CRISIS INTERVENTION LAW ENFORCEMENT POLICY GUIDE

PUBLIC SAFETY TELECOMMUNICATORS ADDENDUM

(CIT FOCUSED)

This manual was completed by staff at the Ohio Criminal Justice Coordinating Center of Excellence in cooperation with Ohio's CIT Coordinators and community partners.

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OVERVIEW

This addendum to the Crisis Intervention Law Enforcement Policy Guide (CIT-Focused) is designed to assist Public Safety Telecommunicators (PSTs) and those responsible for leading/managing Emergency Communications Centers with the construction and publication of policies and procedures to process and handle service calls involving persons in crisis. "Persons in crisis" are identified within the primary guide and will not be defined in this addendum.

Emergency Communications Centers (ECCs) are defined as locations that receive 911 calls for service (or text-to-911 requests if enabled to do so) from the public along with any service calls that come in on non-emergency or administrative lines or circuits. ECCs may be large centers with substantial staff or small centers where one or two persons handle all tasks, and those persons may have additional job tasks. ECCs in Ohio are also acknowledged to be operated and controlled in various methods to include:

- Operated by a law enforcement agency,
- Operated by a fire/EMS agency or one that specializes only in fire service or EMS,
- Operated as a stand-alone center within a single jurisdiction, or
- Operated by a regional authority or jointly controlled by multiple governmental entities or a governmental entity-created board of directors.

PSTs are defined within the primary guide. Usually, they consist of call takers, dispatchers, or personnel who take calls and dispatch. They may have other job tasks independent of supporting responding public safety personnel. These personnel receive calls, text messages, or other forms of data directed into the ECC. Those personnel then dispatch the appropriate resources to the service call, redirect and transfer the call to the appropriate agency if the call does not involve an immediate threat to public safety, or transfer the call to the relevant jurisdiction where the incident is occurring. PSTs may only process and dispatch calls for police services or process calls for fire/EMS services. Some PSTs process all public safety calls for service. Some PSTs will process and dispatch service calls for a single jurisdiction, and some process and dispatch service calls for multiple jurisdictions. This variation in ECC operation, control, and personnel tasks and workloads requires a more generalized set of policies and procedures for the ECCs in Ohio.

Users should recognize that this addendum concentrates on handling service calls involving a person or persons in crisis within the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) framework. CIT is more expansively defined and discussed in the primary policy guide. This addendum is not designed to be used independently but used in conjunction with the primary policy guide. Based on a review of multiple CIT core elements documents, the roles of PSTs within CIT are:

- PSTs know what CIT is, how CIT programs operate within their jurisdictions, and how CIT officers are identified and dispatched even if immediately unavailable.

- PSTs can effectively interact with persons in crisis and obtain sufficient information to identify the service call as one involving a person or persons in a crisis.

- PSTs can classify the service call as one involving a person in crisis.

- PSTs can dispatch CIT officers and others to a person in crisis call and relay all known information to all responders.

A review of more recent guides and the few available research articles about the PST role within a CIT program reveals some additional integration points and duties:

- PSTs can evaluate a service call involving a person in crisis to determine which resources should respond and know if the call can be diverted to other resources such as crisis lines or non-law enforcement responders.

- PSTs can de-escalate callers while actively listening to the caller and gathering pertinent information about the call involving a person in crisis.

- PSTs can classify the service call as one involving a person in crisis, then add a secondary code if the call detail provides a reason to assign a higher priority. This coding allows data to be extracted and used to create formal reports for CIT program stakeholders.

Finally, this addendum is structured to help ECCs leaders, managers, and staff members create policies and procedures for handling persons in crisis calls within the CIT program framework. The addendum will provide commentary for each of the included policy and procedure categories, along with the elements that should be included. The main elements for policy and procedure creation are provided. Sample policies are not included due to the complexity and variation of ECCs and duties performed by PSTs within those ECCs.

The addendum is organized into the following categories:

- Taking and Processing the Call
- Resolution of the Call
- Dispatching the Call
- Training and Outcomes
- Miscellaneous Policy Concerns and Guidance

Taking and Processing the Call

<u>Commentary</u>

As those involved with public safety telecommunications know, taking and processing a service call is a critical job task for a PST. Determining if a call for service needs to be classified as a person in crisis is one of those crucial tasks. This determination may be obvious or may be difficult based on available information. In order to determine the appropriate classification for a call, a PST must take in real and perceived information from a caller, interpret that information, and make sense of it before selecting an appropriate classification along with assigning a priority or escalating the pre-existing priority (Simpson, 2020). Once a call is classified as involving a person in crisis and prioritized, the PSTs should either dispatch the call to a CIT officer or divert it to another location or service.

