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June 10, 2026

The Honorable Karen Bass
Mayor, City of Los Angeles
Room 303, City Hall

Honorable Members of the City Council
c/o City Clerk
Room 395, City Hall

RE: REPORT ON STRATEGIES AND THE STEPS NECESSARY TO CO-SPONSOR WORKSHOPS TO INFORM INDIVIDUALS ABOUT EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER PATHWAYS TO BECOMING CRISIS WORKERS

SUMMARY

In May 2025, the Los Angeles City Council approved the motion in Council File 25-0358,¹ instructing the Civil, Human Rights and Equity Department (“LA Civil Rights Department”) and the Youth Development Department (“YDD”) to “report on strategies and the steps necessary to co-sponsor workshops to inform individuals about educational and career pathways to becoming crisis workers. These would support the City’s outreach programs to individuals experiencing homelessness and unarmed crisis response teams.”² The motion was initially introduced by LA City Councilmember Bob Blumenfield, in April 2025, and was later amended by the Ad Hoc Committee On Unarmed Crisis Prevention, Intervention, and Community Services, which is co-chaired by LA City Councilmember Blumenfield and Councilmember Eunisses Hernandez.

This directive recognizes the City of Los Angeles’s (“city’s”) care-based, public safety programs, namely Crisis and Incident Response through Community-Led Engagement (“CIRCLE”) and the City’s Unarmed Model of Crisis Response (“the UMCR”). Both programs require a sustainable pipeline of skilled professionals and are part of an essential part of an ecosystem of agencies, including service providers, academia, and the County of Los Angeles (“LA County” or “the County”) addressing mental health crises. This report outlines a departmental approach and methodology to identify

¹ Blumenfield, Bob. Councilmember, Los Angeles 3rd District. *Motion 25-0358*. Los Angeles City Clerk. April 4, 2025. https://cityclerk.lacity.org/online/docs/2025/25-0358_misc_04-04-25.pdf.

² *ibid.*

workforce challenges, highlight opportunities, and recommendations to improve health and economic outcomes for Angelenos.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the additional instructions in Council File 25-0358,³ the LA Civil Rights Department and the Youth Development Department respectfully request the Honorable Mayor Karen Bass and the Honorable Members of the City Council to:

1. REVIEW the Economic and Workforce Development Department (“EWDD”), the Office of the City Administrative Officer (“CAO”), the Office of the Chief Legislative Analyst (“CLA”) and the Personnel Department analyzing how other jurisdictions support education and workforce development for crisis response teams.
2. SUPPORT the CAO’s future collaborations with the County Department of Mental Health to identify opportunities for joint education and workforce development initiatives, which directly support the recruitment, training, and placement of professionals into unarmed crisis response roles and ensure alignment across City and County efforts.

BACKGROUND

In the wake of the uprisings of 2020 and a subsequent reckoning on the role of policing and public safety, local governments across the country have faced renewed scrutiny over police funding, accountability, and methods of policing underserved communities. For Los Angeles, responding to and understanding the high profile incidents of police brutality, Angelenos called for care-based alternatives with law enforcement in situations involving mental illness, substance use, and people experiencing homelessness. This call for care was bolstered by a broader discussion on mental health, a societal call to move away from punitive measures for all “wrong-doing,” and the broader need for a system of care and health-focused intervention. In fact, a 2021 survey conducted by the CAO indicated that 74% of Angelenos believed a robust unarmed crisis response program would benefit their community, and their support for “mixed-teams” of officers responding to certain types of calls alongside mental health workers grew from 53% in 2020 to 64% in 2022.⁴

³ Los Angeles City Council Ad Hoc Committee on Unarmed Crisis Prevention, Intervention, and Community Services. *Report from Ad Hoc Committee on Unarmed Crisis Prevention, Intervention, and Community Services*. Los Angeles City Clerk. April 18, 2025. Pg. 1. https://cityclerk.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2025/25-0358_rpt_AdHocUCP_04-11-25.pdf.

⁴ Szabo, Matthew W. Los Angeles City Administrative Officer. *STATUS UPDATE ON THE*

Such sentiments reflect the growing dialogue regarding the mental health needs of Americans. In a 2018 survey by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the organization estimated that 19.1% of Americans aged 18 or older suffered from mental illness, including substance use disorders, in the past year.⁵ By 2024, that percentage increased to 23.4% of American adults.⁶ These increases demonstrate a need for additional mental health care, as well as highlight the potential risk that an individual suffering a mental health crisis⁷ may have when interacting with law enforcement, or other individuals seeking to de-escalate but lacking the necessary training.⁸ These situations often led to activation of traditional emergency response protocols, such as deploying armed patrol officers as sole first responders to 9-1-1 calls, which may present additional risk to individuals in crisis. Data indicates that 104 people in the United States were killed by law enforcement responding to service calls describing erratic behavior or mental health crises in 2021.⁹ For Los Angeles in particular, data from the Los Angeles Police Department (“LAPD”) documenting police use of force between 2018 to 2022 revealed that individuals experiencing mental health crises and those experiencing homelessness were disproportionately involved in officer-involved shootings. This connection highlights the potential impact of alternative response programs, and subsequent reduction of harm, on vulnerable populations.¹⁰

DEVELOPMENT OF A MULTI-YEAR PLAN FOR UNARMED RESPONSE AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS FOR CREATING AN OFFICE OF UNARMED RESPONSE AND SAFETY.
Los Angeles City Clerk. May 12, 2023. (Pgs. 14-15).

https://cityclerk.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2022/22-0979_misc_5-15-23.pdf.

