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## **Galveston Launches Mental Health Crisis Response Teams**

Specialty Trained Teams Provide 9-1-1 Response for Mental Health Emergencies

GALVESTON – Galveston city and county officials, in partnership with the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation, The Pew Charitable Trusts, and other Galveston foundations today announced the launch of a new program that improves 9-1-1 mental health emergency call responses. Galveston Mayor Craig Brown delivered opening remarks and underscored the need for a health-driven response to behavioral health emergencies, especially as the nation recognizes Mental Health Awareness Month.

Roundtable participants included Fire Chief Charles Olsen, Police Chief Doug Balli, County Commissioner Stephen D. Holmes, Meadows Institute Senior Director of Health and Public Safety Max Geron, Gulf Coast Center CEO Felicia Jeffery, The Pew Charitable Trusts Project Director Julie Wertheimer, and moderated by Meadows Institute Senior Fellow for Justice Policy Dr. Tony Fabelo.

Compassionate Open Access to Services and Treatment, also called COAST Teams, are specially designed to provide immediate mental health assistance on-site and connect patients to ongoing care. The teams consist of a licensed clinician from the Gulf Coast Center, a paramedic from the Galveston Fire Department, and a Galveston police officer specially trained in mental health emergency response. Operating out of the Gulf Coast Center offices, the teams are available in 12-hour shifts from 7 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday-Saturday and 9 a.m.-5 p.m. on Sundays. When not answering calls, they conduct proactive and follow-up outreach to individuals in need of services.

Additionally, 9-1-1 call takers and dispatchers have received extensive training to recognize and triage mental health emergency calls. Galveston's 9-1-1 Call Center also recently launched a "fourth option," asking if the caller needs mental health services alongside police, fire, or EMS.

"When people in our community experience an emergency, they deserve to know they will receive the best response and care when they dial 9-1-1. I am tremendously proud of this program that was specially designed to meet the needs of Galveston," Galveston Mayor Craig Brown said. "This accomplishment would not be possible without the vision and guidance of the Meadows Institute, the funders who have generously and passionately supported this effort, and our COAST Team members and 9-1-1 personnel, devoted public servants who are dedicated to improving and saving lives."

"I'm encouraged to see Galveston launching a solution that ensures equitable access to care for everyone with a mental health emergency," said B.J. Wagner, Meadows Institute Senior Vice President

of Health and Public Safety. “The question we are asking public policymakers needs to shift from ‘Why did we send police?’ to ‘Why did we send only police?’ Galveston’s COAST Team provides a better way of caring for all residents, equitably and with dignity.”

From October 2021 to October 2022 about 48 percent of people booked in the Galveston County jail were screened positive for a mental health condition.

The COAST program was designed by the Meadows Institute and financially supported through a public-private partnership. Funders include the [Moody Foundation](#), [Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation](#), [The Pew Charitable Trusts](#), [Harris & Eliza Kempner Fund](#), [Ippolito Charitable Foundation](#), [Mary Moody Northen Endowment](#), and the Sasser Family Foundation.

Plans for the program were first publicly announced in June 2022.

“Galveston is fortunate to have been approached by the Meadows Institute to provide our community with the much-needed support for citizens who are suffering with mental health issues,” said Galveston Fire Chief Charles Olsen. “This program has provided a valuable alternative for these individuals. In the short time that this program has been in existence, we have seen a noticeable decline in calls for some of our regular patients who suffer from mental health issues. I feel very fortunate to be part of this new program which I feel will be extremely valuable to Galveston.”

“The Galveston Police Department is dedicated to serving our residents and visitors, and the launch of the COAST Team provides the City of Galveston the opportunity to better serve our community by serving some of the most vulnerable individuals among us,” said Galveston Chief of Police Doug Balli. “In collaboration with the Meadows Institute, the Galveston Fire Department, and the Gulf Coast Center, the police department is now better suited to serve those living with significant behavioral, medical, and social service needs. This integrated service approach will deliver the highest level of service to individuals in a mental health emergency.”

“A safety net for wellness is knit through careful collaboration with community partners to build a framework for a crisis continuum of care that diverts the right individuals from arrests, jail, and emergency rooms,” said Felicia Jeffery, CEO of the Gulf Coast Center. “Gulf Coast Center’s COAST Team is dedicated to effective referral partnerships, providing smooth transitions to quality mental health, primary health, and substance use disorder treatment and services. The COAST Team follows individuals with a mental health diagnosis all the way through to maximum community support.”

“Galveston’s COAST team is an important example of what communities across the nation are doing – ensuring that people in behavioral health emergencies are met with appropriate, health-first responses,” said Julie Wertheimer, who directs Pew’s work on mental health and justice partnerships. “And we are seeing promising results. At a time when there are rising numbers of people with substance use disorders and mental health conditions, there is no more crucial moment than now to invest in our crisis care system.”

“We understand that redesigning the structures and systems for the betterment of a community requires persistent effort and an unwavering commitment,” Katherine Lorenz, president of the Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation, said. “We commend Galveston’s commitment to this innovative health-first model, and CGMF looks forward to supporting this multi-disciplinary collaboration to change mental health emergency responses.”

The innovative model is based on the [RIGHT Care program](#), first launched in Dallas, developed by the Meadows Institute through a generous grant from the W.W. Caruth, Jr. Fund at Communities Foundation of Texas.

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### **About Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute**

Launched in 2014, the Meadows Institute helps Texas legislators, state officials, members of the judiciary, and local, state, and national leaders identify equitable systemic solutions to mental health needs, and has become Texas's most trusted source for data-driven mental health policy. The Meadows Institute is making a significant impact in multiple areas, helping Texas and national leaders shift the focus of new investments toward early intervention, addressing the mental health crisis in our jails and emergency rooms, and helping all people with mental health needs recover and be well. Learn more at [mmhpi.org](http://mmhpi.org).

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