

LA COUNTY MET



Latest Update Regarding the Sheriff's Mental Evaluation Teams (MET)

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JANUARY 2021

Calendar Year 2020 Recap & Summary Report



**Crises Calls Were
Up ↑6% in 2020
(↑97% in Past 5 Yrs)
(↑125% in Past 7 Yrs)**



MET covers 4,084 mi²
42 Cities • 120 Uninc.
communities • 40 courts
CHP & Fire Dept assist



Today, MET has **55%**
of the minimum needed
911-level co-response
teams for LA County.



**ATI Recommendation
#45** "Substantially
increase the number of
co-response teams."

Overview / Update

Mental Evaluation Teams (MET) refer to exceptionally well-trained deputy sheriffs working in plain cloths partnered with a Department of Mental Health (DMH) licensed clinical social worker using an unmarked patient-centric design emergency vehicle capable of responding to high-risk crises reported Countywide. MET specializes in de-escalation of crises, mental health evaluations for potential "involuntary hold" when necessary, and diversion of mentally ill patients away from the criminal justice system. MET endeavors to transport patients to mental health care facilities instead of jails whenever possible — 98% of MET cases being diverted in 2020.

By the end of 2020, 33 County MET units were strategically responding to Countywide crises from **14 regional offices** located in: South El Monte, Lancaster, Santa Clarita, Cerritos, Lennox, East Los Angeles, Lakewood, Carson, West Covina, Lost Hills, Norwalk, West Hollywood, Compton (newly added in 2020) and La Crescenta (newly added in 2020).

911-level Mental Health Crises Summary for LASD in 2020:

- Last year, LASD patrol deputies responded to **17,215 calls** reportedly involving persons with a mental illness in crises.
- Of those, **10,470 (61%)** were confirmed to be crises involving mental illness or a developmental disability as a significant factor in the incident.
- MET units were dispatched and responded to **7,246 (69%)** of those reported mental health crises. Having just over half of the minimum needed regional teams, the MET response rate again exceeded expectations last year. The triage desk ability to pre-screen calls and guide patrol deputies via telephone 24 hours per day was credited with the added 14% in MET response capacity.
- On average, MET units **relieved 2.7 patrol deputies and 1 sergeant** at *each* crisis incident after arriving on scene and once the situation was rendered safe. This helps reduce the stigma associated with law enforcement being called to help mental health consumers since MET personnel don't wear typical police uniforms and MET utilizes specially equipped unmarked cars in compliance with CA law (WIC § 5153).
- Patrol personnel were relieved by MET units at 6,036 calls once MET personnel assumed care for the consumer. In those cases, MET handled the transportation, involuntary hold, and hospital or urgent care admitting while patrol deputies had already returned to their duties. This saved patrol deputies from being out of the field for up to 2.5 hours on average
- Based on the opinion of the handling deputies and/or patrol supervisor(s) on scene when MET arrived, patrol would have reportedly "*very likely*" used at least "Level-1" force (or greater) to subdue consumers they encountered during **434 crises** during 2020, were it not for MET personnel arriving in time to help de-escalate the consumer.
- Up to **34 lives were reportedly spared** during potential deadly force encounters including 14 very high-risk incidents involving consumers attempting "suicide by cop" in 2020. These lives saved were credited not only to MET involvement but the higher level of preparedness for patrol deputies due to the vastly improved mental health training in recent years were also significant factors in these incidents.

- It is impossible to calculate the immeasurable savings to the County plus a reduction in consumer injuries, fewer deputy injuries, less workers compensation claims, reduction in hospital bills for consumers, and multiple civil claims and lawsuits against the County that were almost certainly averted by reducing the use of force.
- De-escalation of crises by MET personnel was credited with resolving **51 incidents** in 2020 without having to summon the Special Enforcement Bureau (tactical team). These incidents, such as barricaded suspects, generally result in lengthy, costlier deployments.
- MET personnel (state-certified advanced-level negotiators) were able to help de-escalate consumers involved in **41 high-risk incidents** before the on-call Crisis Negotiations Team (CNT) personnel were activated to respond. Due to incremental expansion, MET is now handling approximately 2/3 of all crises formerly handled by CNT prior to 2018.
- MET units responded to **288 requests for assistance** at “Type-1” (station or court lockup) jails to help de-escalate consumers who refused to exit cells or threatened not to cooperate with booking procedures. MET was credited with helping to resolve 243 (84%) of such incidents with no uses of force necessary.

The Impact of COVID-19



The recent COVID-19 pandemic has created implications for mental health that likely will result in further increases in 911-level mental crises in the year ahead. MET calls increased from 2,148 crises during the 104 days before the initial stay-at-home orders to 2,372 crises reported after the stay-at-home order — **10% increase** in reported mental health crises.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, MET units have seen a steady rise in case severity in addition to more crises being reported Countywide.

Expansion Recommendations Reaffirmed

In [2018](#) and [2020](#), the **Sheriff’s Civilian Oversight Commission** recommended the LA County MET should be “*conservatively*” staffed with 60 regional teams at minimum. With 911-level crisis calls up 12% since that recommendation was first made to the Board of Supervisors, that minimum need Countywide was again reaffirmed this year.

In 2016, the growth roadmap to address increasing 911-level mental health crises co-response needs was incremental expansion of MET to eventually achieve the goal of 60-teams Countywide.

By 2019, MET had 33 regional (County-funded) teams strategically located and responding from 14 offices spread out geographically to help reduce our response times to 911-level mental health crises. The goal is to arrive in time to help de-escalate crises, reduce force and save lives.

In 2016, the average MET response time was 56 minutes when MET had a unit available to respond. In 2020, the average response time was approximately 18 minutes Countywide (68% reduction).

Two fiscal years have passed without incremental additions at the MET to add capacity for responding and handling the rising number of 911-level crises in LA County.

The next proposed growth phase would **add +12 teams (45 MET teams total)**. This would achieve 24-hour crisis response coverage and fill critical service gaps. The proposal for the next phase of growth would establish a Crisis Intervention Bureau (CIB) encompassing MET, Risk Assessment & Management Program (RAMP), Veterans Mental Evaluation Teams (VMET), Intake Booking Diversion (IBD) program, Crisis Negotiations Team (CNT), plus search and rescue support for the [LA Found program](#). For the Sheriff’s Department, the cost would be approximately \$5.5M inclusive of 12 new teams, support and supervisors.

CIB would oversee all mental health training for first responders (over 5,000 LASD personnel plus outside agencies). Consistent with past recommendations of the Civilian Advisory Commission, CIB would certainly attract highly motivated personnel seeking a career path specializing in trauma informed de-escalation care for the seriously mentally ill (SMI) with emphasis on harm reduction strategies and diversion away from the criminal justice system whenever possible.