⁵ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. August 2019. Pg. 43.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/cbhsq-reports/NSDUHNationalFindingsReport2018/NSDUHNationalFindingsReport2018.pdf>.

⁶ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2024 National Survey on Drug Use and Health*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. July 2025. Pg. 32.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt56287/2024-nsduh-annual-national-report.pdf>.

⁷ The County of Los Angeles (“LA County” or “the County”) Department of Mental Health defines “mental health crisis” as a situation in which an individual’s emotional or mental state has put them at risk of hurting themselves or others, or impaired their ability to take care of their basic needs.

⁸ Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health. *Alternative Crisis Response (ACR)*. lacounty.gov.

<https://dmh.lacounty.gov/acr/>.

⁹ Mapping Police Violence. *2021 Police Violence Report*. policeviolencereport.org. Pg. 10.

<https://policeviolencereport.org/policeviolencereport2021.pdf>.

¹⁰ Szabo, Matthew W. Los Angeles City Administrative Officer. *STATUS UPDATE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MULTI-YEAR PLAN FOR UNARMED RESPONSE AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS FOR CREATING AN OFFICE OF UNARMED RESPONSE AND SAFETY*. Los Angeles City Clerk. May 12, 2023. Pg. 12.

https://cityclerk.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2022/22-0979_misc_5-15-23.pdf.

To meet the need for a local, specialized response to mental health crises without singularly relying on armed officers, the city, as well as the LA County Department of Mental Health have implemented inventions. At the county level, Law Enforcement Teams and Psychiatric Mobile Response Teams allow a more holistic response to 9-1-1 calls related to mental health. Each Law Enforcement Team is composed of a uniformed police officer and a certified mental health clinician who respond to mental health-related calls.¹¹ Psychiatric Mobile Response Teams do not include a law enforcement officer, but will consist of at least one clinician tasked with de-escalating conflict and averting harm if possible while providing response measures for individuals experiencing crises.¹²

Similarly, the city has responded to Angelenos' calls for an emergency response system which integrates community care and behavioral health experts. In particular, the City Council's 2020 decision to allocate \$90 million toward a "Reimagining Public Safety Service Delivery" reserve further signaled a fiscal shift in response to community demands and awareness of mental health issues.¹³ Likewise, building on this investment, the City's Fiscal Year 2022-23 Budget expanded the LAPD's Community Safety Partnerships and established a new bureau of the same name. Other alternative public safety measures present in the FY 2022-23 budget included the Call Redirection to Ensure Suicide Safety ("CRESS") program, which rerouted suicide-related calls from the LAPD to the Didi Hirsch Mental Health Crisis Call Center.¹⁴

In addition to funding allocations, the LAPD, in particular, has increased its efforts to integrate the presence of mental health specialists into responses. The LAPD's Mental Evaluation Unit deploys Systemwide Mental Assessment Response Team Units, or "SMART" Units, composed of a uniformed officer and a mental health professional to make assessments of individuals who are expected to be suffering from mental health issues in scenarios traditionally involving only law enforcement.¹⁵

However, despite participating in efforts to support individuals navigating mental health

¹¹ Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health. *Law Enforcement Teams (LET)*. lacounty.gov. <https://dmh.lacounty.gov/our-services/countywide-services/eotd/let/>.

¹² Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health. *Psychiatric Mobile Response Teams (PMRT)*. lacounty.gov. <https://dmh.lacounty.gov/our-services/countywide-services/eotd/pmrt/>.

¹³ Budget and Finance Committee. File 20-0600. City of Los Angeles. June 29, 2020. https://cityclerk.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2020/20-0600_rpt_bfc_6-29-20.pdf.

¹⁴ Garcetti, Eric. Los Angeles Mayor, Former. *FY 2022-23 Proposed Budget Summary*. City Administrative Officer. Pgs. 25-27. <https://cao.lacity.gov/budget22-23/budgetsummary/index.html#p=28>.

¹⁵ Mejia, Kenneth. Los Angeles City Controller. *On the Sideline: Assessing LAPD's Mental Evaluation Unit & SMART Co-Response Model*. Los Angeles City Clerk. October 27, 2025. Pg. 5. https://cityclerk.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2020/20-0780-s1_rpt_10-27-25.pdf.

crises, the LAPD's officers have several duties which keep them from focusing on that task alone. The LA Civil Rights Department's analysis of data from 2023 illustrates the workload: The LAPD received approximately 1.46 million calls for service over the course of the year,¹⁶ but only had 8,995 officers in August of that year.¹⁷ City officials have also acknowledged the strain that addressing mental health calls places on officers; In 2024, Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass recognized and celebrated the expansion of CIRCLE, which is a 24/7 unarmed response program that addresses non-violent calls to the LAPD that are reporting unhoused Angelenos in crisis. Mayor Bass' statement championed value of CIRCLE and its ability to relieve the LAPD, while simultaneously ensuring safety and strong public service delivery saying, "CIRCLE continues to be a proven program to help Angelenos, and the CIRCLE team has helped people in need and freed up police officers to respond to the calls where they are needed the most."¹⁸ As Mayor Bass' statement demonstrates, city action has demonstrated and uplifted the knowledge that city-run programs, which employ trained mental health service providers, are well-placed to intervene in non-violent calls, thus relieving a burden on the LAPD's capacity.

