

Williamson County: 9-1-1 Crisis Call Diversion

People experiencing or witnessing a mental health crisis often call 911 for help. Since a soft launch during January 2022, Williamson County residents calling 911 are offered help from emergency medical responders, police, firefighters, and now mental health professionals. Bluebonnet Trails Community Services (BTCS) entered a strategic partnership with Williamson County Emergency Services embedding mental health clinicians in the Emergency Operations Center. Beyond the primary goal of connecting more people to critical crisis care when they need it most, a secondary goal of the program is to reduce unnecessary hospitalizations, arrests, and utilization of law enforcement and EMS resources.



Through this new program BTCS mental health professionals provide crisis intervention, de-escalation, and treatment coordination for persons in crisis through the dispatch center. Depending on the severity of the situation, this could include a Mobile Crisis Outreach Team response or a dual response in partnership with law enforcement. For a person determined not to be in imminent risk of danger to themselves or others, BTCS will provide connections to needed supports, reducing the need for law enforcement, fire, and EMS involvement.

“Having mental health professionals on the 911 communications floor now allows the appropriate resources to be determined and sent,” Williamson County Sheriff Mike Gleason said in a press release. “This allows us to better target specifically which first responders are needed and makes resources available for other calls.”

“Having mental health professionals on the communications floor will be a tremendous resource to the first responders in the field and may alert other emergency responders on what to expect in the field,” said Chris Connealy, Senior Director of Williamson County Emergency Services.

“This partnership has enabled more people to quickly access the mental health care – and follow up care – they need. Awareness is rising and the stigma of mental illness is fading,” Show Yang, BTCS Program Manager, 911 Dispatch Program.

Preliminary Outcomes

Meeting monthly with law enforcement throughout Williamson County, Bluebonnet Trails Community Services continues to customize the program and their approach

to best support first responders. Ongoing data collection and analysis is essential to that process. Since the program's inception:

- 40% of all calls have resulted in diversions from jail;
- 46% resulted in a mental health assist alongside a first responder in the field; and,
- 14% resulted in support and information shared by the mental health professional triaging the call.

Other Texas Communities with Similar Programs:

- Austin Police Department partnered with Austin-Travis County Integral Care to develop the Mental Health Crisis Call Diversion program. Since the programs launch in 2019, Austin 911 operators have successfully diverted thousands of calls to crisis clinicians.¹ Last year, 82% of calls with a mental health crisis component were diverted, meaning clinicians were able to help the caller without the need to send a police officer.²
- In 2015, the Harris Center launched the Crisis Call Diversion program in collaboration with the Houston Police Department (HPD), Houston Fire Department (HFD), Houston Emergency Center to decrease the volume of non-emergency mental health-related calls for service for both HPD patrol and HFD emergency medical services.³ Between March 2016 and March 2021 the CCD program diverted almost 7,500 calls from law enforcement response, saving more than \$2 million in resources for the police department.⁴

Resources:

- [Integrating 9-1-1 and Behavioral Health Response](#), Texas Health and Human Services Commission
- [Tips for Successfully Implementing a 911 Dispatch Diversion Program](#), Council of State Governments Justice Center
- [Community Responder Programs: Understanding the Call Triage Process](#), Council of State Governments Justice Center
- [Crisis Call Diversion Program](#), Houston CIT
- [Austin's 911 Call Center Integrates Mental Health Crisis Diversion](#), CrisisTalk

¹ <https://www.kxan.com/news/local/austin/austin-911-has-successfully-transferred-thousands-of-mental-health-calls-to-crisis-clinicians/>

² Integral Care. Combined Transportation, Emergency, and Communications Center Crisis Call Diversion Program Cost Analysis, October 2020

³ <https://www.houstoncit.org/ccd/>

⁴ Neylon, Kristin. (2021, December 14). Embedding crisis response in Harris County's 911 Dispatch Center. #CrisisTalk. Retrieved December 15, 2021, from <https://talk.crisisnow.com/embedding-crisis-response-in-harris-countys-911-dispatch-center/>