



HOMELESS &
HOUSING
RESOURCE
CENTER

Strengthening Partnerships Between Homeless Services and Behavioral Health Crisis Teams

Tuesday, August 18, 2026

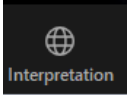
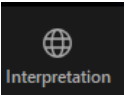
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- This webinar includes live ASL and Spanish interpretation. 
- To listen in Spanish, choose Spanish audio.
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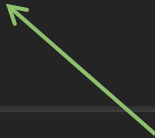
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Webinar Instructions

- All participant lines will be muted and the chat feature is disabled
- **Questions:** Please submit your questions using the Q&A feature
- **Slides:** Available now on HHRC website: <https://hhrctraining.org/events-webinars>
- **Recording:** Will be available on the HHRC website soon
- **Evaluation:** Link will be shared at the end and browser should redirect you
- **Certificate of Participation** (no CEUs are offered): Provided after the evaluation is completed



Participation Today

- Participants can use the Q&A feature to submit questions
 - Questions can be submitted at any time throughout the presentation, and will be answered after the roundtable
- We will feature a panel of experts in a roundtable format
- We will use the poll feature twice today



Agenda

- Learning Objectives
- Topic Background
- Key Strategies
- Roundtable Discussion
- Q&A
- Closing Remarks

Introduction Poll



Which best describes your primary role:

- a) Provider of Homeless Services (shelter, outreach, housing navigation, case management)
- b) Behavioral Health/Mental Health Provider/Substance Treatment Provider
- c) Crisis Services Provider
- d) Housing Authority or Housing Program
- e) Local/State Government
- f) Law Enforcement/First Responder
- g) Peer Support Specialist/Person with Lived Experience
- h) Other Nonprofit or Community-Based Organization

Learning Objectives

- Describe the role of partnerships between providers of homeless services and behavioral health crisis teams.
- Identify effective strategies for partnering with behavioral health crisis teams before, during, and after a crisis.
- Apply practical tools and strategies to support individuals during a behavioral health crisis and improve coordination across community partners.



Audience Poll



What is the biggest barrier to effective partnership between crisis services and homelessness response in your community?

- a) Unsure who to contact
- b) Limited capacity/staffing
- c) Different eligibility or service criteria
- d) Information-sharing barriers
- e) Funding limitations
- f) Lack of shared protocols
- g) Other

New Issue Brief!



- *Strengthening Partnerships Between Providers of Homeless Services and Behavioral Health Crisis Teams*

- This brief covers practical strategies to help providers of homeless services prepare for behavioral health crises, coordinate with crisis providers for effective on-scene responses, and support individuals after behavioral health crises.



Background

The Impact and Visibility of Crisis

When someone is housed

- A crisis often unfolds in private
- Family or a known provider often notices first
- Care can be reached through familiar channels

When someone is unsheltered

- Crises unfold in public: sidewalks, shelters, encampments
- Bystanders, staff, or 911 are often first responders
- Distress is visible, but support is harder to reach

A Costlier Path

Higher visibility, higher exposure — and a costlier path



The Intersection of Homelessness and Behavioral Health Crisis

- People who are homeless experience behavioral health crises at higher rates than the general population, yet they often face significant barriers to timely, appropriate crisis care.
- Without timely support, crises may contribute to:
 - Repeated emergency department visits or hospitalization
 - Law enforcement involvement or incarceration
 - Disconnection from ongoing services
 - Continued housing instability
- Providers of homeless services are often the first to recognize early warning signs and connect people to crisis support.



Behavioral Health Crisis Defined

- **Crisis:** A behavioral health crisis may include stress, emotional or behavioral symptoms, substance use challenges, or a traumatic event that affects a person's well-being, safety, or ability to function.
- This is distinct from a behavioral health emergency, which may involve imminent risk of significant harm to self or others, or grave disability, and may require immediate intervention.