In a broad sense, Los Angeles' investment in unarmed crisis response can be understood as a response to sustained community advocacy and a marked shift in public safety philosophy. Programmatic action by the City and LA County demonstrates that there is attention to, investment in, and potential for restructuring response to mental health crises.

RECENT PROGRAMMATIC ACTION

As highlighted above, city leaders have responded to the emergent call for unarmed crisis response and increased integration of mental and behavioral health professionals into the model of law enforcement with a commitment to transitioning responsibility for non-violent calls away from law enforcement.¹⁹ Despite the city's lack of a department providing mental health services, City leaders have fulfilled commitments to Angelenos

¹⁶ Los Angeles Police Department. *LAPD Calls for Service 2023*. Los Angeles Open Data. January 30, 2024. https://data.lacity.org/Public-Safety/LAPD-Calls-for-Service-2023/ug7m-rynj/about_data.

¹⁷ Niemietz, Brian. *LAPD at its smallest since the 1990s*. Police1. August 9, 2023. <https://www.police1.com/police-recruiting/articles/lapd-at-its-smallest-since-the-1990s-EnbJOGepQb8PQzb2/>.

¹⁸ Bass, Karen. Los Angeles Mayor. *Keeping Angelenos Safe: Mayor Bass Announces CIRCLE Program Expanding to More Neighborhoods in West L.A.* Mayor Karen Bass: Press Releases. August 8, 2024. <https://mayor.lacity.gov/news/keeping-angelenos-safe-mayor-bass-announces-circle-program-expanding-more-neighborhoods-west>.

¹⁹ Raman, Nithya. Councilmember, Los Angeles 4th District. Harris-Dawson, Marqueece. Councilmember, Los Angeles 8th District, Los Angeles City Council President. *Motion 25-0331*. Los Angeles City Clerk. March 25, 2025. https://cityclerk.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2025/25-0331_misc_3-25-25.pdf.

by developing and administering two programs in partnership with local service providers performing in-field care and intervention: CIRCLE and the UMCR.

Crisis and Incident Response through Community-Led Engagement (“CIRCLE”)

The CIRCLE program is Los Angeles’ first 24/7 non-law enforcement alternative to address non-emergency 9-1-1 calls involving people experiencing homelessness. Launched as a pilot program in 2022, CIRCLE receives calls meeting specific criteria redirected from LAPD dispatchers. CIRCLE’s deployed response teams address incidents that do not involve violence, weapons, other immediate safety threats, or medical emergencies, and may include requests for wellness checks, conflict resolution, syringe disposal, or interaction with individuals displaying antisocial and/or drug-influenced behaviors. In 2024, Mayor Bass announced CIRCLE’s geographic expansion funded by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Byrne Discretionary Grant Program.²⁰ Programmatic data presented in January 2026 reported more than 3 million Angelenos have been served by CIRCLE’s four operating partners: Alcott Center, Heluna Health, Sycamores, and Urban Alchemy. Operators provide service to the Hollywood, Metro, Pacific, South Los Angeles, Valley, East, and Harbor areas of Los Angeles.²¹

The Unarmed Model of Crisis Response (“UMCR”)

The UMCR, launched on March 12, 2024, diverts calls from traditional police response to trained behavioral health teams who provide 24/7 mobile crisis responses to non-emergency 9-1-1 calls related to mental health crises, substance abuse, wellness checks, and indecent exposure. The program is administered by the CAO’s Office, with support from the LAPD and three contracted service providers: Exodus Recovery, Inc., Alcott Center, and Penny Lane Centers.²² The UMCR does not respond to calls involving violent crime, the immediate threat of violence, weapons, medical emergencies, nor individuals confirmed to be less than 18 years of age, or incidents involving three or more individuals in need of assistance (Attachment 1). Between the

²⁰ Bass, Karen. Los Angeles Mayor. *Keeping Angelenos Safe: Mayor Bass Announces CIRCLE Program Expanding to More Neighborhoods in West L.A.* Mayor Karen Bass: Press Releases. August 8, 2024.
<https://mayor.lacity.gov/news/keeping-angelenos-safe-mayor-bass-announces-circle-program-expanding-more-neighborhoods-west>.

²¹ Los Angeles Civil Rights Department. *Shaping the Future of Community Safety*. January 31, 2026. Newsroom: In Case You Missed It.
<https://civilandhumanrights.lacity.gov/sites/g/files/wph2271/files/2026-05/Shaping%20the%20Future%20of%20Community%20Safety%20Presentation.pdf>.

