

Reimagining Crisis Response: Alternate Response Models

Alternate response is growing as a valuable way of providing the right solution for every crisis. It can take many forms, including a warm handoff to the local 988 crisis line, deployment of a behavioral health mobile crisis team, or could be a blended team of first responders (police, fire, or emergency medical services) with each other or with a crisis worker such as a peer or a behavioral health or social worker, known as co-response.

Alternative response aims to best combine and utilize the skills of responders in the crisis ecosystem for the best possible outcome:



Police

neutralize physical threat



Fire

address fire safety



Emergency Medical Services

ensure physical safety



Crisis Worker

act as a peer with lived personal experience or a behavioral health clinician to create emotional safety and support crisis assessment and mitigation



988

crisis support over the phone

Why alternate response?

- Better met needs & outcomes
- Lower costs than arrest or incarceration
- Stronger communities
- Fewer involuntary holds and hospitalizations
- Fewer avoidable arrests
- Better utilization of resources like ambulances or emergency rooms
- Greater emotional safety for those in crisis
- Reduced strain on emergency rooms and jails

Alternate response in action



Police & Fire



Fire & EMT



Police & EMT



Special Trained Squad/
Crisis Intervention Team



Police & Crisis Worker



Fire & Crisis Worker



EMT & Crisis Worker



988 Transfer



Mobile Crisis Team
(Crisis Workers Only)

About the California Behavioral Health Justice Intervention Services (BHJIS) Program

From 2022-2025, the BHJIS program provided funding to help local communities address critical intervention points through which individuals with mental and substance use disorders can be diverted from criminal justice involvement. Funding to support BHJIS was awarded to the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) through the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA).

With the help of funding from BHJIS, counties throughout California have been able to implement successful alternate response programs that still operate today.