Concerning Behavioral Health Situations and Incidents- FAQs

Community members often express that they don't know what to do when they see someone they're worried about, or witness behavior that is concerning but not criminal. While there is not a perfect answer to most situations, below are some answers to more specific, frequently asked questions about how to get help when you're not sure what to do. *This FAQ covers services offered by the City of Boulder. Longmont, Boulder County, and Louisville have their own dedicated co-response teams who respond with Longmont PD, Boulder County Sheriff's Office, and Louisville PD.*

You'll see the phrase "behavioral health" throughout this page. Behavioral health refers to situations where a person is experiencing mental health issues and/or a substance use disorder.

I'm seeing someone that's exhibiting concerning behavior or who looks incapacitated. I think they might have mental health problems. I want them to get help, but I don't want them to get in trouble. What should I do?

Most of the time, the answer is to call the Police Department dispatch at 911 (if the situation seems like an emergency or if you're unsure) or the non-emergency line at 303-441-3333.

Community members are not expected to know whether a situation is dangerous or not, so the best option is calling the police so that an appropriate assessment of the situation can be made. The goal of the Police Department is not to arrest people with behavioral health issues, and not all behavior that seems concerning is illegal. Whenever possible, police will bring the Crisis Intervention Response Team (CIRT), licensed behavioral health clinicians that can help people de-escalate and connect to services. Community members can request CIRT when they call police dispatch if the situation appears to involve someone in behavioral health crisis. There are some situations in which officers have no choice but to arrest the individual, such as when there are outstanding arrest warrants.

What are the options to get behavioral health help without involving the police if I don't think the situation is dangerous?

Multiple options exist for community members needing behavioral health help, including:

- Colorado Crisis Line: 1-844-493-8255 or text TALK to 38255.
- 24/7 Walk-in Crisis Center & Addiction Services at 3180 Airport Rd.
- Mobile Crisis Response through Colorado Crisis Line - Crisis clinicians respond to mental health crises wherever they are happening in Boulder County, including schools, workplaces, centers of worship, private residences, hotels/motels, shelters, stores, community events, outdoor areas, and many other locations. A mobile assessment of someone who is in crisis can avoid the possibility of law enforcement involvement and/or long, expensive psychiatric hospitalizations. A mobile response from this team may not be appropriate in all situations. For example, the person for whom mobile crisis response is being called must agree to the service. Call Colorado Crisis Line at 1-844-493-8255 to see if a mobile response is appropriate.

**City of Boulder
Housing & Human Services**

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What's being done proactively, to provide outreach or mental health services for people to prevent these situations?

The City of Boulder and its partners operate or fund numerous behavioral health and homelessness programs, including the following programs targeted to meet people where they are out in the community:

- Crisis Intervention Response Team (CIRT) – licensed behavioral health clinicians that can help people de-escalate and connect to services. CIRT responds with Boulder Police Department officers when the police are called to a situation involving behavioral health.
- Boulder Targeted Homelessness Engagement and Referral Effort (BTHERE) – a three-person team with personal experience with homelessness and housing instability, street outreach and engagement, and mental health training. BTHERE provides education and resources with its primary goals of engaging and building relationships as well as connecting people experiencing unsheltered homelessness to services.
- Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) – two Boulder Police Department officers that focus on engaging people experiencing homelessness in services and housing rather than enforcement actions.
- Municipal Court Homeless Navigator – focuses on connecting court-involved people experiencing homelessness with appropriate services.

In addition, the city provides funding for behavioral health and homeless services through Mental Health Partners, Boulder Shelter for the Homeless and other community partners. Programs are evaluated on a regular basis to identify new needs and opportunities for improvement.

It's frustrating when I call the police and they say they can't do anything, or I have to call on the same person repeatedly. Why does this happen if there are programs in place to help people?

Boulder Police Department officers respond to a variety of calls and work to resolve situations using the most beneficial options, including asking for a CIRT response or making referrals to service providers. Certain criteria must be met to arrest someone or take them to the hospital on an involuntary mental health hold, and those options are not the best solutions for many situations. In most instances involving behavioral health issues, CIRT will be dispatched to calls for service.

We all have civil rights, including the right to refuse treatment and decline to participate in programs. Sometimes people face very complex behavioral health issues that make it difficult for them to understand the help they're being offered and accept it. There are also situations in which treatment options don't fully meet individual needs. Although the city works proactively with local and regional partners to support behavioral health needs, availability of treatment options is a national issue involving a complex web of factors including healthcare funding streams, regulations, workforce issues and the difficulty of delivering effective treatments for some disorders.

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