²² Szabo, Matthew W. Los Angeles City Administrative Officer. *STATUS UPDATE ON THE UNARMED MODEL OF CRISIS RESPONSE PILOT PROGRAM*. Los Angeles City Clerk. June 16, 2025. Pg. 1. https://cityclerk.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2020/20-0769-S7_rpt_cao_1_6-16-25.pdf.

UMCR’s launch March 2024 through April 23, 2026, UMCR has responded to 23,585 calls, with 566 calls diverted from the Los Angeles Fire Department (“LAFD”).²³

Convening: “Shaping The Future of Community Safety”

On January 31, 2026, the LA Civil Rights Department and YDD partnered to host “Shaping the Future of Community Safety,” a virtual event promoting pathways to careers in behavioral health and unarmed response.

To plan the event, the departments met with city personnel administering CIRCLE and the UMCR to gain an understanding about each program’s scope of work, the typical composition of deployment teams, and service providers’ perspectives on workforce retention. Early in the event’s development, LA Civil Rights Department staff (“Staff”) ideated on a series of workshops based on specific research insights, but due to limited capacity, ultimately hosted one introductory convening to share the emerging field with a broad public audience. This engagement informed the event’s structure and bilateral focus on academia’s preparation of new crisis responders and lessons from veteran responders participating in city initiatives. To ensure a diverse set of experiences and expertise were available to the public audience, Staff organizing the event made a concerted effort to include panelists presenting perspectives from the community college level, California’s public universities, and the youth and workforce development sector.

Staff and fellows organizing the event promoted it among the region’s colleges and universities. Our outreach garnered 189 registrants and more than 50 participants attended the event. Upon registration, about 32% described themselves as college or graduate students, 24% reported working in a field different from the behavioral health sector, another 24% reported working in the behavioral health field. Three registrants were high school students and five people reported they were seeking employment. (Some registrants marked the option “prefer not to say,” and others did not enter a response.)

The event occurred as follows:

10:00 AM - 10:03 AM	Welcome & Technical Instructions
10:03 AM - 10:15 AM	Opening Remarks: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• LA Civil Rights General Manager and Executive

²³ Internal communication from the UMCR.

	<p>Director Capri Maddox</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-chairs for Ad Hoc Committee on Unarmed Crisis Prevention, Intervention, and Community Services, Councilmember Bob Blumenfield (Council District 3), Councilmember Eunisses Hernandez (Council District 1)
10:15 AM - 10:20 AM	Moderator Introduction & Panel Overview
10:20 AM - 10:40 AM	<p>Spotlight Presentations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CIRCLE (Presented by Deputy Mayor Karren Lane, Mayor’s Office of Community Safety) • The UMCR (Presented by Vanessa Willis, Senior Management Analyst I, CAO’s Office)
10:40 AM - 11:10 AM	Panel: Academic Pathways to Behavioral Health Careers
11:10 AM - 11:40 AM	Panel: Workforce Development & Crisis Response Careers
11:40 AM - 11:55 AM	Question & Answer Segment
11:55 AM - 12:00 PM	Closing Remarks

Presentations from Deputy Mayor Karren Lane of the Mayor’s Office of Community Safety and Vanessa Willis, the Senior Management Analyst I leading the UMCR, highlighted the roles service providers, first responders, and licensed clinicians play in facilitating meaningful outcomes for Angelenos in need. Service providers for both CIRCLE and the UMCR are not city employees, and the agencies recruit, hire, and manage their own personnel. The following personnel types comprise the response and deployment teams, which were also outlined at the event.

- CIRCLE teams are staffed by employees from multiple service providers, and are composed of three responder types each with their own qualifications requirements:
 - **Clinicians** require a Master’s Degree, at least two years of supervised experience interacting with individuals experiencing homelessness, and license to practice in their chosen field. Examples include a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (“LMFT”), a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (“LCSW”), or a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor (“LPCC”).

- **Supervisors** require either a Bachelor's Degree in a relevant field (e.g., psychology or social work) in addition to one year working with individuals experiencing homelessness or members of other vulnerable populations or an Associate's Degree in a relevant field in addition to two years working with individuals experiencing homelessness or members of other vulnerable populations.
- **Outreach Advocates** require lived experience with homelessness, substance use, or the criminal justice system as well as a minimum of one year working with people experiencing homelessness.
- The UMCR's three service providers make use of different team compositions, and each organization has various educational and licensing requirements. Despite these variations, the UMCR program as a whole employs five basic types of responder:
 - **Community Workers** build rapport, engage hard-to-reach clients, and connect clients to the City's resource network.
 - **Licensed Clinicians** assess risk, determine clients' mental health needs, and guide field decisions, including referrals to urgent psychiatric care.
 - **Social Workers** specialize in crisis resolution and resource navigation, connect clients to housing, benefits, and long-term support systems.
 - **Psychologists** are behavior and trauma experts, who support clients with complex mental health conditions and contribute to individualized stabilization plans.
 - **Therapists** are skilled in de-escalation and rapport building, provide emotional support and bridge clients to outpatient mental health care.

