

May 18, 2010

AHS and CPS launch Police and Crisis Team

CALGARY – Individuals and families experiencing mental health, addiction or psychosocial crises who are a danger to themselves or the public will now be sought out for treatment by a Police and Crisis Team (PACT).

PACT, a partnership between Alberta Health Services (AHS) and the Calgary Police Service (CPS), pairs a mental health clinician and a police officer who provide a shared response to assist individuals in crisis.

The purpose of PACT is to divert individuals who have mental illness/addiction issues from the justice system and hospital emergency rooms, to stabilize them within the community and to connect them with the appropriate services/resources.

“Research indicates that by reaching out to this vulnerable population, we can reduce the incarceration and recidivism of people with mental illness by linking them to mental health services and supports,” says Valerie Wiebe, Executive Director, Mental Health and Addictions, Calgary Zone. “By providing early intervention for these individuals, we are more likely to see successful health outcomes.”

“Our goal is to reach out to folks with mental illness or addictions, who are in most cases homeless, and may come to our attention after committing a minor, non-violent crime,” says Calgary Police Chief Rick Hanson. “We want to have something in our toolkit to work with this vulnerable population, and to get them linked up with agencies who can give them the help they need, while keeping them out of the justice system. They will still be held accountable to the law, however, the main focus will be on finding them the appropriate help, and alternative sentencing will be considered.”

Members of PACT are dispatched to crisis calls by the Calgary Police Service.

Every year, the CPS responds to at least 5,000 calls related to mental illness or addictions. By having a mental health specialist attend those calls with police, clients are immediately provided with a mental health assessment and the team determines the most appropriate course of action. Teams also provide assertive community outreach to the vulnerable homeless population by building a rapport with individuals and connecting them with appropriate community services.

PACT is a three-year, \$2.4-million pilot project funded by the Government of Alberta’s Safe Communities Initiative.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than 3.7 million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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