Arizona’s Comprehensive Crisis Care System

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Arizona has developed a comprehensive crisis care infrastructure that includes the following:

- A peer-operated warmline to support people who are struggling, but not in crisis.
- A crisis line that provides risk assessment and coordination of resources.
- Mobile crisis teams that are dispatched when individuals require higher levels of support. The mobile teams offer deeper risk assessment, safety planning, and identification of mental health services.
- Transportation to crisis stabilization units for those in need of more in-depth services. These units provide 24-hour monitoring by psychiatrists who can prescribe medication.
- Inpatient hospitals for those who are in immediate danger and require urgent treatment.

Every night, the crisis line centers send records of individuals who have received crisis services to providers in Arizona’s public mental health care system. These providers are contractually required to provide follow-up to people served by the crisis system within 24–72 hours of the initial crisis.

To fund this comprehensive system, Arizona’s annual state budget provides $16.3 million for crisis services. Arizona also bills Medicaid for crisis call services (as a form of telephonic case management) for people who are eligible to enroll in Medicaid, or who are already enrolled.

To obtain this funding and support, Arizona worked with partners in population health for a number of years to advocate for comprehensive crisis care. The partners, which included law enforcement, hospital associations, justice systems and more, all made the case that crisis services provide cost savings to their systems and to the state.

Arizona’s state Medicaid agency performs ongoing analysis that compares the cost of the state’s investment in crisis services with the savings obtained from the reduction in inpatient hospital beds given to individuals who only need lower levels of care. Arizona also houses a public online dashboard that allows anyone in the state to monitor
crisis response service metrics, costs, and outcomes so they can see the value of crisis services and the real lives being saved. These efforts help to ensure that the public sees Arizona’s investment in crisis services in a positive light.

Learn how your state can develop similar infrastructure and read additional examples by visiting the Build [1] essential element of SPRC’s State Infrastructure Recommendations.

Links within this resource