

Hamilton Police Services’ Crisis Response

Hamilton Police Services is recognized as a leader in developing innovative responses to mental health crises. They have introduced several programs aimed to better support individuals in crisis, particularly within vulnerable populations like the homeless. These initiatives prioritize de-escalating situations and connecting individuals to appropriate community resources, which helps prevent arrests, reduces criminal justice system involvement, and lowers emergency department visits. This holistic approach ensures individuals receive the right care in the right place and at the right time. For instance, in 2023, the Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team responded to 3,585 calls, with approximately 84% of those cases being de-escalated and diverted from emergency departments. Key programs that support this work include:

- **Crisis Outreach and Support Team (also known as COAST):** This program pairs specially trained police officers and mental health professionals, such as nurses, social workers, occupational therapists, and crisis triage workers, to support persons who are in crisis and have a mental health concern. They provide outreach visits on a triage basis to assess and refer individuals to health and social services. This is a partnership between St. Joseph’s Healthcare Hamilton, Hamilton Police Service, and Halton Regional Police Service.
- **Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team:** This program pairs specially trained police officers and mental health professionals to rapidly respond to persons in crisis. This collaborative approach provides immediate on-site support, de-escalates crises, and connects individuals to necessary mental health resources, ensuring timely and appropriate care.
- **Social Navigator Program:** This program pairs paramedics and police officers to assess the needs of individuals and support them with referrals to health and social services. This is achieved through short-term case management and outreach services. This is a partnership between Partnership between the Hamilton Paramedic Service and Hamilton Police Service.
- **Rapid Intervention Support Team:** This program, which serves as an extension of the Social Navigator Program, provides a multi-disciplinary outreach team of experts including a Housing Navigator, Mental Health Navigator, Addictions Navigator, Women’s Navigator, Indigenous Navigator, Youth Navigator, and a Court Liaison Worker. They offer wraparound case management for the most complex and marginalized individuals to provide comprehensive assessments and referrals to health and social services. This is a partnership with St. Joseph’s Healthcare Hamilton, Canadian Mental Health Association, Internal House, YMCA, Wesley, John Howard Society of Hamilton, Hamilton Regional Indian Centre, and Hamilton Police Service.

Another example of a collaborative response to these complex issues is the recent establishment of Zachary’s Legacy, developed through a partnership between St. Joseph’s Healthcare Hamilton, the Hamilton Police Service, and the Hamilton Paramedic Service. This downtown center is focused on mental health outreach and community support, serving as a hub for many of the services mentioned above.