \$1.7 million for staffing resources. The ultimate goal is to expand the program so that a county behavioral health team, led by a clinical social worker, is available in Santa Monica 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This new resource builds on council action last year that [secured more funding](#) for community mental health resources.

“Santa Monica’s therapeutic transport program launching this week demonstrates the power of Measure H and Los Angeles County’s emergency declaration for homelessness — a declaration also made by the city of Santa Monica, which has long championed local investments to address homelessness,” said Chair of the Board of Supervisors Lindsey P. Horvath, Third District. “Homelessness will best be solved by scaling solutions just like this one that meet people where they are with care and support from the county’s Department of Mental Health. I’m grateful for city leaders’ resolve to partner, innovate and create lasting solutions for those in greatest need.”

While addressing the homelessness crisis is a main priority of the program, the therapeutic van is a significant step toward enhancing behavioral health support in Santa Monica across the board. The service will benefit a wide range of clients, such as a teenager considering suicide, a senior experiencing dementia or a person experiencing homelessness impacted by post-traumatic stress disorder.

Staff are trained to connect individuals to supportive case management and other recovery-focused interventions, as well as transport them to a behavioral health facility if needed. Santa Monica is the third jurisdiction in Los Angeles County to partner with the DMH to deploy a new approach to responding to mental health needs in the community, and this partnership is set to inform future efforts to deploy behavioral health resources across the county.

“The Department of Mental Health is proud to collaborate with the city of Santa Monica to expand mental health services through this real-time, mobile resource aimed at meeting critical needs on the Westside,” Director Dr. Lisa Wong said. “In the months ahead, we look forward to seeing the results and the impact made by working side-by-side with our partners in the city of Santa Monica.”

For more information on Santa Monica’s efforts around behavioral health care, [click here](#). For background on Los Angeles County’s Therapeutic Transport Program, [click here](#).

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