



Citizens Police Oversight Commission

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

Inside the Philadelphia Police Department's New Behavioral Health Unit



PPD BEHAVIORAL HEALTH UNIT

In November 2022 the Philadelphia Police Department (PPD) launched a new Behavioral Health Unit (BHU) to improve police response for individuals actively suffering from various behavioral health and emotional crises.

The BHU seeks to provide alternative solutions to individuals in crisis by utilizing co-responder teams, as well as diverting certain low-level arrestees from the court system into treatment programs.

BHU response focuses on de-escalation and connecting individuals to supportive services and treatment programs instead of arresting them, allowing Philadelphia citizens to access the help they need to improve their quality of life and prevent them from future encounters with the police and court system.

BHU LEADERSHIP

The PPD has entrusted the following personnel with command of the Behavioral Health Unit

Chief Inspector Michael Cram, Homeland Security Bureau

Responsible for managing response efforts to critical incidents, as well as operations for special events citywide, Chief Inspector Cram began his career with the PPD in 1993. Over the past 30 years, he has worked patrol assignments as a Sergeant, Lieutenant, Captain, Staff Inspector, and Inspector. During the course of his career, he has served as the Chief County Detective for the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office. Outside of the PPD Chief Cram is a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army Reserve with over 34 years of service, including tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. He has a BA in Criminal Justice and a MA in Emergency Management and is a graduate of the Northwestern University School of Police Staff and Command, the FBI National Academy, and the Army's Advanced Operations Course.

Lieutenant Victoria Cassale, Commanding Officer

Lt. Casale began her career in 2015 as a patrol officer in the 25th District. After being promoted to Sergeant she served as a supervisor in the 1st District before being assigned to the 24th District, where she led the East Service Detail (ESD), serving the homeless and those struggling with substance use disorder in the Kensington community. While overseeing the ESD, she launched the Crisis Intervention Response Team's East Division Pilot Program. She holds Bachelor's and Masters of Science degrees from Drexel University and has completed a Graduate Certificate in Emergency and Disaster Management from Millersville University of Pennsylvania. Lt. Casale is also a member of the PPD's Major Incident Response Team.

Sergeant Ronald Fred, BHU Supervisor

Sgt. Fred began his career in 2000 as a patrol officer in the 26th District. After being promoted to sergeant in 2013, he served in the 19th District both as a patrol and a bike supervisor. Sgt. Fred was transferred to the City Wide Vice Enforcement Unit in 2015 where he served in the PPD's Human Trafficking Taskforce alongside Homeland Security Investigations and FBI counterparts. In this taskforce Sgt. Fred worked bring down perpetrators involved in human trafficking and to ensure the victims were connected to critical supportive services to help them rehabilitate from their endured traumas. Sgt. Fred was transferred to the BHU in 2022 where he serves as a Police Assisted Diversion Supervisor.

TWO-PHASE ROLLOUT PLAN

The PPD has a two phase rollout plan for the BHU. The unit is currently in the second phase of implementation, which should be complete near the end of spring, 2023.

01

CIRT Co-Responder Teams

CIRT teams are made up of specially trained PPD officers and civilian mental health professionals who are qualified to respond to 911 calls that involve individuals in active crisis.

02

Police Assisted Diversion

The Police Assisted Diversion program is a joint operation between the PPD, District Attorney's Office (DAO), and civilian service providers which seeks to divert offenders for certain low-level crimes from the criminal justice system, referring them to necessary treatment programs.



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PHASE 1: CRISIS INTERVENTION RESPONSE TEAMS (CIRT)

CIRT is a co-responder model that pairs sworn PPD officers with civilian mental health service providers.

CIRT teams provide a health-centered response to citizens experiencing behavioral or emotional crisis. This approach aims to:

- Reduce injuries to police and civilians.
- Reduce repeat 911 calls.
- Increase connection to services through partner providers.
- Provide additional mental health or crisis centered resources in the field to PPD and civilians.

CIRT teams are available to assist in getting approval for an involuntarily commitment if necessary. This includes assisting in completing paperwork and offering guidance such as Crisis Response Center navigation, de-escalation, and follow-up.

CIRT TEAMS

CIRT teams consist of **two sworn Crisis Intervention Trained (CIT) PPD officers and one civilian social services provider**. Teams operate in unmarked cars to provide a less forceful presence to citizens in crisis.

Two civilian follow up teams exist to engage with Philadelphia citizens who received CIRT services to ensure they maintain connections to necessary treatment to reduce the likelihood of future crises.

Four CIRT teams are available **citywide, Monday through Friday 7 am to 3 pm**. BHU command staff is working to make CIRT teams available from 7 am to 10 pm.

CIRT teams can be dispatched by 911. Teams may also be requested by other officers who encounter citizens in crisis and CIRT may initiate their own citizen encounters as well.

