

City invests \$37M in 'new chapter' for mental health

The city will spend \$37 million on services aimed at people with serious mental illnesses as it looks to address gaps in care, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced Monday.

The largest portion, \$23 million, will fund teams of responders who support people in the middle of a mental health crisis and work with them in the weeks that follow.

The city will devote \$14 million to services for those who are not engaged in treatment and pose a higher risk of violent behavior. Overall, people with mental health issues, including those receiving treatment, are no more likely to exhibit violent behavior than others and are more likely to be victims of a violent crime, [according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#).

The de Blasio administration's new initiatives [follow criticism](#) that City Hall's \$850 million ThriveNYC program did not offer solutions for people with bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and other illnesses. Such critiques escalated recently, after a mentally ill man killed four homeless men in Chinatown.

The funding is tied to recommendations from the NYC Crisis Prevention and Response Task Force, a group of about 80 experts from government and mental health treatment organizations.

"Today marks the beginning of a new chapter in the transformation of how the city responds to mental health crises," Susan Herman, director of the mayor's office of ThriveNYC, said in a statement. Herman was formerly the NYPD's deputy commissioner of collaborative policing.

The city will create four Health Engagement Assessment Teams made up of a clinician and a person who has previously experienced a mental health challenge to respond to people who are the most frequent subjects of 911 calls. The number of 911 calls related to mental health increased about 85% in the past decade, rising to 179,569 last year.

The city will add six mobile crisis teams, made up of clinicians, case managers and peer workers. It is also targeting resources to two high-need police precincts: the 25th in East Harlem and the 47th in the East Bronx. In those areas, the city is adding four HEAT teams and four co-response teams, made up of two police officers and one mental health clinician.

"What's important is the range of crisis intervention options," said Gail Nayowith, an independent consultant and the chair of the city Health Department's Community Services Board. "It allows for a more customized, individualized response to the situation and person in need. We have not had enough of those. We have not had the ability to respond to the community in the way people need."

Within the NYPD, a new behavioral health unit will coordinate the department's response.

DJ Jaffe, a frequent critic of ThriveNYC and executive director of Mental Illness Policy Org, criticized the mayor's office for failing to expand Kendra's Law, which allows judges statewide to mandate that seriously mentally ill people adhere to their treatment plan or risk involuntary admission to a hospital.

"If press releases could solve this problem, it would have been solved a long time ago," Jaffe said.