Behavioral Health Crisis System

Component	What You Need to Know
988	24/7 call, text, and chat support for mental health, substance use, and suicide-related crises
Mobile Crisis	Respond in the community to assess, de-escalate, and connect people to care
Crisis Stabilization	Provide short-term assessment and stabilization as an alternative to hospitalization
Emergency Department	Evaluation and treatment of medical or behavioral health emergencies requiring higher-acuity care
Other Partners	EMS, co-response teams, specially trained officers, and diversion programs



Strategies for Effective Partnerships

Why Partnerships Matter

People who are homeless are more likely to experience behavioral health crises and face barriers to accessing care¹

- Crises often occur in public settings, shelters, encampments, or transitional housing²
- Multiple systems may become involved simultaneously³
- Poor coordination can lead to repeated emergency department visits, hospitalization, justice involvement, or continued housing instability³
- Effective partnerships support faster access to person-centered care

¹U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development, Office of Community Planning & Development (2023). *The 2023 annual homeless assessment report to Congress*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development.

²National Health Care for the Homeless Council (2025, October 14). *Homelessness and health: What's the connection?*

³Balfour, M., & Zeller, S. (2023). Community-based crisis services, specialized crisis facilities, and partnerships with law enforcement. *Focus: The Journal of Lifelong Learning in Psychiatry*, 21(1), 18–27.

Partnership in a Crisis



Before a Crisis Happens



- Understand the local crisis response system and available resources
- Clarify each partner's roles, responsibilities, and limitations
- Establish communication pathways and points of contact
- Build relationships through regular meetings, cross-training, and joint outreach
- Develop shared tools and protocols for crisis response
- Create clear referral and warm handoff processes

During a Crisis

- Use trauma-informed de-escalation
- Share critical information to support an effective response
- Coordinate roles and communication in real time
- Leverage each partner's expertise
- Support person-centered decision making whenever possible
- Confirm next steps and follow-up responsibilities before the response concludes

Information to gather before calling a crisis team:

- ☐ Exact location
- ☐ Current behaviors
- ☐ Safety concerns
- ☐ Willingness to engage
- ☐ Relevant behavioral health history/symptoms
- ☐ Known triggers or engagement preferences

Support Roles During Crisis



CRISIS TEAM

- ✓ Assess immediate behavioral health and safety needs.
- ✓ Lead stabilization and disposition decisions.
- ✓ Explain available options and next steps.



HOMELESS SERVICES PROVIDER

- ✓ Share relevant context, triggers, preferences, and baseline behavior.
- ✓ Help identify housing-related or practical needs.
- ✓ Maintain continuity after the crisis team leaves.



TOGETHER

- ✓ Use trauma-informed and person-centered approaches.
- ✓ Clarify what will happen next and who is responsible.
- ✓ Support engagement and trust.

Post-Crisis and Strengthening the Partnership

- Coordinate follow-up and continuity of care
- Identify who is responsible for follow-up and re-engagement with the individual and addressing immediate needs
- Update service, housing, and safety plans as appropriate
- Conduct warm handoffs to ongoing supports and treatment
- Debrief significant incidents and identify lessons learned
- Review outcomes and improve protocols over time
- Maintain ongoing communication, training, and cross-system collaboration



Roundtable

Roundtable Panelists

- Walla Walla Fire Department, Washington, Community Paramedicine
 - Neliah Williams, Community Resource Navigator
 - Kristy Capps, Nurse Navigator
 - Cody Maine, Community Paramedic
- Health Solutions, Colorado, Mobile Crisis and Connect to Care
 - Ruth Matthews, Mobile Crisis Program Coordinator
 - Brian Bretton, Connect to Care Lead Clinician
- Pathways, Washington D.C.
 - Jessie Knowles Henry, VP of Homeless Operations



Questions and Answers

Closing Remarks

Summary

- ✓ This webinar covered the role and importance of effective partnerships for crisis response
- ✓ It presented practical strategies and tools for application of the strategies
- ✓ The roundtable panelists described how they recognized barriers to effective partnering and developed tools relevant to their communities to address those barriers

Key Takeaways

- ✓ Understand your local crisis system
- ✓ Build relationships before a crisis occurs
- ✓ Coordinate roles during the response
- ✓ Follow up after the crisis and learn from each event
- ✓ Strong partnerships improve outcomes for both providers and the people they serve

Contact Information

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Thank You!

SAMHSA's Homeless and Housing Resource Center provides high-quality, no-cost training for health and housing professionals in evidence-based practices that contributes to housing stability, recovery, and an end to homelessness.

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Evaluation Survey