Since the BHU's inception, the majority of CIRT's citizen engagements were self-initiated, with requests by sworn officers, and PPD supervisors the second and third most common dispatch source.

SELECTION AND TRAINING

- Officers must be CIT certified
- CIRT teams undergo an 80-hour training course in crisis response, which focuses on identifying and de-escalating crisis situations
- CIRT teams receive additional crisis negotiation training

RESPONSE TO 911 CALLS

911 can directly dispatch a CIRT team to a call for service. This allows patrol officers to remain on patrol or respond to other emergency calls for service within their district.

TRANSPORTING CITIZENS

Because there are three people in a CIRT vehicle, teams are unable to transport individuals who wish to voluntarily commit themselves. BHU command staff intend to design a transportation system in the future.

CIRT STATISTICS

From November 22, 2022 to March 10, 2023 CIRT made **two hundred seventeen citizen engagements**, twelve of them being youth engagements.

Only **two CIRT engagements resulted in an arrest** and just **one required a use of force** by an officer.

Forty-six CIRT engagements involved a person with a weapon. Additionally, twenty-nine involved domestic situations and eleven involved a person with a gun.

Through CIRT's citizen engagements:

- 60 connections to supportive services were made.
- 42 individuals were assisted in voluntarily committing themselves.
- CIRT teams assisted in 50 involuntary commitments for individuals in crisis. 35 of which were done by a CIRT civilian clinician, while 9 were done by a CIRT officer and 6 were previously approved prior to CIRT's engagement.
- 63 follow up attempts were made by CIRT's civilian teams.

PHASE 2: POLICE ASSISTED DIVERSION (PAD)

PAD diverts citizens arrested for certain low-level crimes away from the court and jail system by guiding them into supportive treatment programs.

A person is offered PAD at the time of their arrest and must voluntarily services. If they accept, there will be no record of their arrest and they will be assigned to a PAD officer who will connect them to treatment programs.

Since being assigned to the BHU, PAD has become available in all police districts within the PPD's Regional Operations Command (ROC) North. This includes the 2nd, 5th, 7th, 8th, 14th, 15th, 22nd, 24th, 25th, 26th, 35th, and 39th districts. BHU command staff are working to expand PAD services city-wide and anticipate completing the expansion by the end of April, 2023.

PAD officers operate Monday through Friday from 8 am - 12 am. Upon completion of the second phase of the BHU's rollout, eight PAD officers will be assigned - four in ROC North and four in ROC South.

Since January 1, 2023 **the BHU has received 348 diversion referrals, of which 221 have been PAD eligible.** The primary referral source is drug arrests (224), followed by retail theft and prostitution.

PAD ELIGIBILITY

Arresting officers can check an individual's PAD eligibility at the time of their arrest. Philadelphia citizen's can be offered PAD if they are arrested for the following crimes in a ROC North district:

- Retail theft
- Low-level drug crimes (possession, purchasing, etc.)
- Prostitution

Individuals arrested for selling drugs (possession with intent to distribute) will not be offered PAD.

PAD INELIGIBILITY

A person may be denied PAD for a number of reasons which may include the following:

- An active warrant for their arrest.
- A person has already participated in PAD twice during previous arrests.
- Circumstances of the arrest include more serious crimes (e.g., a person arrested for retail theft also assaulted a store employee during the incident).

PPD's creation and implementation

of the Behavioral Health Unit is a great step towards improving equitable, health-centered services to Philadelphia communities.

Response efforts such as CIRT and PAD allow the PPD to provide a holistic response to vulnerable populations that regularly encounter police. The BHU provides another much-needed resource for Philadelphians to be connected to crucial services, rather than being funneled in and out of the court and jail system.

Furthermore, these types of police response efforts allow PPD patrol officers to better serve citizens by responding to emergency calls, proactively patrolling their districts, and engaging community members.

CPOC looks forward to seeing the positive impacts the BHU will have in communities across Philadelphia and hopes to see the unit expand its capacity as it proves successful.

WHEN ENCOUNTERING AN INDIVIDUAL IN CRISIS

If you encounter someone who appears to be in an active mental health or behavioral or emotional crisis **call 911.**

911 operators are trained to identify crisis situations and will dispatch the appropriate emergency responder to de-escalate the situation and provide the person with the help they need.

When calling 911, residents can and should **ask 911 to dispatch a CIT trained PPD officer** if a person appears to be in crisis.

If the person is presenting no immediate threat to themselves or public safety you may call 988 to be connected to the 24/7 civilian crisis response line for information and resources.

For more information, please click [here](#) to view the PPD's 'Guidelines for Effective Communication with 911 Dispatch.'

FOR MORE INFO

CPOC's mission is to review the policies, practices, and customs of the PPD, and help improve the relationship between the community and the police.

CPOC is always available to accept complaints and comments through our website:
Phila.gov/CPOC.

Please contact us online or by phone at (215) 685-0891 if you have any questions or concerns about the BHU.



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