

East Harlem center will provide alternative to ER for mental health patients

The city is planning to open its first support and connection center in East Harlem next week to give police officers a place to bring patients who appear to need mental health or substance-use services.

The city Health Department offered a tour of the facility to the media and politicians on Wednesday and shared how it will provide access to counseling and medically-supervised withdrawal services before connecting people to longer-term social services.

The center, operated by the nonprofit Project Renewal, is located on the second and third floors of an unmarked building on East 116th Street between a Chase bank and an optical store. The second floor has an intake center, a screening room, a medical exam room and an area to stabilize intoxicated individuals. The third floor includes a community room and dorm rooms for sleeping.

"The NYPD has long wanted to have other options to help New Yorkers who they suspect have behavioral health needs—some other way to get people connected to care than a trip to a hospital emergency department that may be unnecessary or a traditional law-enforcement response that isn't really appropriate," said Susan Herman, director of the Office of ThriveNYC.

A second center, operated by Samaritan Daytop Village, is slated to open in the Bronx in the next few months. Each center can accommodate up to 25 people at a time, and the two locations will serve a combined 2,400 people a year. The city estimates the program will cost \$10 million annually for the next 10 years, with the state covering 20% of that cost.

People can stay at the facility for up to 10 days, though most will be discharged in five days or fewer. Only individuals brought to the center by police can be admitted, but once a person is admitted, he or she can return voluntarily.

Asked about crisis services for people who aren't picked up by police, Health Commissioner Dr. Oxiris Barbot said they or their family members can call 888-NYC-WELL to be connected to treatment.