



El Paso's Homeless Outreach Street Team is One Call Away

El Paso emergency and public services faced a growing number of calls concerning people experiencing homelessness. The calls forced police officers to divert time away from public safety and into a role often associated with a social worker. Officers picked up people experiencing homelessness for criminal trespassing, resulting in a brief booking into jail. After being processed through the indigent court system, the person would often return to the streets.

This increase of people experiencing homelessness created an opportunity for the El Paso Police Department (EPPD) to find new, innovative ways to respond to the need while focusing on public safety.

Leslie Canada spent 40 years with the EPPD before joining the [El Paso Coalition for the Homeless](#) (EPCH) in 2017 as a program analyst. With help from EPCH Director Camille Castillo, she focused on creating and strengthening law enforcement partnerships to address homelessness – a natural next step thanks to her tenure at EPPD.

Emergency and public services in El Paso are connected through and dispatched by the Multi-Agency Tactical Response Information eXchange (MATRIX), also known as the El Paso Fusion Center. The Fusion Center is a collaboration between local, state and federal agencies in El Paso and Dona Ana County, New Mexico. All public safety service calls to 911 in the region are handled through the Fusion Center, where local law enforcement and fire, animal control, crisis, emergency medical services, and other departments are integrated and triaged through this central point.

In December 2022, EPCH began its Homeless Outreach Street Team (HOST) program. EPCH leveraged the existing Fusion Center to create a dedicated nonemergency line (Channel 1) for issues related to homelessness. Officers responding to a call for service related to homelessness use their discretion in directly reaching the HOST team to provide options for people in lieu of issuing criminal charges or citations. Nonemergency dispatch can also route calls from the public for nonemergency situations involving people experiencing homelessness directly to the HOST team's discrete number.

In both scenarios, the HOST team can offer people connections to shelter and resources. This type of pre-arrest diversion can help address mental health issues, nonmedical drivers of health, and substance use that could be contributing to or exacerbated by inadequate or unstable housing. EPCH cites that 63% of people referred by these calls between

What is a fusion center?

Fusion centers are owned and operated by state and local entities and located in major urban areas. Federal partners offer support for deployed personnel, training, technical assistance, grants, and technology.

-Department of Homeland Security

A fusion center offers an efficient way to exchange information and intelligence, maximize resources, streamline operations, and improve the ability to fight crime and terrorism by merging data from a variety of sources.

-Bureau of Justice Assistance

January 2023 and June 2023 accepted shelter. One person they obtained housing for had been unhoused and living on the streets for 19 years.

El Paso's shelter capacity and needs are complicated by the daily processing of migrants entering the city who are processed through the U.S. Border Patrol Central Processing Center. While many people are moving through El Paso to reach another destination, the migrant population – which can exceed 1,000 new people daily – faces homelessness when they arrive. The HOST team can connect women and families to the center for emergency shelter while single males have other options, including the Salvation Army.

HOST also works closely with community partners to move people experiencing homelessness to permanent housing. They share information with partners on camp locations, input and reference basic demographic information through the HOST call line in the Homeless Information Management System, and use their network and expertise to connect people to long-term housing.

The efforts of EPCH and El Paso emergency and public services continue to make a positive difference for people experiencing chronic homelessness.

