

Behavioral Health Emergency Response and Coordination Services pilot

Implementing effective, integrated, and coordinated services

Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5187; Section 215(73); Chapter 475; Laws of 2023

Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5693; Section 215(109); Chapter 297; Laws of 2022

December 31, 2023

Health Care Authority
Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery
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Executive summary

Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill (ESSB) 5693 (2022) appropriated \$150,000 of state general funds for fiscal year 2023 for “the city of Snoqualmie to pilot behavioral health emergency response and coordination services through a regional behavioral health coordinator.” ESSB 5187 (2023) appropriated another \$160,000 of state general funds for a continuance of the project for fiscal year 2024. Both bills used the same language and required the same report, due December 31, 2023.

“The authority shall collect information on the pilot project and, in coordination with the city of Snoqualmie, must submit a report to the office of financial management and the appropriate committees of the legislature by December 31, 2023, summarizing the services provided through the grant funds and identifying recommendations on how to implement effective, integrated, coordinated behavioral health emergency response and community care services. The authority must also provide the report to the criminal justice training commission, the Washington association of sheriffs and police chiefs, and the Washington fire commissioners association.”

From September 2022 through September 2023, the Behavioral Health Coordinator (BHC) hired to provide services under the Community Responder Program worked within the Snoqualmie Police Department to respond with law enforcement officers to calls involving behavioral health concerns, conducted outreach and relationship-building with community leaders and partners, participated in care coordination, and provided training and education to first responders.

The Community Responder Program

Background

In an effort to provide behavioral health responses to behavioral health crises, programs pairing mental health providers with law enforcement, emergency medical services, or fire department personnel have proliferated across Washington State. In 2022, the Washington State Legislature passed Substitute Senate Bill 5693, which included a proviso funding a pilot behavioral health emergency response and coordination services program with the City of Snoqualmie. Through this pilot, the legislature directed the Health Care Authority, in collaboration with the City of Snoqualmie, to publish a report summarizing services provided under the pilot and making recommendations “on how to implement effective, integrated, coordinated behavioral health emergency response and community care services.”

Pilot services

A Mental Health Professional (MHP) was hired to fill the role of the community responder program’s Behavioral Health Coordinator (BHC) by the City of Snoqualmie in September 2022. The BHC worked within the Snoqualmie Police Department to support the police and fire departments. They primarily functioned in a co-response capacity, responding with law enforcement personnel on calls involving behavioral health concerns. They also offered follow-up services to ensure comprehensive resolution to a crisis and connection to on-going care. Since the beginning of the program, the BHC has responded to 411 calls. No calls for services were reported as abandoned by the BHC.

Table 1: 411 calls taken by the BHC, broken down by type and number of calls

Type	Count
Agency assist	27
APS referrals	12
CIT	166
Citizen assist	23
DV	24
Follow-Up	46
Suicidal	39
Suspicious	19
Welfare check	36
*Other:	19

The table above shows the number and types of calls responded to by the Behavioral Health Coordinator from October 2022 through September 2023.

*Other: aggregate count of reported call types that require data suppression.

Coordination, engagement, education

The Behavioral Health Coordinator partnered with other community providers to provide awareness of the Community Responder Program and to coordinate services and share knowledge.

Attended or participated in meetings with

- King County Coordinators
- Co-Response Outreach Alliance
- King County Housing Authority
- Department of Community and Human Services (Crisis Care Center discussion)
- North Bend Safety Committee (addressing barriers to care for children, youth, and teens)
- Snoqualmie Valley Hospital's Emergency Medicine Team
- Eastside Fire and Rescue's Mobile Integrated Health and the Office of Councilmember Perry (regional planning meeting)
- International Co-Responder Conference

Training attended

- 40-hour King County Crisis Intervention Team training

Presented to

- King County Regional Law and Justice Safety Committee
- North Bend Citizen Academy

Provided training to

- Snoqualmie Police Department (on active listening)

Recommendations

The City of Snoqualmie's Community Responder Program pilot identified two key components for success.

Engagement

Co-response works by building a strong partnership between the law enforcement, firefighter, or emergency medical services personnel and the behavioral health response providers. Sufficient high-quality training on co-response for all services involved is necessary for building more effective programs across the state.

Sufficient resources

Without officers available to partner with behavioral health professionals, there can be no co-response in law enforcement departments. Officer staffing affects the ability of departments to host programs or dedicate officers to co-response teams. Similarly, adequate funding is imperative to support both the staffing numbers and access to resources needed to provide effective intervention.