

# Improving POLICE RESPONSE to Persons Affected by MENTAL ILLNESS



***Report from the  
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# EXTENT OF THE ISSUE

Law enforcement agencies across the world are increasingly required to respond to and intervene on behalf of people who are affected by mental illness.

There is compelling evidence to suggest that law enforcement agencies need to enhance their training on interactions with persons affected by mental illness. Research conducted by the *Washington Post* and the Treatment Advocacy Center (TAC) highlight how often the interactions between persons affected by mental illness and the police can lead to injury or fatality.

- In 2015, the *Washington Post* noted that victims who were mentally ill or experiencing an emotional crisis accounted for one-fourth of those killed in officer-involved shootings.<sup>1</sup>
- The Treatment Advocacy Center (TAC) found that persons with severe mental illnesses are 16 times more likely to be killed by police than other civilians.<sup>2</sup>
- According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA), in a large urban police department, 11 percent of officer-involved shootings in a ten-year period were identified as suicide-by-cop.<sup>3</sup>
- Studies conducted in both Canada and the United Kingdom suggest that police response to persons affected by mental illness is not a United States-centric issue.

1 Kimberly Kindy et al., “A Year of Reckoning: Police Fatally Shoot Nearly 1,000,” <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/investigative/2015/12/26/a-year-of-reckoning-police-fatally-shoot-nearly-1000>.

2 “Mentally Ill Are 16 Times More Likely to Be Killed by Police,” Sott.net (Signs of the Times), <http://www.sott.net/article/308250-Report-Mentally-ill-are-16-times-more-likely-to-be-killed-by-police>.

3 Ibid. The APA discounted other studies reporting even higher percentages.

## Promising Programs and Services

- **The Crisis Intervention Team (CIT)** program is a collaborative initiative between law enforcement officers and mental health experts to provide crisis intervention for persons affected by mental illness and focus on diversion and treatment over arrest and incarceration.
- **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** is an eight-hour course focused on mental illnesses and addictions as well as providing law enforcement with effective response options in order to de-escalate incidents without compromising safety.
- **Smart 9-1-1** is a private service that allows citizens to provide personal details in a secure online “Safety Profile” that is accessible to 9-1-1 dispatchers.

# CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

## Recent Changes Affecting Mental Health Services

- Bi-partisan criminal justice reform programs, such as the *Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing*, provide a contemporary framework for discussion about improving law enforcement services.
- The widespread use of social media, and in particular each department's ability to respond effectively through their own social media platforms creates an opportunity for the public to more fully understand each incident in question.
- Synthetic drug distribution and abuse has increased in recent years, to which persons affected by mental illness may be particularly vulnerable.
- Changes in insurance laws provide more access to health insurance, including mental health and substance use disorder treatment, to those who previously did not qualify.

## Challenges to Improving Law Enforcement Response

- The creation and maintenance of strong partnerships with mental health advocacy organizations, hospitals, jails, schools, churches, legislatures, and government.
- The need for wider implementation of a response model that meets the needs of police agencies in their individual communities.
- When state and local laws/policies need to be amended, such changes require action by legislators, administrative bodies, and policy makers.

## Platforms to Address These Challenges

- Effective partnerships are the key platform to facilitating change in the way law enforcement responds to persons affected by mental illness.
- Police training is a critical venue for change. Delivering effective training is a challenge, particularly for smaller agencies that lack the necessary resources or personnel; however, providing consistent training is important.
- Smartphone applications (apps) can be ideal opportunities to provide police officers with easy access to information about local service programs and providers, diversion opportunities, and training tools.
- The IACP's One Mind Campaign is a platform from which to launch enhanced law enforcement services to persons affected by mental illness.

# THE ONE MIND CAMPAIGN

The One Mind Campaign seeks to ensure successful interactions between police officers and persons affected by mental illness. To join the campaign, law enforcement agencies commit to implementing four promising practices over a 12-36 month timeframe. Agencies demonstrating a serious commitment to implementing all four required strategies in a timely fashion will become publicly recognized members of IACP's One Mind Campaign.

## Four Required Practices:

1. **ESTABLISH** a clearly defined and sustainable relationship with at least one community mental health organization. This partnership will serve to institutionalize effective collaboration between the police agency and the mental health community. Where appropriate, a Memorandum of Understanding can be crafted.
2. **DEVELOP** and implement a written policy addressing law enforcement response to persons affected by mental illness. A written policy ensures that the department is taking a holistic approach and setting minimum standards for necessary training, officer response, and evaluation of outcomes.
3. **DEMONSTRATE** that 100 percent of sworn officers (and selected non-sworn staff, such as dispatchers) are trained and certified in MHFA. Officers who have taken this eight hour course are able to employ a variety of de-escalation and communication techniques to reduce the likelihood of an unfavorable outcome.
4. **DEMONSTRATE** that a minimum of 20 percent of all sworn officers (and selected non-sworn staff, such as dispatchers) are trained and certified in CIT. This comprehensive course

uses a team approach, which connects officers with mental health professionals during a law enforcement response.

Beyond the four campaign strategies, there are multiple approaches that hold promise as well. These action items are promoted by the campaign as optional, but worthy of serious consideration:

- Provide mental health training in academies and routinely implement updated training in department roll calls.
- Partner with a state association of chiefs or sheriffs to adopt a statewide model.
- Effectively utilize technology to enhance awareness of community mental health services.
- Take a leadership role with City/County/State government in supporting the establishment of a mental health court.
- Implement routine diversity and cultural awareness trainings, focused on where culture or language barriers make effective response more difficult.
- Consider the benefit of enrolling in the Stepping Up Initiative, which was initiated in May 2015 by The Council of State Governments Justice Center, The National Association of Counties, and The American Psychiatric Association Foundation.

## How to Join the One Mind Campaign:

Take the pledge today! Join your colleagues in enhancing your community by reducing injuries, saving lives, and strengthening community-police relations.

Visit <http://www.theIACP.org/onemindcampaign> to take the pledge and for further information.

# RESOURCES

## The One Mind Campaign

[www.theIACP.org/onemindcampaign](http://www.theIACP.org/onemindcampaign)

## IACP Model Policy

Responding to Persons Affected  
by Mental Illness or in Crisis

[www.theIACP.org/MPMentallIllness](http://www.theIACP.org/MPMentallIllness)

## MHFA

Mental Health First Aid

[www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs](http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs)

## CIT

Crisis Intervention Team International

[www.citinternational.org](http://www.citinternational.org)



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