

Contact: Stefanie Knowlton (503) 871-1216 (PSU); Caryn Brooks (971) 409-7993 (PSR); Matt McNally (Commissioner Hardesty's office) (503) 823-8422

New PSU report examines effectiveness of Portland Street Response

The pilot program responds to non-emergency calls involving people experiencing homelessness or a mental health crisis. Researchers present results to Portland City Council 9:30 a.m. Tuesday, Oct. 5

PORTLAND, Ore. — Portland Street Response (PSR), the city's new first-response unit, demonstrated success in meeting outcome goals during the first six months, according to [an evaluation](#) by PSU's Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative presented to the [Portland City Council](#).

The program's outcome goals include reducing the number of calls typically responded to by police; reducing the number of behavioral health and non-emergency calls responded to by police and fire; and reducing the number of non-life threatening 911 calls that are transported to the ER.

Key findings (All from PSR's service area in Lents neighborhood and during hours of operation):

- 4.6% reduction in total calls traditionally responded to by police.
- 22.5% reduction in police response on non-emergency welfare checks as well as dispatches coded as "unwanted persons" and "suspicious persons" calls.
- 11.6% reduction in fire department activity on behavioral health calls and illegal burn calls.
- Only 14 calls (3.7%) required transport to ER.
- Clients rated PSR 5 on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being the best.

The evaluation included a survey in collaboration with the Street Roots Ambassador Program. Comments from people experiencing homelessness described the care they received from PSR: "They were friendly, treated me like a human being;" "They were loving and talked with my friend who needed help"; "They put medicine on a wound, gave me food and water, and asked if I needed anything else"; "My friend lived because of them."

The PSR team made 44 referrals during the initial contact and the team's community health workers made another 125 referrals in follow-up visits with clients for everything from housing and financial benefits to medical treatment and pet care. The team also helped six people find permanent housing.

"Based on our findings, we believe Portland Street Response is well on its way to becoming a citywide solution to responding to 911 and non-emergency calls involving unhoused people and people experiencing a mental health crisis," said Greg Townley, director of research at PSU's Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative and the lead evaluator.

The evaluation also included recommendations to further increase the program's effectiveness by expanding it citywide 24/7; expanding call criteria to allow the team to respond inside residences and to respond to calls involving suicide; and keeping the program within Portland Fire & Rescue.

"We appreciate the in-depth evaluation that the researchers from Portland State University put into their program assessment: we plan to utilize the report's findings and recommendations as we build Portland Street Response's capacity," said Portland Fire & Rescue Chief Sara Boone.

Portland launched PSR in the Lents neighborhood as a new first response for non-emergency calls involving people experiencing homelessness and/or mental health crises. The crew consists of a firefighter paramedic, a licensed mental health crisis therapist and two community health workers.

Portland Fire & Rescue contracted with the Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative to conduct an evaluation to examine overall program effectiveness, provide suggestions for refinement and provide recommendations for scaling up citywide. The evaluation will culminate in a one-year program review at the end of the pilot period in Spring 2022.

"From the onset of the Portland Street Response pilot, we have been committed to transparency, evaluation, and adaptation," said Portland City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty.

"PSU's 6-month evaluation report includes vital information to understanding PSR's success and where it can improve moving forward. I'm so thankful to everyone at PSU for this extensive work that will help inform Council as it prepares to vote on expanding PSR citywide this October."

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PSU's Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative (HRAC)

[HRAC](#) brings together faculty researchers with expertise in disciplines ranging from psychology and architecture to medicine and linguistics to address the issues that lead to and perpetuate homelessness. We work alongside community partners, elected leaders, and those experiencing homelessness on solutions with an emphasis on communities of color.

Media Contacts/Resources:

Portland State University: Stefanie Knowlton, (503) 871-1216, Sknow2@pdx.edu

Portland Street Response: Caryn Brooks, (971)-409-7993, caryn.brooks@portlandoregon.gov

Hardesty's Office: Matt McNally, (503)-823-8422, hardestymedia@portlandoregon.gov

[Photos, b-roll and additional information about the program](#)