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For Immediate Release

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## DA Funds De-escalation Training for Police, Distributes 911 Checklist Card

Individuals with mental health issues frequently come into contact with the criminal justice system and too often, the outcomes fall short of helping people who face those challenges. Today, San Diego County District Attorney Summer Stephan announced two initiatives designed to improve the way law enforcement interacts with people with mental health issues, including up to \$1.5 million in funding for access to Crisis Intervention and De-escalation Training for police officers and a 911 Mental Health Checklist card. The announcement comes during Mental Health Awareness month in May.

Last year, law enforcement across San Diego County responded to more than 53,000 calls for service that involved a mental health issue. A 25-year study of officer-involved shootings in San Diego County shows 79 percent of the incidents included people who had drug and/or mental health issues. And, according to the San Diego Sheriff's Department, about 30 percent of inmates in San Diego's jails receive medication for a mental health disorder.

Recognizing this significant nexus between mental health, substance abuse and criminal justice, the District Attorney's Office brought more than 200 stakeholders and experts together over the past year to map the intersection of mental health, homelessness and criminal justice, to better-identify problems and recommend concrete solutions.

The District Attorney also publicly released its [Blueprint for Mental Health Reform: A Strategic New Approach Addressing the Intersection of Mental Health, Homelessness and Criminal Justice in San Diego County](#) which includes system reform recommendations to improve public safety outcomes. The 70-page document contains 30 specific recommendations for how law enforcement and the justice system can better respond to people facing mental health challenges. Crisis and De-escalation Training and development of the 911 Checklist Card are two of the recommendations included in the report.

"We have a crisis in our community that cannot be solved by public safety agencies alone," District Attorney Summer Stephan said. "Nor can it be solved by public health agencies alone. There needs to be a sea change in the way we address the needs of people living with mental illness in our community who find themselves involved with the criminal justice system. These two initiatives represent a step toward a new approach in San Diego County to improve the way law enforcement approaches individuals in a mental health and substance abuse crisis, while still keeping our neighborhoods safe."

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The DA-funded **Crisis Intervention and De-escalation Training** will consist of a newly-created curriculum that builds upon, and enhances the current training peace officers receive. The training will include classroom discussions led by PERT (Psychiatric Emergency Response Team) experts, role playing ‘real life’ situations, and use of a video simulator known as the MILO Range Theater. Officers will also be trained to recognize the signs of methamphetamine toxicity, a condition often encountered by police. Meth is the most common drug found in individuals following an officer-involved shooting incident.

The District Attorney’s Office is uniquely positioned to collaborate on the de-escalation training, since it works directly with all police agencies in the County and reviews officer-involved shooting incidents. The DA’s Office is committed to engaging in the development and implementation of effective, evidence-based crisis intervention and de-escalation programming by providing access to tools in support of law enforcement officers, dispatchers, first responders, and others who may come into contact with persons in crisis. The goal is a reduced need for the use of deadly force, improved officer safety, and reduced likelihood of injury to persons in crisis and/or the public.

The MILO system is being purchased by the DA’s office using federal asset forfeiture funding. The interactive simulator improves on similar training systems currently available in San Diego County. The training is also portable, so it can travel countywide in order to promote maximum participation by law enforcement while allowing departments to perform their ongoing duties.

“Police agencies across San Diego County are grateful for access to this additional training on how peace officers and first responders address mental health-related calls in the field,” said Chief Craig Carter, President of the San Diego County Police Chiefs’ and Sheriff’s Association. “Offering de-escalation training and scenario-based hands-on training will give us even more tools to rely on as we strive to resolve these contacts with the least amount of force necessary. Every agency in the county appreciates the services of PERT and the leadership of the District Attorney’s office as we embrace mental health-related reforms and work collaboratively to address this ongoing public safety issue.”

PERT clinicians respond with law enforcement or EMS to assist persons in mental health crisis or proactively engage persons to direct them to supportive services. For many years, PERT also has been the major training provider to County law enforcement involving the identification of signs of mental illness and related intervention/de-escalation skills to facilitate compassionate, safe, and effective interactions with persons in mental health crisis.

WHAT TO  
KNOW  
BEFORE  
CALLING

911

Mental Evaluation **911** Checklist  
When Calling for Help

If your family member or loved one is in a crisis and is a danger to themselves or others, **CALL 911**.

Read from this list when you call 911 so you can give the dispatcher the following information:

☐ Your name

☐ Phone number

☐ Location to which police should respond

☐ Nature of emergency

☐ Weapons or access to weapons

☐ Name of person in crisis

☐ Age of person in crisis

☐ Height, weight & physical description

☐ Clothing description

☐ Are there others present?

☐ Prior or current violent behavior

☐ Diagnosis

☐ Medications or drug use (current or past)

☐ Triggers (what upsets them?)


☐ Prior police contacts and what has helped

Additional info: \_\_\_\_\_

Current medications: \_\_\_\_\_

Doctor's phone numbers: \_\_\_\_\_

**IMPORTANT:** You are asking an officer to resolve a crisis. They will only have the information that you provide them. Gather as much information as possible before a crisis occurs.



“The growth and success of PERT is directly tied to a collaborative spirit with San Diego County Behavioral Health Services and other providers, public safety agencies, and consumers as well as their family members and other supports,” said PERT Director Dr. Mark Marvin. “Our partnership with the District Attorney’s Office will facilitate an expanded training menu to County first responders and PERT looks forward to expanding our collaboration with the District Attorney’s Office to ensure the utmost in care for all members of our community.”

Working with NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) San Diego, the DA has also developed a **“911 Mental Evaluation Checklist Card”** that’s being distributed in English and Spanish to the public. The card contains a checklist of important information that callers should provide to dispatchers when a family member or loved one is in crisis and may be a danger to themselves or others. The goal is to provide responding officers with more information about the individual’s mental state and history before they arrive on scene.

“NAMI San Diego has been honored to participate in reform efforts by providing the perspectives of those living with mental health challenges as well as the expertise of professionals working in the mental health field,” said Cathryn Nacario, CEO of NAMI San Diego.

The District Attorney’s Office is working closely with San Diego County Behavioral Health Services on mental health initiatives to promote healthy, safe and thriving communities throughout the County.

“I want to thank District Attorney Stephan for her leadership of a crisis stabilization approach that can help support the community we serve,” said County Behavioral Health Services Director Luke Bergmann. “Ensuring our law enforcement officers are thoroughly trained to identify, deescalate and work with people experiencing a behavioral health crisis will lead to reduced trauma and better outcomes for San Diegans.”

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#### **About the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office**

*The San Diego County DA’s Office prosecutes all felony crimes in the county and misdemeanor crimes committed outside the City of San Diego. The office files about 40,000 criminal cases a year and balances prosecution with numerous crime prevention programs. District Attorney Summer Stephan leads the office of more than 1,000 dedicated employees who pursue fair and equal justice, and support victims daily across San Diego County.*