Calls for service involving a person in crisis, whether on an emergency line or a non-emergency line, can come from the person in crisis or someone else. The PST may have to begin de-escalating the caller while gathering information and interacting with the caller in a manner that does not purposely or inadvertently escalate the caller's emotions or actions. When the PST can reduce emotional levels, communication is more effective and produces better information to determine which option is best to resolve the service call.

Suppose the call does involve a person in crisis. In that case, the information provided to responders or entered into the call-taking or Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system must clearly state that the call is about a person in crisis or suspected to be in crisis, and contain details about current dangerousness to self or others and all prior history, if any, about the person in crisis. The call should be classified in a manner to allow it to be extracted later for research purposes. Information and data from persons in crisis calls from the ECC can be extracted, compiled, and analyzed. This analysis can reduce future service calls, aid stakeholders with how to most effectively and efficiently use their finite resources, and show community members how public safety services respond to and resolve persons in crisis calls.

<u>Policy Main Elements</u>

- Directions to PSTs to obtain the most accurate incident location (should be part of the general policy).

- Requirements that the PST gather all pertinent information from the caller to determine if the call involves a person in crisis (should be part of the general policy). If the call is about a person in crisis, the PST must classify it that way.

- Instructions to the PST to use de-escalation techniques when handling persons in crisis calls and gather information in a manner that does not elevate the emotions or

behaviors of the caller. The PST should attempt to gain rapport with the caller when able to do so.

- Directions to the PST to use information gathered to determine the appropriate classification for the call and decide if the call requires immediate intervention by law enforcement or to direct the call to another available and appropriate resource (Example: crisis phone lines)

- Requirements that the PST ask about present dangerousness to the person in crisis or others, any weapons or access to weapons, recent threats made, any history of responses to that person or location, and any other details that will aid responding law enforcement officers or other responders in assessing their own risk and assessing the risk to the person in crisis or others in the community.

- Directions for the PST to enter all available information and data into the call taking/CAD system and use the language/terminology known and understood by all responders and stakeholders.

- Requirements that the PST document all calls into the ECC that are suspected to be crisis-related, all available information, and how calls were resolved.

Resolution of the Call

Commentary

The resolution of a call is a logical extension of taking and processing a call. The resolution will often depend on the seriousness or acuity and what resources are available in the community or various communities served by the ECC. PSTs must know what options they have available to divert the call away from law enforcement officers' response if such a response is unnecessary.

Some communities have few or no emergency mental health resources and have come to rely on law enforcement as the primary responders to mental health concerns and service calls involving persons in crisis. Some communities may have access to co-responder units that pair a law enforcement officer with a clinician. Other communities may have a non-law enforcement mobile crisis response unit or team to respond to low safety risk calls involving a person in crisis. Some communities have mental health crisis lines that can allow for a "warm" handoff from an ECC to that line for evaluation and assistance for a person in crisis. Some ECCs may have embedded clinicians who can take over the crisis calls from PSTs and divert low-risk and low acuity calls to mental health services. The PST taking the call involving a person in crisis should select the best option to resolve the call based on available information. If the call

cannot be safely diverted, a law enforcement response may be the most sensible resolution based on gathered information or lack thereof.

Finally, ECCs that divert calls away from law enforcement response must document how and why the call was redirected and to whom. This information must be entered into the appropriate systems to be retrieved later and used to evaluate the diversion's efficacy.

Policy Main Elements

- Directions that PSTs should dispatch a CIT officer or officers, if available, when it is evident that the call involves a person in crisis and mental health concerns are suspected, and the received information warrants it.

- Guidance to PSTs that persons in crisis who are reported to be dangerous or engaged in significant criminal activity should cause the dispatch of law enforcement officers. At least one CIT officer, if available, should be dispatched to the scene.

- Directions to PSTs that a person in crisis call that is acute but not immediately dangerous or involving criminal activity should be rerouted to a crisis line, a designated service provider, or a resource that can provide pertinent information. If the call is transferred back to the ECC, the receiving PST should re-evaluate the previous response and select a different response based on available data.