During the virtual event, two sets of panelists with administrative, field, and teaching experiences followed these presentations with recommendations to better connect students and job seekers to training and opportunities in this emerging field. The panelists' discussion also explored academia's role in preparing a compassionate workforce, including community workers, social workers, therapists, and emergency medical technicians all dedicated to supporting vulnerable Angelenos in need of trauma-informed care.

Speakers on the Academic Pathways to Behavioral Health Careers panel were:

- David Sedghi, LMFT, Los Angeles City College;
- Dr. Argelis Ortiz, Macro Social Worker, Educator and Community-Based Researcher, California State University, Los Angeles;
- Dr. Jim Lancaster, Vice Chancellor of Workforce and Economic Development, Los Angeles Community College District;
- Erin Nakamura, Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Practicum Education Faculty, UCLA Luskin's Department of Social Welfare; and
- Moderator Alex Briscoe, Principal for Strategy and Systems Change at Public Works Alliance and a mental health practitioner specializing in adolescent services and youth development.

Speakers on the Workforce Development & Crisis Response Careers panel were:

- Naomi Novak, of UMCR service provider Penny Lane Centers;
- Ben Climer, Training Director for UMCR service provider, Exodus Recovery, Inc.;
- Victor Lopez, UMCR responder at the Alcott Center, supporting outreach and access to critical services; and
- Moderator Kandee Lewis, LA City Commission on Civil Rights, Member, and CEO/President of Positive Results Center (PRC) and Founder of Black Women Leaders of Los Angeles.

The recording and slide presentation of “Shaping the Future of Community Safety” is available on the LA Civil Rights Department’s website at [LAisForEveryone.com](https://www.lacivilrights.org/).²⁴

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

Even as governmental attention to this field and public and philanthropic investment is growing, and new financial support for mental health interventions have become available, such as the youth-focused Rare Impact Fund,²⁵ the overall workforce of mental health specialists and community workers currently face a number of acute challenges.

At the state level, California’s behavioral health workforce includes more than half a million professionals and paraprofessionals, yet the widespread need for behavioral and mental health support creates persistent workforce shortages — particularly among

²⁴ Los Angeles Civil Rights Department. *Behavioral Health Event: Shaping the Future of Community Safety*. Newsroom: In Case You Missed It. January 31, 2026. <https://civilandhumanrights.lacity.gov/news/behavioral-health-event-shaping-future-community-safety>.

²⁵ Rare Impact Fund. *Request for Proposal: Strengthening the Nonclinical Youth Mental Health Workforce*. March 2026. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NkO-WqLm0lObzwwqJd_ic5gRr0_FU5lgr/view.

bilingual workers, practitioners with lived experience, and culturally competent providers — which continue to strain the system. These shortages are largely the result of an aging clinician base, regional disparities in provider availability, and high turnover from burnout and under-compensation. Shortages significantly impact peer specialists, licensed clinical social workers, and case managers. Such shortages and other barriers hampering the state’s mental health providers in 2023²⁶ may correlate with a 2021 analysis forecasting a healthcare workforce shortfall in California by 2026.²⁷

The 2023 report also notes difficulty retaining and hiring behavioral health professionals who reflect the diversity of clients in California,²⁸ with minority racial populations being underrepresented in various fields and at the state’s county-level behavioral health agencies.²⁹ LA County has a considerably diverse populace in which 55.1% of people above age five speak a language other than English at home,³⁰ and only 25% of residents identify as non-Hispanic- or Latinx-White alone.³¹ If the racial/ethnic and linguistic diversity of LA County is not adequately represented in the mental health workforce, then community members who interact with crisis response teams may find themselves being served by a clinician who does not speak their primary language or share their cultural context, thus risking a decrease in the quality of their care. Speakers at the event also noted that growing a diverse workforce is paramount to ensure equitable outcomes for behavioral health clients and patients.

Industry Insights Impacting Los Angeles’ Prospective and Current Workforce

During the January 31st virtual convening, and in the course of preliminary and post-event engagement with panelists and city personnel, the LA Civil Rights Department learned of multiple challenges facing behavioral health and crisis responders working in Los Angeles. Additionally, to understand municipal unarmed

²⁶ Coffman, Janet; Fix, Margaret. *Building the Future Behavioral Health Workforce: Needs Assessment. California County Behavioral Health Directors Association.* February 2023. Pgs. 59-61.
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b1065c375f9ee699734d898/t/63e695d3ce73ca3e44824cf8/1676056025905/CBHDA_Needs_Assessment_FINAL_Report_2-23.pdf.

²⁷ Bateman, Tanner; Hobaugh, Sean; Pridgen, Eric; Reddy, Arika. *US Healthcare Labor Market.* Mercer LLC. 2021. Pg. 4.
<https://www.mercer.com/content/dam/mercer/assets/content-images/north-america/united-states/us-healthcare-news/us-2021-healthcare-labor-market-whitepaper.pdf>.

²⁸ Coffman, Janet; Fix, Margaret. *Building the Future Behavioral Health Workforce: Needs Assessment. California County Behavioral Health Directors Association.* February 2023. Pg. 9.
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b1065c375f9ee699734d898/t/63e695d3ce73ca3e44824cf8/1676056025905/CBHDA_Needs_Assessment_FINAL_Report_2-23.pdf.

