

OPP and Headwaters collaborate to expand mobile crisis response teams

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The Ontario Government is working to improve how law enforcement supports people in crisis with funding granted to numerous police services to expand mobile crisis response teams.

Solicitor General and Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones announced last Friday, March 11, at the Dufferin Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) headquarters in Primrose, that the provincial government would be investing more than \$4 million over two years to expand mobile crisis response teams.

"Increasingly, police are confronted with the need to assist with vulnerable people in acute crisis situations that may be impacted by mental health and/or addiction issues, a promising solution is to recreate mobile crisis response teams," said Jones during Friday's announcement.

The Dufferin OPP is among 28 communities receiving a maximum funding of \$120,000 per fiscal year for a total of \$240,000 over two years.

Headwaters Health Care Centre (HHCC) and the Dufferin OPP as recipients of the two-year grant will partner in providing mobile support for individuals experiencing a moderate to severe mental health or addiction crisis in the community.

"We are excited about this new partnership and what it will mean for our community," said Kim Delahunt, president and CEO of Headwaters hospital. "The team will be able to provide assistance, where it's needed, which may not be in a hospital setting."

The Dufferin Mobile Crisis Response Team (D-MCRT) will consist of a police officer and a crisis worker who will collaborate on responding to calls where mental health or addictions may be a factor. Crisis workers "registered nurses, social workers, or counselors" will determine if an individual should be sent to the emergency department for treatment and connected to community programming to address their physical and mental well-being.

"This partnership will enhance our response to the community. We are building on existing services and taking our service delivery to the next level," said Dufferin OPP Inspector Terry Ward.

One of the goals of the D-MCRT is reducing the number of emergency department visits and inpatient admissions in crisis situations.

Headwaters Hospital reports an average of 1,529 visits to the emergency department annually for mental health and addiction services equating to over four visits each day.

On Friday, Delahunt noted that 30 per cent of all emergency department visits for mental health and substance use are the first point of contact.

"The mobile crisis response team allows for a crisis specialist and the police to intervene early and connect to community resources ensuring that the first point of contact is in the community and not at the hospital," she said.

Delahunt added that only 26 per cent of all mental health and substance use clients coming into Headwaters hospital's emergency department are admitted.

?This shows that if these individuals are assessed and supported in the community by the appropriate supports, it is likely they could avoid hospitalization,? she said.

The OPP reports an average of 74.5 mental health and addiction calls each month with most requiring an average of two and a half hours of response time.