

RECOMMENDATION TO THE LEGISLATURE OF ALASKA FROM THE ALASKA CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMISSION

Recommendation 3-2020, adopted, September 10, 2020:

Implementation of the Crisis Now model

The lack of a dedicated behavioral health crisis intervention system in Alaska stresses emergency department, first responder, judicial, correctional, and public safety systems. Response efficiency is degraded when existing systems that are not specially trained and equipped to handle behavioral health crisis are required to do so.

Crisis Now is a framework for behavioral health crisis response that offers an alternative to traditional law enforcement responses.¹ The Crisis Now framework comprises four core elements, detailed below, that provide targeted interventions for people experiencing a behavioral health crisis. This enhanced crisis response, which includes options to respond at appropriate levels, will ensure better care for individuals who are suffering as well as offer law enforcement officers a diversion option alternative to jail and emergency rooms.

Crisis Now is recognized and supported by the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) as a framework for best practice behavioral health crisis care, by the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention and endorsed by Crisis Intervention Team International. In 2020, the Legislature enacted SB 120, which establishes the necessary legal framework for implementation of the Crisis Now framework in Alaska communities.

Therefore, the Commission recommends that the Legislature, following the passage of SB 120:

- **Develop an effective crisis response system.** The Commission recommends that the Legislature support current efforts aimed toward the development, implementation, and operations of effective crisis response and stabilization programming, which operate within the *Crisis Now* framework in communities where there is a shared commitment to developing enhanced behavioral health response to mental health and behavioral health crisis. The core elements of an effective crisis response system includes:
 - **A regional or statewide crisis call center** that coordinates in real time with the other components;
 - **Centrally deployed, 24/7 mobile crisis teams** to respond in-person to individuals in crisis in community (preferably includes a peer with lived experience for high engagement, and a clinician).
 - **Crisis stabilization programs** which include 23-hour observationrecliners and short-term stabilization beds, which may be operated separately or jointly, offering a safe, supportive and appropriate behavioral health crisis placement for those who cannot be stabilized by call center clinicians or mobile crisis team response. These centers must accommodate voluntary and involuntary placement.
 - **Essential Crisis Care Principles and Practices** which include recovery orientation, trauma informed care, significant use of peer staff, commitment to Zero Suicide/Suicide Safer Care, strong commitments to safety for

¹ Crisis Now's website is at <https://crisisnow.com/>.

consumers and staff, and collaboration with law enforcement.

The primary purpose is to provide the appropriate and immediate mental health/behavioral health intervention for individuals in a crisis through a well-designed, well-coordinated continuum of services that requires strong collaborations between community services, public safety and behavioral health providers. Currently, there is work underway to develop and implement the Crisis Now framework in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and the Mat-Su Valley.

The Commission also recommends that the Legislature support the development of this type of service in other communities around the state. Work is commencing to identify elements of the framework that are feasible for rural communities. The expansion of *Crisis Now* to these communities will require state agencies to work together with tribal health organizations and other local partners to avoid creating larger gaps or disparities in access to care between rural and urban Alaska communities. It is important to note that not all communities will have the demand or capacity to implement all the components of the framework. For that reason, it will be critical to continue to offer and expand Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training, explained further below, to all levels of law enforcement, correctional officers and other first responders.