²⁹ *ibid.* Pg. 6.

³⁰ United States Census Bureau. *QuickFacts: Los Angeles County, California.* census.gov.
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/losangelescountycalifornia/PST045225>.

³¹ *ibid.*

response innovation and hiring at a national level, Staff attended a Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab webinar in May 2026.³²

Subject-matter experts who were panelists at the city event posited that local students and recent graduates may face a number of challenges when pursuing behavioral health and crisis response careers in Los Angeles. Researchers at the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab corroborated this assertion regarding the comparatively unstructured nature of this critical sector, writing, “Alternative emergency response is an emerging field without established educational or credentialing pipelines, making it difficult to recruit candidates with the specific skill set this work requires. Additionally, pay and benefits for alternative response staff are often less competitive than other first responders, creating additional recruitment barriers.”^{33 34}

Subject-matter experts supporting the LA Civil Rights Department and Youth Development Department’s event repeatedly referenced the obscurity of pathways to more advanced positions within the field, but the ambiguity is experienced even earlier in educational settings. At this time, entry into these careers is contingent on an individual student’s awareness of unarmed crisis response, which is far less defined than other lines of first response, such as medicine, nursing, fire service, or law enforcement. Furthermore, application of other well-known occupations, such as therapist or counselor, to unarmed crisis response is far more nascent, and as a result, job opportunities may not be apparent to students. Development of this workforce is largely reliant on word of mouth and personal recommendations.

Engagement with subject-matter experts also illuminated that students enrolled in undergraduate academic programs focused on social work or psychology, may not find relevant, preparatory coursework that facilitates in-field crisis response learning. Furthermore, qualifying paid internships and practica connected to unarmed crisis response were reported as more limited and harder to find. Traditional, post-graduate clinical experience, such as work at a state- or county-level mental health agency, may be funded by the California Social Work Education Center (“CalSWEC”), which offers aspiring behavioral health professionals two-year commitments and stipends for work at the institutions students have chosen.

³² SEMINAR RECORDING – Government Performance Lab. *Developing Clear Triage and Dispatch Processes for Alternative Response Programs*. YouTube. April 27, 2026.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7WF9julXi8>.

³³ Doyle, Libby; Solis Torres, Gabriela. *Innovations in 911 Response: Hiring and Supporting Alternative Responders*. Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab. November 13, 2025. Pg. 2. https://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Durham_Staffing_vF.pdf.

³⁴ This document reports on the Government Policy Lab’s crisis response-related engagement with the Community Safety Department of Durham, North Carolina. More information on the department can be found at <https://www.durhamnc.gov/4576/Community-Safety>.

However, students and jobseekers interested in this field may find wider access to training through local certificate programs conferring credentials in specialties related to behavioral health and unarmed crisis response. Los Angeles City College (“LACC”) offers multiple avenues for undergraduate students of social work to prepare for a relevant career. LACC’s Human Services Certificate³⁵ and the Addiction Studies Certificate³⁶ require one year of on-site work with organizations familiar to school administrators, and are meant to provide pathways for students to smoothly enter the workplace.

While intervention and innovation at specific institutions may provide greater access to this sector, subject-matter experts, including educators and the city’s service providers, noted the likelihood of mismatch of school-sponsored experience, qualifications needed for employment with service providing agencies, and state licensing requirements. Graduate students pursuing a license from the California Board of Behavioral Sciences may even learn that hours of supervised work on city-sponsored deployment teams may not align or count towards board standards.

During the research engagement, service providers also cited pay as a barrier to recruitment and retention at their agencies. A crisis worker responding to calls may eventually vacate the role for a higher-paying position in private healthcare. Furthermore, funding for health programming can be inconsistent and clinicians, community intervention workers, and health advocates employed by public agencies may be especially impacted. Recently, spending cuts shuttered seven LA County Department of Public Health clinics. Administrators turned instead to support from a private foundation in order to maintain services.³⁷

A majority of the city’s partners in unarmed crisis response and behavioral health are non-profit organizations. For non-profits overall, relatively low rates of compensation for work can therefore contribute to smaller applicant pools and lower retention rates of existing teams.

Also, working with a relatively small pool of employees, which includes licensed specialists, means that the city’s service providers often end up indirectly “poaching” personnel from each other. Some partners reported making use of other organizations’

³⁵ Los Angeles City College. *Human Services*. Los Angeles Community College District.
<https://www.lacc.edu/academics/aos/human-services-program>.

³⁶ Los Angeles City College. *Addiction Studies*. Los Angeles Community College District.
<https://www.lacc.edu/academics/aos/addiction-studies>.

³⁷ Schrank, Aaron. *LA County turns to private foundation to backfill public health funding cuts*. LAist. April 2, 2026.
<https://laist.com/news/health/la-county-turns-to-private-foundation-to-backfill-public-health-funding-cuts>.

referral lists to search for potential new hires. This results in a small, rotating pool of workers. Retention rates can be additionally impacted by workers seeking to advance their careers with further study, education, and/or training, limiting their ability to conduct and support field work and community response programs.