- Guidance to PSTs that alternative methods of resolving a person in crisis call should be considered when the crisis call does not require the involvement of law enforcement officers on patrol. When such alternatives exist, a co-responder unit, non-law enforcement mobile crisis response units or personnel, or clinicians could handle those service calls.

- Directions to PSTs that EMS should also be dispatched to respond or stage nearby for persons in crisis calls when injuries have occurred to the person in crisis or others. EMS should also be dispatched to stage near the scene if the situation involves a person in a physical health crisis such as a person who may be suffering from Excited Delirium Syndrome.

- Requirements that calls that are not handled by law enforcement officers, whether CIT or otherwise, must be entered into the call taking/CAD system so that they can be tracked and evaluated. This information must include a brief description of why the call was diverted and to which agency.

Dispatching the Call

<u>Commentary</u>

Dispatching the call is the next step in the process. General dispatching guidelines are not discussed in this addendum. It only includes the issues involved with dispatching the appropriate resources to a person in crisis call within the CIT program framework. These guidelines include the dispatching of CIT officers, non-CIT law enforcement officers, or co-responder units. The need to alert a supervisor or dispatch a supervisor to the scene is included for incidents when appropriate resources are not available or when CIT officers or other necessary units must be released from lesser priority service calls or found in other areas or with other agencies.

<u>Policy Main Elements</u>

- Directions that a PST assigned to dispatching will identify and send the nearest available CIT officer to the call based on the call's classification. The PST will then clearly state that the call involves a person in crisis or is suspected to involve a person in crisis based on the information entered by the call-taking PST. The same PST may take the call and dispatch the appropriate resources. Systems used by the PST must be able to identify CIT officers who are on duty and any co-responder unit that may be available.

- Directions that the dispatching PST will relay all initial information to the responding CIT officer or officers, other law enforcement officers, or co-responder units and will continue to update those officers or units as new information becomes available. Information that impacts safety will be immediately conveyed to responders. PSTs can verbally communicate safety concerns or alert responders that additional information is available for review within CAD or electronic systems used by those units.

- Requirements that the PST will alert a supervisor if a CIT officer is not available for a call concerning a person in crisis call so that a CIT officer can be located to respond. That supervisor may need to respond to the scene or re-prioritize workloads for co-responder units or other officers to effectively respond to persons in crisis.

Training and Outcomes

Commentary

Training for PSTs gives them the knowledge, skills, and abilities to recognize persons in crisis calls and handle them effectively. Training for PSTs is vital, as noted by state and national CIT core elements documents, CIT guides, and various other publications. PSTs are often the first contact point for persons in crisis or those seeking help for a person in crisis when that person or another calls 911 or a non-emergency police or fire/EMS number. PSTs must recognize a call that involves a person in crisis, effectively process the call, and connect the person in crisis with the appropriate resources or have the right resources sent to the person's location. PSTs must also use their skills to calm or de-escalate callers, actively listen to the caller, and ask appropriate questions to obtain information to maximize safety for all involved and choose the best resolution for the call. If the proper solution is to dispatch CIT/other law enforcement officers or other resources available to the location, information about those resources and how they can be obtained must be included in provided training.

Public safety personnel must always be trained to policy. Training PSTs to established policy should also provide them with guidance to appropriately classify a call for service involving a person in crisis, to enter sufficient information into the call system/CAD so that others can obtain that information for use in prioritizing resources, and to evaluate current responses to determine if they need to be enhanced, changed, or eliminated. Any changes to the policy or Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) manuals for handling persons in crisis calls must be relayed as soon as operationally possible to PSTs. If training is required, it should be expedited.

Finally, training for PSTs must include knowing the signs and symptoms of a mental illness or other reasons that a person could be in crisis. A portion of the training must be about recognizing when a person is saying or doing things that would lead the PST to believe that the person in crisis has attempted or is contemplating suicide. Job aids and guides should be provided during the training so that PSTs know what services are available and who provides those services. Information about those services and service providers can be given to callers, family members, or responders as needed.

The training policy must identify what training is to be provided to new PSTs during their initial training phase and what additional training will be provided as PSTs gain tenure. This identification must include topical matter, the length of the training sessions, and how often continuing training/education is provided. External guidelines or requirements from regulatory agencies may help establish timelines for required training, what topics are needed and when and training/education must be completed.

