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TO: Community Services Committee

DESTINATAIRE : Comité des services communautaires

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DATE: November 25, 2025

25 novembre 2025

FILE NUMBER: ACS2025-CSS-GEN-016

SUBJECT: Alternate Neighbourhood Crisis Response (ANCHOR) Year One Update

OBJET : Solution de rechange communautaire pour l'intervention en cas de crise (ANCRE) – Mise à jour de la première année

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide the Mayor and Members of Council with an update on the Alternate Neighbourhood Crisis Response (ANCHOR) at the end of the first year of its implementation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Launched on August 15, 2024, the [Alternate Neighbourhood Crisis Response \(ANCHOR\)](#) is a 24/7, community-led, culturally sensitive, and equity-focused response for mental health and substance use (MHSU) crises, which dispatches skilled teams to people experiencing such crises. ANCHOR's community-based response is designed as an alternative to police responses to MHSU crises. ANCHOR is based on recommendations from the research led by [The Ottawa Guiding Council for Mental Health and Addictions](#). It is funded through the Ministry of the Solicitor General as part of the [Ontario-Ottawa Agreement](#) until March 2027.

ANCHOR was first implemented in Centretown in collaboration with Community Navigation of Eastern Ontario (CNEO/211), Centretown Community Health Centre (CHC), and Somerset West CHC.

In the first year of implementation, ANCHOR applied a collective impact approach focused on ensuring that a solid foundation was laid, and a robust evaluation framework was in place to collect feedback for continuous quality improvement. The Community Safety and Wellbeing team in Community and Social Services provides secretariat, project management, evaluation and funding support to the initiative. Exploring safer alternatives to police for mental health crisis response is the first of three strategies under the Mental Well-Being pillar of Ottawa's Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Plan.

ANCHOR is meeting its objectives for providing a safer alternate response to mental health and substance use crisis. In its first year, ANCHOR received **4,464** calls, a majority of which were made directly to ANCHOR – **4,138** (92.70 per cent) and **326** (7.30 per cent) were transferred from 911/Ottawa Police Service (OPS). Feedback from service users and community partners highlights the positive impact of ANCHOR and demonstrates ANCHOR's effectiveness in providing timely and compassionate support.

BACKGROUND

The Alternate Neighbourhood Crisis Response (ANCHOR) was launched as a prototype on August 15, 2024 in Centretown following approval and funding from Ottawa City Council ([ACS2023-CSS-GEN-010](#)) in July 2023. ANCHOR is a safer alternate response to mental health and substance use (MHSU) crises because it is community-led, culturally sensitive and equity-centered and dispatches skilled crisis response teams to people experiencing a MHSU crisis. ANCHOR's design is a result of recommendations from the research led by the Ottawa Guiding Council for Mental Health and Addictions (the Guiding Council) in its 2023 report: [Transforming Mental Health and Substance Use Crisis Response in Ottawa: The Report](#).

The Guiding Council was convened in January 2021 by a [motion](#) of the Ottawa Police Services Board to respond to requests from Ottawa community members to examine alternatives to a police response for mental health and substance use crises. In December 2021, the Guiding Council accepted the [mandate from Ottawa City Council](#) to work with the Community and Social Services Department to develop a culturally appropriate, trauma-informed enhanced or new mental health and substance use crisis response system that will improve outcomes for Ottawa residents experiencing such crises.

In July 2023 ([ACS2023-CSS-GEN-010](#)), Council approved the alternate response model and also appointed Councillor Bradley to attend meetings of the Guiding Council as a non-voting member to facilitate the transition from a strategic planning phase to operational readiness. Since 2023, Councillor Bradley attended meetings of the Guiding Council to facilitate the goal of expediting and streamlining implementation of the safer alternative response prototype. As ANCHOR is fully operational, Councillor Bradley has now fulfilled the terms of her appointment to the Guiding Council.

Exploring safer alternatives to police for mental health crisis response is the first of three strategies under the Mental Well-Being pillar of Ottawa's Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Plan. Community and Social Services Department partners with the Emergency and Protective Services Department, Ottawa Public Health, and Ottawa Police Service to deliver on this strategy.

The CSWB Office has updated Council on ANCHOR progress previously in:

- Memo: Update – Formative Evaluation for Safer Alternate Response for Mental Health and Substance User Crises Prototype (February 27, 2025)
- Memo: Status of Funding for Safer Alternate Response for Mental Health and Substance Use Crises Prototype (November 25, 2024)
- Memo: Update on the Safer Alternate Response for Mental Health and Substance User Crises Prototype (August 13, 2024)

ANCHOR 1-YEAR RESULTS

On August 15, 2025, ANCHOR completed one year of implementation in Centretown. ANCHOR service was available 24/7 within the following defined boundaries: Ottawa River (North), Rideau Canal (East), Highway-417 (South) and Preston Street (West). ANCHOR's 1-year results show a marked increase in ANCHOR calls to 211 since the formative evaluation which indicates that ANCHOR is progressing as intended.

Furthermore, it demonstrates an increase in the community's trust and confidence in ANCHOR's services and that community members feel safe to call ANCHOR. ANCHOR is meeting the community need for non-police, community-led, safer alternate response to mental health and substance use crises.

