

Report to / Rapport au:

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

26 October 2020 / 26 octobre 2020

Submitted by / Soumis par:

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

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SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO INQUIRY I-20-12: HANDLING OF MENTAL HEALTH CALLS

OBJET: RÉPONSE À LA DEMANDE DE RENSEIGNEMENTS I-20-12 : GESTION DES APPELS LIÉS À LA SANTÉ MENTALE

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Ottawa Police Services Board receives this report for information.

RECOMMANDATIONS DU RAPPORT

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

INQUIRY

How is a call for service handled by the Ottawa Police Service (OPS) when it is known to be a mental health related call, as well as when officers are dispatched to a call where there is a mental health component that only becomes known on officer arrival?

RESPONSE

The Ottawa Police Service (OPS) responds to about 6,000 calls for service every year involving someone in a mental health crisis. That number can be augmented by shifting demands that often transpire during a call; including emergent response and those with pre-existing or known issues. A call that starts off as neighbour dispute could change to a mental health response, depending on exigent circumstances.

Our Mental Health Unit (MHU) officers have specialized training and are paired up with The Ottawa Hospital (TOH) mental health nurses to attend addresses where people are known to have had prior mental health emergency calls. This is in addition to check-ins of about 40 per day, that will often involve follow-up calls to ensure the resident's safety, based on direct calls to the unit. Our Memorandum of Understanding with TOH helps us to re-divert and redirect those in need to the support services to help them. But in many cases, those in crisis will call our MHU directly based on existing relationships.

The OPS is developing a new Mental Health Response Strategy that will be included in the Draft 2021 Ottawa Police Service Budget. The three-year strategy is designed to build new capacity to deal with mental health issues in Ottawa. It will be developed and co-led in close consultation with our partners in the mental health community.

The goal of the strategy is to identify better and more coordinated methods to help people in mental health crisis. This includes coordinating access to appropriate services for people with mental health issues.

At a high level, the three-year strategy will focus on improving four key areas:

- **Initial Response:** We will work with community partners to build on our current MHU capacity and crisis response options by involving professional mental health practitioners in frontline response.
- **Improved Screening:** A key area of opportunity includes placing mental health professional capacity on-site in the 911 communications centre to help determine a response based on their professional experience. We will work with community partners to develop this model and increase mental health training for all communications centre staff.
- **Better Follow-up:** The strategy seeks to ensure that people with mental health challenges, who come in contact with police services, receive improved accessibility and coordination with appropriate community resources. We will work with partners to identify and leverage existing and new services and expertise. This approach will be designed to help people avoid a crisis situation later.
- **Increased Training for Frontline Members:** Working with our partners, we will identify opportunities for new and enhanced training on mental health for all members in frontline positions, including de-escalation and helping people in mental health crisis.

We have seen a year-over-year increase in calls for service to police related mental health increase and the current system is not adequately addressing the needs of our community, specifically those who need better access to mental health services.

We also know that mental health issues are a major factor in calls for service to police. These types of calls require a disproportionate amount of officer time and effort. It's clear that more research needs to be done to ensure we understand the full impact.

Mental health is a community issue, and it requires an all-of-community response. We will be meeting with local stakeholders to hear their input on where support is needed, and how the OPS can effectively respond to people in crisis.