IF NOT 911, THEN WHO RESPONDS?

These are the teams called upon to solve public safety concerns and medical issues that arise among people experiencing homelessness in Portland. These teams often respond to the types of situations that many Portlanders are over-utilizing 911 and the police non-emergency number to report.

Portland Street Medicine

This all-volunteer team responds to reports for assistance with non-life-threatening medical issues affecting people experiencing homelessness. It takes referrals from street outreach teams, TriMet, Union Gospel, Portland’s One Point of Contact, and the Portland parks bureau, as well as other organizations. It also performs its own outreach, especially visiting people where they are, offering clinical services. Portland Street Medicine offers free access to doctor-provided medications and writes one-time prescriptions for non-contraindicated medications. Teams include a licensed independent provider, a registered nurse and a social worker.

Established: 2018
Number of vehicles: 1
Number of volunteers: 25 clinicians, 4 non-clinicians, 6 administrative volunteers
Typical response time: A phone call follow up occurs within 24 hours, and a site visit within a week
Number of calls and referrals in 2018: About 100
Number of people served last year: 500
Referrals from police: None
Annual budget: $50,000 in 2018; $150,000 projected for 2019
Public funding: None, supported through donations
Hours of operation: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Fridays

One Point of Contact

One Point of Contact is an online portal where Portlanders can file complaints about homeless camps within the city. Users log into the city’s website, enter the location and photos of a camp or camper, along with their complaint or concern. This system is used primarily to address garbage, sanitation and other material impacts of homelessness — and to propel higher-risk camps for removal.

Most typically, once a complaint is received, employees of Central City Concern’s Clear Start program will visit the site to pick up trash and survey conditions. If it determines the camp is posing a significant public safety threat, it will be scheduled for posting and removal. If the camp is not causing any significant problems, the response is limited to trash removal. In some cases, other support services may be initiated, such as supplying Deputies, portable toilets or hygiene drop boxes.

Outreach teams are notified when Clean Start or the person who files the report identifies an extremely vulnerable person. Minor medical issues are often referred to Portland Street Medicine, and mental health issues are referred to Project Respond.

Many callers dial 911 and police non-emergency to report an encampment or sanitation issues arising from an encampment are referred to this program.

Cascadia’s Project Respond Mobile Crisis Team serving Multnomah County

Project Respond has multiple 24-hour a day, seven-day a week mobile crisis teams that respond if police call for assistance or in medical crisis. These teams are staffed by mental health professionals who respond to mental health related crises. During the past fiscal year, 2021, 97 percent of calls were to assist someone who was also experiencing homelessness, according to monthly reports Project Respond submits to Multnomah County. Teams typically arrive with a police escort, so while police may take a back seat in most situations, they are not removed from the response. Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare runs Project Respond with funding from Multnomah County. Portland Police Bureau also contracts with Project Respond for mental health professionals who ride along with its Behavioral Health Unit’s Mobile Crisis Unit.

Established: 1995 as a street outreach team; first contracted as a 24-hour crisis response team in 2001
Number of vehicles: 2; however these are shared with several follow up teams, and sometimes staff use their personal vehicles
Number of people served last year: 26,000 clinicians on the crisis response team plus follow up teams and supervisors, totaling 55 employees; this does not include on-call staff
Median response time 2018: 22-26 minutes
Number of mobile crisis teams: Ranges from 1 to 4, with an average of 2 to 3 teams active at the same time.
Number of calls and referrals in 2018: 2,410
Referrals per call: 620
Annual budget for Project Respond Crisis Team: $3.5 million for the county funded mobile crisis units and two follow up teams.
Public funding: 100 percent
Hours of operation: 24/7

To Request Services: Call 503-501-1231
If No One Answers: Leave a voicemail that includes your name and contact information: the name, description and location of the person you are calling about, as well as the medical concern; and whether the person you’re calling about has indicated they may open to receiving services from Portland Street Medicine.

Central City Concern

Hooper Inebriate Emergency Response Service (CHIERS) & Sobering Station

CHIERS picks up people who are seriously intoxicated or suffering acute reactions from drugs when police or community members summon its mobile crisis team. It delivers these individuals to its Sobering Station, where they can sober up safely. Staff then attempts to connect the individuals with recovery resources once the intoxication subsides. Central City Concern operates this program with funding from the city of Portland.

Established: 1971
Number of vehicles: 27 for CHIERS mobile unit and Sobering Station
Annual budget: $1.2 million
Public funding: 100 percent
Hours of operation: 24/7

To Request Services: Between 1:45 p.m. and 11:45 p.m. seven days a week, call 503-238-6132. During off-hours, call the police non-emergency line at 503-823-3333.

Portland Fire and Rescue’s Community Health Assessment Team (CHAT)

Firefighter Tremaine Clayton manages the CHAT team, and he’s also the only person on it. He follows up with people the fire bureau identifies as high utilizers of 911 to help mitigate their reasons for frequently relying on emergency services. These high utilizers can call 911 five or six times in one day — most frequently for falls. Once he mitigates a high-utilizer’s reasons for calling, either by moving them to a nursing facility or into rehab or in some cases just speaking with them about other resources, they move off his list and are replaced by another high-utilizer. Clayton also visits homeless campers after incidents to teach residents safety in order to prevent future out-of-control blazes. He also provides first aid and offers items such as socks and water to campers he encounters.

Established: 2016
Number of vehicles: 1
Number of employees: 1
Number of clients at a time: 27
Number of current clients experiencing homelessness: 10
Annual budget: $191,000
Public funding: 100 percent
Hours of operation: 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday

CHAT does not take outside requests for services at this time but plans to expand its program.

Portland Patrol

This private security firm supplies foot, bike and Segway patrols in downtown Portland as a service funded through losses collected from members of the business improvement district. These patrol persons, many of whom are former police officers, respond to complaints about panhandling, camping and suspicious persons, as well as other downtown safety and nuisance issues. Portland Patrol is not technically law enforcement but acts as an extension of law enforcement, working closely with Portland Police Bureau and the Multnomah County District Attorney’s Office.

Beginning as soon as July 1, another geographically based private security force, Central Eastside Sidewalk Operations, will patrol the Central Eastside Enhanced Services District. This team, however, will also receive trauma-informed training and be accompanied by crisis workers trained in de-escalation, according to the district’s plan.

PROJECTS TO REQUEST SERVICES: Call 503-988-4908 or toll free at 800-716-9789 (hearing impaired, dial 711)