

City announces \$95M investment in mental health centers

Mayor Bill de Blasio's office Friday announced plans to open two health diversion centers for individuals referred by law enforcement with mental-health and substance-use needs. The city's total investment will be about \$95 million for 10 years.

The centers will be operated by Samaritan Daytop Village, in the Williamsbridge neighborhood of the Bronx, and Project Renewal, in East Harlem, the mayor's office said. Both operators said they were selected through a request-for-proposals process for 10-year contracts worth about \$44 million each. The centers, which can provide police officers an alternative to arrest, are expected to divert 2,400 people annually.

"We saw this as an opportunity to continue to build on our expertise and also continue to innovate and try a new model," said Jody Rudin, chief operating officer of Project Renewal.

Admittance to the centers will be voluntary, with both clinical and nonclinical services provided for up to 10 days, according to the mayor's office. Clinical services will include health and behavioral-health assessments, counseling, and medically supervised substance-use stabilization and withdrawal management, the office said. Individuals who are admitted to the centers will be referred to additional health care, social services and other support services, it said.

The centers can lower costs to city agencies and health care providers and improve quality of life in the two communities, said Eric Rosenbaum, CEO of Project Renewal.

"For starters, they are not going to jail, which will only cost money," Rosenbaum said. "If they need medical care instead of just being shunted to an emergency room, which is really expensive, we get to do the assessment ourselves.

"They may end up in a hospital, but it will be a thoughtful evaluation that brings them there."

Dr. Oxiris Barbot, the city's acting health commissioner, said in a statement the centers will "help us break the cycle of criminal justice involvement for thousands of New Yorkers each year."

Both operators said they are committed to operating the centers 24 hours per day, seven days a week.

"The brilliance of the diversion centers is that people will get all these services instantly," said Mitchell Netburn, president and CEO of Samaritan Daytop Village.

The centers, to be staffed by health care professionals and peer advocates, are expected to open by late next year.