



MAINE CRIMINAL JUSTICE/MENTAL HEALTH BRIEFS

CRISIS INTERVENTION TEAMS

Policy makers in Maine have initiated a number of strategies to divert mentally ill persons from jail during the pre-booking or post-booking stages. These diversion strategies have shown success in decreasing jail stays for persons with mental illness and increasing police response times, as well as saving money. The following is a description of one type of strategy that relies on police officers to identify and divert persons with mental illness from entering the criminal justice system.

What are Crisis Intervention Teams

A Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) is a pre-booking diversion strategy with a police-based specialized response. Officers receive special training to help them appropriately respond to calls that may concern a person with mental illness. Their role is to avoid arrest and incarceration through either negotiation, de-escalation, providing referral for service, or when necessary, transporting a person to a mental health facility instead of jail. While different cities may have different programs, these are some common characteristics of crisis intervention teams:

- Trained police officers respond to calls concerning ‘mental disturbance’
- Officers make on-site assessment to determine the next step
- The goal is to avoid arrest or incarceration if possible
- Teams operate in collaboration with local mental health facilities

In some CIT programs, dispatchers play a key role by identifying if mental illness is a factor; they dispatch calls for a CIT response as appropriate. Officers provide on-scene assessments to determine whether mental illness is a factor. CIT officers use their training to identify alternatives to incarcerations through negotiating or de-escalating a situation, referring to a service, or providing transportation to a mental health facility. By collaborating with mental health centers, law enforcement also reduce the need for subsequent contacts through the development of police response evaluations.

Successful National Models

Memphis, Tennessee is credited with the first CIT model. In this model, police training is voluntary and is provided, free of cost, by local professionals. Officers respond to ‘mental disturbance’ calls in addition to their regular calls city-wide. There is at least one CIT officer available on each shift.

The Memphis program is a partnership between the Memphis Police Department and the University of Tennessee-Memphis Medical Center. The two organizations jointly developed procedures and facilities for the Medical Center’s Psychiatric Emergency Centers. The Center immediately accepts all referrals from CIT officers. This collaboration has enhanced the success of the Memphis CIT program. The Memphis CIT identifies its benefits as: lower arrest rate, decreased response time, frequent referrals for treatment, positively rated by officers, and a low cost to implement.

Crisis Intervention Teams in Maine

Police-based CIT teams are currently found in 10 law enforcement agencies including: Augusta, Portland, Lewiston, Piscataquis County Sheriff’s Department, and Bangor. Jail-based CIT teams are found in the Piscataquis and Penobscot County Jails.



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Diversion Re-Entry Steering Committee

The Committee is established to oversee the implementation of a joint action plan of action to address the needs of people with mental illness who are involved in the criminal justice system. The Diversion/Re-Entry (DRE) Steering Committee will focus on diverting people with mental illness from the criminal justice system and improving re-entry planning from prison or jail.

Maine Association of Criminal Defense
Lawyers (MACDL)
Maine Chiefs of Police
Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault
Maine Coalition to End Domestic
Violence
Maine Criminal Justice Academy
Maine Department of Corrections
(MDOC)
Maine Department of Health and
Human Services (DHHS)
Maine Judicial Branch
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