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## Toronto should expand non-police crisis response service across city, staff recommend in new report

Executive committee to consider expanding Toronto Community Crisis Service Oct. 31



A view of Toronto city hall. City staff, in a report that will be considered by the executive committee on Oct. 31, recommend that the Toronto Community Crisis Service be expanded across the city to become the fourth municipal emergency service in Toronto. The other three are Toronto Fire Services, Toronto Paramedic Services, and the Toronto Police Service. (Michael Wilson/CBC)

A city council committee will be asked next week to recommend that Toronto expand a program in which mental health experts instead of police respond to calls involving people in crisis.

City staff, in an Oct. 17 report that will be considered by the executive committee on Oct. 31, recommend that the Toronto Community Crisis Service be expanded to become the fourth municipal emergency service in the city. The other three are Toronto Fire Services, Toronto Paramedic Services and the Toronto Police Service.

Currently, the service provides access to care to residents in 64 per cent of the city's wards, or four pilot areas, downtown east, downtown west, northwest and northeast. The service is in its second year of a three-year pilot that sends 911 and 211 mental health calls to specialized community partners in designated zones.

The report says the service provides "a community-based, client centred, trauma-informed, non-police led response to people experiencing mental health crisis and wellness checks." City council will consider the matter on Nov. 8.

The service, launched in March 2022, received 6,827 calls for service in its first year of operations. The report says 78 per cent of calls that were transferred from 911 were "successfully resolved" without police involvement.

Data from an evaluation done at a year show that 95 per cent of clients were satisfied or very satisfied with the service they received and 90 per cent said they think it had a positive impact on how they perceived community safety and wellbeing, according to the report.

In its first year, the report says community crisis teams completed 2,936 post-crisis follow up interactions and connected 1,160 service users to case management supports.

"The Toronto Community Crisis Service has a demonstrated positive equity impact on Indigenous, Black, racialized, and 2SLGBTQ+ communities. The service has strengthened confidence in community safety efforts, and led to better outcomes for Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving communities that face over-policing and concerns about police interactions," the report reads.

"This service reduces police engagements and increases community-based solutions that connect people in crisis to much needed mental health and well-being programs and services. This community-based service prioritizes the community safety and well-being of Toronto's most vulnerable populations."

According to the report, the 2023 approved budget for the service is \$13.7 million, which funds eight positions. If expanded, the costs would increase to \$26.8 million in 2024, which would fund 13 positions, and \$34.7 million in 2026, which would fund 43 positions.

Andrea Westbrook, manager of the Toronto Community Crisis Service Project at Gerstein Crisis Centre, said on Tuesday that it's good news that the city will consider expanding the service.

"We are really encouraged and highly supportive of the city's plan to expand the TCCS project citywide," she said. "We've really seen how effective that a response that's really centred in community is when meeting the needs of folks who are having a mental health crisis in the community."

The program was introduced in early 2022 in response to several deaths of people in crisis where a police interaction occurred, including [Ejaz Choudry](#), [D'Andre Campbell](#) and [Regis Korchinski-Paquet](#).

"We want something that's trauma informed, that's harm reduction informed, that we're responding to a health need with a health response instead of a justice response."



Majd Darwich, right, is pictured here his son Abdullah, who is autistic and non-verbal. His son was Tasered and handcuffed by Peel Regional Police nearly a year ago after wandering away from home and hasn't been the same since. (Talía Ricci/CBC)

Majd Darwich, a Mississauga resident whose son Abdullah has autism and is non-verbal, said he also supports the expansion. Although he and his family live with the jurisdiction of the Peel Regional Police, he said hopeful that more crisis response teams everywhere will prevent harmful police interactions.

"I'm looking to see it everywhere in Canada because our vulnerable people in our community they have the right to live peacefully," he said. "I hope our children will have a safe place in the future."

On Nov. 4, his son Abdullah was Tasered and handcuffed by Peel Regional Police after he wandered away from home. He was left with cuts, bruises and sores from the Tasers and his face was bloodied. He was only wearing shorts at the time.

Darwich found his son a few houses away surrounded by police. He said officers would not let him get near.

"I found my son laying down on the floor and he was handcuffed to the back. And then when I looked to his face, it was full with blood."

Darwich says Abdullah was Tasered three times and nearly a year later, still hasn't recovered from the trauma.

"Before this incident, he was very comfortable going with us, to the restaurant, going to the barber shop, going to the family doctor. But after the incident, this is what happened to him. I don't know when he will get rid of this effects."

*With files from Tyler Cheese and Muriel Draaisma*

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/toronto-community-crisis-service-report-expansion-city-council-committee-1.7007108>