The [infographic](#) details ANCHOR's result in its first year of implementation (August 15, 2024, to August 15, 2025). The highlights are:

- **4,464** calls were successfully received by ANCHOR – **4,138** calls (**92.70** per cent) were received on the 2-1-1 line of CNEO/211,
- **326** calls (**7.30** per cent) were transferred from 911/Ottawa Police Service (OPS), a pointer towards calls that OPS would have handled if ANCHOR (a community-based response) did not exist, thereby creating additional capacity for OPS to focus on other calls.
- Compared to the baseline data collected during the first 11 weeks, ANCHOR calls received through 211 increased by about **8** per cent throughout the rest of the first year of the program. The average call wait time was one minute eight seconds.

- Out of all the calls received successfully by ANCHOR, **41.98** per cent (**1,874**) were dispatched to the ANCHOR Crisis Response Workers, **52.40** per cent (**2,339**) were addressed virtually (on the phone) by CNEO/211 Community Navigators and did not require dispatch. Only **5.62** per cent (**251**) were redirected to 911 for reasons that included potential for serious bodily harm to a person, or the person calling was outside of the catchment area.
- With regards to call diversion in the context of ANCHOR, **92.47** per cent of calls dispatched to ANCHOR Crisis Response Workers were handled with no police involvement.
- The average call duration was 4 minutes 42 seconds while the median crisis response time (from dispatch to arrival) was 11 minutes.
- CNEO/211's ANCHOR Community Navigators made **1,632** referrals to various agencies – for service users to receive additional support and resources related to family services, housing, health, information services, mental health and substance use disorders and financial assistance.
- ANCHOR Crisis Response Workers provided support in **87.10** per cent of the dispatched calls and when the team was providing onsite support only **1.15** per cent of the calls were rerouted to 911 due to reasons such as imminent danger of serious bodily harm, or criminal act has been implied/committed.
- Onsite support provided includes active listening and emotional support, well-being check, crisis counselling, crisis de-escalation, and referrals for ongoing case management and system navigation.

The following were the key project deliverables of ANCHOR.

- Establishment of Project Implementation structure which ensured regular connection among ANCHOR partners and coordination of ANCHOR operations with Ottawa Paramedic Service, Ottawa Police Service, and other City partners.
- Inclusive hiring and 200+ hours training curriculum for ANCHOR staff for call intake and dispatch, crisis response workers and post-crisis support.
- A public awareness campaign and branding for ANCHOR, including the [ANCHOR Community Report](#).
- Development of a robust, trauma-informed and equity-centered framework to track, monitor and report on key indicators over ANCHOR's lifetime.

- A [formative evaluation](#) of the first 11 weeks of implementation to assess ANCHOR's activities, identify opportunities for operational efficiency, improve data collection and quality, and ensure service delivery excellence throughout the program's lifecycle.
- A publicly available dashboard with relevant ANCHOR Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) is in testing and is expected to be released in Q4 2025 – Q1 2026.
- The CSWB Office responded on behalf of City of Ottawa and Ottawa Public Health to the recommendations of inquest into the death of Mr. Abdirahman Abdi. Recommendations key to ANCHOR include: Ottawa Police Service to “continue to refer mental health calls to Alternate Neighbourhood Crisis Response (ANCHOR) when suitable” and City of Ottawa, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Solicitor General to “Consult on ways, and provide funding, to evaluate and expand the availability of ANCHOR or similar community-based, peer led 24/7 crisis intervention programs to the entire City of Ottawa”.¹

ANCHOR continuously receives positive feedback from all partners on the ground. The following are sample testimonies:

- “The ANCHOR Team saved my life, and as a result I will be graduating next week.”
- “I work at a community building which regularly uses this program. The amount of times we have avoided wasting emergency response resources is incredible. [ANCHOR] show up so much faster than police and almost always resolve the issue. Glad this program is in place.”
- “My elderly neighbour was having a mental health episode, wandering the halls, barely dressed for the cold. The ANCHOR team helped him back home and even tucked him in to bed. They made him an appointment for further support the next day. Your team are angels!”
- “I've called ANCHOR once when a woman was screaming and crying by herself on a very cold day. I was glad I could get her some professional help without involving the police or ambulance -- after all, she wasn't committing a crime and didn't seem to require an ambulance. She still needed help though. This fills an important service gap.”

