



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Media contacts

MMHPI

[press@texasstateofmind.org](mailto:press@texasstateofmind.org)  
972.884.4660

DFR

[jason.evans@dallascityhall.com](mailto:jason.evans@dallascityhall.com)  
214.670.7949

Parkland

[april.foran@phhs.org](mailto:april.foran@phhs.org)  
469.419.4400

DPD

[pio@dpd.dallascityhall.com](mailto:pio@dpd.dallascityhall.com)  
214.671.4065

## Dallas Launches Coordinated Response Program for Behavioral Health Calls

*Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, Dallas Fire-Rescue Department, Dallas Police Department and Parkland Health & Hospital System announce partnership to provide specially-trained response teams for 911 calls;  
Program is first-of-its-kind in Texas*

DALLAS, January 22, 2018 – The Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute (MMHPI), Dallas Fire-Rescue Department (DFR), Dallas Police Department (DPD), and Parkland Health & Hospital System today announced the launch of the Rapid Integrated Group Healthcare Team (RIGHT Care) pilot program, which will provide a comprehensive emergency response to calls involving behavioral health emergencies. The first-of-its-kind program in Texas is an innovative partnership involving specially-trained and equipped paramedics, police officers, and mental health professionals who will respond as a single coordinated team to safely and effectively manage patients experiencing behavioral emergencies. The first phase of this program will launch Jan. 29 in South Central Dallas, thanks to a generous grant from The W. W. Caruth, Jr., Foundation at Communities Foundation of Texas (Caruth).

“Dallas Fire-Rescue is excited about the launch of this innovative program, which partners highly-trained and experienced DFR paramedics with a Dallas police officer and Parkland behavioral health specialist to better serve the needs of select patients experiencing behavioral health emergencies in Dallas,” said Daniel Salazar, Assistant Chief, Dallas Fire-Rescue. “The RIGHT Care program will provide the Department and the city with another tool to address specific patient requests for assistance with more appropriate resources thereby maintaining the Department's operational capabilities to respond to other medical emergencies.”

The program will consist of three RIGHT Care team members, a specially-trained police officer, paramedic and behavioral health specialist from Parkland that will be dispatched to respond to behavioral-health related calls in South Central Dallas. The teams will operate 16 hours per day, seven days a week. Initial operating hours are based on peak call times for behavioral health-related emergencies. A Parkland mental health clinician will also be housed in the 911-call center

to triage calls and serve as a liaison to DPD officers across the city. With the addition of the mental health clinician in the call center, this approach is the first-of-its kind in the country.

A comprehensive study by MMHPI funded earlier by Caruth found that the number of mental health-related emergency calls to the Dallas 911 center increased by an average of 18 percent from 2012 to 2015, with some divisions surging up to 85 percent. The study also found that roughly 17,000 people with mental illness are booked in to the Dallas County jail annually, and 40 percent return within a year of their release.

This program will dramatically change the response to these patients while also decreasing the need to utilize other scarce EMS, police, and hospital emergency department services throughout the city.

“We believe this program will enhance EMS service delivery overall as ambulance units will be more available to respond to other high priority EMS calls in a timely fashion,” said Marshal Isaacs, MD, Medical Director, BioTel/EMS System, Dallas Fire-Rescue, attending emergency physician at Parkland and Professor of Emergency Medicine at UT Southwestern Medical Center. “The ongoing data analysis in this pilot phase of the program by MMHPI will help gauge the effectiveness of the program and we look forward to reporting those results and potentially expanding the program to more areas of the city in the future.”

“This partnership exemplifies the service first mission of the Dallas Police Department and the city of Dallas. With police, fire, and hospital personnel working together on the RIGHT Care program, we are able to provide the best service to our community,” said U. Renee Hall, Chief, Dallas Police Department.

“People call us for help and our philosophy is to provide that help with compassion. The partnerships in RIGHT Care allow us to build on that compassion to provide meaningful and timely help to our most vulnerable residents in Dallas,” said Paul Stokes, Assistant Chief, Dallas Police Department, who served as a key project planner for the police department.

Leadership from DFR, DPD, and Parkland worked with a team from MMHPI’s Caruth Smart Justice Project to document the baseline trends driving emergency care currently and to examine best practices around the country for responding to individuals experiencing behavioral health emergencies. The program was designed, utilizing research-informed best practices, to significantly improve the response to behavioral health calls while diminishing the need to utilize other expensive and already overburdened resources throughout the city.

“Individuals living with mental illness should only be involved in the criminal justice system when they have committed an offense warranting that involvement, and about half of those in the Dallas County Jail each day are there only because of an untreated mental illness,” said Andy Keller, PhD, President and CEO, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute. “With the implementation of the RIGHT Care Program, along with the other components of the Caruth Smart Justice Plan, Dallas emergency responders and mental health professionals can help

ensure those who need mental health care will receive their care in the right treatment setting rather than a jail cell.”

“As the clinician members of the multidisciplinary RIGHT Care response team, Parkland social workers bring extensive experience in the Psychiatric Emergency Department setting to this mobile program. Their training enables them to quickly evaluate a patient to determine the appropriate resources and level of care for each individual,” said Kurtis Young, MSSW, LCSW, Social Work Manager, in Parkland’s Psychiatry Department. “We anticipate that Parkland’s ED will also benefit from the RIGHT Care program by diverting many patients away from hospital emergency rooms where they frequently seek care. We believe this approach will improve patient access to appropriate care and is the right approach for Dallas.”

###