

**Report to / Rapport au:**

**OTTAWA POLICE SERVICES BOARD  
LA COMMISSION DE SERVICES POLICIERS D'OTTAWA**

**25 September 2023 / 25 septembre 2023**

**Submitted by / Soumis par:**

**Chief of Police, Ottawa Police Service / Chef de police, Service de police d'Ottawa**

**Contact Person / Personne ressource:**

**Deputy Chief Patricia Ferguson, Intelligence, Information and Investigations /  
Chef adjointe, Enquêtes, Information et Crime organisé et Crimes graves  
FergusonP@ottawapolice.ca**

**SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO CITY COUNCIL REQUEST: GRANT FUNDING FOR  
SAFER ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE PROGRAM FOR MENTAL  
HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE CRISIS**

**OBJET: RÉPONSE À UNE DEMANDE DU CONSEIL MUNICIPAL : ALLOUER  
UNE SUBVENTION AU PROGRAMME SOLUTIONS DE RECHANGE  
PLUS SÉCURITAIRES POUR L'INTERVENTION EN CAS DE CRISES  
DE SANTÉ MENTALE ET DE CONSOMMATION DE SUBSTANCES**

**REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

**That the Ottawa Police Services Board receive this report for information.**

**RECOMMANDATIONS DU RAPPORT**

**Que la Commission de services policiers d'Ottawa prenne connaissance du  
présent rapport à titre d'information.**

**BACKGROUND**

On July 12, 2023, Council directed staff to report back no later than the end of Q2 of 2024, in advance of 2025 Budget discussions, on the status of funding requests/or funds received from other sources or levels of government that would be used to fund the Crisis Response Pilot project.

Council approved Ottawa's first Community Safety and Well-Being Plan in October 2021 (ACS2021-EPSPPD-0003). The Plan includes six priorities including Mental Well-Being. One of the strategies within the Mental Well-Being priority is to "work with

partners to explore safer alternatives for mental health crises response.” The desired outcomes of this strategy include:

- Fewer mental well-being and substance use crisis situations are handled by the Ottawa Police Service (OPS)
- More follow-up and monitoring to offer ongoing support
- More mental well-being crisis situations are mitigated before reaching a crisis point
- Increased access to harm reduction and overdose prevention supports and services

At that same meeting, Council approved the strategies and action points to implement the first phase of this priority which is a safer alternative response program for mental health and substance use crises, as described in this report, including:

1. Strategies to establish an alternative call intake, triage and dispatch system for mental health and substance use crisis-related calls;
2. Strategies to establish a 24/7 trauma-informed and culturally appropriate crisis response service provided by community-based civilian-led multi-disciplinary mobile crisis response teams; and
3. Begin the necessary work to set up the required project governance, infrastructure, and resources to advance the proposed development and implementation for a program launch in Q3 2024.

### **Introduction of a community-driven model**

In January 2020, the Ottawa Police Service (OPS) presented its Mental Health Response Consultation Strategy to the Ottawa Police Services Board (Board). That report outlined the need to identify ways to respond to those in mental health or addictions crisis, outside of police interaction. An Ottawa Guiding Council for Mental Health and Addictions (Guiding Council) was created to collaboratively develop a community-driven framework, with the OPS attending as a partner, but not leading its development. It was important that solutions to respond to those in crisis were developed by community experts who were best positioned to create this framework.

As one of the outcomes in the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, the Guiding Council was given a mandate, by the City of Ottawa, to develop an enhanced or new mental health and substance use crisis response system that will improve outcomes for residents. The results of the Guiding Council’s efforts to date have led to a Mental

Health and Substance Use Strategy that is grounded in research, evidence, leading practices, and Ottawa residents' in-depth perspectives and lived experiences.

It was clear from the consultations that Ottawa residents and service providers wanted a 24/7/365 non-police, non-uniformed mental health and substance use crisis response system with the following key elements:

- A “no wrong door” approach where people can reach crisis response services through different channels;
- A multi-disciplinary crisis response team led by community-based organizations; and
- The expansion of peer support in new and existing crisis response services

The Guiding Council recommended a phased approach to implementing the community-based crises response prototype. The first phase of the strategy is expected to span three years (2024-2026) followed by a phased expansion, supported by strategies that are proven effective through an evaluation of the first phase. The first phase proposed actions to be implemented as part of the program strategy roll-out will include: 1) call diversion and 2) civilian-led response team.

#### **Call Diversion: Non-911 Number**

An alternate call intake, triage and dispatch system for mental health and substance use calls will be implemented. This provides a non-911 number for residents seeking mental health and substance use crisis support. In addition, and as part of this action, the Guiding Council will explore a specified set of calls going to 911 for mental health and substance use response that can also be referred to the non-911 services for assessment, triage, and dispatch of the response teams.

#### **Response Team: 24/7/365 Community-based Civilian-led**

Community-based and civilian-led multi-disciplinary mobile crisis response teams will offer a 24/7/365 trauma-informed and culturally appropriate crisis response service. The response team will be managed through community partner agencies that, in addition to the mobile crises team, can provide individuals with wrap-around supports providing a continuum of care with pathways to services. The multi-disciplinary mobile crisis response team will be made up of professionals, including mental health professionals, outreach workers, and peer support workers. Peer supporters provide stability, system navigation, and advocacy supports to individuals during and following a crisis. The community partner agencies will also be responsible for assembling a network of supporting agencies in the defined geographic area.

One of the recommendations of the Community Safety and Well-Being Mental Well-Being Priority Progress Update: Safer Alternatives for Mental Health and Substance Use Crises Response presented at the July 12 Council meeting was:

4. Request that the Ottawa Police Services Board (Board) seek grant funding through other levels of government to support the strategies and actions described in this report to establish a safer alternate response program.

## **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Board and Council on the progress of seeking grant funding from other levels of government to establish a safer alternate response program.

The OPS has begun the process of seeking grant funding through other levels of government and has worked with the City of Ottawa to assemble a three-year funding request package. It was submitted to the Honourable Michael Kerzner, Minister of the Solicitor General, on Monday, September 11, 2023.

The OPS recognizes the need to transform our existing mental health and substance use crisis response to better serve these individuals. The development of an alternate response model requires a whole-of-community engagement in order to effectively leverage the expertise of our frontline partners and incorporate feedback from those with lived experiences.

By forging strong partnerships with mental health professionals and community stakeholders, we envision a transformative model that will break down barriers, reduce stigmas, and create a safer and more supportive environment for all members of our community. This alternative approach model was the result of input from community members and service providers and represents a systems change through multiple approaches that unite different parts of Ottawa's community. The program was co-produced with the Ottawa Guiding Council for Mental Health and Addictions which is made up of representation from Ottawa-based community, health, and social service networks working to respond to mental health crises, and the City of Ottawa.

The Ottawa Police Service is a fully supportive partner of the Guiding Council's Safer Alternative Response Plan and continues to work collaboratively with the Guiding Council to develop an implementation plan.