¹ [Abdi Inquest recommendations](#)

NEXT STEPS

1. ANCHOR Evaluation: The CSWB Office is leading a mid-term prototype evaluation of ANCHOR guided by ANCHOR Evaluation Framework. The mid-term evaluation will be published in Q2-Q3 2026.
2. Prototype Adjustment: The original prototype boundaries were set to effectively launch the prototype in Centretown. The year one data has now informed the need to adjust the existing boundaries to include more Centretown geography. The CSWB Office is working with ANCHOR partners to phase in the adjustment of existing prototype boundaries, within the existing project budget. Beginning this fall, the exiting prototype will extend into the current catchment area for the Somerset West Community Health Centre, westward to Island Park Drive and southward to Carling Avenue. The prototype boundary will be cut off at Bronson Avenue between Carling Avenue and the Queensway (See Map of ANCHOR Prototype Catchment Area in Appendix I).
3. In 2026, the CSWB staff will engage local partners such as the Guiding Council, Community Navigation Eastern Ontario, Centretown Community Health Centre (CHC) and Somerset West CHC to conduct a data review to inform an ANCHOR expansion strategy, including a business case for additional communities.
4. Funding: ANCHOR is currently funded from the Ministry of Solicitor General until March 2027. Aligned to recommendation #44 of the inquest into the death of Mr. Abdirahman Abdi, the CSWB Office will be working with ANCHOR partners to advocate for sustainable sources of funding.²
5. To implement Abdi Inquest recommendations #8, the CSWB Office will continue to work closely with Ottawa Police Service to increase diversion of mental health crisis calls to ANCHOR program.

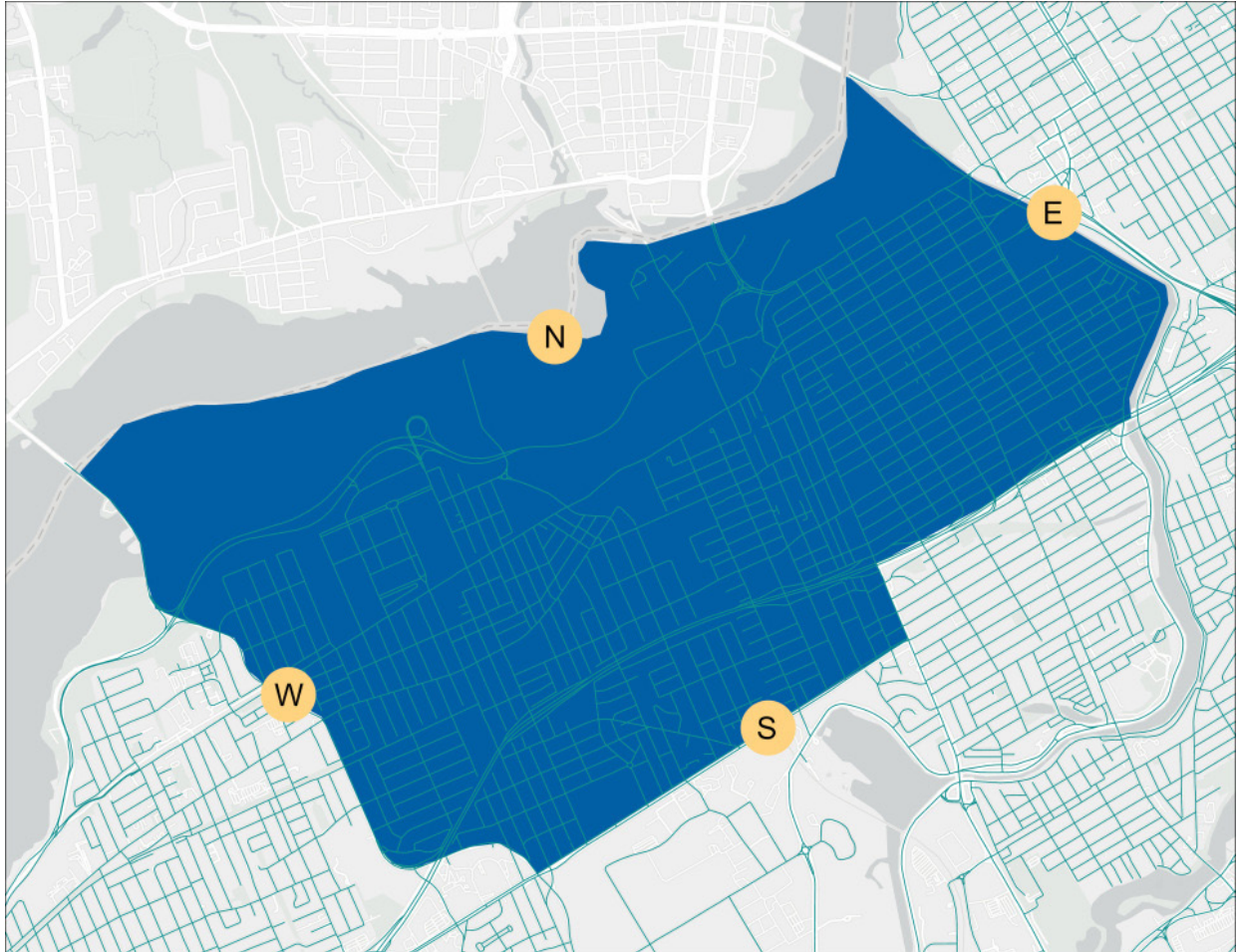
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SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

1. City of Ottawa/Ottawa Public Health Response to Abdi Inquest Recommendations
2. Abdi Inquest Verdict Form

² [Abdi Inquest recommendations](#)

Appendix I: Map of ANCHOR Prototype Catchment Area



Prototype Boundaries

- North: Ottawa River
- East: Rideau Canal
- South: Trans-Canada Hwy/ON-417, Carling Avenue between Island Park and Bronson
- West: Island Park Drive