IACP LAW ENFORCEMENT POLICY CENTER

Need to Know.....

Responding to Persons Experiencing a Mental Health Crisis

Law enforcement officers should be provided with guidance and training to effectively assess and respond to situations involving individuals experiencing a mental health crisis, with the goal of de-escalating the situation safely for all individuals involved whenever possible.

- A **mental health crisis** is defined as an event or experience in which an individual's normal coping mechanisms are overwhelmed, causing them to have an extreme emotional, physical, mental, and/or behavioral response. Individuals experiencing a mental health crisis may or may not be affected by mental illness.
- Law enforcement officers should be familiar with signs and symptoms of mental illness or a person in crisis (PIC) but are not required to make a **medical diagnosis**.
- Law enforcement agencies should partner with local mental health and other community agencies to develop a **holistic, community-based approach** to responding to these individuals.
- Officers responding to PICs should attempt to gather as much **information** as possible on the person through personal observation, as well as information from friends, family, and treating clinicians, where available. This information can then be utilized to assess the individual's potential danger to themselves, the officers, or others.
- The **safety** of all individuals involved should be the primary consideration when law enforcement responds to PICs.
- A backup officer should always be requested, as well as assistance from **individuals with specialized training in dealing with PICs**.
- Whenever possible, officers should take steps to **calm the situation**. This may include eliminating emergency lights and sirens, assuming a nonthreatening manner, and moving slowly.
- Officers should be prepared to provide the PIC and, where available, their family with information on **available resources**, such as mental health referral information.
- In some situations, **involuntary psychiatric commitment** may be necessary. Officers should be familiar with the associated legal requirements and potential transportation and custody concerns.
- All interactions with PICs should be **documented** in detail, using specific descriptions of the individual's behaviors, statements, and actions.

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