

Introduction to the  
Palo Alto Police Department  
**Psychiatric Emergency Response Team (PERT)**



COUNTY OF SANTA CLARA  
**Behavioral Health Services**

# WHAT IS PERT?

- ❖ PERT employs a joint-response model, comprised of a BHSD clinician and PAPD officer paired up full-time.
- ❖ PERT responds to real-time, crisis situations, utilizing the joint response model.
- ❖ The purpose is to divert individuals to community-based treatment and reduce hospitalization/incarceration, as appropriate, and to prevent future encounters with law enforcement.
- ❖ Another goal of PERT is to improve law enforcement's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in response to mental health issues.

## Joint Response Team

### Clinician

- Embedded with patrol, real-time response with police radio
- Access to County EHRs – field laptops
- Conducts Mental Health Evaluations
- Assist in determining appropriate call disposition
- Write 5150/5585 applications/related coordination of care
- Consult with officers regarding de-escalation strategies/tactics
- Provide referral/resource linkage

### Officer

- Patrol officer, dressed down in modified uniform
- Access to criminal history/prior LE calls
- Provide safety for clinician, clients, and community
- Provide/coordinate transportation to identified level of care
- Consult with on-scene officers/clinician regarding de-escalation strategies/tactics
- Responsible for control/safety within PERT
- Evaluate scene for criminal behavior

# SERVICES PROVIDED

- ◇ Rapid Crisis Response for the most imminent emergencies;
- ◇ Mental health evaluations and assessments of individuals and families;
- ◇ Crisis intervention, de-escalation, safety planning;
- ◇ Threat mitigation, crisis/hostage negotiation support;
- ◇ Referral, resource linkage, coordination of care;
- ◇ Provide or coordinate transportation of individuals to most appropriate level of care;
- ◇ Post-crisis follow-up

# POPULATIONS SERVED

- ❖ PERT primarily serves all adults over the age of 18.
- ❖ No individual will be turned away by PERT based on age. If a youth is in imminent crisis and at risk, PERT can and will respond.

# WHAT TO EXPECT

- ❖ PAPD PERT consists of one officer and one clinician.
- ❖ PAPD PERT operates an unmarked vehicle.
- ❖ The PAPD PERT Officer wears a modified uniform, generally consisting of a polo t-shirt and black or grey pants.

# ACTIVATION AND REFERRAL SOURCES

- ❖ PERT calls are generated through PAPD's 24-hour dispatch center — either via the emergency line or the non-emergency line. PERT will then self-dispatch to calls-for-service, where appropriate.
- ❖ Law Enforcement may request or consult PERT.
- ❖ Law Enforcement may submit a PERT referral for follow-up services.

# CRITERIA FOR A PERT RESPONSE

- ❖ PERT responds to acute psychiatric emergencies that require a law enforcement response (i.e. imminent danger to self/others or presence of weapons/other elements of danger).
- ❖ PAPD PERT also responds to non-emergency welfare checks on a case-by-case basis, where there may be an underlying mental health component.
- ❖ PAPD PERT serves as the Police Department's main point of contact for unhoused related concerns.

# TRANSLATING THE PERT MODEL INTO PRACTICE

- There is not one, uniform PERT model.
  - The success of PERT hinges on an agency's ability to tailor its offerings to the needs of its respective community.
- Unique to PAPD PERT, we have an added layer of duties:
  - We frequently arrive first on the scene, where the crisis may still be unstable.
  - We maintain frequent contact with the unhoused population, as homelessness is sometimes intertwined with mental illness.

# REFLECTIONS

## POSITIVE HIGHLIGHTS

- Teamwork makes the dream work.
  - Synthesizing the expertise from law enforcement and mental health
- PAPD personnel has been receptive to PERT's work and mission.
- We feel immense gratification from helping others.

## CHALLENGES

- Client refusal of services
- Managing expectations
  - Families



# Comments & Questions