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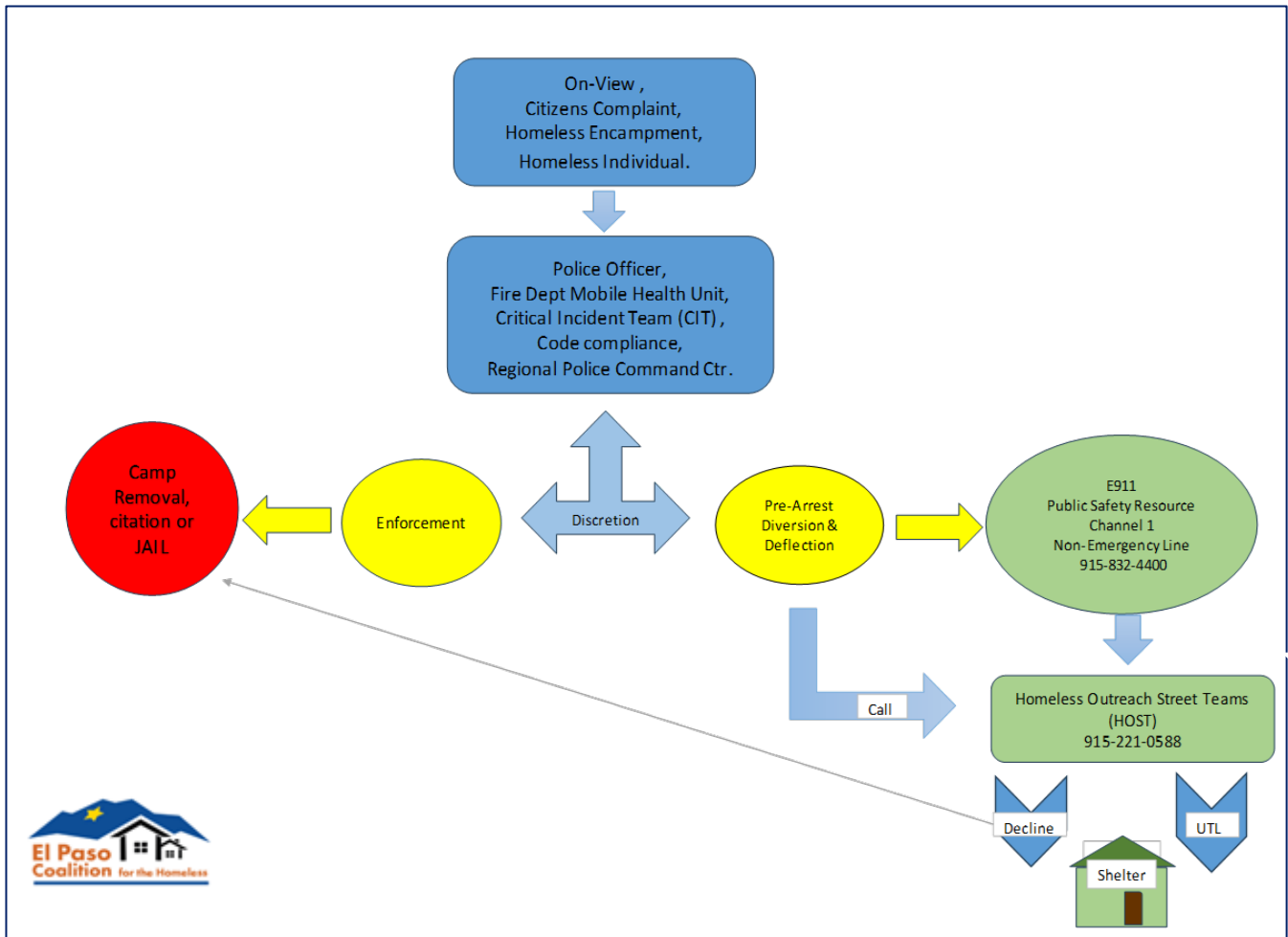


Additional Resources

- [Outreach & Enrollment Quick Guide: Promising Strategies for Engaging the Homeless Population](#). Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. 2014.
- [Police Mental Health Collaboration Toolkit](#). Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA).
- [The Role of Outreach and Engagement in Ending Homelessness: Lessons Learned from SAMHSA's Expert Panel](#). United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. 2016.



Diversion Workflow



The El Paso Coalition for the Homeless implements the above model to assist people experiencing homelessness. This 2023 flowchart was created and shared with permission of Leslie Canada, El Paso Coalition for the Homeless.