

# PORTLAND STREET RESPONSE

- *Not every call requires a badge and a gun*
- *Not every crisis has to end in handcuffs*
- *It's time for a better response*

## GOAL

Reduce police responses to calls for service involving people experiencing homelessness and behavioral health crises in public spaces.

## WHAT THIS IS

With input from various public officials and agencies, and from our position as an organization that works with people experiencing homelessness, we've imagined a street response team that would alleviate the drain on police resources and serve as an appropriate and compassionate response to crises on the streets.

## HOW IT WORKS

Teams of medics and peer support specialists with specialized training in de-escalation and behavioral health would be dispatched on calls related to street homelessness and public disorder 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Peer support specialists would have personal experience with mental health, homelessness or addictions issues and a working knowledge of how to connect people with programs that initiate services. Medics would be able to respond to non-life-threatening medical issues, and together, teams would provide a compassionate alternative to police response to calls for unwanted persons, behavioral health issues, low-priority incidents at camps and other situations that arise on the streets.

Portland Street Response would have the ability to transport individuals to shelters, drop-in centers, clinics and other destinations on a voluntary basis.

## PRESENCE & TRUST BUILDING

Teams would be recognizable, in logoed vans stocked with first-aid supplies, water, naloxone, hygiene items and other tools. When not responding to calls, they would perform outreach, teaching camp safety and addressing medical concerns among the populations they serve.

## COST

At most, each 24-hour unit would cost about \$800,000 annually, including salary and operating costs. If six units\* operated around the clock every day, the program would cost about \$4.8 million per year.\*\*

A street response team would be a public safety and first responder program and, as such, should not take dollars away from programs aimed at fixing the root causes of homelessness.



## FUNDING

Portland already spends the money it would cost to implement a street response team to respond to street homelessness in a disjointed fashion, in part through the reallocated hours spent among various bureaus. Additionally, funding slated for a pilot project through the police bureau to address low-priority calls could be diverted to a non-law-enforcement approach instead.

## OPERATOR & PARTNER AGENCY

Portland Street Response would be dispatched through the Bureau of Emergency Communications on calls involving street homelessness and behavioral health issues that come in through 911 and police non-emergency. Police would continue to handle calls with a criminal nexus.

Portland Fire & Rescue has the infrastructure in place to take on the role of partner agency to Portland Street Response, with teams serving as an expansion of the bureau's CHAT (Community Health Assessment Team) program or as a third-party organization contracted through the fire department.

Medics and peer support specialists would be hired or recruited based in part on their desire to work with and show compassion for people experiencing homelessness. These teams would undergo training from Eugene's CAHOOTS, which has expressed a desire to help with this component.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Portland Street Response will need additional tools in the community to be successful. This will require follow-through and investment from the city and county on shelters, drop-in centers and other wrap-around service providers that can offer drop-off locations teams can utilize when an individual needs to be removed from a problematic situation or is interested in seeking mental health or substance abuse treatment.

\*Street Roots estimates six teams would allow for prompt response and outreach availability, but additional data analysis will be needed.

\*\*This figure does not include start-up costs. This estimate is based on Portland Fire & Rescue's cost of operating its Rapid Response Vehicle teams, of which roughly \$500,000 is salary and benefits.