



Continue or expand funding for behavioral health services and alternative response programs.

Background:

Cities throughout the state identify the availability of behavioral health resources as a major concern for their community. In 2022, nearly a quarter of adults with mental illness in Washington state said that they were not able to receive the treatment they needed.

Nearly two thirds of individuals booked into jail have unmet mental health or substance use disorder treatment needs. Those unmet needs can also be a major risk factor for experiencing homelessness or engaging in criminality. People with mental illness and substance use disorder are also more likely to be the victim of crimes.

Cities are not traditionally direct service providers, yet are often tasked with finding solutions for the impacts of the lack of available services.

A number of cities are adopting alternative response programs that complement or replace a traditional law enforcement response with one that takes a holistic approach to an individual's needs.

Some examples of community diversion options include:

- Mobile crisis outreach teams and co-responders;
- Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD);
- Community Assistance, Referral, and Education Service (CARES); and
- Pretrial or post-sentencing supervision, diversion services and treatment.

In 2022, the Legislature provided **\$2 million** for grants to cities to establish new programs, but the need is still dire. Currently, **55% of Washington cities** report not having alternative community diversion programs in place. Cities call for more funding for the state's behavioral health system and support for programs that help people stay out of the criminal justice system.

Strong cities need:

- **Greater access** to behavioral health services, including substance use disorder treatment and dual diagnosis treatment facilities.
- **State investment** in alternative response strategies; treatment facilities for adults and juveniles; treatment in jails, and staff such as social workers, treatment providers, and system navigators to help direct people to treatment.

67% of Washington cities

identify availability of behavioral health resources as a **major concern** for their community.

Diversion programs are shown to work.

Researchers found that participants in Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) programs were **58% less likely to be arrested** after enrollment in the program, compared to people who went through more traditional criminal justice processing. Participants were also significantly more likely to obtain housing, employment, and legitimate income.

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