<u>Policy Main Elements</u>

- Requirements that PSTs be trained in policies and procedures involving persons in crisis service calls. Training will include instruction that PSTs must know all policies and procedures and where to find policy/procedure manuals or documents for reference.

- Requirements that PSTs be trained to access and use available job aids about persons in crisis service calls and that managers/supervisors will keep those job aids accessible and updated.

- Direction that PSTs and all supervisors/managers within an ECC be trained to know what CIT is and how it operates as a program, and the role and responsibilities of PSTs within CIT.

- Requirements that PSTs be trained to know and recognize signs and symptoms of a mental illness or other reason that would cause the PST to understand that the service call is about a person in crisis.

- Requirements that PSTs be trained to know and recognize signs and symptoms of persons who have attempted or are contemplating suicide and determining if the information received requires an immediate response.

- Requirements that PSTs be trained to appropriately classify (assign or select a call type) and process the call to get the right resource for a person. The right resource may be a non-law enforcement resource.

- Requirements that PSTs be trained to remain calm during persons in crisis calls, use techniques that can be applied during the call to de-escalate the caller when possible, and use active listening techniques to gather information.

- Requirements that PSTs be trained to ask appropriate questions to determine a disposition for a person in crisis call and ask additional questions for clarification.

- Requirements that PSTs involved with dispatching be trained in locating CIT officers, dispatching those officers, and dispatching other officers or resources as needed.

- Requirements that PSTs be trained to know how applicable agency policies allow CIT officers to be dispatched across geographical boundaries or jurisdictional boundaries, including intra-agency sharing of CIT officers and resources.

- Direction that the training provided to PSTs includes the need to enter sufficient information into call-taking/CAD systems so that data can be extracted later for reports

and sharing with others to prioritize resources and make CIT programs and their elements better.

- Direction that changes to policies or SOP manuals be conveyed at the first opportunity and that training on those changes occurs as soon as possible.

- Direction that ECC managers provide introductory training for new PSTs in handling calls involving persons in crisis.

- Direction that ECC managers provide Continuing Education Training (CET) to PSTs about persons in crisis calls. This direction should include the amount of time to be spent, the topics to be covered in training, and how often CET should be provided. This policy language should also mention that regulatory entities such as the Ohio 911 Program Office may require both introductory training and CET.

Miscellaneous Policy Concerns and Guidance

Commentary

This addendum does not address general requirements for a PST in call-taking and dispatching and the training needed to be proficient for either or both. PSTs must be trained to a minimum set of standards. In Ohio, those standards are set by regulatory agencies such as the Ohio 911 Program Office. Additionally, ECC managers and public safety officials who operate ECCs can seek and obtain recommended standards from organizations such as the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) International and the National Emergency Management Association (NENA). ECCs with PSTs certified in Emergency Police, Emergency Medical, or Emergency Fire Dispatch (EPD/EMD/EFD) may also be subject to standards set by the International Academies of Emergency Dispatch (IAED).

This policy guide addendum also recognizes that some ECCs use guide card systems to determine the classification of call types and prioritization of all service calls, including those for persons in crisis. Those guide card systems may be in the form of manual flipcharts or may be electronic. ECC supervisors and managers may use the information in this addendum in addition to those guide cards to develop policies and procedures for persons in crisis calls.

This addendum does not identify all the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for PSTs to take and process service calls involving persons in crisis successfully. These skills and outcomes should be addressed in training curricula and materials. Various resources are available for ECC managers to create and provide this training. ECC managers are encouraged to review the upcoming APCO International standard titled *Crisis Intervention Techniques and Call Handling Procedures for Public Safety Telecommunicators.* As this addendum is created, this standard had completed a public review session and is awaiting final publication. The draft

version is titled *APCO Candidate Standard ANS 1.120.1-20XX*. This standard is comprehensive and identifies skills and elements needed to handle calls involving persons in crisis, whether they are due to an underlying mental illness or any other condition.

Policy Main Elements

- Requirement that any training provided to PSTs about persons in crisis calls incorporates relevant standards or requirements. The training should include how those standards and requirements intersect with CIT programs.

- Requirement that training in the use of guide card systems for PSTs includes how those systems intersect with CIT programs.

References

Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) International. (n.d.). *Crisis intervention techniques and call handling procedures for public safety telecommunicators (APCO Candidate Standard ANS 1.120.1-20XX).* Retrieved December 28, 2020, from https://www.apcointl.org/standards/standards-call-to-action/

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