Beyond these challenges in education, hiring, and retention, subject-matter experts and scholarship on crisis response provided by the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab noted the importance of physical safety and mental health maintenance for unarmed responders. Although both CIRCLE and the UMCR's teams are deployed to non-emergency calls, first-responders must still get used to the potential volatility and emotional impact of mental health crises. Examples of work-related risks include being forced to confront emergent safety concerns not present in the original service call, suffer verbal berating, and other hazards. The acuity of these situations may require specialized training, support, or mentorship for new response employees to keep pace with their work environments. Strategies to prepare unarmed crisis response workers include ride-alongs³⁸ and cultivating safety and de-escalation skills, such as a calm tone and adaptability.³⁹ Without proper worker support and care, these unexpected challenges and hazards can, in turn, lead to demoralization or "burnout" which further affect employee retention.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following strategies reflect the insights gained from "Shaping the Future of Community Safety" and engagement with administrators of the city's unarmed crisis response programs, practitioners, and clinicians. Each recommendation is proposed to augment the quantity and quality of the prospective and existing workforce that can support the city's response and service to diverse Angelenos experiencing mental health crises.

Greater Advocacy for Growth of Behavioral Health and Unarmed Crisis Response Fields

As part of calling attention to the improvements and structure needed to fortify the industry, city leaders can generate and facilitate more dialogue about CIRCLE, the UMCR, and the greater need for a sustained, skilled, and compassionate workforce. By

³⁸ Doyle, Libby; Solis Torres, Gabriela. *Innovations in 911 Response: Hiring and Supporting Alternative Responders*. Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab. November 13, 2025. Pg. 5. https://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Durham_Staffing_vF.pdf.

³⁹ Watson, Amy C.; McNally, Kellan; Pope, Leah G.; Compton, Michael T. *If not police, then who? Building a new workforce for community behavioral health crisis response*. *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 16. April 24, 2025. Pg. 6. <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1579787/full>.

playing the roles of “influencer,” intermediary, and convener for this sector, the city can promote the overall health and economic growth of Los Angeles, as it has with other industries in the past.

The city’s large platform and global significance has been a helpful device for policymakers, including former executives and current Mayor Karen Bass, hoping to improve quality of life and equity in sectors beyond the city’s direct control and sphere of influence. Precedents include Executive Directive No. 8, in which Mayor Bass instructed city departments to form a Film and Television Task Force, with the unified purpose of supporting film creation in Los Angeles.⁴⁰ While an interdepartmental task force may not be the most immediate catalyst to growth of an abundant workforce that can support CIRCLE, the UMCR, and future unarmed crisis response initiatives, the example of the Executive Directive demonstrates strong advocacy from city leaders applied to workforce development in the private sector.

As an intermediary between academia preparing the next generation of workers, service providers, and municipal agencies that may employ those workers, the city can hold additional convenings, which raise awareness, outline barriers, initiate thought-partnership, and spark innovation. While the city does not control academic offerings and available coursework at institutions, its programs can provide real-time, training hours for people entering or re-entering the workforce through unarmed crisis response.

Future workshops and convenings may address anecdotal insights learned during the research period for this report with pointed objectives:

- **Objective No. 1: Raise awareness to update requirements for professional certifications, credentials, and licensure.**
 - Workshop Goals: Facilitate conversation between behavioral health advocates, city officials, and academic partners with the aim of integrating city-affiliated response work, including training hours, into existing academic programs.
 - Prospective Partners: California Board of Behavioral Sciences; service providers supporting CIRCLE and the UMCR; the academy, including

⁴⁰ Bass, Karen. Los Angeles Mayor. *Executive Directive No. 8*. Mayor Bass Executive Directives. August 6, 2024.

<https://mayor.lacity.gov/sites/g/files/wph2066/files/2024-08/ED%208%20-%20Uplifting%20Our%20Economy%20Through%20Entertainment%20Production%20Final.pdf>.

professors and faculty from local institutions; and representatives of organizations which provide funding, including CalSWEC.

- **Objective No. 2: Resolve Recruitment Challenges and Increase Advancement Opportunities Among LCSWs and other licensed professionals.**
 - Workshop Goals: Ideate on targeted retention and advancement strategies, such as shifting late-shift start times and promotion of Community Workers into therapist roles to begin collecting licensure hours; emphasize the opportunity for licensed professionals to serve as leaders in this emerging sector, and provide an overview of program structure, clinical supervision, and other day-to-day operations.
 - Prospective Partners: The California Chapter of the National Association of Social Work and the Council on Social Work Education.
- **Objective No. 3: Raise awareness among Master of Social Work (“MSW”) students.**
 - Workshop Goals: Explore how social work skills translate to unarmed crisis response, connect participants with hiring agencies, and provide resumé coaching and onsite application opportunities.
 - Prospective Partners: Schools conferring MSW degrees and local MSW program alumni networks.
- **Objective No. 4: Engage youth and early-career professionals in crisis response work by building clearer entry pathways into Community Worker and Advocate positions, or those which do not require licensure.**
 - Workshop Goals: Establish direct pipelines into non-licensure roles through LA City and LA County youth development programs.
 - Prospective Partners: The city’s HIRE LA’s Youth programs;⁴¹ Los Angeles Regional Initiative for Social Enterprise (“LA:RISE”); LA County Department of Mental Health’s Peer Certification Program; the Economic

⁴¹ Hire LA’s Youth. *Hire LA Summer Application*. Los Angeles Economic & Workforce Development Department. <https://www.hirelayouth.com/>.

and Workforce Development Department; local homeless service providers, and job readiness trainers.

