

Alternative Crisis Response | Policy Model from Durham, North Carolina

Though navigating community mental health crises is a complex issue, it is clear that armed officer response is not the best solution. Alternative crisis response is not only safer for communities, but also leads to more comprehensive and long-term support. This kind of emergency response is just one item on Emancipate NC's policy menu for local policing reform. View the full menu of local policy models [here](#).

Community Response

A substantial number of [911 calls](#) are related to mental health emergencies and are often non-violent. But, a mental health emergency can quickly escalate if the responder is not adequately trained to help a person in crisis. Alternative crisis response connects mental health professionals, instead of police, with individuals in need.

Durham's comprehensive crisis response solution, [HEART](#), ensures that individuals get the care they need without encountering an armed officer.

The initiative currently consists of three pilot programs, with a fourth to begin in the fall of 2023:

Crisis call diversion - adds mental health practitioners to Durham's 911 call center

Community response teams - dispatches an unarmed team of three people as first responders to non-violent behavioral health and quality of life calls

Care navigation - follows up with people 48 hours after meeting with first responders to ensure they receive appropriate care

HEART was initially met with skepticism by some in law enforcement. But, the model has shown [positive results](#) in Durham and other cities across the nation, including freeing up police resources for other emergencies.

16x more likely

Individuals with [untreated mental illness](#) are sixteen percent more likely to be killed in a police encounter.

June 2022

Durham launched pilot program Holistic Empathetic Assistance Response Teams (HEART) in June 2022.

2,500 responses

HEART responded 2,500 times to 911 [calls made](#) between June and December 2022.

0% of HEART cases

No cases where HEART responded [required police](#) department backup.



Those moments of a mental health crisis can be devastating if they are not handled with care and if they're not addressed with...concern for the neighbor who's undergoing that crisis."

Anise Vance, Assistant Director
Durham's Community Safety Department

Tips for Implementation

- Develop a pilot program to test alternative crisis response in your municipality
- Look at your county/city government and determine whether there's an [agency or program](#) within an agency that would be a good fit to pilot the program
- Create a [budget](#) for having a program director and three licensed providers
- Find [champions](#) for the program and get them to help organize around program expansion beyond the pilot phase