Maintain and Support the Current Behavioral Health Workforce Development Programs

As highlighted in this report, the city has multiple, longstanding initiatives designed to promote workforce development for youth, including HIRE LA's Youth and the LA:RISE Youth Academy. These programs are administered by the Economic and Workforce Development Department ("EWDD").⁴² Similar programs are run in partnership with the LAFD and provide CPR certification as well as introduction to community emergency response training.⁴³ Such initiatives cultivate desirable skills in youth and young adult participants, and can therefore be foundational to future careers in crisis response. Continued investment in these programs is integral towards building a long-term sustainable workforce in Los Angeles, where some of these youth might eventually become mental health responders and gain practical experience through city-run programs, such as experience interacting with members of the community.

More precisely, narrowly-directed initiatives have also been successfully implemented, such as EWDD's Peer-to-Peer Support Specialist Program. This course offers youth aged 18 to 24 years old a paid training regimen meant to prepare them for work as mental health advocates for community members in the same age range.⁴⁴ EWDD reports that the first cohort of 25 participants have completed training, and 18 have continued their education or gained employment in the field. Maintaining and supporting training programs can bolster the city's development of a stronger behavioral and mental health professional workforce.

Consider Integrating Workforce Development Into Procurement Opportunities to Support Workforce Longevity

Previous iterations of the city's competitive opportunities for behavioral health and unarmed response programming, including Requests for Proposals ("RFPs") and Requests for Qualifications ("RFQs") have centered primarily on service delivery. While this has proven effective for ensuring the stated goals of the programs are fulfilled, the

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ LAFD Youth Programs. *Firefighter/EMS Magnet HIGH SCHOOL (FEMS)*. Los Angeles Fire Department. <https://www.joinlafd.org/youth-programs>.

⁴⁴ Los Angeles Economic and Workforce Development Department. *REPORT BACK FROM THE ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT AND THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT IN RESPONSE TO COUNCIL MOTION REGARDING A MULTI-YEAR WORKPLAN TO SCALE UP EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS TO TRANSITION INDIVIDUALS OUT OF HOMELESSNESS*. Los Angeles City Clerk. August 9, 2024. Pg. 4. https://cityclerk.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2023/23-0600-s62_rpt_EWDD_8-08-24.pdf.

city may wish to consider augmenting RFP and RFQ language for future versions of proposals to include requirements for education and training. For example, in addition to the service delivery outlined in previous solicitations, the city could consider requiring the proposals include facilitation of: workforce development training, educational programs for young professionals, and/or collaboration with local high schools or colleges/universities to support hands-on training for students. In doing so, the city would have the ability to continue delivering effective and essential services through programs, such as UMCR and CIRCLE, while also supporting the next generation of service providers and building out the behavioral health workforce.

Additionally, city staff reviewing proposals from prospective service providers could choose to develop a weighted metric to score the qualifications of proposing firms and their designs for workforce development. Furthermore, firms which propose integration of past participants of city youth programming may score higher on their proposals.

Establishing Paths to Entry for Youth Program Participants

Additionally, administrators of CIRCLE and the UMCR can facilitate participation and skill-building with other city-led programs by requesting proposals which take completion of youth development initiatives into account. This participation would be considered tantamount to experience needed for community-centered/peer roles, such as Community Worker or Advocate. For example, the CIRCLE program requires prospective Outreach Advocates to possess at least one year of experience working with unhoused individuals. This may prove to be a barrier for early-career professionals with similar experience and education, but not the precise listed requirement. With a weighted scoring model, their other experience and participation in HIRE LA's Youth programs, such as the Angeleno Corps, could be applied to the CIRCLE requirement since they give participants robust experience working with community-based organizations.⁴⁵ In doing so, such policies would streamline requirements, remove barriers to entry, open up a new source of hiring opportunities for non-profit providers, and ultimately create an entry point for young people and emerging workers to engage in longer-term, compensated public service.

CONCLUSION

The city continues to invest in its unarmed crisis response and behavioral health initiatives. In February 2026, the UMCR was adopted on a permanent basis by the City

⁴⁵ Hire LA's Youth. *Hire LA Summer Application*. Los Angeles Economic & Workforce Development Department. <https://www.hirelayouth.com/>.

Council,⁴⁶ strengthening the city's long-term commitment to a more modern, specialized approach to behavioral health and crisis care. The CIRCLE program continues its work across Los Angeles. By augmenting the workforce through recruitment events, youth programs, and contractual incentives, policymakers can lay the groundwork for an expanded alternative to armed response.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact with the submission of this report.



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⁴⁶ Los Angeles City Council. *Council File 26-0061*. Council File Management System. February 24, 2026.
<https://cityclerk.lacity.org/lacityclerkconnect/index.cfm?fa=ccfi.viewrecord&cfnumber=26-0061>.